

# FaithLife



Clearfield student lays wreath at Tomb of Unknown Soldier PAGE 2

www.ErieRCD.org

BI-WEEKLY NEWSPAPER OF THE DIOCESE OF ERIE

December 24, 2017

**A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE**

## Share Christ's light

All of us, at one time or another, have embraced a newborn baby. Maybe you're a mother—like Mary, the Blessed Virgin—who carried a baby inside her womb. Perhaps you're a father—like Joseph—who was there at the moment of birth, protecting, guiding. You may be among the vast majority—the shepherds—who have welcomed a baby into your families and circle of friends. Then, there are the teachers and spiritual guides—the wise men—who have nurtured a child in mind and spirit. As St. Paul told the Ephesians (1:11): "In Christ, we have also obtained an inheritance..."



Bishop Lawrence Persico

When a baby is born—like Jesus, more than 2,000 years ago—we inherit a gift. Like any inheritance, this gift becomes part of our lives, part of our history. We then must ask ourselves a few questions: "How do I use this gift? How do I treasure it? How might I share it so that others may also see its beauty?" Leaving the gift of Jesus in the manger on Christmas Day isn't enough for the authentic Christian. We must hold him close, embrace him, and bring him along with us for the rest of our lives. The three wise men taught us this, didn't they? The child was born, they sought him out, and they even gave him gifts. Taking another route home, they took the gift of Jesus' light with them.

I see this light shared in our diocese every day of the year, whether it's in our schools and parishes, or in the various social service agencies that reach out to the needy. This Advent, I had the singular pleasure of meeting in person with the men and women who come every weekday morning to our Bishop's Breakfast program in downtown Erie. One young man, Tyrone Morrow, asked me to pray with him. I may have given him fast food gift certificates, but he shared with me the ultimate gift, the only thing he could give: his belief in Jesus. I was reminded of Isaiah's prophecy (9:1) proclaimed in the Christmas liturgy: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light." This Christmas, embrace Jesus and carry him with you into the New Year.

*Lawrence T. Persico*

The Most Rev. Lawrence T. Persico  
Bishop of Erie

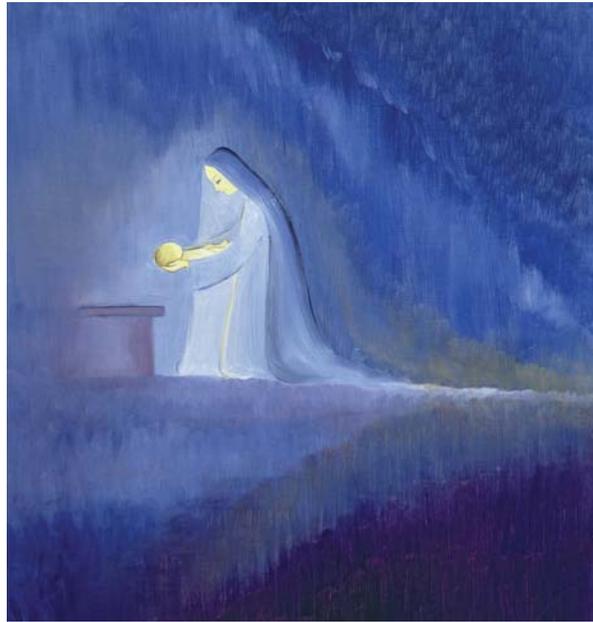
## Foundation awards grant

The Catholic Foundation of Northwest Pennsylvania recently awarded \$29,000 from its Education Endowment to enhance technology throughout the Erie Catholic School System. The grant provided funds for high-speed fiber optic internet, enabling all six schools in the system to seamlessly connect, collaborate, align curriculum and share best practices. The schools that comprise the Erie Catholic School System include Blessed Sacrament, Our Lady of Peace, St. George, St. James, St. Jude and St. Luke. For information on the Catholic Foundation of Northwest Pennsylvania, contact Lisa Louis, executive director, at 814-824-1237 or at [mycatholicfoundation.org](http://mycatholicfoundation.org).



Pictured at the recent Catholic Foundation check presentation are, from left: Sam Louis of St. George School; Damon Finazzo, president of the Erie Catholic School System; Karen Burton-Horstman, board chair of the Catholic Foundation; Lisa Louis, executive director of the Catholic Foundation of Northwest Pennsylvania; John Schroeck, director of technology for Erie Catholic; and Megan Maholic, also a student at St. George.

# Merry Christmas to all



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Mary and the Christ Child are depicted in a 1997 painting by Elizabeth Wang. The feast of the Nativity of Christ, a holy day of obligation, is celebrated Dec. 25. Mary's "yes" to God brings us a Savior.

## Autistic students and parents take 'leap of faith'

BY MARY SOLBERG | FAITHLIFE

**Editor's Note:** This is the final installment of a two-part series on autism and the Autism Initiative at Mercyhurst University in Erie.

Paul Cohen, a junior at Mercyhurst University in Erie, didn't start speaking fully until he was about 5 years old. His mother, Julia Guttman, an attorney in Washington, D.C., describes the constant care and understanding necessary to diagnose and raise a child on the autism spectrum.

"I guess I tried to take it one year at a time," Guttman says. "If he was doing well, then I thought the next year would be better. When he was little, I had no idea how he would develop. I talked to friends who had children with various developmental issues. It was more cobbling things together."

As in Cohen's case, autism usually appears in early childhood, mostly among boys, and affects a person's ability to communicate and interact with others. According to the Autism Society, more than 3.5 million Americans live with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), considered to be the fastest-growing developmental disability in the country.

In Cohen's lifetime, the prevalence of autism in the United States jumped dramatically, according to the Autism Society, from 1 in 150 births in 2000, to 1 in 68 in 2014. Understanding the complexity of the neurological disorder can be a difficult learning curve for parents as well as for those with autism.

That's why Mercyhurst University, in 2008, founded the Autism Initiative at Mercyhurst (AIM). Its goal is to assist stu-



Courtesy photo

Brad McGarry, director of the Autism Initiative at Mercyhurst (AIM), is pictured at center with students, staff and professional guides during AIM's experiential learning trip to Mt. Kilimanjaro in Africa.

dents like Cohen to advocate for themselves and to develop and largest autism support programs in the country.

"For the parents of these students, a four-year college away from home is not doable, but with the support of AIM it is. It's a leap of faith on the part of parents."

Currently, AIM enrolls 60 students from all over the world. It is one of the oldest

and largest autism support programs in the country. "AIM is a fine line between enabling and empowering," says Brad McGarry, director. "For the parents of these students, a four-year college away from home is not doable, but with the support of AIM it is. It's a leap of faith on the part of parents."

Guttman and Janet Slaby, the mother of Mercyhurst grad Ryan Slaby, agree. AIM staff

meet weekly with students to keep them on task with coursework. Students also are required to join at least two extracurricular activities in order to improve social skills. Optional experiential adventures—including trips to the Grand Canyon in the western U.S., and Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, Africa—boost student confidence. Career training offers mock interviews and assists with job placement. Cohen, a history major, has taken advantage of everything, including internships at the International Institute in Erie and the Museum of

## A WEARY WORLD REJOICES

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—The Nativity scene in St. Peter's Square does not look like a stable, and the characters in need—hungry, naked, dead, imprisoned—don't exactly evoke a silent night when all was cozy, calm and bright.

Franciscan Father John Puodziunas said he didn't like it at first.

But the Nativity scene includes figures that illustrate the ongoing need for the corporal works of mercy, including feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, burying the dead, caring for the sick and visiting those in prison.

Father Puodziunas, a friar from Philadelphia who is now general treasurer of the Order of Friars Minor, stood in St. Peter's Square recently and said, "This really captures what I believe the Nativity set is about.



CNS photo

Life-size statues depict, in this Nativity scene at St. Peter's Square, Rome, the corporal work of mercy of visiting the sick. Other areas of the Nativity include statues showing the call to bury the dead and visit the imprisoned, among other works of mercy.

It's about "Where am I today? Where is the world today? Where is the church today?"

The Vatican display, he said, "brings the manger scene into our present world reality to remind us that this is a God who continues to step into our world. It isn't just something that happened 2,000 years ago."

## Newsmakers



Snippets of Catholic headlines and stories from around the world

from Catholic News Service

### Lebanon's religious oppose Trump's Jerusalem move



CNS photo

Christian and Muslim leaders in Lebanon gather Dec. 14 for an interreligious summit at Bkerke, Beirut, the seat of Maronite Catholics, to discuss and put forth a unified position regarding the Trump administration's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

BEIRUT (CNS)—Lebanon's Christian and Muslim leaders denounced what they called the "unjust" decision of U.S. President Donald Trump to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and demanded that the decision be reversed.

In a Dec. 14 statement released at the end of an interreligious summit, the leaders said "in addition to violating the laws and international charters," the decision ignores the fact that Jerusalem is holy to Christians, Muslims and Jews.

### Archbishop sees signs of God's presence, even in fires

LOS ANGELES (CNS)—As wildfires raged near Los Angeles, Archbishop José H. Gomez called on those who have lost their homes and those offering assistance and fighting the flames to remember that God is accompanying them in their sorrow and acts of sacrifice.

"The Lord is there in the outpouring of donations and in all of the volunteers serving selflessly in our Catholic Charities and St. Vincent de Paul Society," the archbishop wrote Dec. 12 in *Angelus*.

The fires continued to burn out of control, with the largest being the fast-moving Thomas fire in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties northwest of Los Angeles. Officials said the wind-whipped flames were about 30 percent contained late Dec. 13, but continued to rapidly advance toward the Pacific Coast.

### U.S. bishops award \$3.2 million to projects in Latin America

WASHINGTON—With the goal of strengthening and supporting the pastoral work of the church in Latin America and the Caribbean, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Subcommittee on the Church in Latin America awarded nearly \$3.2 million in grants for 183 pastoral projects in the region for 2018.

# Remembering veterans at Christmastime

## Fifth-grader lays wreath at Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

BY MARY SOLBERG | FAITHLIFE

CLEARFIELD—Dehlia Elbe is only 11, but she found herself on the national stage Dec. 16 when she helped lay a Christmas wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington, D.C.

The fifth-grader from St. Francis School in Clearfield joined three other people selected nationally to

America founders Morrill and Karen Worcester, of Maine, whom she met during a recent trip there with her father, Ken Elbe, a truck driver with Tyson Foods. Tyson is a corporate supporter of Wreaths Across America.

Elbe took his daughter with him to Maine so she could present the Worcester's with t-shirts from St. Francis School. The school raised hundreds of dollars to purchase WAA wreaths for veterans' graves at Beulah Cemetery in nearby Ramsey.

"It just touched them so much that they gave her this honor," Ken Elbe said.

School principal Sheila Clancy was inspired to pursue the WAA



Photo courtesy of Wreaths Across America

Dehlia Elbe, wearing the ballcap at center, helps lay a wreath Dec. 16 at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington, D.C.

lay the wreath as part of the annual Wreaths Across America (WAA) event at Arlington National Cemetery. In total, Wreaths Across America—a national nonprofit dedicated to remembering and honoring veterans—placed 246,700 wreaths that day on the markers of veterans buried at Arlington. A total of 1.5 million WAA wreaths were placed on veterans' graves across the country.

Dehlia called her experience "quite outstanding." "I think Wreaths Across America is really amazing," Dehlia told *FaithLife*. "You remember the soldiers. You honor those who served and who are still serving, and it teaches the value of freedom and that freedom isn't free."

Dehlia was selected to help place the wreath by Wreaths Across

project after a conversation with Dehlia's mom, Tina, who is a kindergarten teacher at St. Francis. About 165 veterans are buried at Beulah Cemetery, but the community has never before had the funds to provide enough wreaths.

Clancy is ecstatic that Dehlia and St. Francis were put in the national spotlight for a good cause.

"I think this shows how everybody doing one small part can lead into something so much bigger," Clancy said.

Wreaths Across America spokesperson Amber Caron said Dehlia's selection to place a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier "is a pretty significant honor."

"Dehlia gets what we're doing and she helps other kids understand it," Caron said.

## Vocation News

Catherine Caulfield, a former parishioner of St. George Parish in Erie, was clothed in the Benedictine habit at the Monastery of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Westfield, Vt., on Nov. 21. She received the religious name of Sister Macrina.

Immaculate Heart of Mary is a cloistered monastery, part of the Benedictine Congregation of Solesmes. Being clothed in the habit is an initial step in the formation process.

Sister Macrina is the daughter of Michael and Stephanie Caulfield, parishioners of St. George.



Sister Macrina

## Diocesan youth attend NCYC

INDIANAPOLIS—More than 100 high school students, chaperones and priests from the Diocese of Erie joined the more than 25,000 youth at November's National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC) in Indianapolis.

The youth who participated from the diocese represented parishes and Catholic schools from throughout the 13 counties of northwestern Pennsylvania. Diocesan priests—Father Steve Schriber, Father Mike Polinek, Father Kyle Seyler, Father Sean Kerins and Father Brandon Kleckner—celebrated at the closing Mass.

"The group spent their days in Indianapolis being fed by the theme of the conference: that we are all called by God to be saints in our own unique way," said Jennifer Durney, coordinator of the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry. "NCYC gives both the teens and chaperones the tools and support they need to light the fire of their own faith and to go home and continue to live with that passion and share it with the world around them."



Contributed photo

Above: Students, chaperones and priests from throughout the diocese gathered for this group photo during NCYC.

Right: Gabe DeVore, Andrew Kightlinger and Andrew Dalton, all of Our Lady of Mercy and St. Mark the Evangelist parishes, Erie; and Josh Salada and Austin Moore, both of St. Tobias Parish, Brockway, carried the diocesan delegation banner at the opening session of the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis in November. The individual diocesan banners were hung in the Lucas Oil Stadium for the remainder of the conference.



Photo courtesy of Natalie Blagoev

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EVENTS

■ Scripture and song

The parish communities of St. John the Baptist and Holy Rosary in Erie invite everyone to "A Festival of Lessons and Carols" Jan. 4 at 7 p.m. at St. John the Baptist Church, 509 E. 26th St.

The event is a service of Scripture and song that dates to the late 19th century. Those in attendance will hear nine short Scripture readings and listen to music. A light reception will follow.

■ Baldwin Wallace/McDowell High School choral concert

The Baldwin Wallace University Choir, of Berea, Ohio, will perform Jan. 5 at 7 p.m. in a choral concert at St. Peter Cathedral, Erie, with Erie's McDowell High School Chorus.

The conductor of the Baldwin Wallace Choir is Dr. Dirk Gardner; the McDowell Chorus is under the direction of Leslie Weber. The public is welcome. A free-will offering will be taken. For more information, call Bill Herring at St. Peter Cathedral at 814-453-6677, ext. 8.

■ Diocesan Study Week

Mark your calendars for the annual Diocesan Study Week, Jan. 8-11, at St. Mark Catholic Center, 429 E. Grandview Blvd., Erie.

The presenter will be Father Paul Turner, rector of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Kansas City, Mo., and director of the Office of Divine Worship for the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph.

For more details and registration, go to [www.eriecd.org/religiouseducation.html](http://www.eriecd.org/religiouseducation.html).

■ 'Judaism Today'

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie will welcome Rabbi Emily Losben-Ostrov of Erie's Temple Anshe Hese as the presenter of "Judaism Today: A Modern Look at an Ancient Faith," on Jan. 24 at 7 p.m. at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, 6101 East Lake Road, Erie. The event is free and open to the public.

For further information, contact Sister Stephanie Schmidt, OSB, at [formation@mtsbenedict.org](mailto:formation@mtsbenedict.org) or at 814-899-0614, ext. 2511.

■ Cheerleading competition

The ninth annual St. Michael Cheerleading Competition will be held Saturday, Feb. 17, 2018, beginning at 2 p.m. at Kennedy Catholic High School gymnasium, 2120 Shenango Valley Freeway, Hermitage.

The competition is among pep squads, elementary junior varsity, middle school varsity, and high school junior varsity and varsity squads. Diocese of Erie cheerleading guidelines and criteria will be followed.

The early bird entrance fee, due by Jan. 10, is \$5 per girl. The cost is \$10 per girl after that date. The final deadline to enter is Feb. 3, 2018.

If participating, email a group photo along with the name of each girl and advisers to: [cheerleading@saintmichael1.org](mailto:cheerleading@saintmichael1.org) no later than Jan. 15, 2018. For more details about the competition, contact Mary Lynne Reimold at 724-813-5934 or at [cheerleading@saintmichael1.org](mailto:cheerleading@saintmichael1.org).

■ March 2018 women's retreat

Register now for the March 9-11, 2018, women's retreat at the Villa Maria Education and Spirituality Center in Pulaski, Pa. The cost per person is \$145, which includes meals and a private room. A non-refundable deposit of \$45 is due with registration. Send checks, payable to The Spiritual Family The Work, to: Julia House, c/o Sister Josephine Vuodi, FSO, 4415 Briggs Ave., Erie, Pa. 16504. For more information, email [sr.josephine@the-work-fo.org](mailto:sr.josephine@the-work-fo.org).

■ Faith and Reason Program

Saint Vincent College in Latrobe will host its eighth annual Faith and Reason Summer Program, an intensive, one-week introduction to the Catholic liberal arts tradition. The program will be held June 10-15, 2018, and will be directed by Dr. Michael P. Krom, professor and chair of the Philosophy Department.

Housing in a college residence hall and three daily meals in the college dining hall are included in the cost (\$495). Further information is available by contacting Dr. Krom at 724-805-2844 or emailing him at [michael.krom@stvincent.edu](mailto:michael.krom@stvincent.edu). Registration is accepted at [www.stvincent.edu/faithandreason](http://www.stvincent.edu/faithandreason).

Autism

Continued from page 1

American History in Washington, D.C.

"I think Paul is going to be able to live on his own and I think he will get a job someday, but he'll have more challenges," Guttman says. "He'll be much better prepared because of the AIM program."

For Janet Slaby, Mercyhurst's Catholic tradition and small size were beneficial for her son Ryan, who now is working full-time for KeyBank in Cleveland.

"We're Catholic, so it made me feel a sense of peace," Slaby says. "It instilled in him confidence and a belief in himself."

Paul Cohen also is Catholic, but that's not a requirement to attend Mercyhurst, a university founded in 1926 by the Sisters of Mercy in Erie.

He's involved in several campus organizations, including Colleges Against Cancer, Circle K International, and Mercyhurst Campus Ministry. He joined the excursion to Tanzania, and traveled this fall to New York City, where he

was interviewed along with other students for a Netflix documentary, "This Business of Autism," scheduled to be aired in April 2018.

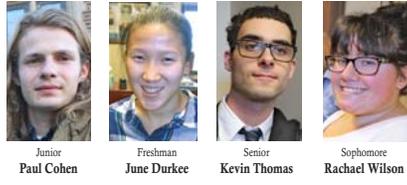
"AIM has allowed me to soar," Cohen, 21, says.

Cohen met recently in McGarry's office with three other AIM students: Kevin Thomas, a senior majoring in English; Rachael Wilson, a sophomore with a double major in English and history; and June Durkee, a first-year student who plans to major in sports business.

They frankly discussed the difficulties that have plagued them since childhood—stuttering, isolation, an

The faces of autism

Students at Mercyhurst University, Erie



Mercyhurst University students June Durkee, Paul Cohen, Kevin Thomas and Rachael Wilson gathered recently with Brad McGarry, second from right, director of Mercyhurst's Autism Initiative.

inability to focus. Most take advantage of on-campus housing dedicated to AIM students, who generally experience less stress living with each other.

"It's really nice to have people who understand what goes on in my head," Wilson says. "A lot of my friends are not on the spectrum, so they act like they know, but they don't really get it. People who I'm friends with at AIM really get me."

Adds Durkee, who was officially diagnosed with autism in her senior year of high school: "The diagnosis gave me another perspective. Now I fully understand why I might have

been timid in my early days." Thomas, who was diagnosed with autism at age 3, acknowledges having certain ticks and mannerisms that make it difficult in social situations. But AIM, he says, helped him make important life decisions.

"I've figured out more of what I want to do," says Thomas, who hopes to land a proofreading/editing job after graduation.

In that regard, students with autism are like any college-age students trying to find their way. Says Cohen, "I've learned about accepting myself."

IT'S REALLY NICE TO HAVE PEOPLE WHO UNDERSTAND WHAT GOES ON IN MY HEAD.

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Email news items to: FaithLife@ErieRCD.org

Check out more photos at [www.ErieRCD.org/atd.htm](http://www.ErieRCD.org/atd.htm)



## Decking the halls at Seton School



MEADVILLE—Seton School principal **Laura Blake** helps kindergarten student **Jace Mattocks** hang his handmade ornament on a tree at the school's annual Deck the Halls ceremony Dec. 6, the feast of St. Nicholas. Father Jeff Lucas—pastor of Meadville's St. Agatha, St. Brigid and St. Mary of Grace parishes—blessed the tree, and Tara Thompson led each class in singing Christmas carols.

## Donated socks will fill lots of stockings



ERIE—Third-graders at Blessed Sacrament School in Erie sponsored a "Socktober" sock collection this fall for Kid's Cafe and Our Neighbor's Place overflow shelter, both in Erie. The school community donated more than 350 pairs of socks to the cause. Students, pictured from left, are: **Heath Kreidinger**, **Ahmar Horton** and **Elizabeth Theisen**.

## Students care a lot for The Caring Place



ERIE—St. Luke School students and faculty created the shape of a butterfly in the school gym to recognize the symbol of The Caring Place, a local outreach to children who are grieving. Eighth-grade student council members spent a day recently at the agency and came up with a fundraising idea on National Childhood Grief Awareness Day. They donated \$400 to The Caring Place.

## Cookie mania helps with open house



LUCINDA—Students in fourth through sixth grade at St. Joseph School in Lucinda made several dozen Christmas cookies for the preschool students to decorate with their families at a recent preschool open house.

## Catholic Daughters of the Americas donate funds to music/ arts program



MEADVILLE—The Catholic Daughters of the Americas Court Columbia #2 donated \$1,000 to the music/arts department at Seton Catholic School in Meadville. The funds will assist with updates to the current arts program and performance space at the school. Pictured, from left, are CDA representatives **Jeanette Kitch**, **Audrey Albaugh**, **Angie Lewis**, **Mary Ann Cochran**, **Ruth Dimerling**, **Lucille Gable**, **Suzanne Kelly** and **Pat Say**; Father **Jeff Lucas**, pastor of the Catholic Community of Meadville; CDA representatives **Janice Chatley** and **Phyllis Vrobel**; Father **Tom Trocchio**, parochial vicar of St. Agatha, St. Brigid and St. Mary of Grace parishes, Meadville; and principal **Laura Blake**. Pictured in the front, from left, are students **Adison Foster**, **Lucy Murphy**, **Lissa Murphy** and **Lillian Blake**.

But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" — Gen 3:9

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