

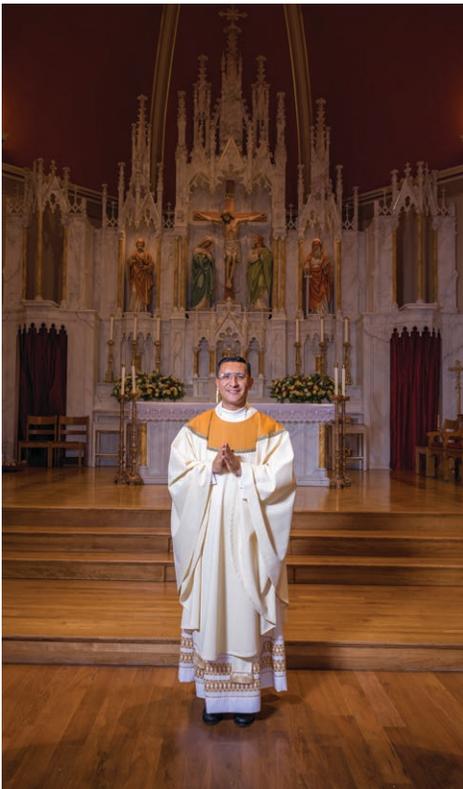


ST. GABRIEL

THE ARCHANGEL ♦ CATHOLIC CHURCH

WELCOMING FR. CHRISTIAN VACA

A Faithful Servant Brings Joy and Gratitude as Our New Parochial Vicar



When Fr. Christian Vaca arrived in Colorado Springs, he quickly discovered that the mountains here felt familiar — even if the snow did not. A native of Guadalajara, Mexico, he had never experienced winter before moving to Colorado, yet he's come to love the change of seasons almost as much as the people he now serves. The beauty of the mountains, the strong faith of the community, and the warmth of parish life have all helped him feel at home in this new chapter of ministry.

“I am so blessed to serve the Diocese of Colorado Springs and very grateful to Bishop Golka and all the priests at the diocese for their help and support,” he says. “I pray for our parishioners and hope they will pray for me to serve the parish in love and charity.”

Ordained on June 7, 2025, at St. Mary's Cathedral by Bishop James Golka, Fr. Christian describes the day as “emotional” and unforgettable — the culmination of many years of formation, prayer, and discernment.

“At that moment, when I entered the church and the main altar, I was crying a lot and felt so many blessings,” he recalls. “I was thanking God for everything He is doing in my life. To be in church and feel the love of the community — it was a very full church, plenty of people were there.”

Although his parents and siblings could not travel from Mexico, they watched the ordination online and celebrated with joy from afar. Fr. Christian is the oldest of six — four sisters

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THE FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

A Lesson in Catholic Stewardship

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception, celebrated on Dec. 8, holds a special place in the hearts of Catholics worldwide. It commemorates the belief that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was conceived without original sin. Beyond its theological significance, this feast offers essential lessons on Catholic stewardship and discipleship.

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception teaches that Mary was preserved from original sin from the very moment of her conception. This means that Mary's soul was without blemish, making her the perfect vessel to carry and nurture the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The Feast of the Immaculate Conception underscores Mary's unique role in the salvation of humanity and her exceptional purity, highlighting her as a model of discipleship.

Stewardship of God's Grace: Catholic stewardship is about recognizing that everything we have, including our talents, time, and resources, is a gift from God. Mary's Immaculate Conception is a reminder that we are called to

be stewards of God's grace. Just as Mary's purity was a divine gift, so are the talents and resources we possess. Stewardship encourages us to use these gifts for the greater good, just as Mary used her life to serve God's plan.

Imitating Mary's Fiat: One of the most significant aspects of the Immaculate Conception story is Mary's fiat, her "yes" to God's plan. When the angel Gabriel announced that she would become the Mother of the Savior, Mary replied, "Let it be done to me according to your word." This act of surrender exemplifies the essence of discipleship. As Catholic disciples, we are called to emulate Mary's obedience, saying "yes" to God's will in our lives.

The Call to Holiness: The Immaculate Conception reminds us of the call to holiness in our daily lives. Mary's exceptional purity points to the possibility of leading a life free from sin. While this may seem unattainable, it emphasizes the importance of continuous conversion and striving for holiness as part of our discipleship journey. The Feast of the Immaculate Conception invites us to make choices that align with our faith and values, drawing us closer to God.

Mary as the Advocate: In the Catholic tradition, Mary is often venerated as the Advocate, the one who intercedes on our behalf. Her role as the Immaculate Conception reinforces her unique ability to bridge the gap between humanity and God. In our stewardship and discipleship, we can turn to Mary as a source of inspiration and guidance. Just as she interceded at the Wedding at Cana, we can trust in her prayers as we navigate life's challenges and joys.

Caring for God's Creation: Catholic stewardship extends beyond our personal talents and resources; it also encompasses our responsibility to care for God's creation. Mary's purity and grace reflect the beauty and purity of the world that God has entrusted to our care. Discipleship includes protecting and preserving the environment, recognizing it as a precious gift from God.

Service to Others: Mary's life was marked by her service to others. From her humble acceptance of her role as the Mother of God to her support of Jesus throughout His ministry, Mary embodies selfless service. Catholic stewardship encourages us to follow her example by serving our communities and those in need.

In conclusion, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception holds a deep significance in the Catholic Church, serving as a reminder of Mary's purity, her fiat, and her unique role in God's plan for humanity. It provides a powerful lesson on stewardship, prompting us to recognize and use the gifts God has given us. Mary's example of discipleship, her holiness, and her advocacy for us further strengthen our commitment to following Christ. As we celebrate this feast, let us be inspired to say "yes" to God's plan, strive for holiness, and serve others with love and humility, just as Mary did.

A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

LIVING STEWARDSHIP IN THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

Dear Parishioners,

Here in Colorado, December and January often feel more like deep winter than late fall. Snow on the mountains, crisp mornings, and long evenings remind us of the season's quiet beauty. It is in this setting that we enter into one of the most sacred times of the Church year — the celebration of Christ's birth and the unfolding joy of the Christmas season.

At Christmas, we rejoice that God has given us the greatest gift of all — His Son, Jesus Christ. The mystery of the Incarnation is at the heart of our faith, and it is also the foundation of our call to stewardship. God gives Himself completely to us, and our grateful response is to offer our time, talent, and treasure in return.

The New Year provides a natural moment to reflect on how we are living as Christian stewards. Just as many people set personal goals or resolutions in January, we can also make spiritual commitments — resolving to spend more time in prayer, to share our talents in parish life, or to be more intentional in our financial giving to the Church. These acts of stewardship keep Christ at the center of our lives and allow His light to shine more brightly through us.

The Feast of the Epiphany, celebrated in early January, reminds us that Christ came not only for Israel, but for all nations and peoples. The Magi brought their gifts to the newborn King, and in doing so, they show us how to respond to the gift of Christ Himself. As stewards, we too bring our gifts — not gold, frankincense, and myrrh, but our prayer, our service, and our generosity. These gifts



continue Christ's mission here in our parish and throughout the Diocese of Colorado Springs.

This edition of our parish newsletter includes stories that show how stewardship is alive and thriving in our parish community. In these pages, we welcome our new parochial vicar, Fr. Christian Vaca, who shares his inspiring journey from Guadalajara, Mexico, to the Diocese of Colorado

Springs and reflects on the blessings of beginning his priesthood here among us. You'll also read about our beloved St. Nicholas Advent Tree, a beautiful parish tradition that brings joy to children and families in need while reminding us of the true spirit of Christmas giving. And as we look ahead to the coming year, we preview Catholic Schools Week 2026, celebrating the faith-filled education and vibrant community that make our Catholic schools such a vital part of parish life.

As we move through this Christmas season and into a New Year, let us embrace the light of Christ with renewed gratitude. May this be a time of blessing for you and your families, and may our parish continue to grow as a community of faith, hope, and generosity. Please know of my prayers for each of you in these holy days.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Christian Vaca". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned over a faint image of a hand holding a small object.

Fr. Quezada
Pastor



THE ST. NICHOLAS

A Wonderful Parish Tradition P



We cannot help but feel the joy and anticipation during Advent as we prepare for Christmas. The excitement of buying gifts, the beauty of the decorations, and the fun of Christmas festivities help us to embrace the joy that comes with the celebration of Christ's birth. Our hearts are also driven to generosity as we seek to help those in need. The success of our annual Giving Tree shows us how the love of Christ leads us to serving others.

This year, the Giving Tree is being renamed to the St. Nicholas Advent Tree. This name change is fitting as we recall the remarkable generosity of St. Nicholas as he gave away his fortune to the poor and dedicated his life to serving God and His people.

Sue Garcia is the coordinator for this project that reaches out and serves so many people in our community.

"We really try to incorporate everyone in this project by supporting as many organizations as we can," she says. "We are moving in a lot of different directions, and we don't want to forget anyone! It makes Christmas so special for so many people."

Some of the organizations supported through this project include the local school district, Fostering Hope, Bahkita House, Crossfire Ministries, our military members, a local nursing home, and God's Sneakers.

Because of the wide variety of organizations that we serve, not all of the ways to give are through the purchase of gifts. God's Sneakers is

a collection of money to serve this organization, and this is the only time we do a collection in the parish for them. Last year, we collected \$4,400 to support this organization. The collection for the members of the military in our parish is for gift cards to give them.

Crossfire Ministries is a big organization that many of our gifts go to. Last year, 21 families were served by our parishioners, with each family member receiving gifts.

"Last year, we offered something a little different in addition to the usual gift tags," Sue says. "We offered for groups or families to sponsor an entire family. One family in the parish matched with another family whose kids were similar ages. This gave their children the opportunity to buy gifts for kids that were like them. We also had two families that asked for larger items. One had a son that needed a laptop for school. Another family asked for bikes for everyone in their family."

"We had generous parishioners who were capable of fulfilling these requests," she adds. "It was so incredible to see people stepping up to help in big ways. We will be doing this again this year. Parishioners who are interested in helping in this way can reach out to me."

Another unique way of giving was offered last year and will be offered again this year. Some parishioners wanted to give gifts, but were unable to do the shopping themselves. So we have a way of doing the shopping for them.





AS ADVENT TREE:

Promoting the Spirit of Christmas

“These parishioners didn’t just want to give money — they wanted to know what they were buying,” Sue says. “They chose the items for the gifts, and I went and did the purchasing. It made it so much more personal for them, and that is important, too. We are happy to offer this as an option again this year as well.”

With the generosity of our parish providing so many gifts to so many different organizations, there is always a need for people to help organize, load, and deliver the gifts. Anyone interested in volunteering to help with this side of the project

is welcome to contact Sue to find out how they can help.

“The St. Nicholas Advent Tree really is about the spirit of Christmas,” Sue says. “It is more about serving others than ourselves, and it is such a wonderful tradition here at St. Gabriel’s. We are able to ease the burden of families at Christmas, and it is truly a gift.”

The trees will be up at the church on the weekend of Nov. 29-30. Parishioners are asked to have the gifts wrapped and returned by Dec. 14 so that gifts can be distributed before Christmas.

If you would like to volunteer, sponsor a family, or have your shopping done for you, contact Sue Garcia at saintgabriel.outreach@gmail.com.

FR. CHRISTIAN VACA *continued from front cover*

and one brother — and he has one niece and three nephews. His family remains an important part of his life and vocation, offering constant prayer and encouragement as he begins his priestly ministry.

His vocation journey began years earlier in Guadalajara, where he first entered seminary before completing his studies at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Maryland. Drawn by a deep love for Jesus in the Eucharist and a growing desire to serve, he gradually discerned the Lord’s call to priesthood through moments of prayer, reflection, and spiritual direction.

Fr. Christian initially applied to the Archdiocese of Chicago, but after being advised to wait during an archbishop transition, he turned his attention westward. Accepted for formation under Bishop Michael Sheridan, he came to love Colorado — a place he had visited often while spending summers with his aunt and uncle. Those visits left a lasting impression, and he felt a special connection to the

people and the beauty of the region long before he ever called it home.

Today, he finds his greatest joy in celebrating Mass and hearing confessions. “I love these two sacraments because both reveal the most precious value that the Church has,” he says. These sacred moments remind him daily of God’s mercy and presence among His people.

Outside of ministry, Fr. Christian enjoys the outdoors, reading, watching movies, and spending time with friends. He also loves tacos, Mexican and Italian food, a good burger, and trying new sports — even if he admits he’s not always perfect at them. His cheerful spirit and openness to new experiences make him approachable and easy to know.

Above all, Fr. Christian feels profoundly grateful to begin his priesthood here. “It’s wonderful,” he says. “It’s amazing being a priest and serving this community here. It’s a friendly, welcoming, faithful community close to Jesus.”



REDISCOVERING FAITH AT CHRISTMAS: *Coming Home to the Church*



For many Catholics, attending Mass regularly might not be part of their routine throughout the year. However, Christmas provides a unique opportunity for fallen-away Catholics to reconnect with their faith and rediscover the beauty of the Mass. How can you use Christmas as a springboard to renew your faith and begin attending Mass regularly while actively participating in the life of the parish through stewardship?

- **Reflect on the Meaning of Christmas:** Take some time to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas. Consider why Christ's birth is celebrated worldwide and how it has impacted your life. This reflection can serve as a powerful motivator to reconnect with your faith and inspire you to attend Mass more regularly.
- **Attend Christmas Eve or Christmas Day Mass:** Christmas is an ideal time to return to the Church. Attend Christmas Eve or Christmas Day Mass to immerse yourself in the celebration of the birth of Christ. The liturgy, music, and the message of love and hope can be deeply moving and rekindle your connection with the faith.
- **Engage with the Parish Community:** After attending Christmas Mass, make an effort to engage with the parish community. Introduce yourself

to the priests and fellow parishioners. Join in parish activities and events, such as social gatherings, Bible studies, or volunteering opportunities. Building relationships within the community can make attending Mass more enjoyable and meaningful.

- **Set Realistic Goals:** If you've been away from the Church for some time, it's important to set realistic goals. Rather than committing to attending Mass every week immediately, start with a goal of attending Mass once a month or on major feast days. Gradually increase your frequency as you become more comfortable and spiritually engaged.
- **Embrace Stewardship:** Stewardship is a key aspect of Catholic faith, emphasizing the responsible use of your time, talent, and treasure for the service of God and others. Start by exploring your talents and how you can contribute to your parish. This might include joining a choir, volunteering for a parish event, or helping with charitable initiatives. By participating actively in stewardship, you become an integral part of the parish community and strengthen your connection with the Church.
- **Seek Spiritual Guidance:** If you have questions about your faith or need guidance on your

spiritual journey, don't hesitate to reach out to the parish priests or lay ministers. They can provide support, answer your questions, and offer resources to help you grow in your faith.

- **Pray and Reflect:** Take time for personal prayer and reflection. This can be done daily or weekly and will help you deepen your faith and establish a stronger connection with God. As your prayer life strengthens, your desire to attend Mass regularly will likely increase.

Christmas is a wonderful opportunity for fallen-away Catholics to renew their faith, reconnect with the Church, and begin attending Mass regularly. By reflecting on the true meaning of Christmas, engaging with the parish community, setting realistic goals, embracing stewardship, seeking spiritual guidance, and prioritizing personal prayer and reflection, you can use the Christmas season as a springboard to a more spiritually fulfilling and connected life within the Catholic Church.

LOOKING FORWARD TO CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK 2026

United in Faith and Community

Catholic education plays an essential role in the upbringing of children and the building of our society. While parents are the primary educators of their children, Catholic school education also guides children as they learn about the faith and teachings of Christ. Each year, Catholic schools across the country take a week at the end of January to celebrate the importance of Catholic education and those who are involved in our schools.

This year, St. Gabriel Classical Academy will once again participate in Catholic Schools Week, joining schools across the country, running from Jan. 25 through 31. The theme is “Catholic Schools: United in Faith and Community.”

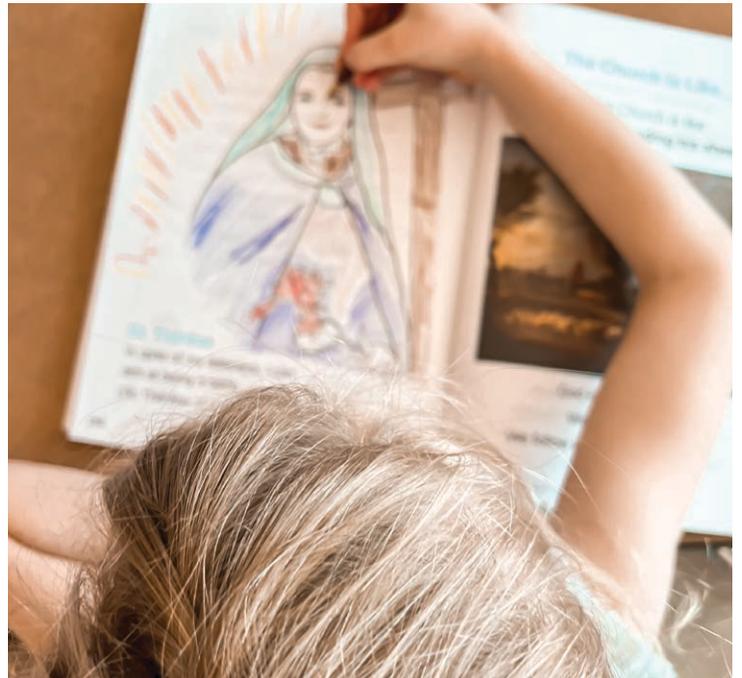
“It’s a time we can celebrate, and a chance for people to understand the difference between Catholic and public education,” says Holly Goodwin, interim principal. “And we celebrate all the things our Catholic schools do.”

Throughout the week, the school community celebrates all the many blessings received through Catholic education. Some of the activities include writing thank-you cards to parishioners who support the school, completing community service projects, children giving testimonies at the parish Masses, helping support Mater Filius, and other diocesan and community projects. Each day of the week is marked by a celebration and acknowledgement of the gift that Catholic education is to our parish families and community.

Catholic Schools Week is a unique experience set apart from the rest of the school year.

“It’s an opportunity for the outside world to get an inside peek at our Catholic schools,” Mrs. Goodwin says. “Within the school, we have special days and projects.”

The Catholic school system sees parents as the first educators of their children, and the children’s formation as including the students’ minds and



hearts. Ultimately, it is about not only academics but learning to view the world through a Catholic lens. This is something that sets it apart from the public school system.

“We support the parents and continue the education and formation that started within the home,” Mrs. Goodwin says. “The primary difference is we try to get children to realize Christ is the center of all things.”

Specifically for St. Gabriel Classical Academy, this means “threading” the faith into everything that is taught.

“It means for the students to have awe and wonder about God’s creation and seek truth,” Mrs. Goodwin says. “Catholic Schools Week is a celebration of that approach to education, as opposed to worrying about just grades. Each child is from God, created for a specific purpose.”

Furthermore, during CSW, the students will learn about both religious vocation and career vocations. They will also have the opportunity to

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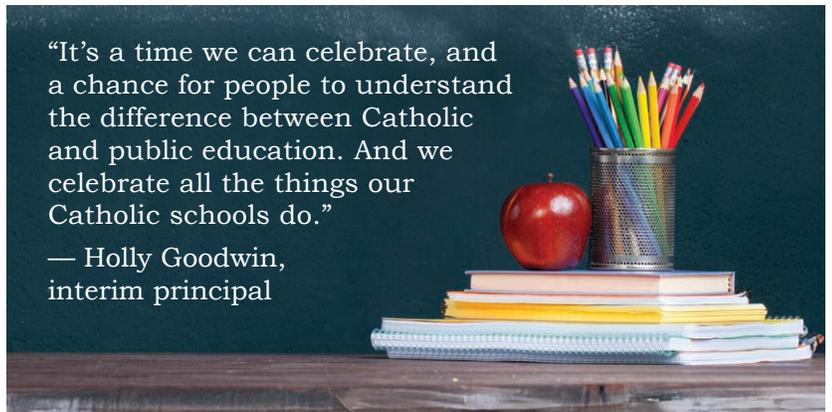
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK 2026 *continued from front cover*

attend the diocesan all-school Mass the week following CSW.

“Bringing all the kids together is beautiful; celebrating Mass together,” Mrs. Goodwin says.

In today’s world, where parents have to choose between public and Catholic schools, Mrs. Goodwin counts the community as blessed to have the option to choose St. Gabriel Classical Academy. The school is truly centered on Christ, where each child is known as a child of God.

“We know parents are the first educators of their children, and we’re here to support the education and formation, getting to the roots of what Catholic education is about,” Mrs. Goodwin says.



“It’s a time we can celebrate, and a chance for people to understand the difference between Catholic and public education. And we celebrate all the things our Catholic schools do.”

— Holly Goodwin,
interim principal

For more information, visit the school website at stgclassical.com.

LITURGY SCHEDULE

Saturday: 4 p.m. | **Sunday:** 8 a.m., 10 a.m., and 12 noon (Spanish)

Daily Mass: Monday – Friday: 8 a.m. | **Adoration:** Monday – Friday: 8:30 a.m. – 9 p.m.

Confession: Saturday: 2:45 p.m. – 3:45 p.m. and Mercy Wednesdays (See bulletin for dates) 7:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.