The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Savannah, GA
May 2017

Feeding the Hungry
Team at work
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It is amazing how former altar servers can vividly recall their experiences even decades later. They remember exactly what their tasks were and who the priests were at the time of their service. Our altar server corps consists of nine adults (three are women) and fourteen youths under the age of 17 (five are girls). I recruited some of them after observing their behavior during Mass and at other Cathedral events. But most approached me after Mass to ask about becoming an altar server. No doubt some were nudged forward by their parents but many were simply drawn to the solemn choreography of the Mass.

The most basic requirement to serve is being able to sit still and concentrate for 60 minutes. That is harder than you may think. Try sitting bolt upright wearing hot vestments with your hands in your lap for an hour. After the initial introduction, I schedule a meeting in the Sacristy with the interested server (and his or her parents if applicable) and we talk about what altar serving entails. I go over the ‘beginner’ tasks and we practice them. I schedule them for a Mass and I assign them the seat next to me. Every subsequent Mass becomes a learning opportunity to master a new assignment such as bell ringing, candle lighting, etc. I try to conduct a brief post Mass huddle with the server-in-training to discuss what went well and what needs improvement.

A server schedule for Sundays is generated by the preceding Thursday. All who are to serve are contacted by me before being placed on the schedule. Since there are 15 server slots per weekend and we have 23 servers, some servers will be off at various times. When possible, I also try to rotate servers to different Masses so they can become acquainted with the liturgical variations involved. Some servers find change difficult or are disappointed when they have to sit out a Sunday. I try to remind them that reverently participating in the Mass while sitting in a pew is also a form of ministry to those around you. No Mass ‘belongs’ to any given server.

So how does it actually work? Servers arrive in the Sacristy about 20 minutes prior to Mass where they vest in a black cassock and white surplice. Then we decide as a team who will do what — carry the cross, be thurifer, accompany the Eucharistic Minister to the choir loft with a candle, etc. When tasks have been agreed upon, we walk to the back of the Cathedral. Sometimes the celebrant will invite all participants at the altar to gather for a short prayer for us to keep our attention on the Mass and to do our best for the glory of God. That prayer serves as a ‘reset button’ aligning everyone to the same page, calming nerves and fostering a reverent sense of purpose.

The altar server corps wouldn’t be what it is without the efforts of our permanent Deacon, Dr. Dewain Smith. He is truly the ‘go to’ person for server protocol and his ideas are spot on. Having, as they say, ‘seen it all’, he has averted many a potential serving disaster. All of us enjoy working with him.

Not everyone is cut out to be an altar server. But for those who are, the ministry gives a new understanding of the Mass — its components, its meaning, and its everlasting beauty.

Pope Francis has said, "Serving at the altar, is a privileged way to draw closer to Jesus."
Easter Saturday morning dawned clear and bright as many “grown-up” Cathedral members made their way to the parish hall, church, and square to prepare for the day’s activities. The excited hum of children would not be heard for more than an hour but these loyal volunteers showed up to make sure that all of our parish from the oldest to the youngest would be pleased with the Easter preparations.

Members of the Knights and the Knights auxiliary joined parish volunteers in the square to hide the over 2000 candy-filled plastic eggs that the children would be eager to retrieve. Other Knights members were busy in the kitchen preparing lunch for children and their parents.

The Serving Seniors team members began arriving with homemade goodies to prepare Easter baskets that were later delivered to our home-bound members, our priests, and even Bishop Hartmeyer! Cookies, glazed nuts, and trail mix were packaged individually and the assortment filled to overflowing the little buckets.

More than 20 volunteers hurried to the street in front of the Cathedral when Oelschig’s flower truck arrived and helped off-load and carry up to the chancel the dozens of potted flowers that would grace the church for the Easter Masses. Sacristan Lynne Everett supervised and many volunteers stayed in the church to arrange the flowers on altars, in window sills, and where ever Lynne directed. The volunteers ranged in age from 4 to “maybe we shouldn’t ask” but all were delighted to watch the dark sanctuary of Good Friday become the jubilant sanctuary of Easter.

And then . . . the children and the Easter Bunny arrived! Excitement filled the air. The thousands of eggs disappeared in seconds, the ice cream truck pulled up and a line immediately formed, and hot dogs were piled on plates. Grinning faces were everywhere. Carol Herb and the Parish Life Committee coordinated the activity with the Knights and it was a perfectly planned event.

What a wonderful end to our Lent and beginning of our Easter celebration!
Music at the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist strives to enhance our Sacred Liturgy. The music serves to facilitate meditation upon the Sacred Mystery of Christ’s dying, rising and coming again, and participation in his gift of the Eucharistic Banquet. Every time we assemble for the Eucharistic Liturgy, the texts of the Roman Rite urge us to join our voices with the divine choral music of the celestial city. At more than 60 Masses a year, the Cathedral Choir of St. John the Baptist performs hymns, acclamations and responses movingly and robustly filling the resonant space of the Cathedral in a very real foretaste of the heavenly choirs.

The mission of the Cathedral Choir of St. John the Baptist is: “To serve God and our congregational assembly through the ministry of music. By using the musical talents God has given us, and by striving to develop those talents to the best of our abilities, we seek to be a model of community and fellowship to the larger Cathedral community, caring for one another and welcoming new members. Our mission is to lead the congregation in sung worship each week, through the singing of hymns and choral anthems.”

Over the past several years, the Cathedral Choir has added significantly to it’s repertoire under the direction of McDowell Fogle who became the Director of Music/Principal Organist for the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in January, 2013. Mac has been ably assisted by a group of talented vocalists and musicians who have joined the Cathedral Music Staff over the past few years. For those of you who attend the same Mass each week and may not have experienced their talent as they serve as cantor at a different service, we introduce them to you as follows:

Jillian Pashke Durant, Soprano Section Leader/Cantor
Jacquelyn Hamilton, Alto Section Leader/Cantor
Andrew Hillis, Tenor Section Leader/Cantor/Musician
Dr. Christopher Jordan, Bass Section Leader/Cantor
Erica Gillette, Associate Organist

We are most grateful to them for leading us in worshipful praise each week. They inspire us to "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord.”

The Cathedral Choir welcomes all who wish to participate in singing the prayers, the hymns and the rich treasury of anthems which support the liturgy of the day. They are a diverse group of people, from all backgrounds, high school through adult. The choir is open to all music lovers, Catholic or Non-Catholic. Anyone interested in joining the choir, please contact Mr. Fogle through the Parish Office at 233-4709.

“...And so, in company with the choirs of Angels, we praise you, and with joy we proclaim...”
We also provide inspiration through concerts and special events, seeking always to raise the hearts and voices of all in praise and thanksgiving for the gift of music bestowed on us by God. The Friends of Cathedral Music was established in 2015 to support the music ministry. The Cathedral serves Savannah by opening its doors and inviting people from all walks of life, who come from far and near, to experience the splendor of our musical events.

For the past two years The Friends of Cathedral Music has sponsored a Concert Season comprised of 4 free seasonal performances. We are very excited to announce the 2017—2018 Concert Season and anticipate great moments for concert goers in the third musical season. We’ve combined a memorable repertoire of classical music with exceptionally talented artists from around the globe.

The season will begin on October 29th with a Concert and Rededication performed by Olivier Latry, Titular Organist, Cathedral of Norte Dame, Paris in celebration of the 35th anniversary of our Cathedral Pipe Organ. (ticketed event)

This will be followed on December 17th with Christmas at the Cathedral featuring Rutter’s “Gloria” including the unveiling of the Cathedral Creche.

During Holy Week, on March 23rd, Tenebrae: A Service of Shadows, will be performed featuring Allegri’s “Miserere” and Gregorian Chant.

And the season will end on a high note on May 6th with a Solemn Vespers in Honor of the Virgin Mary featuring Rachmaninoff’s “All-Night Vigil” and Gregorian Chants.

We invite you to join us, to take part and be touched by the Spirit that moves through music. Come and be nourished by that same Spirit and deepened in your relationship with each other and the Lord through great music and talented musicians.
The cornerstone is part of the foundation of a church building. The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist’s cornerstone was laid 144 years ago. We all pass the granite plaque that marks where the cornerstone of the Cathedral is located each time we attend Mass. What many may not know is that a box was placed in the cornerstone when it was put in position.

The Savannah Morning News of Nov. 20, 1873 spread the story of the cornerstone ceremony, the history of Roman Catholics in Savannah, details of the cathedral fund drive, architectural plans for the cathedral, and a list of the contents of a box placed in the cornerstone, in six columns in fine print — some two thirds of its editorial page. Here are excerpts from a November 18, 1973 Savannah Morning News article on the 100th anniversary of the cornerstone ceremony.

It was bitter cold at 3 p.m., Nov. 19, 1873 when 6000 citizens gathered in the vicinity of Abercorn and Harris Streets to see the laying of a cornerstone for the Roman Catholic Cathedral of St. John the Baptist.

Presiding at the service to dedicate the marble stone before a temporary outdoor altar at the east end of the building outline — approximately where the high altar would rise — was Bishop William H. Gross of Savannah. Bishop James Gibbons of Richmond, Va. preached from a temporary pulpit.

Bishop Gross blessed the white cornerstone with holy water before it was borne to the southwest corner.

The box of gifts was put in it and the stone lowered into place. The clerical procession then moved slowly around the enclosure with the bishop as he sprinkled holy water on the walls.

Bishop Gibbons opened his talk with a quotation from the Psalmist, “The heavens declare the glory of the Lord and the firmament announces the work of his hands”….he praised the “liberality” of Savannah people who formerly contributed to the erection of churches in other dioceses, including his own Diocese of Richmond. “In other countries, churches have been erected by crowned heads and jeweled princesses, but our reliance is on the generous hearts of the people,” he said.

Clergy and laity contributed coins and mementos for the cornerstone box. M.T. Quinan put in $60 in Continental shin plasters dated Jan. 14, 1779. John Rourke laid in a Russian copper coin 200 years old.

Turf from the bogs of Mayo, Ireland; clay from the grave of St. Commin in Mayo, Ireland; a piece of tow brought by Bishop Gartland — Savannah’s first Bishop — from the College of All Halloows, Ireland; and antique French, English, Prussian, Chinese, Dutch, Danish and Spanish coins were the gift of Mrs. Catherine Flynn were also included.

James D. Reynolds added a piece of stone from St. Savior’s Dominican Catholic Church in Dublin laid in 1853 by Cardinal Cullen. The rules of Savannah City Council went in from Hon. E.C. Anderson and A. B. Luce and Mrs. M.S. Raymur put in the day’s menus from Marshall House hotel on Broughton Street.

It was April 30, 1876 when the completed structure costing $150,000 was dedicated. In 1896 Bishop Thomas A. Becker added the church spires and residence at additional cost of $35,000 and $26,000 respectively.”

A church is a building. The Church is its members and the faithful form the foundation of the Catholic Church. The Cathedral is full of history and is a cornerstone for the faithful in Savannah.

This article was originally published in the December 2003 issue of Twin Spires.
It seems like only yesterday when our former Council of Catholic Women (CCW) President, Monica Kerr, surprised the members with a unique fund raising idea. She proposed that our very large women’s and men’s bathrooms could be opened to those attending the St. Patrick’s Day parade. “Potty for a Price” was born.

For the past ten years, on St. Patrick’s Day during the parade, the CCW opens the bathrooms in the Parish Hall from 7:00 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. and charges a $5.00 user fee for the duration of the parade, or a one time $1.00 fee to utilize our clean, fresh and “indoor” bathrooms.

The first year was quite memorable. Monsignor O’Neill was so enthusiastic about our project that he even came over during the morning to check on the operation and see how things were going. We continue to receive the support and encouragement from Fr. Schreck and the parish staff. The first year we raised $2,022.55. With little startup cost, most of those proceeds went to the CCW Treasury to fund CCW projects and donations. This year we raised a total of $2,607.35 and over the past ten years, the total is estimated to exceed $27,000.

The biggest year for Potty for a Price was 2012. The Parade was on Saturday and we had lines out the door and up the side walk. That year Potty for a Price really established its reputation. We were able to handle a big crowd and provide our guests with a much needed service.

We have many repeat guests who come to watch the parade and they know that the CCW will have the bathrooms ready. One of our biggest clients is WSAV, which broadcasts from Lafayette Square. They make a donation every year so that their staff and guests can use the facilities.

Although this is an important fund raising event for our council, it is more than that. It is a great time to work together as a council. We provide a valuable service to our guests, and try to improve on that every year. Our guests tell us how much they appreciate that we provide a clean, fresh and indoor bathrooms.

Over the years the funds have been used to “give back” to our gorgeous Cathedral. One of the most important projects was to fund the restoration of the frame on the portrait of “Our Lady of Good Counsel”, the Patroness of the National Council of Catholic Women. (See page 8)

We also have contributed to a number of renovation projects in the Rectory and Parish Hall. The proceeds from this event also helps fund our annual goals for giving to the Social Apostolate, the Bishop’s Annual Appeal, and the Cathedral Heritage Foundation. Each is a good cause and we know those donations go into our Parish community to do good work.

In 2018, the parade will be on a Saturday again, so it will be another big year. We anticipate a large crowd and we will need many volunteers. Even if you are not a CCW member you can still volunteer. We will work hard, but it will be satisfying work.

The Cathedral Council of Catholic Women is a group of dedicated Catholic Women. Our focus and goal is to serve the women in our Parish and the Diocese of Savannah through our commitment to Leadership, Service and Spirituality in the Catholic Faith. If you would like to get to know more about the Cathedral Council of Catholic Women, join us at one of our upcoming meetings.
The month of May is especially dedicated to Our Blessed Mother. It is the occasion for a moving tribute of faith and love when Catholics in every part of the world pray to the Queen of Heaven. During this month, both in church and in the privacy of their homes, the faithful offer up to Mary an especially fervent and loving homage of prayer and veneration. In this month too, the benefits of God's mercy come down to us from her throne in greater abundance.

This custom of dedicating the month of May to the Blessed Virgin arose at the end of the 13th century. In the 16th century, books appeared and fostered this devotion. The practice became especially popular among the members of the Jesuit Order and by 1700 it took hold among their students at the Roman College. A bit later it was publicly practiced in the Gesu Church in Rome and from there it spread to the whole Church. In 1847, Mary was officially declared the Patroness of the United States as the Blessed Virgin Mary under her title of the Immaculate Conception.

Here at the Cathedral we honor Mary in many ways. There are twenty one representations of the Blessed Mother throughout in the Cathedral. She can be found in multiple windows, murals, Stations, as well as in a statue, a painting and a coat of arms. Here is where you’ll find all those images.

Windows
- The Assumption of the BVM – South Transept Window
- The Annunciation – Chapel of BVM
- Mater Admirabilis – South lancet window #4
- Mary, the Christ Child and St. Dominic – South Aisle #1
- Holy Family – South Aisle #3
- Jesus teaches in the Temple – South Aisle #5
- Virgin Mary appears to St John - North Aisle # 1
- The Blessed Mary Virgin – North Lancet Window # 2
- The Ascension of Christ – North Transept

Murals
- First Pentecost – South Transept/East Wall
- Mary and Child Jesus - South Transept/West Wall
- Flight into Egypt – North Transept/East Wall
- Presentation in the Temple – North Transept/West Wall
- St. John the Baptist as a Child – North Transept/West Wall

Stations of the Cross
- #4 Christ meets his Mother
- #12 Christ dies on the Cross
- #13 Christ is removed from the Cross
- #14 Christ is laid in the tomb

Statue
- Blessed Virgin Mary Shrine

Painting
- Our Lady of Good Counsel – South Transept

Papal Coat of Arms
- Cross and M

PS - And don’t forget that the Blessed Mother chapel in the lower church also contains 15 more windows and statues dedicated to her.
About 15 months ago, the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist unveiled a new website, making the online experience to seek information not only more user-friendly but also to portray a more visually descriptive platform to let the world know who we are and what we believe. In this short time, over half a million site visits! Visitors are offered a scrolling banner of images, which portray who we are as a Catholic family – the grandeur of architecture and art, the solemnity of Mass, and the vibrancy of our worshipers.

The most viewed external link on the Cathedral web site is Protecting Children. A study of the analytics of the site shows the link gets clicked five to ten times per day. This link will take the web visitor away from the Cathedral’s site to the Diocese’s Office for the Protection of Children and Young People. Those who go to the external site will find the policies and procedures for the Diocese of Savannah as it fulfills the call of the Bishops’ “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.”

Joan Altmeyer serves as the Director of the office. She was surprised when told of these statistics. “Knowing so many people visit our office’s website brings a feeling of validation. People are curious about what the Church is doing to keep children safe.” Ms. Altmeyer further added, “My suspicion would be that most visitors to your site are tourists planning to visit Savannah, and most are not Catholic. Touring the Cathedral is a great evangelization tool, and sharing our requirements for volunteer ministry and mandated reporting provide a different method of evangelization. If one person views any of our forms or information items on the site, they might gain more knowledge than before about ways they can protect children that they encounter. Every single child counts, not only our Catholic children, but all children.”

In June 2002 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops promulgated the “Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People.” The Diocese of Savannah endorsed the “Charter” and by September 2003, the Charter mandates were enacted here. Most of us think of the requirements of VIRTUS training and background checks for employees and volunteers, but the “Charter” calls us to promote healing and reconciliation with victims/survivors of sexual abuse of minors.

As part of its outreach to victims/survivors, on March 29th, Bishop Gregory J. Hartmayer offered a Lenten Prayer Service of Consolation at the Cathedral. All victims and survivors of abuse, their families, friends, and the community were invited to gather for this solemn service. Bishop Hartmayer felt the service offered a way to acknowledge publicly the pain and suffering of abuse victims. “For more than three decades the Catholic Church has been compelled intensely to find ways to comfort, to heal, to console, to support our people who bear such burdens and who labor under such yokes of pain and isolation. The most important part of this challenge has been the duty of all of us to acknowledge that the Church herself has too often added to the burdens and weighed down the yokes of too many people through the deeds of some of her ministers and colleagues, through the negligence and regrettable decisions of some of her Shepherds and through reactions that have added to the feelings of isolation of those who were bent low with the burdens and yokes that events in the past had placed upon their shoulders and most importantly within their hearts.”

For more information on what you can do to protect children, contact Ms. Altmeyer at (912) 233-8380.
The Feeding the Hungry Team visited America’s Second Harvest of Coastal Georgia to pack food boxes for the mobile grocery distribution program. The visit, arranged by FTH team lead, Pam Smith, brought 14 Cathedral parishioners, ages 14-60, to the food bank’s warehouse on President Street on Saturday morning, March 27. This visit was one of the Time and Talents Ministries extra activities designated as Lenten almsgiving, above and beyond normal activities. However, the group had so much fun doing this that it might become a regular FTH event.

The Mobile Food Pantry (MFP) was created in 2007 to supplement the efforts of food bank partners operating in rural communities where hunger relief is limited. The communities served have a concentrated need yet lack sufficient feeding programs or food pantries. The America’s Second Harvest trucks transport approximately 15,000 pounds of food to a centrally located partner organization for distribution directly to families and individuals.

The MFP is designed to provide emergency food relief to rural residents who struggle to have enough to eat. Through this program, the food bank can increase the residents’ access to fresh foods and balanced nutrition. Last year the food bank distributed 1,982,742 pounds of food through 165 MFP events within the area served.

The Cathedral parishioners were happy to be part of this effort and packed over 400 boxes during the shift they worked. Tired and sweaty, they all agreed that it was an effort totally worth the time. While often we participate in events where the outcome is unknown, in this case, we knew this food would go to families, seniors, children, and others in rural South Georgia where food assistance is not as available as it is in the cities.

Noah Eastman, the youngest of our team, was accumulating service hours for confirmation. He has other community service requirements for school organizations. Noah and his parents, Kevin and Jackie, help in many of our volunteer activities and would like to encourage other families to join them. We have many opportunities where children can serve with their parents so the whole family participates. What a great message to deliver to the next generation!

For participation in any of the Feeding the Hungry Ministry events, contact Pam Smith at pavercel@comcast.net or Melanie Brooks at brooks508@aol.com for details.
As the Cathedral volunteer ministries grow, we are happy for parishioners to find a personal niche. A good example is Scott Crotzer. After returning to SCAD to complete a masters’ degree, Scott relaxes by knitting afghans and lap blankets for our older home-bound members. First to receive a blanket was Mrs. Millie Roush, a resident at Abercorn Rehabilitation and fondly remembered by many Cathedral parishioners. Scott is pictured with the newest afghan, a beautiful blanket of coral and blue. If you know someone who would appreciate this beautiful gift, please contact the Serving Senior’s Ministry in the parish office.

Photo by Melanie Brooks