Standing for Life in Atlanta
By Gretchen K. Reese, MEV

Each year, the Deanery of Savannah Respect Life Ministry plans special activities to commemorate the anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the landmark Supreme Court decision in 1973 that legalized abortion across America. This year, on January 23, the actual date of the 44th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, 14 pilgrims, including 4 SCAD students and 3 children, boarded a bus bound for Atlanta at the invitation of the archdiocese to take part in their annual “Stand for Life.” This is the first occasion on which members of these two large dioceses in Georgia formally joined together for a single memorial for the anniversary of Roe v. Wade.

After an early start, our joyful travelers filled the morning with prayer and song. On our arrival, the Cathedral of Christ the King was filled to capacity with families, students from local Catholic schools and visitors, as Archbishop Wilton Gregory officiated in the morning Mass, assisted by 6 other clergy. Following the Mass for the Unborn, attendees gathered for public witness along both sides of Peachtree Road.

We boarded our bus for the return trip about 2:00 PM. A pro-life rosary followed more prayer and song. Then we had time to share the highlights of the trip. Here are some of the responses:

“It was a special pleasure sharing this event with such enthusiastic youth and exuberant children. Everyone came together like family and helped one another, especially with the children. It was a very enjoyable day!”

“The fellowship on the bus, with the next generation of pro-life Catholics, who will be the pro-life leaders of tomorrow was really special,” Margaret commented.

Linda, RLM member from Sacred Heart, was elated that the SCAD students who came all attended her church. “I was so excited to see their support and commitment for pro-life!”

Krystyna, one of the students, thought “it was good for us students to connect with our community in a positive way, instead of just with other people our own age.”

“I learned it isn’t enough to count on politicians and the courts to protect life. Yes, they are important, but so are we (citizens). It is important for us all to do our part to protect life at every stage.”

Melissa said, “Every parent has a responsibility to live the pro-life message as an example for their children. Public schools often do not provide the perspective needed for a Catholic child living in a society with such mixed messages. I want my son to see me doing these things, and when he is older, he will participate with his parents so that he comes to value the right things and to understand his responsibilities in our world.”

And one of us had a unique take on the pilgrimage. Jaclyn told us that the day before our trip, she met her friend’s newborn adopted son. “She and her family shared with me the joy of him joining their family.” Then, on our trip, spending time with a mother and her three adopted children further impressed her. She recalled that her own mother-in-law is an adopted child. “It is so important for people to consider adoption over abortion; these children matter!” she said.

The Savannah Deanery Respect Life Ministry wishes to express sincere appreciation to those who attended and also to the deanery priests for underwriting the cost of our bus.
What does Easter mean to you?

In just a couple of weeks, we will celebrate Easter. Like most holidays, Easter means different things to different people. When we were young it meant new clothes and lots of chocolate candy. Easter means much more than that.

But to some people it has no meaning. For many it is just another day. Some folks go to work or go on an outing without giving a thought to God. Easter Sunday has no more meaning than any other Sunday.

Recently a secular web site asked the question “What does Easter mean to you? Many of the posts commented on a three day weekend in a new outfit with no spiritual implications. But one post said, “Easter means that the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ, died on the cross for my sins and was resurrected to give those that believe in Him eternal life.” Hallelujah!

It is a day set aside to remember the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is what sets Christianity apart from every other religion in the world. Yes, Jesus died on Calvary and was buried, but the victory of Easter is that Jesus didn’t stay dead, he didn’t stay buried. Up from the grave He arose, with a mighty triumph over His foes. He arose a victor from the dark domain and He lives forever with His saints to reign. Jesus is not dead, He is alive!

… "Why do you seek the living one among the dead? He is not here, but has been raised." (Luke 24:5-6)

The folks who see Easter as a time for new clothes and nothing else, should be encouraged to see in those new clothes, a symbol of something more… a new life in Christ.

Easter is a day to worship the risen Christ. Not just because He arose from the dead, but because He will one day resurrect all those who have placed their faith in Him… "For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead came also from a human being. For just as in Adam all die, so to in Christ all shall be brought to life." (1 Cor 15:21-22) When we are born again in Christ, we are passed from death unto life. Jesus was victorious over death, hell, and the grave. Our victory is in Him. Easter is a day for us to recommit ourselves to Him.

What does Easter mean to you today?

Do you believe that Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, died on the cross for our sins and was resurrected to give those that believe in Him eternal life? Let us place our trust in Him. Knowing that Jesus is a living victorious Savior should encourage us to serve Him with our lives. Scripture tells us that, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Let’s serve Him with a greater fervor than ever before.
Each March the Christian Services Committee of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist makes a month long push to fill the food pantry at the Social Apostolate. This year’s Food Drive was, not unexpectedly, astounding. By the end of March thousands of pounds of food had been collected and delivered to the Social Apostolate. The Cathedral parishioners respond generously and quickly each year during the annual drive and this year, the Cathedral response was so overwhelming, that volunteers from the CSC, loaded their cars after each weekend Mass and made several deliveries to the Liberty Street facility just to keep the church entryway uncluttered.

Even though the March food drive is a highly concentrated effort to fill the shelves at the food pantry, there is always an ongoing need for those same items throughout the year. It is never a surprise to find grocery store bags filled with food in the church entry on any Sunday. And each year, when Sr. Julie finds her supplies desperately low, Cathedral parishioners respond just as generously to a specific “item of the month” need.

According to Sr. Julie, Director of the Social Apostolate, the items always in need are basic staples like canned meats, soups and vegetables, cereals, jelly, peanut butter, boxed foods and dried beans. Cathedral parishioners are encouraged to bring items when they come to Mass, dropping their bags or boxes off in the baskets located near the side entry doors. There comes with that simple act, a real feeling of serving God by feeding “His sheep.”

If anyone is new to Savannah or to the Cathedral Parish, you may wonder why there is even a need for a food drive and what happens with all that much food? In addition to its many other services, the Social Apostolate staff and volunteers give out grocery assistance to qualified clients Monday through Friday 9:00-12:30. All this is possible because of the donations made by Catholic churches in Savannah.

And the demand for food assistance is growing. What a life lesson for children if parents would let their little ones pick out food pantry items as they grocery shop and let them place those bagged items in the baskets as they come to Mass each week. Or, if you missed the March Food Drive, think about contributing to the food pantry during Lent. One of the Christian Services members will gladly take your load in order to “lighten” someone else’s this Lenten season. After all, hunger doesn’t take a holiday after March.
The Cathedral celebrated a bittersweet goodbye to our beloved Father Dan Firmin last month at the Knights of Columbus after a special evening Mass. Father Firmin has been part of the Cathedral family since 2007 and as happy as we are to see him start a new adventure, we already miss him. Fortunately, his new assignment as Administrator of Saint Michael Parish, Tybee Island, means that we can still visit as well as see him out and about town while he continues to serve the diocese as Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia.

Father Dan was born in New Iberia, Louisiana, but was raised in Augusta, Georgia where his parents were part of the Alleluia Community. He earned his BA at Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio, and then graduated from the Seminary at the Pontifical North American College in Rome, Italy, where he earned a Bachelor’s degree in Sacred Theology followed by his ordination in 2004.

He served as Parochial Vicar at Saint Joseph Church in Macon, Georgia, before continuing his education at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. obtaining his Licentiate in Canon Law (JCL), which is equivalent to a civil law degree, in 2007.

Father Firmin’s contribution to the diocese extends far beyond his job titles and responsibilities. He also serves as a spiritual director to individuals and groups, and generously serves the Catholic community at large.

During the reception, Father Firmin thanked the parishioners at the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist for helping to make him the priest he is today. That is quite a compliment to us all because his reputation for being a deeply loving, dedicated, joy-filled, intellectual with a great sense of humor is undisputed.

The crowd at the reception traded stories about how Father Dan had impacted their lives and how just being around him reminded many that we are meant to live joyfully in the knowledge of our how great our God is. Parishioner Jillison Parks said, “Father Firmin has this great light about him, and for 10 years has poured it out upon the people of our parish. I think we will miss him more than we realize, even at this moment, we are missing him already.”

Not every priest has the ability to make his love of God palpable in word, deed, and spirit but Father Dan is one of the gifted ones and we wish him all the best in his new position and hope he knows just how much we love him.
First Annual Seniors Mass and Luncheon

By Melanie Brooks
Photos by Paul H. Camp

On Saturday, January 28th, over one hundred senior members of the Cathedral parish gathered for the First Annual Seniors Mass and Luncheon. Mass began at noon and was celebrated by special guest, Bishop Kevin Boland. Father Schreck was the homilist and reminded the attendees that they had great value to the parish – both for their experience and for their wisdom. The new Cathedral Schola provided beautiful music.

After Mass, guests moved across the street to the Parish Hall for a luncheon provided by the Serving Seniors Ministry. Valentine’s Day was the theme as name tags and tables featured red hearts. Chocolate hearts were at each place. A wonderful meal of good comfort food was served including meatloaf and mashed potatoes with strawberry shortcake for dessert. St. Vincent’s students assisted the ministry team with setup and serving. It is always nice to have these lovely young ladies join us.

Key Cathedral staff were introduced including Dr. Lynne Everett, Sacristan, Mac Fogle, Music Director, and Jillian Pashke-Durant, Cantor. The guests expressed their appreciation for the dedication and talents of these church professionals. Father Schreck welcomed the group and offered the blessing.

Barbara Schulz was honored with a birthday cake and the group celebrated her big birthday with a rousing chorus of Happy Birthday.

After a round of how old are you and how long have you been a member, cookie blue ribbons were awarded. Karl Holmen was awarded the cookie for the longest membership in the parish. Patty Schreck was awarded cookies for celebrating all sacraments at the Cathedral. For having children and grandchildren who are members of the parish, Marjorie Conners received a cookie award. And Katherine Scardino received the award for oldest member present – a proud 95.

Sister Julie Franchi of the Social Apostolate was introduced and spoke briefly to the group about the importance of the support the Cathedral provides and how grateful the Apostolate is for it.

It was a delightful day with many old and new friends having some time to enjoy each other. The next Seniors event will be scheduled for late April or early May.
Being a Docent at the Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist

By John Pryor

"Must see while in Savannah!"

"One of the most beautiful cathedrals in America!"

"Stunning! Rivals the great cathedrals of Europe!"

"Breathtaking. GOD is surely present!"

These are just a few select quotes that have been posted on TripAdvisor about our beautiful Cathedral. As a parishioner and a docent at our wonderful Cathedral I take great pride in what our visitors from around the world have to say about our house of worship. According to TripAdvisor, we have been rated among the top attractions in the United States.

We have also been voted the Most Beautiful Building in Georgia by Thrillist. We are very blessed to come to Mass in such a beautiful and spiritual church every week.

The beauty of our Cathedral awes thousands of visitors each week. In the past year, over 213,000 visitors toured the Cathedral. They not only visited and prayed but also contributed over $223,000 to our operating revenue. Crowds of visitors vary during the year with a high point being about 2000 per day during the Christmas season when our Crèche is displayed. This past year we had scheduled tours from around the country specifically to see our Cathedral and Crèche scene, including one group from as far away as New Mexico.

We have docent volunteers available most days of the year to give tours and presentations of the architecture, history and art in the Cathedral. Our docent team consists of thirteen dedicated volunteer parishioners who truly love the Cathedral and enjoy enhancing the visual beauty of our French Gothic house of prayer with information about its history. As part of our tours we discuss the stunning architectural features and its beautiful symbols and art work such as the beautiful Stations of the Cross that were hand carved in Bavaria, the awesome stained glass windows that were made by the Tyrolean Art Glass Company of Innsbruck, Austria and the glorious organ with 2309 pipes made by the Noack Organ Company of Georgetown, Massachusetts. The most notable decorative elements in the Cathedral are the 34 murals, hand painted in oil on canvas, which give the church its name “The Sistine of the South.”

As docents we are asked many questions about the Cathedral, mostly about the building and its history. Some are about our faith and the size of our congregation. Typical questions include: How many priests do you have here? What is a Cathedral? How big is the organ? Why do you light candles? Who did the paintings? How did the church look before the restoration?

Being a docent is a very rewarding ministry. We all look forward to our day on duty and leave at the end of the day feeling very satisfied that we have contributed to our Cathedral by enhancing the tourists’ knowledge of this spiritual place. We all hope that our visitors leave with a memory that will enhance their visit to Savannah.

If you have a strong feeling of pride in our religion as well as our cathedral and would like to join the docent ministry, please contact me at fizzypryor@gmail.com. We will be glad to invite you to “shadow a docent” and see if it is something you would like to commit to undertake.
God wants a personal relationship with each of us. That may seem hard to believe for some of us but it is absolutely true. All relationships require committed, quality time with a sincere interest in getting to know the other person. If you want a relationship with God you have to dedicate a time and place to be alone with him, to talk and to listen. If you had coffee with a friend but constantly talked and never listened, or spent all your time worrying, complaining, or asking for favors for you and your friends the friendship would slowly wane and never develop. While there is no “right” way to pray there are certainly approaches and methods to make prayer more fruitful. But be aware, prayer is not for those craving perfect stability. When you pray you will be changed! To pray is to risk letting God surprise you. God is actually waiting for you and prayer is a way to show up. The Cathedral’s prayer group offers several dynamic programs throughout the year that focus on growing in communion with God and they hope you will join them.

They recently completed Oremus is an 8 week DVD series by Ascension Press that focused on how to become aware of God’s presence in our lives. The most popular parts of the program were the lessons on the practice of Lectio Divina and how to use Ignatian imaginative prayer. The program also taught skills for discernment in prayer and how to deal with consolation and desolation when praying. These were simple steps to discover how to hear God’s voice in Scripture and throughout our everyday experiences. Learning how to express ourselves through prayer, to listen and respond to God is critical to our spiritual growth and benefits all of our other relationships. While the DVD instruction was compelling, the insightful discussions and daily scripture study during the week highlighted the everyday challenges and gifts that come with a regular prayer practice. Some participants shared strategies that helped them to begin a serious prayer routine while others worked on enhancing and diversifying their current prayers. Prayer isn’t always easy and having a group to share individual successes and difficulties was especially impactful in unexpected ways. Sometimes the best we can do is to “just show up” for our time of prayer and know that whatever happens (or doesn’t happen) is really okay. This program will be offered again soon.

Another 8 week DVD prayer program, Untold Blessings, by Bishop Robert Barron began in Mid March. This program walks participants through the extraordinary idea that we are all meant to become saints. Seriously, all of us! Sainthood is our greatest calling and is God’s hope for each of us. In this program Bishop Barron provides a beautiful and mysterious image of what it takes to be a follower of Jesus Christ. He lays out three intriguing paths to holiness; finding the center in Christ, knowing we are all sinners, and realizing that our lives are not about us. Bishop Barron manages to articulate these profound issues in a down to earth manner that helps average people make significant progress on their spiritual paths. Deepening our relationship with God requires effort but we should all remember the famous adage, if we hold out a hand, God extends his whole arm; if we move an inch closer, he moves feet closer; and if we walk toward him, he is running toward us. The prayer group is hoping you will join them on their journey to a more loving and fruitful relationship with God.
WELCOME NEW MEMBERS
By Melanie Brooks

The Cathedral has experienced a “growth spurt” over the last few months with over 60 families joining the parish since October. Sunday morning, March 5th, we welcomed these new members at coffee and doughnuts. Many of these newcomers are already engaged with Adult Faith Formation classes and volunteer ministries. We welcome the enthusiasm they bring to our activities.

New members were asked to wear a name tag so they would be easily recognizable. They were also given a “Cathedral Survival Kit” which included some fun items, some sweets, and information about our Cathedral and its ministries and offerings.

We also made sure that new members knew how to reach out and connect. Anyone who is new to our parish and hasn’t received a welcoming phone call or email, should contact Melanie Brooks at brooks508@aol.com to find out all the Cathedral has to offer. We are eager to make you feel at home with us.

PACK SERVES THE REFUGEE COMMUNITY
Article and Photos by Melanie Brooks

The newest PACK activity involves delivering emergency food supplies to refugees in the Savannah area by supporting the efforts of the Hope Academy. There are currently more than 50 Syrian refugees in our community. The Hope Academy provides adult education including English language classes and assists in the process of finding a job. Refugees receive a Social Security number when they arrive and all efforts are focused on getting them into the workforce.

Food bags are packed on the first Sunday of each month and delivered as required to various agencies around town. The food bags that PACK will deliver to Hope Academy each Friday will help these new Savannahians get over the hurdle of providing sustenance and allow more time to focus on resettlement and finding a job.

There are currently 506 refugees in Georgia, mostly women and children.
The Stations of the Cross are synonymous with Lent, Holy Week and especially Good Friday. This devotion, known as the "Way of the Cross" or the "Via Dolorosa" (the Sorrowful Way), commemorates 14 key events of Christ's Passion. Over the centuries, pilgrims who visited the Holy Land would walk along the Via Dolorosa, the street in Jerusalem that Jesus walked from Pilate to Calvary, pausing to pray and meditate at each station. As part of the Liturgical Year, Stations of the Cross are prayed on Good Friday as an act of sharing in the suffering of Christ. By following the Stations, we make a symbolic pilgrimage to the Holy Land. After praying through the Stations on Good Friday, we then await the Resurrection of Jesus on Easter morning.

After the siege of 1187, Jerusalem fell to Muslims. Forty years later, the Franciscans were allowed back into the Holy Land. Their founder, Saint Francis of Assisi, held the Passion of Christ in special veneration. In 1217, St. Francis founded the Custody of the Holy Land to guard and promote the devotion to holy places. During the 5th Crusade in 1219, St. Francis met with Sultan Malek al-Kamil in Egypt. Some say Francis had gone to the sultan on a mission of peace to end the war while others maintain that he went there to convert the sultan to Christianity.

Though the encounter did not bring peace, it had some major implications on Christian-Muslim relations. In 1272, a sultan allowed the Franciscans to settle in the Cenacle in Jerusalem and in 1342 Pope Clement VI named the Franciscans the custodians of the Holy Land in the name of the Catholic Church.

The Stations originated in medieval Europe when wars prevented Christian pilgrims from visiting the Holy Land. During the 15th and 16th centuries the Franciscans began to build a series of outdoor shrines in Europe to duplicate their counterparts in the Holy Land. The number of stations has varied widely, with some manuals of devotion listing as many as 37. European artists created works depicting scenes of Christ's journey to Calvary.

In 1686, Pope Innocent XI, realizing that few people could travel to the Holy Land because of persecution to Christians in that area, granted the Franciscans the right to erect stations in all of their churches and that the same indulgences would be given for practicing the devotion as if on an actual pilgrimage. Finally in 1731, Pope Clement XII extended to all churches the right to have the stations. At the same time the number was fixed at fourteen and the Stations of the Cross were declared as an official devotion of the Church. Out of the fourteen traditional Stations of the Cross, only eight have direct scriptural testimony, while others like Station 6 (Veronica wipes the grime from Jesus' face) have been part of the Church's ancient tradition. Some modern liturgists say the traditional Stations of the Cross are incomplete without a final scene depicting the empty tomb and/or the Resurrection of Jesus. Although not traditionally part of the Stations of the Cross, the Resurrection of Jesus is sometimes included as a fifteenth station.
Activity Report

To help create an environment conducive to promoting vocations, a Vocation Essay Contest is co-sponsored annually by the St. John Vianney Vocations Ministries of Savannah and Augusta plus the Southern Cross.

This year’s topic was “What are your God-given gifts and talents calling you to do with your life? Which of your talents might be used as a good priest sister or brother?”

Philip Neri Alphonsus Morris, son of Jeff and Lauren Morris of the Cathedral parish, won an Honorable Mention Award for his essay and was presented with a certificate on March 5, 2017. He is pictured with Fr. Schreck and teacher Amy Schuyler.