

# OUR LADY OF MERCY PARISH NEWSLETTER



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*Hope, Peace, Joy and Love remind us of the season of Advent and are represented by the four candles in the Advent wreath. This issue's theme is that these four candles are the lights of our parish community not only during the Advent and Christmas season but also throughout the year.*



## Mary's Hope

By Celeste T. Villegas

When the world around us literally seems to crumble, both physically and spiritually, Mary's hope becomes the kind of hope we can emulate. It is a hope that goes beyond mere optimism and, truly it is a hope that overcomes pessimism.

Behind Mary's hope is unconditional trust in the power and love and the mercy and fidelity of God. It

began with her "yes" at the Annunciation – a journey not without its accompanying suffering, calling for strength and building character. A good foundation for our hope, according to Mary's example, is not only confidence in God but also awareness of our weakness. "For He has looked at His handmaid's lowliness" (*Luke 1:48*). When we consider our weakness, we sharpen our hope and we see the importance of surrendering all to God.

Although Calvary significantly tested her faith, still Mary persevered, in hope. Like Mary, we can learn to see the hand of God at work in the sufferings of life. Certainly, there is redemptive value in our carrying our daily crosses and in cooperating with God's plan, especially when we are led by a hope such as Mary's hope.

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## Hope

"Trust him and he will uphold you, follow a straight path and hope in him." *Sirach 2:6*

## Loving the Church in Times of Turmoil

By Norine Mohle

Condensed from her Cornerstone talk.

*“Come to me all you – who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble at heart. Your souls will find rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)*



For those who feel tired, disappointed, yearning, and unfulfilled – what an enticement this scripture reading is!

I choose to believe there is more to life than what I see with my eyes, more than the drudgery of getting up in the morning, earning a living and dealing with the pressures, expectations, and judgments of people.

How did I get here – to this conclusion, to this parish?

My childhood parish church was a community for the immigrants of my culture, a place of security for those with family left behind the Iron Curtain. The Mass was sung or said mostly in Ukrainian. Beauty, tradition, and emotion are embedded in my childhood church memories.

After 12 years of Catholic school, I was floundering by sophomore year of college. Luckily, I could walk to the church and I returned to prayer and Mass. I started to combine spirituality with my psychology major to figure out a career path. As a single woman, parish felt safe and comfortable – like coming home.

Later my husband Tom and I started our life together. I needed a church to pray, worship, connect, and raise children who would develop spiritually. It was no accident that we settled here. In fact, the Newman House priest of my college days was the pastor here at OLM, Father Kenneth Herbster.

The signs that I was in the right place came through people in this parish. They encouraged me to keep walking a spiritual path. Father Bob, the priest who married us at Corpus Christi, came to OLM. Monsignor Turro had ties to a Ukrainian Church on the Lower east Side of Manhattan. I came to him for guidance and I benefited greatly from his words and prayers. Maureen Nicolosi, the fearless, loving, and dedicated Girl Scout leader of my daughter’s troop became my spiritual friend. I met Sunday Ruvolo, who said, “Do you want to help me work on something called Cornerstone?”

Interestingly, all of these events transpired alongside crises in the Church, the Institution, the arrest and indictment of priests for abusing their positions and human beings, and the complicity of the hierarchy who minimized the horrific damage to individuals. In my “coming home to a church” I must face these facts. I liken it to knowing that a family member, whom you have loved and trusted, has done something dark and devastating. It is a hurt, a betrayal.

In fact mentally, I have had to “go around the Church”, the Institution, and keep pursuing my connection to God, seeking to find the Spirit in the people who make up the Church. “The Church’s mission”, as Donald Cozzens, author and priest, says, “is to bring the light and the freedom of the Gospel to our world.” When the Church falls short of its mission, it is because it is made up of humans who falter by definition.

Please see *Loving the Church* on page 3

**Loving the Church** *(continued from page 2)*

By looking inside and reaching out, I find signs of God's presence, mostly in my little church experience: the sacraments, devotion to Mary, and the lives of the saints. In the Church, the Institution, I know I must forgive the failings of humans, just as I hope to be forgiven. It is easier to forgive when one owns up to personal failings.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin speaks to this point in "The Slow Work of God":

*"Above all trust in the slow work of God.  
We are quite naturally impatient in everything  
To reach to the end without delay.  
We should like to skip the intermediate stage.  
We are impatient on the way to something  
unknown, something new.  
Yet is the law of all progress, that it is made by  
passing through some stages of instability  
and that may take a very long time.*

I have drawn one important conclusion:

The Church, the Institution, the small churches, the parishes need active and openhearted clergy and laity in participation with each other and

with the modern society. We need humility, hunger for the truth, inclusiveness, and trust in God.

But let's not put the cart before the horse. Thomas Keating, in his book *Intimacy with God: An Introduction to Centering Prayer*, asks us to orient ourselves toward contemplative prayer as a start in our discipleship. He says, "We seek to listen to and address the cries of common suffering and a divided world. We seek the prompting of the Spirit to respond accordingly. Most importantly we seek relationship with the Ultimate Reality, through listening to God's first language: silence."

"Jesus is our example, teaching us by his behavior to recognize the need for quiet prayer. The Gospel of *Luke 5:16* tells us 'He often retired to deserted places to pray.'" Keating and Cozzens both remind us to trust in the sacred silence of prayer in openness and humility.

**Suggested readings:**

Cozzens, Donald. *Sacred Silence*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002.

Keating, Thomas. *Intimacy with God: Centering Prayer*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 2013.

**Peace**

"You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you."

*Isaiah 26:3*

**Happy New Year!****Will this be the year that you contribute?**

Send an article or picture soon!

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## Thanks and Praise

*In a wonderfully personal way, five long-time parishioners and avid fans of singing in the choir at Our Lady of Mercy Parish share their joy in giving THANKS AND PRAISE through music.*

### Irma McDarby

I joined the choir with the help of my daughter, Alice Ryan, a cantor at OLM. I've been singing since childhood days. My family (I am one of thirteen children) sang in harmony, and I enjoyed it tremendously. I sang in grade school and high school choirs. What I enjoy most about our choir is the new friendships I made and the one single sentiment we share which is the joy of praising Our Lord, in song.

### Marian Coche

I have been a member of the choir for seven years. Many years ago I took vocal lessons in New York City and can sing in German and French, and sang in my German Club. I love singing and being a member of the OLM Choir. (Note: Each Christmas Marian sings a verse of Silent Night in German.)

### Joni and Ron Von Autenried

Joni and I enjoy music and we joined the choir because to us the meaningful words and beautiful music together truly seem like praying twice. What Joni and I did not know is that we found loving, caring friendships for life. Each choir member is truly missed on a Sunday if unable to come to Mass and there is something special about that. We celebrate life and life's milestones together with each other and with the entire parish when we sing. Debbie, Linda, the instrumentalists and choir are family.

Our practices are on Wednesday evenings. Our most favorite practice Wednesdays (and Father Bob's favorite) are once every month. At the end of practice we have "Cake Day" to celebrate all the birthdays that month. The cakes are delicious and mostly made by choir members (Shop Rite makes a better cake than Joni or I can), but being together is what it is all about. Joni says when others ask her about joining choir, she shares the joy it has brought into our lives and then she adds "and you always have a comfortable seat in church." We have found our place in church in the OLM Choir.

### Gordon Roehrer

I have a musical gift! It's the blessing that music has been in my life – the kind of blessing that keeps us mindful that we indeed are blessed and that God loves us. Only in distant hindsight do I now see how that gift was being poured out on me from a very young age. I grew up in Cliffside Park on the main street nearly right above the local "record store" (now the nation's oldest). I got my first guitar there when I was 12. Around the corner my best friend's Dad was the local audiophile and we were the first on the block to hear "hi-fi" and stereo. We listened to everything from Beach Boys to Brubeck. Music remained an influence in my life, a source of

Please see *Thanks and Praise* on page 5



**Thanks and Praise** *(continued from page 4)***Gordon Roehrer**

many opportunities and the catalyst for so many friendships. I was even wearing my musician's hat when I met my wife Barbara (I guess her Mom never warned her about musicians!) My opportunities to play semi-professionally over the years always managed to balance out against my other responsibilities and commitments, providing mostly enjoyment and minimal conflict. Now that's a miracle in itself!

And always there through feast or famine are the opportunities to serve in music ministry at Mass and other Church celebrations including a dozen stints as a Cursillo music minister. While I derive pleasure from all my musical opportunities, none are as consistently satisfying as serving in ministry.

"The heavens have no voice; the glory is inaudible. The cosmos is a congregation in need of a cantor.

Humanity is the cantor of the universe and in whose life the secret of cosmic prayer is disclosed. To sing means to sense and to affirm that the spirit is real and that its glory is present. In singing we perceive what is otherwise beyond perceiving. Song, and particularly liturgical song, is not only an act of expression but also a way of bringing down the spirit from heaven to earth."

Abraham Heschel

**Congratulations Monsignor James Turro!**

Msgr. James Turro

Monsignor Turro was awarded the 2014 "Many Are One" Alumni Service Award by Immaculate Conception Seminary and Seton Hall University in appreciation of his longtime service and leadership.

When he returned to New Jersey in 1959 after studying at the Catholic University of America and the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, he began teaching at the Seminary and took on the role of Director of the Seminary Library, which he kept until 2004.

In 2007 the library was dedicated as the Monsignor James C. Turro Library.

**Joy**

"Look, I bring you good news of great joy, a joy to be shared by all people." *Luke 2:10*



## Thanks Be to God – Really!

By Carolyn McNamara

*Al and Joann Kotkin have enjoyed being active in OLM, while maintaining their close ties to Joann's childhood parish, St. Ann in Hoboken. Daily Mass, Cornerstone, Discovering Christ and Bible study are just a few ways they have shared their faithfulness and fervor with us. Now as they are moving, they honor us with the story of their conversions giving full credit to the power of The Holy Spirit.*

In 2001 they were in Rome on vacation. Although neither of them was practicing the religion of their families – for Al, Judaism and Joann, Catholicism - they admired Pope John Paul II. So they attended a Mass on Palm Sunday celebrated by the Holy Father.

Al remembers feeling something overwhelming come over him as they knelt on the cobblestones, a sense of “I am where I should be.” In this crowd of thousands, Al felt the presence of God just for him. Later he learned that Joann had had a similar experience.

At first he attributed it to being in the holy Pope's presence. Eventually they both knew it was the Holy Spirit, and that was just the beginning of what was in store for them!

Al noticed a change in Joann, she was more peaceful, more grounded. She had returned to the Church. Sunday Mass became a necessity.

Al wanted to know more about the Faith, so he came into RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults). At the Easter Vigil in 2003 Al entered the Catholic Church.

### Sharing God's Love

As he looks back he can see his life before that was just an existence. Now, along with Joann, he tries to see and serve Jesus in others, and things have real meaning. They became extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, bringing the Lord to the homebound in Hoboken. They are co-workers, assisting the Sisters of Life in their mission by such services as providing rides for women, collecting supplies for babies and attending a monthly Mass with a prayer vigil at the Margaret Sanger abortion clinic in NYC. They are close friends with the Friars of the Renewal in Newark. Al and an RCIA companion have begun a men's spirituality group. They meet each week to bring food directly to the homeless. On returning to their parish they reflect on the Sunday's gospel and how to bring it to their homes and work.

In allowing us to share their story with you, Al and Joann insisted that we make sure to emphasize it was the work of the Holy Spirit that brought them to this day. They thank God for the freedom that religion has given them!

### Love

“Let everything you do be done in love.”

1 Cor. 16:14

## All Saints Quiz

In addition to Mary and Joseph, Joachim and Ann, and the Guardian Angels, our All Saints Chapel contains the following holy men and women of our church. Can you match the right saint with the description?

- |                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. St Anthony           | A. He is the patron saint of our mission in Vallieres, Haiti.   |
| 2. Elizabeth Ann Seton  | B. His Nickname was once “the dumb ox” because he was quiet and big. Now known as “the Angelic Doctor”. |
| 3. Francis X Cabrini    | C. He wrote a letter now part of the New Testament.   |
| 4. Theresa of Lisieux   | D. As a boy he was captured and taken as a slave.   |
| 5. Vincent of Saragossa | E. First U.S. citizen to be canonized.  |
| 6. Jude                 | F. Her parents are now declared “Blessed”, a step towards canonization.                                 |
| 7. Thomas Aquinas       | G. Born in the United States.   |
| 8. Patrick              | H. Canonized less than a year after his death.  |

Answers below.

## A Cross Cultural Experience Through Public Speaking

By Samuel A. Nutile

For several years I have enjoyed teaching public speaking. It has been my pleasure to teach adults at Ridgewood Community School, young adults at Paramus Community school and high school students enrolled in the Pio-neer program at Pascack Hills High School.

Last summer I was asked to teach public speaking to high school seniors from Beijing, China, who were on a visit to Paramus. As a result of this I was asked to continue teaching public speaking via Skype to students in Beijing who are planning to come to the United States for their high school and college education. This was certainly a very different way to teach, but to my surprise it worked out very well. All the students maintained a strong desire to learn public speaking.

I feel very fortunate to be able to help anyone, anywhere, to learn to speak well. If anyone is interested they can contact the Ridgewood Community School to learn more about the Public Speaking Program they offer.

My recent book, *Looking for Friends~A Confidence Building Guide to Public Speaking*, is available at [www.createspace.com/3702537](http://www.createspace.com/3702537).

### A Quote From the Book:

“Woe is me. I have very few friends. They get nervous when they think of me, they get flushed and their stomachs hurt, they even get weak in the knees. Who am I? I think you know, I am public speaking.”

### Answers

1. H; 2. G; 3. E; 4. F; 5. A; 6. C; 7. B; 8. D

## Good Will and the Gift of Peace

By Celeste T. Villegas

When we have the gift of peace, we are so near to fully surrendering our will that we are empowered to love God and thus desire to serve Him.

This “habitual disposition of heart,” called good will, however, is not yet perfection. We may have good will and still experience reluctance or resistance. But the practice of the virtues of faith, hope and charity will help shape and spur into action, good will, where it exists. More

importantly, it will allow the grace of God to carry us, inch by inch, toward perfection.

With a great amount of good will and subsequent heartfelt cooperation with grace, we may be well on our way to welcoming the gift of true peace. Where we need it most, for example, in the midst of conflict or confusion, “**Peace on earth to men of goodwill**” (*Luke 2:14*) will seem the perfect prayer to harvest peace in our hearts.

### San Alfonso Retreat Save the date! March 20–22, 2015



Pictured are the women who attended the 2014 retreat.

Come to the San Alfonso Retreat Center at Long Branch, NJ with other women from OLM to “where God and the sea come together.” The theme for 2015 retreats is “Living In Love.” For more information, see the Alfonso Retreat website at [www.sanalfonsoreretreats.org](http://www.sanalfonsoreretreats.org).