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

November 2016

Children’s Religious Education — Pgs 2, 3
The Children’s Religious Education (CRE) program began in September with lots of smiling, happy children, some new to the program and many returning for another year of faith formation. We are delighted to report that we have 84 children registered this year, more than any in recent memory.

During the second week of class, on Sunday, October 2nd, many of the children and their family members plus all the teachers attended the annual Children’s Mass. Some of the current and past CRE students participated in the 10:00 AM Mass as altar servers.

Rory Schuler, a 6th grade CRE student was one of the readers along with AnaLisa Love, teacher for 2nd and 3rd graders. We applaud Rory for having the courage to read in front of a full Cathedral and for completing the reading with outstanding results.

The Terry Family led by Richard and David brought up the gifts for Father Schreck who celebrated the Mass. During the homily, Father Schreck welcomed all the students, their families and the teachers. He wished everyone a successful year of faith formation. It was wonderful to see so many families in the front rows. I encourage all parents to come to Mass with their children every Sunday and sit in the front rows so they can observe the order of the Mass up close, say the prayers they are learning in Sunday school and witness the tenets of our Catholic faith.

The goal of the CRE program is to assist parents with the faith formation of their children so that one day they will become disciples of Jesus Christ.

To assist with the children’s faith knowledge we are fortunate to have five talented and highly motivated catechists who will guide the children in their faith formation. We welcome back Julie Estvander who will once again teach the Kindergarteners and 1st graders, AnaLisa Love will teach the Reconciliation and Eucharist preparation class and Amy Schuler who teaches the Confirmation
preparation class.

We welcome two new teachers at the Cathedral, Joy Castillo, who will work with the 3rd and 4th graders, and Susan McCormick, will work with the 5th and 6th graders. We are also fortunate to have five substitute teachers who have the knowledge to take any class when needed. All the classes are held in the parish hall building and meet from 8:45 to 9:50 Sunday mornings during the school year, September through May. See the bulletin for the schedule of classes.

We use the Loyola Press; *Christ Our Life* series of textbooks. All the books build on the four pillars of the Catholic Church: Creed, Sacraments, Commandments and Prayer.

Faith formation is a process that starts in the home at birth and continues throughout life. The Cathedral’s CRE program is focused on Sacramental preparation but also creates the foundation of knowledge so the children are ready for the sacrament when the time comes. It is difficult to get children ready for the sacraments if they do not have the foundation of knowledge learned throughout their childhood. I am delighted that so many parents see the benefit of faith formation and I thank each parent for their commitment to the Catholic future of their children. We would like to see every child, every year, from kindergarten to Confirmation in our CRE program so they will have the knowledge necessary to be successful Catholics throughout their hopefully long and productive lives.

Although we have a large group of children in our CRE program we still have room for more. If you would like to enroll your children simply show up for Sunday school with your children and we will enroll them when you arrive. If you have questions about CRE please call me at 912-335-1852. I look forward to another successful year of children’s faith formation.
Catherine Kostilnik, our Web Manager, has been kept busy since the Cathedral website went live in January of this year. Since then, we’ve had over 300,000 views and 1200 inquiries for a variety of things. Back in September, she received the following unusual request and forwarded it to me to respond:

Hi there,
Greetings from Australia.

My name is Zara Tai and I am a student at a Catholic theological college in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. I am just enquiring about your murals for a theology assignment on liturgy that I am doing as part of my Bachelor of Theology degree. I would like to know the artist of your painting of Pentecost and the year it was painted. Blessings

Zara Tai

We provided Zara with an electronic version of *The Sistine of the South* booklet which addressed her questions about the artist and the timing of that mural as follows:

“In 1911, Bishop Keiley commissioned Christopher Murphy, a Cathedral parishioner and noted Savannah artist, to conceptualize and implement a program of mural decoration for the Cathedral.

“Murphy commissioned Paul Gutsche, a New York based artist to execute the murals for the Cathedral. They were painted in oil on canvas in Gutsche’s studio in Greenwich Village and installed in the Cathedral much like you would put up wallpaper, for the formal reopening on Pentecost Sunday, May 19, 1912.”

“How did you discover our Pentecost mural?, we asked.

“I learned about your murals by searching for images of Pentecost. Your mural came up and I thought it was a good example showing Pentecost as a feast that was shared by all”, she replied.

“I was just looking for some paintings of the Pentecost which showed it as a communal event. The thrust of my essay entitled *Liturgical Space and Participation of the Faithful* examines the participation of the assembly in liturgy and how the use of liturgical space enhances or does not enhance participation of everyone. Part of my argument is that how come scripture and paintings portray substantial participation by the faithful, yet we ended up with the Tridentine Mass which excludes participation of the assembly except for a select few. How we can claw that back in better internal use of space in the church as advocated by Vatican II in *The Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy* (Sacrosantum Concilium)? she continued.

In the end Zara, included our mural image, among others, in her essay to demonstrate that Pentecost and other liturgical experiences were indeed communal events. She was most appreciative of our responsiveness and assistance as it did assist in clarifying her arguments.

It truly is a small world and technology has brought us even closer together. It is incredible that someone on the other side of the globe found and viewed our murals and was inspired by them.
Many years ago, the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) designated October as the month each year for the faithful to participate in activities designed to publicly acknowledge the Sanctity of Life. In Savannah, we now have a Respect Life Ministry that coordinates these activities among the 13 churches within the deanery. This team works cooperatively with the Pastoral Center and the Office of Family Life to organize an annual schedule of events and programs to carry the Sanctity of Life message out into the community.

This year, during Respect Life Month, several local and national events converged in the same time period:

- Life Chain on Abercorn Extension on October 2.
- 40 Days for Life from September 28 – November 6.
- Public celebration on the Holy Rosary honoring the final apparition of Our Lady of Fatima in 1917.
- Rachel’s Vineyard Post Abortion Healing Retreat on October 21 – 23.

The pictures included here were taken at the Life Chain on October 2. About 30 Cathedral parishioners and Fr. Gerry Schreck, our rector, participated. From our position near Best Buy, we could see groups from St. Peter the Apostle and St. James churches. It was a sunny day and the hour passed quickly. Since the Life Chain is held on the same Sunday around the country everyone felt connected to a much larger prayer event with many voices raised to God asking Him to help us protect the lives of unborn children, as well as vulnerable people all around our community.

Many other Respect Life activities will be happening in the coming months.

In November, the Respect Life Ministry will sponsor a special Mass for Deceased Children at Blessed Sacrament Church. Fr. Brett Brannen will preside over the new initiative on Tuesday, November 22 at 6:00 p.m. This special Mass will memorialize all deceased children, from pre-born infants to children up to the age of 18, who passed away for any reason.

While a brand new calendar of events will commence in January, one special initiative for 2017 will be advertised beginning November of this year. The Savannah Deanery will sponsor a bus to transport area pilgrims to the Cathedral of Christ the King in Atlanta, GA on January 23, 2017 to participate in March for Life Activities during the anniversary week of Roe v. Wade. More information about that pilgrimage will be announced shortly. Seating will be limited to the size of the bus, so interested parishioners and others should sign up early to participate.

If you are unable to attend even one of these very special events, please pray each day that the Lord will grant success to the Respect Life Ministry efforts to serve Him and His Church.
We have images of many saints in the Cathedral. The most pictured woman other than the Blessed Mother, is St. Cecilia. She can be found in Our Lady’s Chapel in the original stained glass window that survived the fire, in the Virgins of the Church mural on the north wall above the center aisle and in the center of the Rose window up in the choir loft.

Who is St. Cecilia? She is regarded as the Patroness of Music, because she supposedly heard heavenly music in her heart when she was married, and is represented in art with an organ or organ-pipes in her hand. But her story is far more than that.

St. Cecilia was so highly venerated by the ancient Roman Church that she is one of seven women, excluding the Blessed Virgin, commemorated by name in the Canon of the Mass. Her martyrdom probably occurred during the reign of Emperor Alexander Severus, about the year 230.

Cecilia was caught burying Christians and was ordered to die. An experienced executioner was sent to behead her but due to a loss of courage at having to kill such a young and beautiful woman, he was unable to decapitate her with the three blows required by law. He ultimately fled, leaving the Saint on the pavement, alive and fully conscious, with her head half severed. She was lying on her right side, her hands crossed in prayer before her. She turned her face to the floor and remained praying in that position, bleeding for three days and nights. The position of her fingers, three extended on her right hand and one on the left, were her final silent profession of faith in the Holy Trinity.

Crowds came to her and collected her blood while she preached to them or prayed. On the third day she died and was buried by Pope Urban and his deacons at the Catacombs of St. Callistus.

The Church of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, reputedly built on the site of the house in which she lived, was constructed in the fourth century. During the ninth century, Pope Paschal I had her remains reburied there.

In 1599 Cardinal Paolo Emilio Sfondrati, nephew of Pope Gregory XIV, rebuilt the church of St. Cecilia and had her remains exhumed. When her grave was opened, they found that her body, in a coffin of cypress wood, lay incorrupt, complete with deep axe cuts in her neck, as if she had just breathed forth her soul.

She was draped in a silk veil and wore a gold embroidered dress. Officials only looked through the veil in an act of holy reverence and made no further examinations. They also reported a “mysterious and delightful flower-like odor which proceeded from the coffin.” She is the first of all incorrupt saints.

Stefano Maderno (1576 – 1636), an Italian sculptor who witnessed the exhumed body, chiseled a marble statue that replicated its seemingly unposed, naturalistic, recumbent state. St. Cecilia’s incorrupt remains were reinterred under the high altar in the Church of Santa Cecilia in Trastevere. Maderno’s moving sculpture is displayed in front of the altar depicting the way it was found.
Every so often, a visitor to the Cathedral will ask one of our tour guides, "What are those six doors on either side in the upper sanctuary area, beneath the Evangelist murals?" Normally the guide will reply, "That was where the choirs used to sing from many years ago," but most of the guides have no specific knowledge of what this really means.

Recently an old photo surfaced of a large boys choir posed in front of the high altar. It’s hard to believe that once upon a time there was a choir of about 40 boys, whose voices filled the Cathedral with songs of praise to the Lord.

The photo belonged to LaVerne South, a long time parishioner and a former member of the mens choir. I recently sat down with LaVerne and his brother Harry to get more particulars about the photo as well as the Cathedral Boys Choir.

Harry estimated that the photo was taken around 1946-47 and he identified himself as the 3rd boy from the left in the top row. Other boys who looked familiar to Harry were Yardley Schaaf, Walter Schaaf’s brother, as well as three future priests John Fitzpatrick, Richard Canty and Larry Lucree. All of the boys attended Cathedral Day School.

Harry also recalled that Sister Gilbert Maggioni was the Choir Director and Patty Barragan Schreck started playing the organ around that time. This was back when the Diocese of Savannah included the entire State of Georgia and was administered by the illustrious Bishop Gerald O’Hara while the iconic Msgr. T. James McNamara was the Rector of the Cathedral.

Patty recalled that Sister Gilbert taught the boys all the Latin hymns which they sang a capella at the Tenebrae service during Holy Week, from the upper area above the right side of the sanctuary. She also remembered that the boys choir normally sang from an area in the Blessed Mother’s Chapel. Harry said they also sang while accompanying numerous school processions around the Cathedral such as Corpus Christi and Marian celebrations which were common in those days. Later on, the men’s choir sang Tenebrae from above.

A number of years ago Monsignor O’Neill showed me around the interior of this area. It runs the entire length of the sanctuary and is about 30 feet long. There is a built-in elevated platform running its entire length, consisting of 4 steps going back and up gradually about 15-18 feet into in width of the space. This floor plan would have permitted the choir the option to stand in rows on different levels and allowed for a better distribution of their voices, projecting from the open doors, out into the sanctuary area and the entire Cathedral.

Heavenly voices praising the Lord.
The new Cathedral Heritage Preservation Society is off to a grand start! This year’s campaign is a new way to build the Endowment Fund for the Cathedral’s restoration and preservation. The Preservation Society gives everyone an opportunity to join with any donation amount, however small or large. The generosity of parishioners and the Savannah community to the Endowment Fund demonstrates how the Cathedral is cherished as a breathtaking place of worship.

This year’s Society Chair, Dr. Luke Curtsinger, shared his purpose taking on this challenge. “I am passionate about preserving this part of my life for generations to come. This is an investment, which is necessary to me. I hope it is for all who hold this community, parish, and preservation of this beautiful Cathedral so dear. It is also very dear to me as the location of my parish, my faith community and where I bring my children to teach them how important my Catholic faith is to me.”

The Society is open to anyone who wants to give to this effort and there are multiple giving circles to suit any budget. Every donation is significant as it helps to build the Endowment Fund. Father Schreck reports there are upwards of 200+ donors to date giving $5.00 and up. “I am appreciative of everyone who is able to give. For those who cannot give financially, we appreciate your prayers for this effort.”

Donations are accepted anytime during the year. For more information about the Preservation Society, go to the Cathedral website http://savannahcathedral.org/join-the-society/ and learn how you and your family can assist in preserving the Cathedral for generations to come.

...Continued...

By Catherine Kostilnik

Oh, Christmas Tree, Oh, Christmas Tree, how lovely are thy branches.

To followers of Christ, Christmas is the essence of a giving spirit. It opens hearts that branch out like the Christmas tree to bear the beauty of decorations and to offer shelter to any beneath its boughs. And that is what our Christmas trees at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist symbolize and promise.

Every year, “Angel Trees” are set up in the back of the Cathedral, adorned with festive tags on the branches which afford us the opportunity to shelter the needy and provide the promise of a brighter Christmas morning for families here in Savannah. This year, the Christian Service Committee and the Council of Catholic Women will partner to decorate two trees with Christmas cards, tags and tiny gift bags. These decorations will offer a number of ways to bring clothing, food, and basic life needs to families, struggling and often desperate. Please return your gifts to the Cathedral by December 11th. All the gifts and monetary donations will be distributed before December 22nd to families, children and individuals in need by Sr. Julie Franchi, the Director of the Social Apostolate.

The Social Apostolate, the only Catholic relief service in Savannah, was established in 1968 by the Catholic Diocese of Savannah to “put people in the pews, in touch with the poor.” It is funded by donations and grants by the generous people of Savannah who live Christmas all year long. Like that Christmas tree in the song, thousands have found shelter and comfort at the little storefront on Liberty Street.

As all the stores in Savannah start promoting Christmas glitter, our thoughts should turn to the “Angel Tree,” the one heavy with decorations that promise Christmas wishes fulfilled. When you attend Mass at the Cathedral during Advent, look for the trees, grab a tag and think about the joy that tag represents, the Christmas memory it will make someone who has little or nothing. Or you might even hum a little of the old carol to yourself, “Oh, Christmas tree, oh, Christmas tree, how lovely are thy branches.” You, in fact, are one of those branches.
New Votive Candle System Installed

Article and photos by Bart Traywick

One of the most intimate and personal forms of prayer is the ancient practice of lighting a candle to announce our individual messages to God. Whether the purpose is to honor a loved one, pray for guidance in a time of need, or simply as a way to show our love and faith, this lit candle embodies momentarily our one on one relationship with our Creator.

Cathedral parishioners and visitors light an average of 300-400 hundred votive candles a day. In late October, we installed a new votive candle system to replace the existing racks which have served us for many years. The St. Killian’s Votive Candle System, manufactured in Ireland, is a new approach with many improvements over the older candle systems.

With our old system, each morning the docents and volunteers had to remove the used candles and their plastic holders and dispose of them. New candles and holders then needed to be installed daily. This was time consuming, plus the amount of waste material which had to be disposed of was troubling.

The St. Killian’s system eliminates this problem. The assembly consists of a clear cone shaped glass holder which sits inside a colored glass outside holder. Both these holders are open at the bottom. A small cone shaped candle will be placed in the holder by the individual lighting the candle. As the candle burns, the melted wax funnels down the conical holder, through the opening and drops into a tray of water inside the stand. The wax will solidify and be removed periodically and recycled. No need to remove and replace candles and holders daily plus the system utilizes smokeless candles which are much safer and more environmentally appealing. This new system will add to the beauty of the Cathedral and make this individual form of prayer special for years to come.

Oceans of Opportunity

During the month of October we conducted our Annual Stewardship Drive, amusingly themed “Oceans of Opportunity”. This was to emphasize that there are many opportunities to volunteer in different areas at the Cathedral including all 24 active plus 6 possible future ministries that were all listed in a mid-month bulletin insert. The Cathedral needs the time and talent of many people to fulfill our mission “to become a vibrant center of Catholic faith, service, and culture, committed to being good stewards of what we have received.” In the past, Fr. Schreck has emphasized that “Your talent is God’s gift to you. What you do with it, is your gift to God.”

Volunteer opportunities are available for everyone with a time commitment as little as 90 minutes per month. Parishioners were asked to please fill out the form indicating which ministries were of most interest to them. So far we are encouraged by the response but we haven’t heard from everyone. Surely there is something that appeals to you. Please heed the call of the Lord to serve.

Volunteering is good for the heart and the soul.
Hurricane Matthew provided additional opportunities for the Feeding the Hungry team and other Cathedral parishioners to serve the hungry and homeless. As soon as evacuees were allowed back in the city, we started hearing about our Blackshear friends losing almost everything.

Many took their tents, a change of clothes, and their identification papers with them and had to leave anything else. With a quick response to the urgent plea, we spent Sunday delivering a carload of tarps, batteries, lanterns, camp stoves, propane, and other necessary items and enjoying a pizza party during our normal Blackshear Potluck time. As usual, our friends were very grateful for the help.

Right on the heels of that request, we received a notice from PACK that there was a list of 250 elderly people in dire need. These were people who lived in their own homes or in group homes and had some mental limitations.

Not understanding that the food in their refrigerators had spoiled, they were continuing to eat it. When nurses and social workers made well-check visits after the storm, they found some pretty rough situations. Even as they worked to explain why the food shouldn’t be consumed, these sweet people just could not bring themselves to throw away “perfectly good” food.

The solution these clever care-givers came up with was to offer a bag of groceries in exchange for the spoiled food. This worked perfectly and provided additional nourishment for a population for whom it is so critical. This was the first time we had helped this group and we loved it. We are making plans for an “adopt-a-grandparent” project for Christmas. Stay tuned!

When we served at Inner City Night Shelter (ICNS) that same week, the homeless numbers were way down. Discussing this with the staff at ICNS, we learned that the low population had been noted by all agencies downtown.

When the evacuation was ordered, buses transported many of these people to Augusta where they were treated kindly by volunteers who helped them find beds in shelters and provided them with meals, clothing, and toiletries. When it came time for the buses to return to Savannah, the stories coming from the media didn’t sound very promising so a number of these evacuees decided to spend a few more days or weeks in Augusta.

Apparently, this is why Savannah’s numbers were down. As so many of us were dealing with storm related issues in our homes, it is interesting to note that people without homes were dealing with their own set of issues resulting from the storm — different but no less demanding.

The Feeding the Hungry team is always looking for ways to serve the greater community and Hurricane Matthew offered some new opportunities for service to “the least of these.”
Advent
A time to prepare and give thanks.
By Peter Paolucci

These days, Thanksgiving has been somewhat diminished, being sandwiched in between Halloween, which starts right after Labor Day, and the Christmas season, which seems to begin weeks before Halloween arrives.

Thanksgiving, has always been that feel-good holiday which brings together family and food around the table where we give thanks to the Lord for all He has given us.

But thanking the Lord for our gifts shouldn't end with the pronouncement “who wants white meat or dark.”

On Sunday, November 27th, we begin the season of Advent, that time of expectant waiting and preparation to receive the greatest gift of all, our Savior Jesus, on Christmas Day.

The term comes from the Latin word *adventus* which means “coming”. The season of Advent anticipates the coming of Christ from two different perspectives. The season offers the opportunity to share in the ancient longing for the coming of the Messiah, and to be alert for his Second Coming and many of the readings during the season reflect that.

Advent is a period of spiritual preparation which affords us the opportunity to make ourselves ready for the coming, or birth, of the Lord, Jesus Christ by prayer, fasting and repentance, followed by anticipation, hope and joy.

We celebrate Advent not only by thanking God for sending His son Jesus to Earth as a baby, but also for his presence among us today through the Holy Spirit, and in preparation and anticipation of his final coming at the end of time.

The Advent season is filled with expectation as throughout the land Christmas cards have arrived and are displayed while festive trees adorned with tinsel and baubles decorate our homes. But we need to keep our eyes focussed on the spiritual aspect of the season.

The people of Israel waited patiently, comforted by Isaiah’s words which vividly foretold the coming of Emmanuel, our Savior, Jesus Christ. “On that day, a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him.” Isaiah 11:1-2.

Two thousand years ago they waited expectantly as they listened to a prophet called John talk of one who was to come, the Promised One of God, and they began to prepare themselves for that moment. The stained glass window in the apse shows our Patron, St. John the Baptist, proclaiming this challenging message, calling for repentance and lives to be transformed. Those who heard it were filled with expectation, waiting for Messiah, and yet ultimately failing to notice his arrival.

As we thankfully anticipate receiving the most wonderful gift of all, Jesus Christ on Christmas Day, let us pray, “Lord, may we be filled with expectation, as we celebrate the greatest gift of all, your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.”
On Saturday October 1st, in remembrance of St. Francis’ love for all creatures, Fr. Schreck imparted a special blessing to all animals great and small, in Lafayette Square.