Our Cathedral is visited every day by hundreds of people, many of whom are not Catholic, who have no idea what Catholics believe and in some cases hold a distorted view of our beliefs. We recently received the following suggestion from one of our parishioners: “Before Noon Mass I see many visitors wandering around looking at all the beauty of the Cathedral but many of them have no clue about the Catholic Church while some may even have a skewed view of it. I believe that some form of the Creed, which is a public and solemn profession of our faith, should be on display in our vestibule.”

As a result, after deliberation with the Rector and the Parish Council, we have decided to post the Apostles Creed, in the lobby of the Cathedral, as a visible profession of our Catholic faith.

The Apostles’ Creed is a list of what we as Catholics believe. The word creed itself means “I believe.” The Apostles’ Creed is the first of the Catholic Rosary prayers because it lists the important truths taught by Jesus. It summarizes who God is and how he deals with us, His children.

This prayer deals with the Blessed Trinity. The belief in three persons in one God,

- the Father
- the Son and
- the Holy Spirit

The first part deals with God the Father. It tells about His role in creating “heaven and earth.”

The Creed goes on to talk about God the Son, Who plays the major role in our redemption. It lists important truths about Jesus and the dead.”

The final part of the Creed talks about the Holy Spirit and His role in our sanctification.

As we pray we state that we believe in...

- the holy catholic (universal) Church,
- the communion of saints (all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church.)
- the forgiveness of sins
- the resurrection of the body (when Jesus comes again our body will be resurrected and glorified.)
- and life everlasting (our soul will never die. It will live forever.)
Several years ago, Pope John Paul II offered a few thoughts about the Easter mystery. Here is a condensed version of his Apostolic Letter “Dies Domini”, which seems appropriate to reflect upon during this Easter Season:

The Lord’s Day—as Sunday was called from Apostolic times—has always been accorded special attention in the history of the Church because of its close connection with the very core of the Christian mystery. Sunday recalls the day of Christ’s Resurrection. It is Easter which returns week by week, celebrating Christ’s victory over sin and death, the fulfillment in him of the first creation and the dawn of “the new creation” (cf. 2 Cor 5:17). In commemorating the day of Christ’s Resurrection, not just once a year but every Sunday, the Church seeks to indicate to every generation the true fulcrum of history, to which the mystery of the world’s origin and its final destiny lead.

The fundamental importance of Sunday has been recognized through two thousand years of history and was emphatically restated by the Second Vatican Council:

“Every seven days, the Church celebrates the Easter mystery. This is a tradition going back to the Apostles, taking its origin from the actual day of Christ’s Resurrection—a day thus appropriately designated ‘the Lord’s Day.’ Christian believers should come together in order to commemorate the suffering, Resurrection and glory of the Lord Jesus, by hearing God’s Word and sharing the Eucharist, and to give thanks to God who has given them new birth to a living hope through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (cf. 1 Pt 1:3).

Sunday is not only the remembrance of a past event, it is a celebration of the living presence of the Risen Lord in the midst of his own people. For this presence to be properly proclaimed and lived, it is not enough that the disciples of Christ pray individually and commemorate the death and Resurrection of Christ inwardly, in the secrecy of their hearts. Those who have received the grace of Baptism are not saved as individuals alone, but as members of the Mystical Body, having become part of the People of God.

It is important therefore that they come together to express fully the very identity of the Church, the Εκκλησία (in Greek), the assembly called together by the Risen Lord who offered his life “to reunite the scattered children of God” (Jn 11:52). They have become “one” in Christ (cf. Gal 3:28) through the gift of the Spirit. This ecclesial dimension intrinsic to the Eucharist is realized in every Eucharistic celebration. But it is expressed most especially on the day when the whole community comes together to commemorate the Lord’s Resurrection.

Significantly, the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that “the Sunday celebration of the Lord’s Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church’s life.” For Christian families, the Sunday assembly is one of the most outstanding expressions of their identity and their “ministry” as “domestic churches,” when parents share with their children at the one table of the word and of the Bread of Life.

As in every Eucharistic celebration, the Risen Lord is encountered in the Sunday assembly at the twofold table of the word and of the Bread of Life. It should also be borne in mind that the liturgical proclamation of the word of God, especially in the Eucharistic assembly, is not so much a time for meditation and catechesis as a dialogue between God and his People, a dialogue in which the wonders of salvation are proclaimed and the demands of the Covenant are continually restated.

Receiving the Bread of Life, the disciples of Christ ready themselves to undertake with the strength of the Risen Lord and his Spirit the tasks which await them in their ordinary life. For the faithful who have understood the meaning of what they have done, the Eucharistic celebration does not stop at the church door. In coming to know the Church, which every Sunday joyfully celebrates the mystery from which she draws her life, may the men and women of the Third Millennium come to know the Risen Christ.
Who is Our Lady of Good Counsel?

It had been generally accepted that all the décor elements in the Cathedral were destroyed by the fire in 1898, except for the stained glass window in the front of the Blessed Virgin Chapel. However, a small, elegant painting of a Madonna and Child, which used to hang in the Blessed Virgin Chapel, also survived the fire.

Some people have speculated that the painting could be a representation of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, since the Cathedral carried this designation for about the first ten years of its existence.

Before the fire, the painting hung above the altar in the Blessed Virgin Chapel, where the mural of the Holy Spirit now adorns the wall. And afterwards — as indicated by the photo in the booklet “The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, Savannah, GA 1799-1902”, — the painting was suspended above the tabernacle and below the statue of Mary, in the Blessed Virgin Chapel.

The painting is an Eleousa, (the Mother of Tenderness), a well-known iconographic type of the Mother of God. The Christ Child nestles close to his mother, rests on Mary's left arm, her head bends toward him and their cheeks touch tenderly. The left hand of the child gently grasps the rim of her dress, indicating the intimacy of nursing. Based on the positioning of the Mother and Child, the hands of the Infant and the respective glances of the figures at each other and rather than the viewer, it more closely resembles the image of Our Lady of Good Counsel than Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

Who is Our Lady of Good Counsel?

The image Our Mother of Good Counsel, as it is known in the West, is traced to the year 1467 to Genazzano, Italy, a small town about thirty miles southeast of Rome. It is presently located in a side chapel, built between 1621 and 1629, in the church of Our Lady of Good Counsel, whence the image derives its name.

There are two strands to the story of Our Lady of Good Counsel. Most sources refer to the ancient intertwined holy legends of an Albanian image, Our Lady of Shkodra (Good Counsel) and the Italian image in Genazzano.

Albania – The story of Our Lady of Shkodra (Good Counsel) is in part the story of Albanian Catholicism. Albanians nourished a particular devotion and love for the Virgin Mary and in particular, a beautiful icon of Our Lady which hung on the wall over the main altar in the church of Zoja e Bekueme. During the time when the Ottoman Turks were advancing in the fifteenth century, it became a source of consolation and encouragement. One day during the siege of Shkodra, two escaping Albanians stopped at the Church of Zoja e Bekueme to pray for their safe journey. While praying fervently, they suddenly noticed the painting moving away from the wall. The two Albanians followed the painting, as if it were a bright star, all the way to Rome, where the image disappeared. They heard rumors that a miraculous image had appeared in Genazzano. They went to the nearby town and there discovered the painting of their beloved Zoja e Bekueme. The two settled down and made Genazzano their home.
Genazzano — It is here that the second strand of the story begins. When Pope Sixtus III (432-440) called for help in renovating the Papal Basilica of Saint Mary Major, the people of Genazzano contributed generously and property was given to the town on which a church was eventually built, with the title Our Lady of Good Counsel. With the passage of time the church became decrepit and ill-kempt. During the year of the miracle, 1467, a local widow named Petruccia de Geneo felt herself called to spend her meager funds on needed repairs. Her friends and neighbors thought her plan presumptuous. They scoffed and ridiculed her, laughingly calling the effort “Petruccia’s Folly.” Her efforts were nevertheless rewarded in a marvelous manner.

On St. Mark’s Day, April 25, 1467, the entire population of the city was participating in the yearly festival in honor of the day’s patron. About 4 o’clock in the afternoon the merrymakers began to hear the strains of exquisite music. Then, while they silently gazed at the sky for the source of the singing, they saw, in an otherwise clear sky, a mysterious cloud that descended until it obliterated an unfinished wall of the church. Before the thousands of awe-struck revelers, the cloud parted and dissipated, revealing a portrait of Our Lady and the Christ Child. This was resting on the top of the unfinished wall that was only a few feet high. It is said that the church bells of the city rang of their own accord, attracting people from outlying areas who hurried to investigate the untimely ringing. Petruccia, who had been praying in another area, rushed to the scene when she heard the bells and fell down in tears before the miraculous image.

All of Italy came to visit the blessed and very beautiful image of Mary which appeared on the wall without human intervention. The fresco has unexplainably remained suspended in the air close to the wall of the chapel in the church of Our Lady of Good Counsel for over five hundred years, whence the image derives its name. Measuring approximately 15-1/2 inches by 17-1/2 inches, the painting is a fresco executed on a thin layer of plaster or porcelain not much thicker than paper. It appears suspended in mid-air in its frame, with approximately an inch of space between it and the wall behind it. The only support is on the lower edge where it rests on a small base on one of its sides, i.e. from the center to the extreme right. There are also indications that the image appears to bear different expressions according to particular situations. There is a vast registry of miraculous happenings related to the image of Our Lady of Good Counsel and to its copies. Conversions, healings, and specially requested graces are among the numerous accounts of extraordinary occurrences related in connection with the image.

In the United States, there is a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Good Counsel in the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Our Lady of Good Counsel soon became a symbol of lay involvement and today, there are women’s groups, such as the Christian Mothers here in America, who turn to the patronage of Our Lady of Good Counsel. Our Lady of Good Counsel is Patroness of The National Council of Catholic Women.

The condition of the frame on the painting had deteriorated significantly over time. There were many chips and it had been painted over with a dull bronze paint. Michael O’Brien of The Gilder’s Workshop discovered that the frame was originally covered with gold leaf, much of which was still intact under the bronze paint. The ladies of the Cathedral CCW funded the restoration of the frame to its original condition. The Feast Day of Our Lady of Good Counsel is April 26th and the painting will be on display at Mass on the following weekend in conjunction with the Deanery CCW Convention. We are hopeful of displaying this painting, a rich piece of our history, in the Cathedral on a permanent basis.
The Cathedral Parish - A vital Christian Community of Faith

We help others (Food drive)

We have fun (Parish supper)
Over the years we have reflected on the vitality of the Cathedral Parish Community. As members of God’s family, we all have a responsibility to share more fully in the life of our church. The members of St. John the Baptist do many things to use their special gifts to further Christ’s work and enrich their relationships with other people. We invite you to become a more active member of our parish, to glorify God as well as serve others. In addition to personal growth, you will have a sense of belonging, knowing that you are a unique and contributing member of our faith community.

We nurture our children’s Faith (Faith Formation/Bring up Gifts)

We stand up for what we believe (Walk for Life)
We raise funds for church projects (Potty for a price)

We welcome newcomers
The condition of the frame on the painting of Our Lady of Good Counsel had deteriorated significantly over time. There were many chips and it had been painted over with a dull bronze paint. Michael O’Brien of The Gilder’s Workshop discovered that the frame was made of molded and carved pine, with numerous layers of gesso (a plaster like powder mixed with rabbit skin glue) over the molded wood. Then coats of a colored bole (red and black clay mixed with rabbit skin glue) is brushed over the gesso and polished to act as cushion for the 23Kt gold leaf, applied over the entire frame. Sometime after the fire of 1898, the entire frame was painted with gold bronze paint over the original finish and glass covered the canvas painting, both of which needed to be removed to restore the frame and painting to its original condition.

First, the bronze paint on the frame’s gold leafed surface was removed with chemical strippers, which took off only the bronze paint but did not harm the majority of the original gold leaf. Then any structural damages to the frame’s wood molding or gesso finish were repaired and missing ornamentation was cast and replaced. Finally, all missing gold leaf was reapplied with 23Kt, to match the original gold finish. The back of the frame was cleaned to remove loose surface dirt or soot. At the top, a paper label identifying the frame makers was found, which was cleaned, photographed and covered for further protection. The paper label on the back of the frame identified the maker as “George F. OF, 4 Clinton Place (today the address is just 8th Street), one door west of Broadway, New York City”. According to the New York City directories and census records George OF established his business in 1873, having just migrated from Germany the year before. From 1885 until 1899, his business was located at 4 Clinton Place and survived at least till the 1920’s. George OF is well known and his work has been documented and auctioned in various books on frames of important American Frame Makers. The glass in front of the painting was not reinstalled as the painting needs to breathe and only a foam dust cover was applied over the back of the painting. Thank you to the ladies of the Cathedral CCW, for funding the restoration of this historic artistic treasure, to its former glory.
Francis Xavier Gartland, the first bishop of the Diocese of Savannah, was born in Dublin, Ireland, on January 19, 1808. His parents left Ireland for the United States on Palm Sunday of that year. Educated at Mount Saint Mary’s College, Emmitsburg, Maryland, he was ordained in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, by Bishop Henry Conwell of Philadelphia on August 5, 1832. The promising young cleric served as assistant at Saint John Church in Philadelphia under Father John Hughes, later Bishop of New York. After spending some time as secretary to Bishop Hughes in New York, Father Gartland served as vicar general of the Diocese of Philadelphia.

On July 19, 1850, Pope Pius IX erected the Diocese of Savannah, as the seventh provincial Council of Baltimore had requested in May 1849. At its creation, the Diocese of Savannah included all of Georgia and most of Florida, with a total Catholic population of 5,500 Catholics. The pope appointed Father Francis X. Gartland to the new see on July 23, 1850, although he would not be consecrated as bishop until November 10.

Although his diocese had far fewer Catholics than the cities of the northern United States to which he had been accustomed, Bishop Gartland, nevertheless, took the reins of a diocese that, while new, was vibrant and much stronger than it would have been without the efforts of stalwart priests like Bishop England and Father O’Neill. Although he found great needs of all kinds, he was determined to obtain the means for making improvements. For this reason, he traveled to Europe to seek funds for his diocese.

The Church of Saint John the Baptist, then Savannah’s only Catholic church, (located at Perry and Drayton Streets, the site of the current Parker’s Market parking lot), became Bishop Gartland’s cathedral. With money solicited in Ireland and elsewhere, the bishop enlarged the Cathedral with an addition measuring 25 x 60 feet and repaired the hurricane-damaged roof. Bishop Gartland presided at the rededication of the Cathedral on June 26, 1853.

By 1854, things seemed to be going very well in the diocese with a boys’ orphanage and day school in operation and the catholic population increasing. At this point, yellow fever engulfed the city of Savannah. The bishop and his priests immediately began visiting the sick and administering last rites to the dying. After bravely ministering to the dying and consoling the living, it now became his turn and the good shepherd was stricken with the fever. Bishop Francis X. Gartland died on September 20, 1854. His life was an example of loyalty to his faith, courage in the midst of catastrophe and unblemished devotion to his people.

Editor’s note:

It is no wonder that one of the stained glass windows in the new Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, dedicated in 1876, was in memory of Bishop Gartland. We are grateful to the Tyrolese Art Glass Company of Innsbruck, for preserving the original cartoon of this window, all these years.

Every year since 2000, the Diocese of Savannah has recognized long-standing service to the Catholic Church in South Georgia, by conferring the Bishop Francis X. Gartland Service Award on honorees nominated by their pastors to express its gratitude to those who serve within it.
Vocations, the Gift of the Love of God
Message Of The Holy Father For The 49th World Day Of Prayer For Vocations

In his message on the 49th World Day of Prayer for Vocations, celebrated on 29 April 2012, the Fourth Sunday of Easter, Pope Benedict XVI prompts us to meditate on the theme: Vocations, the Gift of the Love of God. The source of every perfect gift is God who is Love – Deus caritas est: “Whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him” (1 Jn 4:16).

It is a love that is limitless and that precedes us, sustains us and calls us along the path of life, a love rooted in an absolutely free gift of God. Every specific vocation is in fact born of the initiative of God; it is a gift of the Love of God! He is the One who takes the “first step”, and not because he has found something good in us, but because of the presence of his own love “poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5).

We need to open our lives to this love. It is to the perfection of the Father’s love (cf. Mt 5:48) that Jesus Christ calls us every day! The high standard of the Christian life consists in loving “as” God loves; with a love that is shown in the total, faithful and fruitful gift of self. It is in this soil of self-offering and openness to the love of God, and as the fruit of that love, that all vocations are born and grow. By drawing from this wellspring through prayer, constant recourse to God’s word and to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, it becomes possible to live a life of love for our neighbors, in whom we come to perceive the face of Christ the Lord.

All of you who are engaged in the field of educating young people: I fervently exhort you to pay close attention to those members of parish communities, associations and ecclesial movements who sense a call to the priesthood or to a special consecration. It is important for the Church to create the conditions that will permit many young people to say “yes” in generous response to God’s loving call.

The task of fostering vocations will be to provide helpful guidance and direction along the way. Central to this should be love of God’s word nourished by a growing familiarity with sacred Scripture, and attentive and unceasing prayer, both personal and in community; this will make it possible to hear God’s call amid all the voices of daily life. But above all, the Eucharist should be the heart of every vocational journey: it is here that the love of God touches us in Christ’s sacrifice, the perfect expression of love, and it is here that we learn ever anew how to live according to the “high standard” of God’s love. Scripture, prayer and the Eucharist are the precious treasure enabling us to grasp the beauty of a life spent fully in service of the Kingdom.

It is my hope that the local Churches and all the various groups within them, will become places where vocations are carefully discerned and their authenticity tested, places where young men and women are offered wise and strong spiritual direction. In this way, the Christian community itself becomes a manifestation of the Love of God in which every calling is contained. As a response to the demands of the new commandment of Jesus, this can find eloquent and particular realization in Christian families, whose love is an expression of the love of Christ who gave himself for his Church. Within the family, “a community of life and love”, young people can have a wonderful experience of this self-giving love. Indeed, families are not only the privileged place for human and Christian formation; they can also be “the primary and most excellent seed-bed of vocations to a life of consecration to the Kingdom of God”, helping their members to see, precisely within the family, the beauty and the importance of the priesthood and the consecrated life.
We make a joyful noise unto the Lord