

THE PHILADELPHIA ORDINARIATE POST

A NEWSLETTER OF THE CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST
THE PERSONAL ORDINARIATE OF THE CHAIR OF SAINT PETER IN THE PHILADELPHIA AREA

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Dear Parishioners and Friends,

We are off to a wonderful start in Bridgeport. Over thirty people came to work on the work day before our first Sunday. One crew worked in the school building, preparing the kitchen and (what is now our) parish hall for Sunday coffee hour. Another crew cleaned the church. A third did reconstruction in the church, removing the altar rail from the lower church and reinstalling it in the upper church, removing the oversized pulpit from the upper church to allow for the altar rail, bringing the pulpit and lectern from the lower to the upper church, and installing the icons from the old pulpit over the high altar. Others polished the brass of the six high altar candlesticks (a gift from Mike Crofton). Still others started “greening” the church. We got a lot done! This was all before our first Sunday, the Fourth in Advent. The following week, several people spent time setting up the creche and decorating the church for Christmas. As you can see from the photo, they did a splendid job.

We then had over 100 for our first Mass on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, including some of our new neighbors from Bridgeport. Fr O'Sullivan, the Pastor of Sacred Heart, our host parish, came and assisted at the Mass, and his assistant, Monsignor Majoros visited for coffee hour. Here are comments from several parishioners after that first Mass:

Seeing all the people at St. John the Baptist last Sunday was certainly gratifying. Everyone looked so happy. I feel as though we have a home of our own.

Mass on Sunday was beautiful. Thank you for bringing all of us together and the rapid improvements to the church. I really like the new name too!

As the reserved Sacrament was placed into the tabernacle and the candle lit (with a little difficulty, but nonetheless effectively), I thought of the passage below from The Voyage of the Dawn Treader:

*IT was nearly three weeks after their landing that the Dawn Treader was towed out of Narrowhaven harbour. Very solemn farewells had been spoken and a great crowd had assembled to see her departure. There had been cheers, and tears too, when Caspian made his last speech to the Lone Islanders and parted from the Duke and his family, but as the ship, her purple sail still flapping idly, drew further from the shore, and the sound of Caspian's trumpet from the poop came fainter across the water, everyone became silent. **Then she came into the wind. The sail swelled out, the tug cast off and began rowing back, the first real wave ran up under the Dawn Treader's prow, and she was a live ship again.***

Quite an amazing day.

As the last comment notes, the Tabernacle was empty at the start of Mass, and we reserved the Blessed Sacrament there after Communion. It was a significant moment. Our Lord has taken up residence with us, and it is He who makes the church a home, His home – as well as ours. A gift we can never wholly fathom, nor can our gratitude ever suffice for the gift. It makes a huge difference in the feel of the church. In any case, we are off and running, with gratitude in our hearts for all that God has done (and is doing) for us.

Responsibilities

With having our own property come various responsibilities. Some are material: the roof, the plumbing, the wiring; and, of course, keeping it clean. There are also spiritual responsibilities. The church is an holy



place. Some of the places we have worshiped during our wandering – Laurel Hill Cemetery Chapel, for example – were of a different character. A church building is properly for one purpose only: the worship of the Triune God. The Reserved Sacrament, the celebration of the Mass and other sacraments, and the manifold prayers which have been said inside Our Lady of Mount Carmel over the years have made it a holy place. Now that it is in our stewardship, we want to be sure that we leave it even more of a holy place than it is now. This will be formed in large part by devotion with which our sacraments and prayers are done here.

It will also be formed by how we treat the building. The church, as you well know, is God's house. It is to be treated always with reverence and respect. It is specially set apart (consecrated) from common or profane use for worship. We should cultivate a sense of this consecration and use. Coming into the church is different from coming into the supermarket or movie theatre. We should feel that, and embrace the reality which the feeling reflects. Our reverence to the altar and genuflection to the Blessed Sacrament are outward manifestations of our belief that it is God's dwelling, and by respecting His house, we respect Him.

Our reverence is also expressed by our reserve in conversation inside the church building. It is not really the place for general conversations with one another about our secular lives, although this is commonly done in many churches. These are better had (and are important to have!) outside the church: one reason we have coffee hour afterward. Think of it this way: if you were admitted, along with a number of others, to an audience with Queen Elizabeth, your attention would be on her, and a conversation with the person next to you about traffic on the way to the audience would be out of place. We set aside our conversations in church for the greater good of attending to God with reverence. Before and after Mass, avoiding unnecessary conversation (and conducting what is necessary *soto voce*) is also a matter of practical consideration for those who are saying their prayers, and those whose prayer is uplifted by the organ voluntary (which is invariably uplifting, thanks to Bill Gatens).

We need to remember that reverence for God and charity for neighbor are not in conflict. This means that our reverence for the building as God's house requires that we welcome the stranger and visitor among us. We should see in him the image of Christ, especially if he seems in some way poor or needy. In welcoming him and helping him to be comfortable worshiping with us, we welcome Christ Himself. This speech, required as it is by charity, in no way violates the sanctity of the building. In line with this, and with pastoral concern for the faithful, I do greet people at the door. (My personal preference is to greet outside the door, which was my custom at St James the Less. Given that we have four doors at St John the Baptist, I'm still working on the best place to do this.)

Cleaning

A while back, Anthony Esolen had a column in *Touchstone* about a couple of churches in an industrial town in New England. As I recall (I don't have the article in front of me), one of the churches bore an inscription over the door referring to the hands of the people who made it. Prof. Esolen notes that in this case the parishioners were for the most part immigrants who built the church with their own hands: masons, roofers, and so on. He reflects upon the spiritual difference between building with their own hands and hiring someone else to do it. Obviously there are specialized skills which a given community might not have. But he is right that there is an essential difference between building a church for the Lord with our own hands and having someone else do it, even if we were to pay for it.



Sunday School Gingerbread House at Christmas

a tangible offering to Him. An offering of menial service, but still a spiritual as well as a material offering of ourselves, our souls and bodies. To do it with our own hands is different from paying someone else to do it. There is grace in the service. If we do it as an offering to our beloved Jesus, wanting His house to be clean because we care about Him, then it will bear fruit in our souls. It will foster His love within our hearts, as it is an act of love. I would not want you to be deprived of this grace.

To be sure, we are nudged into this position because we do not have the money in the budget for a sexton. But that is not really the point. The point is whether we can see this as an opportunity to serve God, to care for His house with our own hands, to make cleaning it an act of loving service. This will give us a greater gratitude for the building, and help to make it our own. And draw us closer to the Beloved, whose house it is.

We are working out a system for keeping it clean. The weekly cleaning and straightening should take about 20 minutes, and can be done after Mass on Sunday or during the week, as may be convenient. During coffee hour on the Second Sunday after Epiphany, January 17th, we will all go over to the church for training in the weekly routine. Then we will all know what is expected, and can volunteer to take a turn. A sign-up sheet will be provided at that time. There will also be more major cleaning tasks, monthly or less often. The planning for these is in progress.

We (obviously) are not going to build our own building. We have the enormous privilege of inheriting what others have done for us. I do not know how much of Our Lady of Mount Carmel was done by the hands of her parishioners. But it is now our responsibility. One way we can make a spiritual offering of that responsibility is to do the cleaning of the church ourselves, with our own hands. I would guess that some of us pay others to clean our homes. Beth and I have done that on occasion for the rectory. But I am still suggesting that we should all (all who are physically able) take a hand in cleaning St John the Baptist. Why? Because it is God's house. We can do it as

Coming Events

Our new Bishop, Steven Lopes, is to be ordained to the episcopate (by four cardinals, no less) in Houston on Candlemas, February 2nd. All members of the Ordinariate are cordially invited. Details of the ordination and the surrounding events may be found on the Ordinariate web site (ordinariate.net), as well as hotel and travel information. This is a major milestone in the life of the Ordinariate, and if you can arrange to be there, I'm sure it will be worthwhile. If you can't, I (and those who can) will give you a report.

Bishop-elect Lopes is planning to visit St John the Baptist on the Third Sunday of Easter, April 10th. The plan is for him to visit with the parish in the morning, and preach in the afternoon at Evensong & Benediction. That will be our chance to host our friends from Holy Cross and Our Lady of the Assumption, and say thank you to them for their hospitality to us in our pilgrimage. We were a little hesitant to schedule this during winter (he was willing to come sooner), lest we get snowed out, and thought it best to schedule it after Easter. Please put it on the calendar now. Further details will be forthcoming.

The Pastoral Council, reflecting on all we got done on the work day in December, felt that another is in order: mainly "deep" cleaning, and perhaps some work on the rectory. It is set for Saturday, January 30th. Mass (in the church) will be at 9, with breakfast and work following. There will be no Mass at St Therese that day. Please plan to come! We also expect that the work on moving the altar back to the east wall will be done before then.

Easter is early this year, March 27th; Ash Wednesday is February 10th; Septuagesima is January 24th. I'll have details about Lenten devotions next month. Planning (which is not completed) is different this year, since we now have our own place.

While we are using the name of St John the Baptist, our legal documents have not caught up yet. Bank accounts in the new name have not yet been set up, so please continue to make checks payable to St Michael's. The Newman charitable trust is being wrapped up this month, so please do not make checks to the Newman Fellowship. In January we are moving to a combined budget. The (new) Finance Council will be producing a new budget for the last half of the fiscal year, which we will share with the congregation when it has been approved. So: for now **all checks to St Michael's**. This will change again when the legal steps for the corporate name change have been completed.



You should all have received a letter last month soliciting your support for the Building Fund, both now and over the next five years. While we have moved into the church in Bridgeport already, we have yet to pay for it. Fr O'Sullivan and Sacred Heart have made it possible for us to begin using the property without having to pay for it up front – for which we are enormously grateful. But the bill will still need to be paid in due course. We each need to do what we can. I know many of you already give sacrificially to the parish, for which I am very grateful. If you have not already made a pledge Building Fund, I hope you will do so now. If you have, thank you!

Several people have asked – we are indeed at work on a new parish directory, sorely needed with the merged congregation. God willing, it will be available before the month is out.

On the other hand, you did not get a Christmas card from me the year. With the move to Bridgeport and all, I just didn't manage to get it done. Mea culpa. No excuse. But please be assured of my (and our) warmest Christmas greetings and best wishes for a blessed new year of grace. Beth & I are grateful for your cards and gifts this Christmastide.

The next Youth Group meeting is Friday, January 15th, at the rectory in Mount Airy. Also Father Richard Harris of Our Lady of the Snows Ordinariate Community in Fredericton, New Brunswick, will be preaching at St John the Baptist on Sexagesima (January 31st).

I want to thank all who worked so hard and so effectively on the December work day: it was inspired and inspiring. Also the members of the new Pastoral and Finance Councils, and the people of the still-being-formed Property Committee. (Since we have property, we can well use a Property Committee.) And the Greeters, Acolytes, and Coffee Hour workers of the merged parish, and those who have gotten it all set up and running smoothly. St John's is, as we used to hear about Nashotah House, "to a considerable extent a self-help institution." It will function well to the extent that we are willing to put in the time and energy to make it so. A word of thanks is also due to Fr O'Sullivan who has generously provided a number of items needed in our new space (sanctuary furniture, the hymn boards, the tabernacle lamp).

Yours faithfully,

Fr David Ousley