

St. Patrick Parish IN FOCUS

www.stpaturbana.org

January 2024

That they may be one

Every year, Christians around the world join together to pray for Christian unity. In the northern hemisphere, this is done January 18 to January 25, ending with the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul.

For many countries in the southern hemisphere, January is the middle of the summer holidays, so they instead focus on Christian unity around Pentecost.

The roots of this time of prayer go back more than 100 years. The World Council of Churches has organized it since its founding in 1948. Since Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church has participated in its planning and coordination.

On the night before his suffering and death, Jesus prayed for us, that we would be one, “as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me” (John 17:21). You see that he links being one with God and being one with one another. While there is strife among us, when we put up barriers between ourselves and other people, we are not yet completely one with God. Jesus also says that we must be one so that the world may believe. Our unity is essential to our witness.

One dimension of our oneness as

Christians is unity among religious denominations. A long view of the history of Christianity is like looking at a child’s box of blocks. Sometimes they are carefully assembled in an orderly way. Sometimes the child

may have a tantrum and the blocks are scattered across the floor. What are the issues that divide us as Christians? “I’m right and you’re wrong!” “I’m better than you!” “You can’t tell me

what to do!” And it all gets mixed up with greed for material resources and maneuvering for political power. Does this sound familiar? Aren’t these the things that cause division in our families, our communities, and our world, just as they cause division among Christians? As Christians, we’d like to think that we’re above squabbling, but we often fail.

We shouldn’t overlook our desire to know God as well as we can and seek to witness God’s actions as accurately as we can. There are important theological differences among Christian churches. But that doesn’t mean we can’t worship together, that we can’t serve the poor together, that we can’t live together in peace.

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Cursillo for men coming in January

Cursillo retreats are among the most popular retreat offerings across North America. What are they? The word “cursillo” is Spanish for “short course,” and Cursillo retreats are set up to be just that – a short course in Christianity. Cursillo was founded in 1944 in Spain and was introduced in the United States in 1957. It is now offered in almost every diocese in the country.

Cursillo is not a substitute for your parish church. Rather, it is designed to help you renew and enhance your Christian life, thereby enabling you to function more fully within your parish. Growing closer to Christ and bringing Christ to the world is not an easy task. It is a lifelong commitment.

The retreats are highly structured weekend retreats that place a strong emphasis on community and evangelization, and the goal of the retreat is to help Christians to become more fully Christian, enabling them to transform their environment to be more Christian through their daily living.

Cursillo takes place where retreatants can get away from everyday life and focus for three days. The retreats are meant to expand your prayer life and foster continuous spiritual growth that will increase your knowledge about scripture and the Catholic faith. It will also equip you to spread the Word of God in your everyday life in a very natural way.

see **Cursillo for men** on page 8



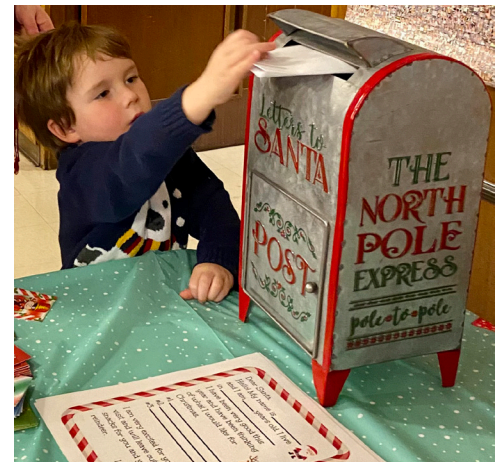
Advent festivities at St. Patrick's



That they may be one from page 1

Another dimension of Christian unity is unity at a local level, among neighboring churches and among our families and friends. What are the things that can bring us together? The love of God burning within us draws us to other people of love. A desire for community helps us reach out to others. Our efforts to care for the hungry and poor bear fruit when we work with others. Our care for the earth and all its people demands more of us than we can do alone. Our hope for peace in our communities and the world are supported by the hopes and actions of others.

The Roman Catholic Church is a part of many efforts to reassemble a child's blocks. It's a painstaking process of sorting out theological conflicts, old wounds, and long-held distrust. Pray for this process during Christian Unity Octave. But also pray for openness to see opportunities to build bridges and share God's love with the people around you.



Sharing a mug of Christmas cheer

A team of more than 20 volunteers gathered on Dec. 7 in the parish center to assemble Christmas gift mugs for guests of our SVDP Food Pantry. The mugs overflowed with sweet treats, personal care items, and warm socks or gloves. More than 150 mugs were prepared, each adorned with festive wrapping.



Lucy Freeman and Mary Long were among those who filled the mugs with treats.



Mark Palermo shows off his work



Kate Donovan adds a final touch of festive beauty.

Parish Council News

At their November meeting, Council members took up several items for discussion. Some items did not move forward, and others did.

The proposal to offer an Advent Family Night on December 10 failed to move forward because staff pointed out that the Confirmation class schedule was short on time. The proposal for this event may be put forward again next year.

The traditional Council Christmas meal, however, had a better outcome. At Fr. Anthony's suggestion, the date of Friday, January 5, was agreed upon, and further planning will be done at the December meeting.

Holy Cross recently prepared a parish photo directory with the assistance of Universal Church Directories (UCD), a company based in Mansfield, Ohio. Follow-up will include contact with the company as well as with Holy Cross for their evaluation of its experience with the company.

Another proposal was made that the parish participate in delivering Peace Meals, a program now operating out of OSF. An appeal for volunteers will be prepared for the parish bulletin.

Considerable discussion was given to The Synodal Church in Mission Synthesis Report, in particular about the types of parish church-related issues where it would prove useful. The synthesis report calls on local churches to adopt Conversation in the Spirit, which was a successful listening device at the synod held at the Vatican in October.

Austen Ivereigh, in a Commonweal article, describes this as beginning with silent prayer, followed by delivery of prepared reflections that are carefully listened to, another time of silent prayer, and sharing of resonances of what was heard. It ends with a facilitator helping the group engage in a freer discussion, identifying areas where they converge or diverge, and suggesting ways forward.

Council members agreed that perhaps a beginning could be made by working on listening and reporting resonances, with additional discussion leading toward a better understanding of the complete process.

Simbang Gabi in America

By Farrah Feliciano

Upholding tradition is one great attribute that symbolizes an individual's respect and value to their cultural beliefs and practices. One great tradition that we, the Catholic Filipino-Americans here in the Central Illinois (Champaign-Urbana, Mahomet and Danville)



area, are continuing to practice is the celebration of the Simbang gabi.

What is Simbang gabi? Simbang gabi literally means "night Mass." It is also known as Misa de Aguinaldo or "Mass at dawn." In the Philippines, this involves going to Mass as early as 4:00 a.m. from Dec. 16-24. In America, we have been going to the evening Mass instead since most of the Catholic churches are still closed at dawn.

Simbang gabi in the Philippines has been practiced for several centuries. Because the Philippines is mainly a Roman Catholic country, this devotion is widely practiced throughout the nation. The atmosphere is so holy and festive that you can definitely feel the Christmas spirit.

It brings me much joy recollecting all the activities we did in the Philippines during this

time and how much we enjoyed going to those Masses. We overcame many challenges, like waking up early at dawn, encountering unpredictable weather, and having to go to school or work later that day. The nine consecutive days can be really difficult at times and that

is why many of us are not able to complete them. These sacrifices in preparation for Christmas day provide a gratifying feeling, most especially if you did not miss any Mass at all. When we were kids, we were told that if you finished the nine consecutive days, your wish would be granted. I do

recall on one of those times that I wished to go to America, and that wish came true for me!

The Simbang gabi in Central Illinois started in 2005. Over the years, the number of participants has steadily increased. We have established a number of people who effortlessly offer their time and talent in organizing this event. Each year, a few weeks before the event,

we meet to begin the planning process. We also have dedicated choir members that sing most of the Mass in Filipino. These songs always have a greater impact on us, for they remind us of our native home and those precious times we have spent with our families in the Philippines.

We celebrate the daily Masses in different Catholic churches in the area, and our officiating priests are usually the parish priests if they are available. After the Mass, we often have a social gathering wherein the assigned sponsors share their specialty dish for everybody to enjoy. This is also one way for us to stay connected, especially because we rarely see one another.

We may have left our original homes and have made America our second home, but Filipino blood runs strongly in our hearts. Letting future generations witness and participate in these special events will hopefully make a tremendous impact on them so the tradition can continue.

We invite you to celebrate with us each year during those special nine-day Masses before Christmas Day to keep the flame burning in our hearts for Jesus Christ—our Savior and King.

Merry Christmas, everyone!
(Accompanying photos are from 2022 Simbang gabi)



The Epiphany: A journey through time and faith

The Epiphany is a significant feast day that commemorates the revelation of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. The term “Epiphany” has its roots in the Greek word “epiphaneia,” which means manifestation or appearance.

Foretold by the prophet Isaiah and described in the Gospel of Matthew, the story of the Magi – Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar – unfolds across centuries in Christian faiths. Guided by a celestial star, the Magi journeyed to Jerusalem and inquired about the newborn King of the Jews. Troubled by this news, King Herod sought counsel and discovered the prophecy pointing to Bethlehem as the Messiah’s birthplace. After summoning the Wise Men, he deceptively tasked them with locating the child and reporting back, intending to harm the Christ Child.

Following the star’s guidance, the Magi reached Bethlehem, where they found and worshiped the infant Jesus, offering gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Warned in a dream not to return to Herod, the Magi chose a different route home, symbolically defying Herod’s malicious plans and affirming their allegiance to divine guidance. It was not merely a geographical detour but a profound testimony to the transformative nature of seeing and worshipping the newborn King.

Traditionally observed on January 6, twelve days after his birth, the date represents the symbolic arrival of the Magi to behold Christ. Modern Epiphany celebrations encompass a broad spectrum, from solemn

religious services to lively cultural traditions. Christian denominations worldwide mark the day with church services retelling the Magi’s journey. Secular festivities include gift exchanges and shared meals, both echoing the Magi’s offerings. Vibrant processions, parades, and the “Three Kings’ Cake” tradition add a joyful dimension, especially in Europe and Latin America. The Epiphany also marks the official conclusion of the Christmas season,



A Three Kings Day parade in New York in 2019.

Historically, however, the Magi traveled almost a year in search of Christ. Who were these men so devoted to finding the newborn King? They emerged from the regions in the East, likely the ancient Persian Empire, in modern-day Iran, Iraq, or Saudi Arabia. Thought by some to be pagan practitioners of early astronomy and astrology, these men stand in sharp contrast to other Magi of their day. Experts in interpreting celestial phenomena, they noticed a unique star that was seen as a sign of the birth of a significant king, fulfilling the prophecies.

Theologians and scholars suggest that they were followers of Daniel,

the servant of the Most High God, and that their knowledge from celestial observations was only accurately interpretable by their knowledge of Holy Scriptures. These Magi further demonstrated their great learning and knowledge of Messiah and his mission by the gifts they bore. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh demonstrated their knowledge that he was King, God, and Sacrifice all in one! Their pilgrimage to Bethlehem marked not only a

historical event but a universal narrative that transcended time.

The Epiphany represents a beacon of light – a reminder that even in the midst of darkness, the star that guided the Magi still illuminates the path toward unity and understanding. In a world marred by division, conflict, and unrest, the message of the Epiphany encourages us to embark on our own transformative

journeys. The history of the Magi invites us to choose the road less traveled, to depart from the well-trodden paths of discord and strife. Their journey becomes a metaphor for our shared humanity – a call to recognize the sacred in the faces of those we perceive as different.

The theological significance of the Epiphany lies in its emphasis on the universal nature of Jesus’ mission. Considered to be non-Jews, the Magi symbolize the inclusion of all nations and peoples in the redemptive plan of God. The Epiphany underscores themes of divine revelation, inclusivity, and the recognition of Jesus as the Savior for all people.



Q: Why was Jesus baptized? It wasn't something he needed to do, was it?

A: When the Lord Jesus went to the Jordan River to be baptized, John the Baptist knew that Jesus did not need baptism. He was astonished by Jesus' request, saying: "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Baptism is for sinners. Why would the all-holy Son of God seek to be baptized?

Everything Jesus did had a purpose. Here are four reasons why – according to various Church Fathers, popes, and theologians from the Council of Trent to Pope St. Benedict XVI – Jesus chose to receive baptism at the hands of John the Baptist.

First, Jesus associates himself with sinners as he prepares to shoulder their sin. He blends into the mass of sinners waiting on the banks of the Jordan. He loaded the burden of all humankind's guilt upon his shoulders and bore it down into the depths of the Jordan.

Second, many of the Church

Fathers and great theologians teach a fascinating lesson: that Jesus, when he descended into the Jordan and was submerged in it, was sanctifying the baptismal waters that now pour over us as we are held over – or bend over – the font: "[Jesus was baptized] that He might bequeath the sanctified waters to those who were to be baptized afterwards." Now the mysterious scene at the Jordan River has an entirely new meaning.

Third, Jesus' baptism symbolizes his death and resurrection. Immersion into the waters is a symbol of death, recalling the death and destruction of the flood. Yet the flowing waters of the river Jordan are also, and above all, a symbol of life. The significance of this event could not fully emerge until it was seen in light of the Cross and the Resurrection.

Pope Benedict XVI describes this as a starting point for our understanding of Christian baptism: The baptism is an acceptance of death for the sins of humanity, and the voice that calls out "This is my beloved Son" is an anticipatory reference to the Resurrection. In his own discourses, Jesus uses the

word "baptism" to refer to his death: Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (Mark 10:38) The answer to the question of why Jesus was baptized lies, ultimately, in his passion and death on the cross.

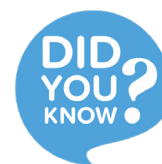
Fourth, it is at his baptism that Jesus embarks upon his mission to save us. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus is referred to as the time of the anointing, a type of formal investiture with the messianic office, analogous to the anointing by which kings and priests in Israel were installed in office.

Now we understand why the sinless Son of God, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, was baptized:

Jesus associated himself with us sinners, taking the unspeakable burden of sin onto his shoulders. He sanctified the future waters of the baptismal font, enabling us to receive the Sacrament of Baptism and be saved. He foreshadowed his death and resurrection, which he embraces on our behalf. And finally, he formally received his anointing and, with it, his mission.



Patron Saints for January



Centering prayer is modeled after an ancient Christian contemplative prayer of silence. There is no right or wrong way to

pray in silence but only to have the intention to be present with God. Jesus invites us to pray in silence: "When you pray, go into your inner room, close your door, and pray to your Father in secret" (Matthew 6:6).

A centering prayer group is now meeting in person on Thursdays, 11:00-12 noon, in the family room at the back of the church. All are welcome and invited to join, whether experienced in centering prayer or new to it. Simply come to pray and be present with God.

St. Hilary of Poitiers

On January 13, we celebrate the feast day of St. Hilary of Poitiers, patron saint of children academically behind, children learning to walk, mothers, lawyers, and the sick. He also is invoked against rheumatism and snakebites.

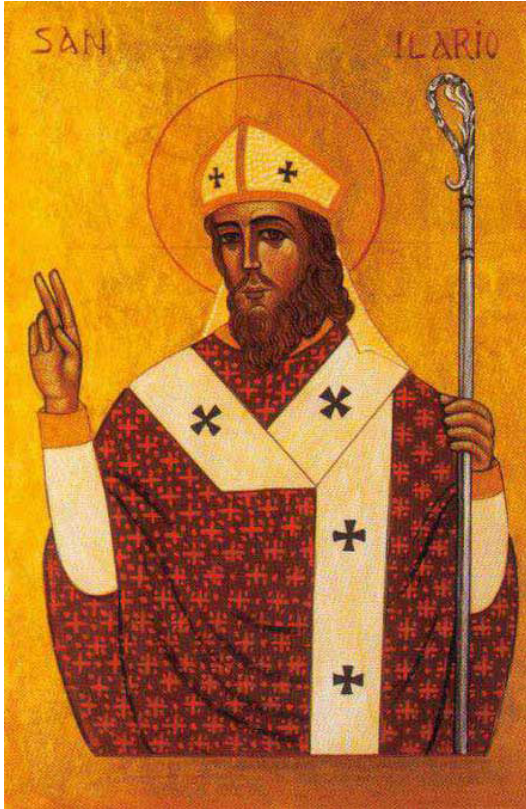
Hilary, whose name comes from the Latin for happy or cheerful, was born around the year 315 into a wealthy pagan family in Poitiers, France. After much study, he began to realize that worldly pursuits would not satisfy his soul, that life was meant for something more eternal. Reading the Scriptures began to satiate this longing, and he took a particular

interest in the Holy Trinity. He was eventually baptized a Christian and went on to defend the doctrine of the Trinity.

He became so respected as a man of God that around 350, the Christians of Poitiers unanimously elected him their bishop.

He focused on battling Arianism, which denied the divinity of Christ. The Arian heresy spread rapidly. Emperor Constantius II ordered all the bishops of the West to sign a condemnation of the leading opponent of Arianism, St. Athanasius the Great. Hilary refused and was exiled from France to far-off Phrygia, in modern day Turkey. Eventually Hilary was called the “Athanasius of the West.”

While in Phrygia, Bishop Hilary spent much time studying and writing. He began what would become the *De Trinitate* (On the Trinity). In writing this, he drew



from his classical education, knowledge of Greek, his love of the Scriptures, and his strong opposition to the heresy of Arianism. Bishop Hilary composed a thorough defense of the doctrine of the Trinity as it

was taught in the Nicene Creed. He caused so much upheaval in Arian Phrygia that the Arian bishops implored the emperor to send Bishop Hilary back to France.

On the way back to Poitiers, Hilary made stops to preach in Greece and Italy to counteract the beginnings of Arianism. Once back home in Poitiers, he

continued to preach, write, and even to compose hymns.

In addition to his important work as bishop, Hilary was married and the father of (Saint) Abra of Poitiers, a nun and saint who became known for her charity.

The death of Constantius in 361 ended the persecution of orthodox Christians. Hilary died in 367 or 368 and was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius IX in 1851.

Vocation Prayer

Holy Mother of Jesus and our Mother, be with us as we discern our life's work and guide us in the way we are called to follow in the footsteps of your son. Let the word of your son be made flesh anew in our lives as we seek to proclaim the good news of everlasting life.

What does the Eucharist mean to me personally?

COME TO THE TABLE

There's a Place for You!



Parishioners of all ages and in all walks of life are invited to send in their story focusing on what the Eucharist means to them. Articles can be very short or quite long. The length is best determined by how you wish to answer the question, “What does the Eucharist mean to me personally?”

Stories will be published in *In Focus* issues beginning in February 2024. This series of stories will conclude with the July-August 2024 *In Focus* to coincide with The National Eucharistic Conference being held July 17-21, 2024 in Indianapolis.

Send stories to Mary Tate (mary.tate@stpaturbana.org). Include your name and phone number. Stories must be submitted on or before the first weekend of the month to be included in the following month's issue of *In Focus*.

Fr. Luke Spannagel challenged us and motivated us to think more deeply about the Eucharist during his mission this past April 29-May 2. Cradle Catholics may differ in their thoughts about the meaning of the Eucharist from those who have joined the faith later in life. Thoughts may differ, but we are all united in faith by our reception of the Eucharist. Let's delve into our innermost thoughts and share stories on the topic: What does the Eucharist mean to me personally?

To all who would accept him he gave the power to become children of God.

—John 1:12

Cursillo for men from page 1

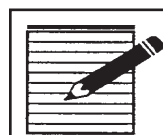
Who is Cursillo for? Are you longing to experience your faith more deeply and live it in your daily life? To enrich your relationship with God, no matter how strong it may be right now? Are you looking for a community with which to share your faith journey? Do you want to become more confident in and enthusiastic about your faith and in sharing it in the secular world? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, then Cursillo may be for you.

The retreat first provides an opportunity for retreatants to get to know one another and to help them analyze their own lives and desire to encounter God. Presentations are made by both lay men and women and the Spiritual Directors, with table discussions following each presentation. Participants examine their current relationship with God

and grow in the desire for a deeper and fuller relationship.

The final day of the retreat, Sunday, combines this knowledge of self and relationship with God and helps participants discern how they can fulfill God's will in their ordinary daily lives.

The Cursillo retreat at St. Patrick's is scheduled for January 26-28, with overnight accommodation and meals provided in the parish center. More information may be had by calling the St. Patrick's office (217/367-2665).



Deadline for submission of articles and news items for the next issue of *In Focus* (January) is **Sunday, January 7.**

St. Patrick Parish IN FOCUS

St. Patrick's Parish In Focus is published on the last weekend of the month in Urbana, Illinois. News items and information may be submitted by the first weekend of the month for an upcoming issue. Materials must include the name and telephone number of the person submitting them.

Please send news items to infocusstpats@gmail.com. You may also send them to any Communications Committee member (listed with contact information below). All submissions are subject to review and/or editing by the committee and staff. Bylines are generally omitted.

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Quick fixin's from the kitchen of . . . Lisa Ries

Peppermint Dazzler

- 1/2 pkg vanilla wafers, crushed (or 2 c)
- 1/4 c margarine, melted
- 3 eggs
- 1-1/2 c powdered sugar
- 1/2 c margarine (not melted)
- 2 pkg German Chocolate, melted
- 1 pt. cream, whipped
- 1/2 c ground or crushed peppermint candy
- 1 c chopped nuts (optional)



Mix crushed wafers and melted margarine; press into bottom of 9 x 12-inch pan. Mix eggs, sugar, and unmelted margarine. Add melted chocolate and mix well; pour mixture on top of crust. Mix whipped cream, peppermint, and nuts, and spread on top of filling. Sprinkle with additional peppermint or nuts if desired.