

A SEASON of HOPE



Holiday messages from around the Diocese of Erie

As we enter the Advent and Christmas seasons, the Diocese of Erie invites you to journey with us through a special holiday campaign of messages — a collection of reflections from clergy, lay leaders and members of the faithful throughout our 13 counties.

Each reflection offers a glimpse into the hope, joy and peace that mark this sacred time of year. From parish communities in our cities to those in our rural towns, these voices remind us that we are united in faith as we prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ.

We invite you to read, reflect and share these messages throughout the Advent and holiday season as a source of inspiration and connection within our diocesan family.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30



Very Rev. Justin Pino, V.F.

Vicar Forane, Saint Mary's Deanery

Pastor, St. Leo Magnus Parish in Ridgway

Vice President for Catholic Mission and Identity, Elk County Catholic School System

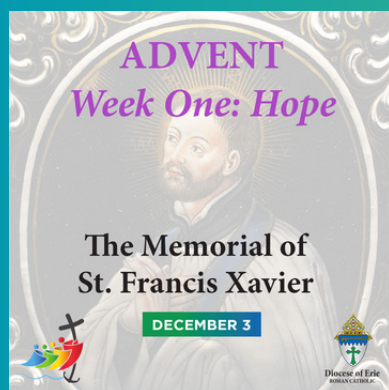
Diocesan Archivist

As we enter the first week of Advent, our hearts turn toward hope—the quiet, steady light that rises even before dawn breaks. This holy season invites us to look beyond what is ordinary and recognize the ways Christ is already at work, renewing our lives with grace and promise.

In a recent reflection, I wrote about the election of our new Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, whose witness reminds us that God continues to raise up shepherds who keep the light of Christ front and center in our world. Just as the Cross remains the “epicenter... of our Catholic Christian experience every day,” so too does Advent call us to fix our eyes on the Lord who comes to save us.

May this season of hope draw us closer to Christ and to one another.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3



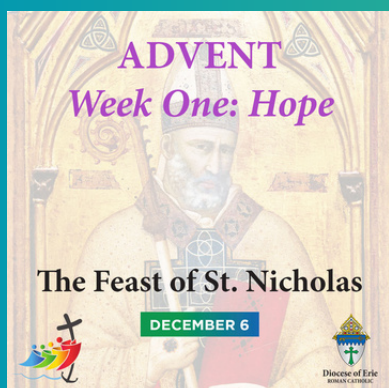
Rev. Benjamin Daghir

Pastor, St. Francis Xavier Parish in McKean

Chaplin, Cathedral Preparatory School

St. Francis Xavier's feast invites us to rekindle our missionary spirit. A companion of St. Ignatius of Loyola, he left Europe in 1542 and brought the Gospel to India, Japan, and the islands of Southeast Asia, dying off the coast of China in 1552 while longing to preach there. From India he once wrote, “Many, many people hereabouts are not becoming Christians for one reason only: there is nobody to make them Christians.” His words echo through our Diocese today. We must spread our Catholic faith—beginning in prayer and moving outward with courage and love.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6



The Most Reverence Lawrence T. Persico, JCL

Bishop of the Diocese of Erie

As we celebrate the Feast of Saint Nicholas during this Jubilee Year of Hope, we are reminded of a bishop whose quiet generosity revealed the compassion of Christ. In an age that often measures worth by wealth, Saint Nicholas calls us to give freely and love deeply. His hidden gifts became a symbol of hope for the poor and vulnerable, a light that continues to shine in our Advent journey. May his example inspire us to share joy, mercy and faith as we prepare to welcome the Savior who is the true gift of Christmas.

Are you at peace with God? With yourself? With others? You can avoid these questions, or you can come to terms with them. Be honest.

Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.” I believe Jesus was at peace because he lived each day with honor and integrity. Jesus fervently prayed to live the Beatitudes he taught to others. Jesus sought to forgive and to love unconditionally, and to walk humbly with the Father. It is this peace Jesus yearns to share with us.

As we immerse ourselves in Advent, may we spend time with Jesus, allowing him to share his peace with us. Perhaps we will not only find a deeper meaning of peace in our own life, but one we will then share with others through the life we lead.

Rev. John Malthaner
Pastor, Holy Spirit Parish in DuBois

“As we focus on peace this week, let’s remember that we are specifically called to be peacemakers and reflect the light of Christ. And it isn’t always easy. For most of us, being a peacemaker doesn’t mean treaties between countries. Being a peacemaker can be about how we treat others and those tiny conflicts that come from how we act or don’t act.

We make choices throughout our day. Do we bring calm and kindness into our workplaces and our homes? What do we say on social media or at the grocery store? Do we see others as our brothers and sisters in Christ, loved by the same Savior, even if they cut us off in traffic?

As we continue through Advent, let us look at others differently, pray for them, and pray for ourselves for a change in heart to always follow the example of the Prince of Peace.”

Mary Jo Yebernetsky
Faith Formation Leader
Holy Spirit Parish in Warren

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7



MONDAY, DECEMBER 8



As the new pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish, it is a joy to celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception with you. Today we honor Mary, preserved from sin so she could offer her wholehearted “yes” to God and bring Christ into the world. Her openness to grace is the model for our parish that bears her name.

The seasons of Advent and Christmas have always been special to me—a time of hopeful repentance as we await the greatest gift: salvation. I invite you to enter this holy season through reconciliation, prayer, Eucharistic adoration and acts of service. Let John the Baptist’s call, “Prepare the way of the Lord,” guide our hearts as together we welcome Christ more fully into our lives.

Rev. Jason Feigh
Pastor, Immaculate Conception Parish in Clarion
Parochial Administrator of St. Eusebius, East Brady and St. Richard, Rimersburg

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12



Indira Suarez

Director

Diocesan and International Missions

On the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Diocese of Erie lifts its heart to the Mother who draws all peoples into the embrace of her Son. When Mary appeared to St. Juan Diego in 1531, she chose an indigenous messenger so the Gospel could be heard through the beauty of his culture, his language and his lived experience. Her message of compassion, dignity and steadfast love continues to echo across the Americas and throughout our own diocese.

We are privileged to have the Hispanic community of St. Stephen Parish in Erie whose devotion and joyful faith deepen the life of our community. Also, for more than half a century our diocese has supported the Mission of Friendship in the Archdiocese of the Yucatán. Their witness reminds us that the church is strongest when every culture is welcomed, honored and celebrated. We join our Hispanic brothers and sisters in giving honor to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Through her intercession, may we grow as one family in Christ.

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SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13



Elizabeth Slaby

Director of the Office of Social Justice and Life

Catholic Charities

St. Lucy, virgin and martyr, whose name means 'light,' devoted her life to Christ and the poor. She persuaded her mother to give her dowry to the poor and, according to tradition, wore a crown of candles in the dark so she could carry food to those in need. Her life shines as a beacon of charity and hope. Inspired by St. Lucy's love for Christ and the vulnerable, Catholic Charities brings the light of hope to individuals and families in need through acts of charity, service and unwavering commitment to dignity, compassion and the common good.

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14



Deacon Ray and Deb Sobina

Coordinators for Retreats;

Deacon Ray: Co-Director of Diaconal Formation

Permanent Diaconate Program

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say Rejoice!" Today is the third Sunday in the Advent season commonly referred to as Gaudete 'Rejoice Sunday'. At this time, we are asked to seek joy: an enduring state of well-being and contentment, providing peace...Gaudete Sunday is a time to take a break from the hurried preparations of Advent to reflect on the good things God has freely given us. Even in sadness, due to sickness, failures, oppression, etc.; there can be joy, knowing that God gives us unconditional love, whether we deserve it or not. NOTHING can take that love away.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21

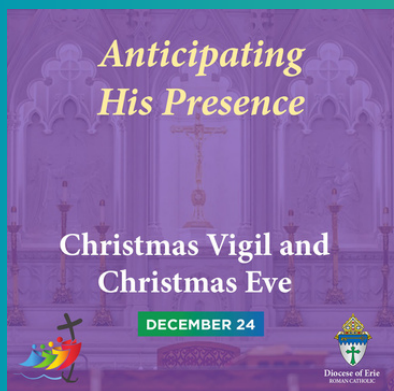


Katherine Chandley
Principal
St. Stephen School, Oil City, PA

As we age and grow, our understanding of love continues to evolve. Each day, when I work with the young people of St. Stephen School, I am reminded of what love looks like when accompanied by the innocence of childhood. Many times, throughout His ministry, Jesus instructed the adults around Him to act like children: “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 18:3)

Christmas is a time for adults to reminisce about childhood and enjoy the sights and sounds of the season. But more importantly, during this fourth week of Advent, God is calling us to love like a child as we await the greatest gift of love, born in a manger.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24



Sister Rosemary O'Brien, SSJ
Director of Lifelong Formation
Sisters of St. Joseph of NWPA

“The People Who Walked in Darkness Have Seen a Great Light” (Isaiah 9:1)

Once upon a time, Christmas Eve glowed with the excitement of children waiting for morning. There was warmth in every familiar carol, and joy in every promise that “tomorrow is Christmas.” The lights on the tree seemed to mirror the light of Christ’s love — bright, colorful, full of hope. The world feels heavier now. Many families are struggling to make ends meet. Wars, division, and uncertainty cloud the horizon.

*And yet — even now — the ancient promise of Isaiah breaks through:
“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”*

It’s not the glow of decorations or the flicker of candles; it is the Light that entered the world in a manger — fragile, yet inextinguishable. It is the Light that no darkness can overcome.

On this night, we are invited to look for that Light again. Maybe it shines through a simple act of kindness, a whispered prayer, a shared meal, or a moment of stillness. Perhaps it flickers gently in our weary hearts, reminding us that even in dark times, God is near.

Emmanuel, “God with us.”

The darkness of our world does not have the final word. The Light of Christ still breaks in — quietly, humbly, persistently. It comes not only to comfort, but to guide — to lead us toward peace, compassion, and hope renewed.

CHRISTMAS DAY THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25

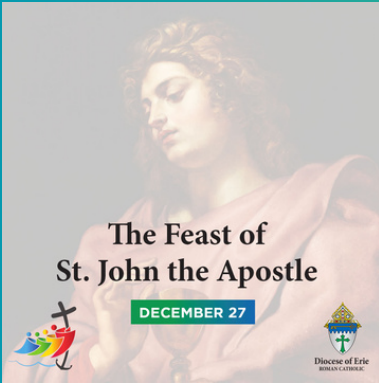


On this Solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord we give thanks for the birth of Jesus Christ who enters our world to bring light, hope and peace. In this Christmas season may the presence of the newborn Savior strengthen your faith, renew your spirit and guide your family with his love. As we reflect on the blessings and challenges of the past year, let us remain confident that Christ walks with us and leads us forward. May his grace fill your homes and his peace rest in every heart.

I hold you and your families in prayer on this blessed Christmas Day.

The Most Reverence Lawrence T. Persico, JCL
Bishop of the Diocese of Erie

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27



I have always taken St. John the Evangelist as my personal Patron Saint. I love that his Feast is in the Octave of Christmas! I often look to my Patron for inspiration as I prepare my homilies throughout the year, especially those Sundays that we hear from his Gospel, hoping that he gives me special words to share with my people. And, we often hear about the special bond that Jesus had with him, hoping that I, too, can do the same with the Lord. I pray that, through John the Evangelist, my words will help lead others to Glory.

Very Rev. John Detisch, V.F.

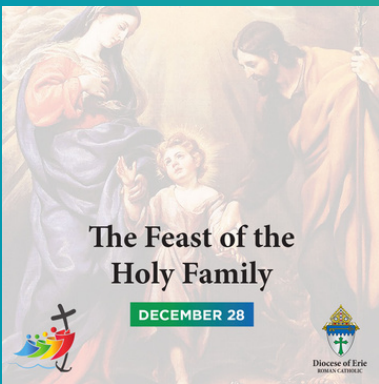
Vicar Forane, Saint DuBois Deanery

Pastor, St. Tobias Parish, Brockway

Parochial Administrator of St. Timothy Parish, Curwensville, with its secondary mission church of St. Bonaventure, Grampian

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28



Many of us are concluding a hectic and blessed holy season, but there is something about turning our attention to the Holy Family that helps situate all of our celebrations:

“Today our gaze on the Holy Family lets us also be drawn into the simplicity of the life they led in Nazareth. It is an example that does our families great good, helping them increasingly to become communities of love and reconciliation, in which tenderness, mutual help, and mutual forgiveness is experienced.” (2013 Holy Family Angelus Address) May this feast day give new focus and healing to our families, that we may imitate the simplicity and love of the Holy Family.

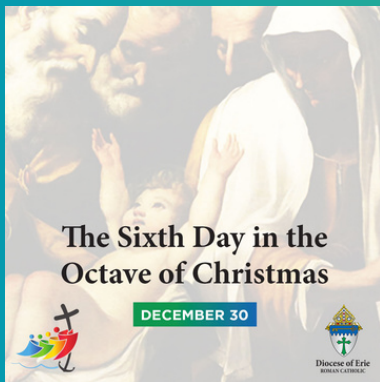
Kate Wilson

Director, Marriage and Family Life

Faith Formation

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 30



Today we meet the prophetess Anna, an old woman who had been a widow for sixty years. “She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer.” When she was a young widow she would have been expected to remarry. She, however, heard God calling her to this life of prayer. She was heedless of societal expectations and obedient to God’s call. Her obedience was rewarded: she had the privilege to be in the temple on that joyful day when the Infant Jesus was brought in by Mary and Joseph. Anna inspires us to ignore the voice of the world and be obedient to God’s call

Rev. James Power

Pastor, St. Joseph Parish, Sharon

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 31



Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice. On this day we are reminded again that God immeasurably blessed all creation when the Word of God entered into human history. All that God had promised was coming true. And it has made all the difference in a world that desperately needs the Light to guide us. Grace and truth came into the world when the Word became flesh and dwelt with us. Our joy and gratitude should know no bounds. May we each day give glory to the Father through the Son and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit continue to spread the Good News.

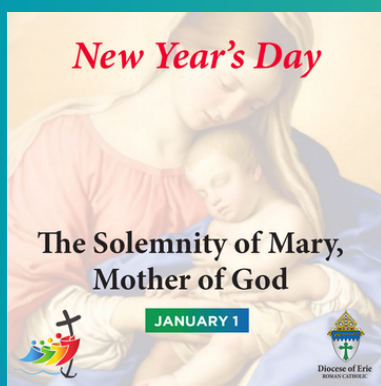
Deacon Owen and Vicki Wagner

Deacon Owen; Beloved Disciple Parish

Victoria: Outreach, Beloved Mercy Ministry Coordinator



THURSDAY, JANUARY 1



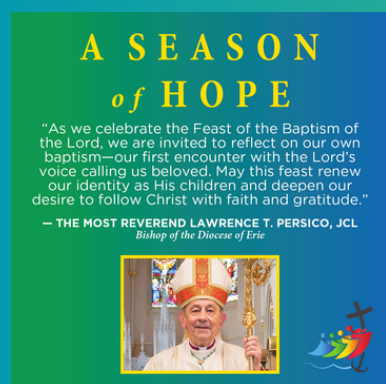
Mary, who “kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart”, may be the only one who can teach us how to live faithfully with the paradoxes of our time. She pondered a divine conception with a very human birth -- the integral connection of life and death, embraced by her son – living as mother of the human, Jesus, and as “Mother of God”. On his World Day of Peace, we turn to Mary for help in experiencing God within ourselves – our still point. Only then will we find hope in the midst of despair –peace within the anger and violence.

Sister Dorothy Stoner, OSB

Benedictine Sisters of Erie



SUNDAY, JANUARY 11



As we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, we are invited to reflect on our own baptism—our first encounter with the Lord’s tender voice calling us beloved. The late Pope Francis reminded us that in Jesus’ baptism, “the face and the voice” of God are revealed, inviting us into communion with Him. He also encouraged us to remember the date of our own baptism and celebrate it as our spiritual birthday. Today, may we ask ourselves: Do I feel loved by God? May this feast renew our identity as His children and deepen our desire to follow Christ with faith and gratitude.

The Most Reverend Lawrence T. Persico, JCL

Bishop of the Diocese of Erie