I recently walked over to the Social Apostolate to get to know the new Director, Sister Julie Franchi. Born and raised in Boston, MA, she entered the Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception right out of high school. “That’s the way we did it back then. Nowadays women don’t go directly into a community. Although I wouldn’t recommend others doing what I did, I have no regrets. For me it was the right thing. I just love my life.” Sister Julie said. She comes across as a very open person. When I asked her what the qualities are that suited her for this job, she responded, “I have good leadership skills but mostly I am an extrovert and a people person,” she responded.

She attended Newton College of the Sacred Heart, which has since been absorbed by Boston College, and received her bachelor’s degree, majoring in Spanish. Subsequently Sister continued her education and received a Master’s degree in Theology from St. Bonaventure University in Olean, NY.

Although she had worked in the Diocese of Savannah between 1990 and 1995 as the Director of Migrant Ministry in Statesboro, GA, she spent the past eight years teaching Spanish at Mt. Alvernia High School in Newton, MA. She was happy in that job but several people asked her if she had considered applying for the job as Director of the Social Apostolate, “No,” was her answer, but “You could do it,” was always their reply. Finally Sister Pauline told her that she would like to see her apply for the job and so Sister Julie began a period of discernment.

She came to Savannah during Holy Week 2011 to interview for the job. While attending the Chrism Mass, she felt a sense of community, that the church here in Savannah was a very nurturing place. “I came to believe that I could be a nurturing presence at the Social Apostolate.” When offered the job her response was, “Yes, I’ll do it”, and she found inspiration from Mary’s “Yes” at the Annunciation. “She said ‘Yes’ without knowing what lay ahead. I just trusted that God brought me here for a reason, that this is where I am meant to be.”

Since her arrival in Savannah, Sister Julie has been overwhelmed by a sense that she has been blessed by the people of this area. “They have been generous, kind and welcoming. It is beyond words to express how beloved by the people I have been made to feel. God is here and I’m glad I’m here too,” she said.

Taking over as Director of the Social Apostolate, Sister Julie is standing on the shoulders of three great women, all members of the Missionary Franciscan Sisters, who founded, nurtured and built the Social Apostolate into what it is today, a ministry caring for the homeless, disabled and at risk individuals here in Savannah.

According to the Savannah Morning News the poor living in the city of Savannah comprise 25% of the population. This is much higher than the state and national average, so there is much for the Social Apostolate to do.

Over the past couple of years, they have served over 100 hot lunch meals per day, Tuesday through Friday, but of late the numbers have crept up towards 120-125/day. Recently, a high of about 140 was reached. Clearly in this economic environment, the need is great.

In addition to the hot lunch meals in the soup kitchen, last year they also provided a total over 1100 baskets of groceries to at-risk families and working poor who do not qualify for food stamps, and can’t make ends meet. The baskets provided each month contain a whole frozen chicken, breakfast food, beans, soup, canned vegetables, rice, pasta, sandwich meat, and whatever else happens to be available on the food pantry shelves. “We used to provide a basket per family every three months. However now we give them one every

Continued on next page
In his Lenten message a few years ago, Pope Benedict XVI focused our attention on the practice of almsgiving, any material favor done to benefit a needy brother, prompted by charity, for Christ’s sake. He emphasized that “Lent offers an opportunity to rediscover the mercy of God, so that we become more merciful toward our brothers and sisters. Almsgiving helps us respond to our neighbor’s needs and share with others whatever we possess through divine goodness.”

And on the occasion of the Feast of Corpus Christi in 2008, the Holy Father said, “Those who eat the Bread of Christ cannot remain indifferent before those who, even in our days, lack daily bread. Many parents are barely able to provide for themselves and their children. It is a grave and growing problem that the international community finds hard to solve. He urged us to “not only pray ‘give us this day our daily bread,’ but to follow the Lord’s example, work in every way to multiply the five loaves and two fishes, with countless humanitarian efforts and sharing, so that no one remains without the necessities of life.”

During this Lenten season, the Christian Service Committee encourages all parishioners to heed the Holy Father’s words and help others in need. Every March, the Cathedral Parish is responsible for contributing food to the Savannah Social Apostolate Food Basket Program which goes to provide meals to the needy of our city. We’d like to see that basket overflowing with food every Sunday in March as the need is so great. A can of soup is welcome but a bag of groceries each week is preferred. So put the bulletin insert on your refrigerator and bring a bag of groceries to church every week.

The drive starts Sunday, March 4th and runs through the entire month. Boxes will be maintained in the vestibule of the Cathedral for parishioners to deposit items of non-perishable food for this much needed cause. Canned fish and meats, dried beans, rice, macaroni, peanut butter and jelly are always needed. Here is an opportunity to fulfill your Lenten responsibility for almsgiving before we get to Easter. Please be generous and support this worthy cause. Remember, “To whom much is given, much is expected.”

Sr. Julie – Continued

month because the need is so great,” said Sister Julie.

The primary sources of the food for these baskets are donations from the various parishes in Savannah. Each parish has a designated month and the Cathedral traditionally helps out in March. As Deborah Wade has observed in the past, the food doesn’t stay on the shelves very long. It goes out as fast as the food comes in. Protein is the most difficult item to provide, so canned fish and meats are always welcome and beans are also a great source of protein. Please be generous and do your part to help your less fortunate brothers and sisters.

In summary, Sister Julie commented that we serve Jesus in each person regardless of the circumstance. In that regard, she recalled her favorite spiritual passage, Matthew 25, “Whatsoever you did for the least of my brothers and sisters that you did unto me.”

“...In the Social Apostolate we do a lot to feed and care for those less fortunate than ourselves. We are the hands for those who want to help but for whatever reason cannot do it. I believe there is a sense of solidarity with those who contribute to the Social Apostolate. When they give to us, they are feeding the poor. We are their hands,” Sister Julie concluded.

Volunteers are always needed. They currently have over 80 volunteers. About 30 of these serve in the soup kitchen each week. Others help in the kitchen, work as receptionist or do secretarial work. Some new volunteers are helping to establish a website and database. So if you have some spare time and want to do something to help your others, give Sister Julie a call at 233-1877 X 104.
In our last article about the Cathedral stained glass windows, information provided by Gernot Fussenegger of the Tyrolese Art Glass Company (TGA) of Innsbruck, Austria, confirmed that they made the original windows, which were destroyed in the fire of 1898. Additional information he provided has also clarified the longstanding St. Bridget window mystery.

The windows that line the side aisles are quite beautiful. Most of them are biblical scenes of Jesus, the Blessed Virgin or familiar Saints like St. Patrick or St. John. However, there is one north aisle window that has always intrigued me; St. Elizabeth of Hungry feeds the poor. There does not seem to any connection with our church per se. The window is “In Memory of Michael and Mary Brannan”. Perhaps the donor had some special devotion to St. Elizabeth.

Frank Rizza shared some information he obtained several years ago from the Tyrolese Art Glass Company, that indicates a St. Bridget window was originally planned for this opening, which makes more sense.

Copies of letters, obtained from Gillian Brown, Diocesan Archivist, between Rector Benjamin J. Keiley and Theodore Rose, Resident Manager of the Tyrolese Art Glass Company also suggest that this window was supposed to be St. Bridget:


St. Bridget distributes alms, window and cartoon
In a window plan dated July 23, 1902. The Gospel or left side windows were planned to be:

L 1  St. John at Patmos (Ord 5/3/1901)
L 2  St. Peter receiving the keys (Sent 9/20/1901)
L 3  Mt. Olive agony
L 5  Christ heals sick

Notes from the TGA records, dated July 9, 1903, further indicate that

“Rose will make sure St. Bridget will be installed in nr. 4.”

And on July 20th another from message Rose states:
“Suggestion to switch 3 and 4 finds approval. Will send location plan for TG to follow.”

All of this seems quite conclusive, however since the early 1900’s, we have referred to the scene in space number 4 as St. Elizabeth of Hungary feeds the poor.

Based on the information above, I posed the following question to Gernot:

“The information previously provided, showed that one of the Nave windows was supposed to be of St. Bridget however, St. Elizabeth of Hungary now fills that space. How did that happen?”

To help clarify this matter, I sent him a copy of the booklet, Art and Symbols of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, published in 2007, which has pictures of all the windows and noted, “As you will note on page 31, we have always identified this window as St. Elizabeth of Hungary feeds the poor.

Subsequently, Gernot cleared up the mystery of the St. Bridget/Elizabeth window as follows:

“There can be no doubt that the Bridget/Elizabeth window was sent to Savannah as the window: St. Brigitta almosen verteilend. (St. Bridget distributes alms.) If the T.G.A. would have sent a wrong window, it would be noted down in the “Bestellbuch”. As there is no note in the books, the Bishop of Savannah must have accepted it as the declared St. Bridget window.”

This is further confirmed by the original cartoon of the St. Bridget window provided by Gernot, which is a perfect match for our Cathedral window that we have called St. Elizabeth of Hungary all these years.

So if this window is really St. Bridget, where is St. Elizabeth?

According to the publication The Cathedral’s Artistic Uniqueness, which was published in the 1960’s in conjunction with a restoration that was done at that time, the south lancet windows were identified as follows:

Below the south transept window depicting the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the four lancet windows picture:

St. Anthony of Padua with the Infant Jesus, “Gift of Mary A. Nally”
St. Dorothea, “In memory of Rt. Rev. Benjamin Keiley, 7th Bishop of Savannah”
St. George, “In memory of Ignatius Cardinal Persico, 4th Bishop of Savannah”
The Blessed Virgin Mary - Mater Admirabilis, “In memory of John O’Reiley”

However, according to the Innsbruck Glassmakers, “There can be no doubt, that the Saint pictured in the south lancet window, previously identified as St. Dorothea, is in fact St. Elizabeth. You will find her name in the title of the cartoon for that window (Left). Moreover, the crown on her head reveals Elizabeth as the Landgravine of Thüringen, which she effectively was.”

So the bottom line is that we do have a St. Elizabeth of Hungary window after all.
Savannah Deanery Marches for Life in 2012

By Gretchen K. Reese

In January, the Savannah Deanery again sent a bus to Washington, DC so that members of the flock could speak up about the children who are lost every day to the abortion holocaust. How many children? Using numbers available through the Guttmacher Institute, one may calculate with a fair degree of accuracy that about 2.5 children die every minute in this country from abortion in all its forms, an astounding number that the secular media dares not discuss.

This year there was a second bus provided by St. James Church. This second bus was designated to transport a cadre of youth under the leadership of Fr. Chris Ortega. The deanery sponsored bus held adults with Fr. Mark Ross of St. James Parish, Fr. John Tran, and trip coordinator Ellen Pinckney. Our departure early on Sunday morning the 22nd was without incident. Everyone was bundled up for an inclement March for Life on Monday morning.

And cold and wet it was. Following a rousing evening Mass at the Basilica on Sunday evening and a good rest at our accommodations, the group headed out for their various destinations in spite of the weather. Fr. Ortega and the contingent of young people attended the standing room only Youth Rally at the Verizon Center. After news reached the adults that, due to the weather, all government buildings would be closed until eleven that morning, the remainder of the group visited museums and memorials during the morning. In spite of the foul weather, the March itself was as well attended as ever. Once again this year, youth predominated, with practically every state in the union represented! The Savannah marchers were recognizable to one another this year because June Dang made each one a lovely blue scarf to wear.

The 2012 March for Life was the biggest and best ever. As usual, the marchers carried themselves with dignity and grace. In the face of opposition protestors who did everything they could to disrupt the peaceful March, all participants maintained their composure, sometimes patiently offering to refute their arguments and completed their mission without incident. Their unconditional support for life is admirable and their dedication to protecting the preborn most heartening. The cold winter rain in Washington, DC did nothing to dampen their enthusiasm.

Following the March, we returned to our buses and enjoyed movies and home made cookies on the way home. As usual, we arrived back at St. James very early the next morning. Tired though we were, everyone made a commitment to try to come again in 2013, because next year is the 40th anniversary of the infamous Roe v. Wade decision. Won’t you consider joining us?
We first met Fr. Chris Ortega at a Knights of Columbus Dinner while he was still a seminarian and were surprised to learn that he was from Los Angeles. “How did he get to Savannah,” was the natural question. “My journey to becoming a priest for the Diocese of Savannah has several dimensions,” said Fr. Chris. “While I was still in high school, I had a personal experience with God which led me to believe that I was being called to the priesthood. During my prayer life, I had a sense of peace when I contemplated becoming a priest. For me, this was an early sign that this would be the right path for me.”

After high school, Chris joined a youth ministry group called NET Ministries based in West St. Paul, Minnesota. He traveled extensively around the country for two years, putting on youth retreats, at various parishes, in such far flung places as Bismarck, ND to Boston MA and from Fort Worth, TX to Rockville Center, NY. It was during that time that he learned to play the guitar and also heard about Ave Maria University in Naples, Florida, which he entered in the Fall of 2003. At Ave Maria he met several friends from the Alleluia Community in Augusta and visited there several times. As he became more familiar with our diocese, it was clear that this was the place for him. He was accepted in the Diocese of Savannah seminary program and entered Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, PA, in 2007.

Life in the seminary can be very intense. They structure it that way to give the seminarians a sense of how demanding the priesthood can be and to help them learn how to deal with it. Despite these challenges, Fr. Chris tried to be himself and actually had fun while there. It was there that he refined his unique, high energy preaching style. During this time when he asked the Lord if this was for him, this sense of peace, almost like a whisper, was still there.

While on a visit home, midway through his seminary studies, Chris had a conversation with his mother who recalled that when he was a young boy he always enjoyed going to church. One Sunday when he was 5 years old, on the way out of church, little Chris was dawdling and his mother was trying to hurry him up as his father was waiting in the car. Chris finally announced “I’m going to be up there one day wearing that long robe like the priest wears.” Obviously the Holy Spirit was speaking to him at an early age.

“My startup as a priest, at the Cathedral, was rather bumpy with Monsignor O’Neill going on vacation to Ireland, and falling ill soon after he got there. I feel fortunate that nothing major happened in the parish during this time that I had to handle on my own. The Cathedral parish is not just like any other parish. Many people live farther away from the church than in the normal parish, making it harder to have a sense of community. And then there is the dilution effect, with so many tourists attending Mass on Sunday, making it difficult for a new priest to recognize the members of his flock,” Fr. Chris reflected. “But now I’ve started to recognize many of our parishioners and look forward to getting to know them better in the days ahead.”

“I really have enjoyed working with the young adults from SCAD and other colleges in Savannah. Music is important to me because it gives me a way to deepen my prayer life. As St. Augustine said, ‘Singing is like praying twice.’ In my desire to assist and deepen their spiritual lives, I have started to hold monthly Holy Hours with this group but they are open to everyone in the parish. I hope that eventually other parishioners will attend these services and also be encouraged to come to the Cathedral at times other than just for Sunday Mass, so as to come pray and experience the Lord,” Fr. Chris concluded.
Consider Making a Planned Gift to the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist

The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist depends on the generosity of our friends and benefactors to meet the extraordinary demands that come with maintaining this magnificent structure that is more than one-hundred thirty five years old. The Cathedral Endowment Fund was established several years ago, to preserve the architectural soundness, integrity, and beauty of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, as a symbol of our faith, for future generations. Although the fund has grown over the years, it cannot possibly provide enough to do the job.

The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist has relied on generous supporters to help us continue this mission. We have been blessed over the years to have received several magnanimous gifts from individuals who included the Cathedral in their estate plans which have helped us to meet some the unexpected expenditures of maintaining this beautiful church.

It is estimated that only about 40% of Americans have a will or estate plans. Having and maintaining a will or estate plan is a good way to guarantee that your final wishes are realized by your loved ones. As you consider your financial commitment to the Lord’s work, you might want to consider estate planning. Many sincere committed Catholics have not made provision for God in their will and estate plan. It can be as simple as including a provision in your will that an outright specific bequest, a gift of a particular amount of money, an item of property or a percent of the value of your estate be donated to the Cathedral at time of your passing. Gifts made to the Cathedral through your will may also offer possible tax benefits.

An estate gift not only provides you with peace of mind, but also affords you an opportunity to leave an enduring legacy of support for the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist for generations to come. If you would like to include the Cathedral in your will please contact Monsignor O’Neill at 912-233-4709 for more information.

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