Each year during the first week of December, Knights of Columbus throughout the Order are encouraged to light a nativity scene. Council 631 brought the 1st blessing of the crèche to the Cathedral many years ago and it is now a much anticipated tradition here in our parish.

We are very grateful to Council 631 for initiating this beautiful program, “Light Up For Christ”, to begin the Christmas season.

On Wednesday, December 2, Father Schreck led the service with a special reading and blessing. Members of the Barber Shop Quartet and K of C led the singing and the crèche was lit. The Knights and their families then joined our Cathedral parishioners for a bountiful covered dish supper.

The Knights furnished wonderful roast beef for the meal and over 140 guests enjoyed a delicious dinner.

Our generous parishioners brought canned goods for the Social Apostolate to help the homeless and working poor in our community. A special thank you to the Knights of Columbus, Council 631, the Cathedral Parish Life Committee and Council of Catholic Women who helped organize this event.

Please watch the bulletin and join us at our next covered dish supper or coffee and donuts. Our dynamic parish provides many opportunities for us to get to know our parish family. God bless us everyone.

Photos by Pail H. Camp
The Cathedral choir and brass presented “Carols of the Nativity” for our second annual concert on Sunday afternoon, December 20, officially bringing in the sounds of the season to the Cathedral. The attendance was overwhelming; all seats were taken and several rows of attendees were standing in the rear of the Cathedral and out the front doors.

Our musicians had the perfect mix of songs of the season, including a mix of modern choral pieces, to the old style congregational hymns that have been sung for hundreds of years. Every sound was arranged and crafted to really set the mood for the event.

Cathedral soloists Rebecca Flaherty and Jillian Pashke sang the well-known duet “Gesu Bambino”; Cathedral soloist Cyril Durant thrilled the audience with his performance of “The Trumpet Shall Sound”, and new Cathedral soloist David Hopkins sang the exquisite solo in the choir anthem “A Spotless Rose”. The concert ended with a rousing rendition of “Hallelujah Chorus” and Cathedral organist Heidi Ordaz and the Brass with the challenging and exciting organ piece “Toccata”, composed by former Notre Dame organist Charles Marie Widor.

—McDowell Fogle

*Photos by Mary Clark Rechtiene*
During the “Time and Talent Fair” on October 25, I signed up to join the Cathedral Council of Catholic Women (CCCW). I knew that they were involved with giving back and I wanted to be a part of it. At my first CCCW meeting, after listening to all the events going on in the parish, I decided to help with the Angel Tree Project for the Social Apostolate.

With the help of Sister Julie, the CCCW decided that this year’s Angel Tree Project would be for the benefit of the working poor families and the homeless. Three hundred stockings were bought with the anticipation of the generosity of the Cathedral parishioners. The Angel Tree was covered with stockings and replenished every week. Parishioners were asked to stop and pick up a stocking on their way out of mass. We asked for a $25 grocery gift card for each of the working poor families and a $5 fast food gift card for each of the homeless. The Christmas spirit prevailed and our parishioners filled 230 stockings for the homeless and more than 80 stockings for the working poor families.

The Christmas party was on December 22nd at the Social Apostolate. The line started in the back of the building at 930am and continued until we served the last person just after 1pm. Christmas lunch was served to 227 people: men, women, and children. The Daughters of Ireland provided a turkey dinner with all of the fixings. Soup kitchen volunteers worked in shifts to set and clear the tables. Each guest received a stocking, at least two gift cards, and a gift-wrapped package donated by the Sts. Peter and Paul parish. Bishop Hartmayer served our homeless friends and musicians from Sacred Heart provided music. Ladies from St. James decorated the rooms. It was truly a deanery effort and showed again the generosity of Catholics in Savannah.

The work of the Social Apostolate is never ending. They serve the working poor and the homeless with different types of services. The Social Apostolate has 120 working poor families that they are assisting now, mostly with monthly grocery bags, eye exams, and clothing. The Homeless Authority estimates there are over 4000 homeless people in Chatham County. The Apostolate serves many of them with showers, prescriptions, birth certificates and IDs, daily lunch, and employment-related support when they have a job.

The mission of the Social Apostolate is to witness to the biblical values of charity and justice in the city of Savannah by caring for and empowering the poor, the homeless, the disabled and the “At Risk” in our society. Without your donations, time and talent, the Social Apostolate would not be able to complete their mission. Thank you for your generous support.
"I am the one vine growing, come make your home in me."

If you attended Mass in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist during Advent, you spotted two stately trees flanking the exit doors, both laden with ornaments. One tree, the one hung with stockings, would bring a morning of surprised excitement to children whose names had been submitted to the Social Apostolate. The second tree, hung with Christmas cards and tiny gift bags, would bring daily, basic life needs to 8 young women living together in a home called The Living Vine.

These young women, are part of a 20 year “living vine” of choosing life. Given the option, they made the decision to bring to term a life that otherwise may never have been. Their stories share sad but all too common likenesses. Many come from broken homes, have experienced abuse in many forms, isolation, depression, a sense of worthlessness, and have little or no relationship with a caring church family. The Living Vine gives them safety, shelter, hope, education, parenting skills, work ethic and a Christian foundation.

The Living Vine, Christian Maternity Home, located at 535 E. 54 St, is their residence for the duration of their pregnancies. It was established in 1996 by Claire Hodges, RN who is still the Executive Director. It operates solely on donations and from income generated by Blessingdales, two re-sale shops here in Savannah. They receive no Federal funds.

The house is staffed with a volunteer coordinator and full time staff who provide guidance for the girls. It is a Christian program, ensuring each woman is loved and cared for, that she sees Jesus in the staff both during her stay and in after birth care. Some girls will return to their families after giving birth. “Others,” says Claire, "...don’t have a family. Some have families that do not want them back. Worse yet, some have families that will use and abuse them.” She recalls this as the reason for opening the home, “We did not want to send a girl back home or see her go to an abortion clinic and not offer a Christian alternative.”

In November of 2015, 8 pregnant girls were living together in The Living Vine home. Two gave birth in December and their places are already being filled. Mia, 15 years old and at the home for 7½ months, shared, “I’ve learned responsibility through chores, how to submit to authority, about Jesus’ love for me, that God has seen me all along.” Over the past 20 years, 360 girls have been in residence at the facility and given birth.

The director is hopeful that in 2016, The Living Vine will extend into the final phase, AFTERCARE. Donations to Gideon’s Army is the branch that will accomplish the final “fruit” of Claire’s mission. “Being pro-life means more than just saving babies. It means investing in their lives.” To us, as Catholics, the Pope’s Year of Mercy is intended to convey the tenderness of Christ to those who are most in need. Who is more in need than the unborn and the mothers who carry them?

Donations to support The Living Vine are welcomed at Blessingdales on 6 Television Circle and 2118 Bona Bella, by becoming a member of Gideon’s Army, or by making personal donations and volunteering. To schedule a visit or make inquiries, call 912-352-9998 or email Kathy at PerfectTimingToday@gmail.com.
The crèche is a living testimony and reminder as to why we celebrate Christmas. The inspiration for this year’s Crèche came from one particular reading from the New Testament, “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”

Orlando Cuadra, the crèche designer, attempted to narrate the Christmas story from the very beginning, by reminding the viewer of the history of salvation from the creation of Adam, Abraham willing to sacrifice his son Isaac, plus Moses coming down from Mt. Sinai with the tablets of the law, a prefiguration of Christ. It also included the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, the “City of Bread,” for the birth of Jesus.

The shepherds tending their flocks occupy a prominent position in the scene because the angel of the Lord appeared to them saying “For today
in the city of David a savior has been born for you, who is Christ the Lord... So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in a manger,” and they became the first humans to adore Jesus.

Biblical symbols of the lion and lamb were added. The lion represents majesty and strength while the lamb stands for gentleness, and meekness. Allegorically, both animals added to the crèche shows that we have a powerful God becoming human and humble in a manger. And the images of wheat and grapes were also present representing the Eucharist. Plus St. Francis who set up the first crib scene, in the Italian hilltown of Greccio in December 1223, using local animals and a carved image of the Christ Child in a manger to recreate the events of Our Lord’s birth in Bethlehem.

The city, the crucifixion, the descent from the cross, burial and glorious resurrection, including the shroud in symbolism through the use of a white cloth on the crucifix similar to Easter, were all present in the Crèche scene as a foreshadowing of his sacrifice on the cross and the resurrection.

Did you see all these elements and a few more? If not here is a look back for you to experience a sense of the history of salvation from past to present to future.
For over a year, the Cathedral staff and volunteers have been engaged in a thoughtful and deliberate process to develop a new website. When asked what he wanted in the new website, Father Schreck said, “I want it to be beautiful and functional.” Hopefully we have exceeded his expectations.

The new site is located at the same URL used in the past: www.savannahcathedral.org. The website committee consisting of Anna Kaluzne, Mario Incorvaia, Father Schreck, and Catherine Kostilnik, aided by many parishioners and staff providing input, pictures and great ideas, helped develop the new site.

Here are a few highlights of the new web site:

- **Lector, Usher, and Extraordinary Ministers Schedules**
  
  In order to protect the privacy of the parishioners, these schedules are in a private Login section of the site. In order to access this area, parishioners must Register. The links to this are on the homepage. Once you Register and request a Login, you will receive a Login from the webmaster. This feature is only open to registered parishioners. Once you Register, the ministry schedules are under the Mass Times link.

- **The Calendar**
  
  This feature shows upcoming events at the Cathedral. This allows us to give parishioners information about parish suppers, adult faith formation events, book clubs, special events during the Year of Mercy plus any other special religious events. Holiday and Holy Day Mass schedules will also be on the Calendar.

- **Live Stream Mass**
  
  You will be able to watch a Live Stream Mass from the website. The 10:00 AM Sunday Mass will be available on the homepage each week. This feature will allow the sick and homebound parishioners to view the Mass. In addition, the Mass will occasionally be posted on the Cathedral’s Facebook page.

- **Giving to the Cathedral**
  
  If you use the website for Offertory Giving, click the Give link at the top of the homepage and the online giving link is there, just like the previous site. In addition, there are opportunities to give to other funds at the Cathedral, namely, the Endowment, Music, Murals, and Annual Giving.

- **Shop**
  
  You can purchase Cathedral merchandise on-line. Currently, we have ornaments, the Arts and Symbols of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist book, and the Sistine of the South booklet available. More merchandise will be available in the future.

- **Daily Reading**
  
  If you click on Mass Times, the daily Gospel Reading will be available for you to read.

  There are many more features on the site. Each week we will have information in the bulletin about the website.

  We hope you will take a few minutes to explore the new site. If you have any questions or suggestions, please contact the Webmaster at webmaster@savannahcathedral.org.
Murals Preservation Fund Established

The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist is home to 34 outstanding murals. The Cathedral exhibits an unusual amount of decoratively painted surface, rarely seen in the churches of America. It has often been compared favorably to the great cathedrals of Europe. Michelangelo’s frescoes in the Sistine Chapel are the cornerstone of high renaissance art. Though no work of art can rival his masterpiece, our murals are masterpieces in their own right and have been acknowledged as the most beautiful in the south. Hence the Cathedral’s appellation, “The Sistine of the South.”

But there is a problem with these beautiful murals which needs attention. Since we installed a new, more efficient chiller for the cooling system a few years ago, we are experiencing condensation on the vents which exit into the Cathedral just below the Procession of Saints murals in the center aisle. The wicking effect of this moisture into the canvas at the base of these murals has begun to cause deterioration of the oil paint on the lower part of the surface on many of these masterpieces. We need to correct the moisture problems, then restore and preserve the murals.

We have established a Murals Preservation Fund to begin raising funds to restore these magnificent murals for future generations. Since the large number of visitors is partially responsible for the problem, a portion of the contributions from the Visitors Box will be dedicated to restoration of the murals. The new Cathedral web site has several opportunities to give to various Causes and Campaigns. Contributions to the Murals Restoration Fund can be made on the web site under the Give tab. We would appreciate your support to preserve these masterpieces.
We were very surprised at the number of parishioners who returned their 2015 Talent Form with the “feeding the hungry” line carefully circled. After determining that the slots for helping at the Social Apostolate were completely filled, we started looking around to see how we could help in the greater Savannah community. Father Scheck was very encouraging. It would be nice to see volunteers representing our parish serving our city, wherever that would take us.

Moira Novack, a member of the Cathedral Parish Council, had made a friend during her son’s time playing basketball with a local home-schooling group. This new friend had a heart for serving the less fortunate. By reaching out to some homeless people who had attended services at her church, she learned of a great need of food for the residents of the homeless camp located behind the Blackshear Basketball Complex on Wheaton Street. This young woman was attempting to feed these people out of her own home on a biweekly basis. Her heart was much bigger than her grocery budget.

We decided to try to help out with this and see how it would go. An email went out to the Cathedral parishioners who had volunteered for the Feeding the Hungry (FTH) Ministry and the response was overwhelming. People not only brought food of all kinds and disposable paper products but they showed up to sit and eat with these new friends and assure them that they were valued members of God’s community. The new friends were male and female, young and old, educated and uneducated but all were united in their gratitude for the time we spent with them.

Planning began for a Christmas party and these festivities took on a life of their own. Many gifts were donated including tents, sleeping bags, grocery store gift cards, sweaters and stockings of fruit, candies, and socks were created for each person. The food provided was incredible and included glazed ham, lasagna, fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, broccoli casserole, macaroni and cheese, green salads, fresh fruit, plus fabulous desserts including a luscious chocolate cake made by our youngest volunteer that was the first plate completely emptied. We ate and talked and prayed. We sang Christmas carols accompanied by our own guitarist, Joe Moriarty. And then we distributed gifts. Our new friends were overwhelmed; not by the generosity of the Cathedral parishioners but by our willingness to sit and talk, to hug and hold hands, to pray and comfort. The best gift we gave to these new friends was the willingness to see them as people of God, just like us. And they were so very grateful.

The FTH team also prepared and delivered fruit baskets to some of our ill or home-bound members during the Christmas season. These were received with smiles, thanks, and often tears. While the FTH team is considering other opportunities to serve in the parish or in the community, our experiences at Blackshear and with the fruit baskets have made us all aware that when we give so openly and freely, we are the ones who receive the best gift of all.

If you would like to participate with the FTH team, please contact Donna Sanders at rndsanders@gmail.com or check out the Blackshear Facebook page, Blackshear Potluck Community.
The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord is an ancient celebration. The Church at Jerusalem observed the feast as early as the first half of the fourth century. The feast celebrates the presentation of Christ in the temple in Jerusalem on the 40th day after His birth. Until 1969, the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord, which is of Oriental origin, was known in the West as the Feast of the Purification of Our Lady, and closed the Christmas Cycle, forty days after the Lord's birth. As such, many Catholics practiced the tradition of keeping out the Nativity crèche or other Christmas decorations until this feast.

According to Jewish law, the firstborn male child belonged to God, and the parents had to "buy him back" on the 40th day after his birth, by offering a sacrifice of "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:24) in the temple.

The mural on the northwest transept wall depicts the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. The turtle doves carried by St. Joseph represent a sacrifice made in gratitude to God for the birth of their first born son. Christ is pictured in the arms of the aged priest Simeon the Just in the presence of Anna the prophetess. They embody Israel in their patient expectation and acknowledge the infant Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.

As described in Luke's Gospel, upon bringing Jesus into the temple, they encountered Simeon, a righteous and devout man, who looked forward to the consolation of Israel. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms, praised God and then uttered the prayer that would become known as the Nunc Dimittis, or the face of all people: to be a light to lighten the gentiles and to be the glory of Thy people Israel" (Luke 2:29–32). Simeon then prophesied to Mary: "Behold, this child is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which is spoken against. Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34–35).

The elderly prophetess Anna was also in the Temple. She offered prayers and praise to God for Jesus and spoke to everyone there about Jesus and his role in the redemption of Israel (Luke 2:36–38).

Luke's Gospel concludes "When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him."

Most people familiar with the few details about the early life of Jesus are aware of the fact that following the visit from the Wise Men, Matthew's Gospel records that Joseph and Mary took Jesus and fled to Egypt at the command of God and later, after Herod's death, departed Egypt for Nazareth. Since Luke does not mention the Flight into Egypt, some bible scholars contend that either Matthew or Luke must be mistaken. However, it is also very possible, and perhaps more likely, that Luke simply omitted Joseph, Mary, and Jesus' trip to Egypt. The fact that Luke does not mention the Flight into Egypt while Matthew's Gospel is quite explicit in this regard remains an open question, shrouded in the mists of time.
The 15th Annual Cathedral Heritage Gala held on a chilly but beautiful Saturday night at an exciting new venue, the newly renovated Catholic Pastoral Center on Victory Drive, was very successful.

Co-Chairs, Rob and Amy Massey recently presented a check to Fr. Gerry Schreck in the amount of $90,000 for the Cathedral Heritage Fund to benefit the restoration and preservation of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist. Due to the Heritage Galas held over the past 15 years, with this latest deposit, the Endowment will be just over $2,000,000, which is amazing since we started out with zero 15 years ago.

We are most grateful to all the Gala supporters who have helped preserve our beautiful Cathedral for generations to come.

A special thanks to Amy and Rob and the entire Gala Committee for a job well done!