

The Mustard Seed



Letter from Father Joseph

Hello from your Interim Parish Administrator! They say if you love your job, you never work a day in your life. My current situation puts that saying to the test! I love serving the parish, and I appreciate everyone’s patience as I try to do the work of two priests. In addition, as we slowly come out of the pandemic we cannot simply maintain parish operations. While we hope the pastor can return soon, it may take months. Certain ministries need to be reestablished. I am positive these issues will soon be resolved, and I look forward to contributing a more substantial article for The Mustard Seed in the near future.

RCIA at St Thomas & Newman Center

by Amy Gomez

After a winter break, RCIA classes at St. Thomas Aquinas and at the Newman Center will meet again after holidays in early 2022. Our parish RCIA director, Scott Danielson offered a short synopsis below of the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) program and also our parish’s program for children over 7 years of age who are not baptized who wish to enter the Catholic Church.

RCIA is intended for people that are unbaptized. They come forth as Inquirers, then enter the Catechumenate, if they choose to continue, when they are then referred to as Catechumens. After their formal preparation during Lent each year, there is a Rite of Elec-

tion at the Cathedral of the Madeleine in Salt Lake City. Following this, the Catechumens are then ready to receive the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and First Communion during the upcoming Easter Vigil.

Our parish is working to build an Inquiry group that meets Wednesday nights at 7pm at the Newman Center. We have invited not only people that are looking to enter the Catholic Church, but also anyone who has questions about the Church. Our Diocese has asked that adults going through the RCIA experience for a full liturgical year before their Baptism. Children over age 7 years go through RCIA as well, and they are required to take 2 years of classes before Baptism.

Although RCIA is intended for unbaptized adults, we also work with baptized people from other Christian denominations that want to join the Catholic Church as well as



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RCIA Director Scott Danielson

baptized Catholics who are preparing for Confirmation. Many core, rich, and complementary Catholic resources are used to teach RCIA classes and to answer questions at faith inquiry gatherings. For the

last RCIA meeting before Christmas break, many aspects of the life of Christ, the Eucharist, Mary and the Marian apparitions were presented in film, the Catholic Catechism and rich discussion.

In November at a faith inquiry gathering at the Newman Center, parishioner Isaiah Jones spoke on *Prayer and Social Order: How Prayer Helps Engage Where We Are Now*. Isaiah studied at Notre Dame University and at USU and holds a Master's degree in Eastern European History. Isaiah now works at USU as the Transition, Parent and Family Program Coordinator. He says, "I have a passion for studying and teaching in anything from philosophy, education, and history." After his presentation, Isaiah encouraged and fielded questions and comments for a rich, insightful meta-cognitive experience that clarified the church's critical role as impetus to human progress through the ages.

Isaiah's sources included a sermon given by Gregory of Nyssa during the Lenten fast of 379 AD that was perhaps the first attack on slavery as an institution in Western history; ideas about bonded servitude from St. Paul, Stoic and Christian writers; recommendations from the Magisterium Compendium for solidarity in order to guarantee the common good and foster integral human development; some history about the creation of early Christian communities in which the difference between masters and slaves was annulled; and Isaiah's Latin and English reflection on one of five beautiful hymns composed by St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) called *Adoro te Devote* that Isaiah sang for us in Latin to introduce each stanza.

Isaiah offered some tips for including prayer in our daily lives: aim for one hour a day of silence; aim to fast twice a week; invest in a Liturgical Calendar and Hours book; download an app such as Laudate, Hallow, or iBreviary; and check out the Compendium on Social Doctrine online.



Isaiah Jones

STA Celebrates Our Lady of Guadalupe

by Christina Ledesma

On Friday, December 10, 2021, our parish held its annual celebration honoring the Solemnity of Our Lady of Guadalupe (OLOG), the Patron Saint of the Americas and Mexico. Although her feast day is on December 12, a special mass was celebrated two days early to accommodate weekend masses and one priest. Thank you, Fr. Joseph! A second celebration and mass honoring OLOG was held on Saturday, December 11, in Hyrum's Elite Hall organized by our very own Maria Olague who was helped by many hands from students in this year's Confirmation classes.

"*Por muchos años,*" said Rocio Luna in Spanish of Danza Azteca Quetzalcoatl of Blackfoot, ID. For many years, Rocio's troupe of 20-25 dancers have been coming to STA to reverently honor OLOG through their colorful and impressive dancing. One by one, the dancers, with the powerful rhythmic beat of the huehuatl (the drum), the sound of the Atecolli or seashell, and the fragrance of incense with its ribbons of prayerful smoke, give reverence to the altar before slowly dancing their way to the large image of Our Lady where it hangs prominently on the west side of our chapel.

Surrounded by twinkling lights and hundreds of fragrant colorful roses and flowers brought by the many parishioners who revere OLOG, the dancers bend on one knee and bow deeply to the Empress of the Americas, humbly asking for protection and blessings. With shouts to



Tonantzin, which is Nahuatl in the language of the Mexica for "Venerable Mother," and La Virgen Morena-the Dark Virgin, they dance energetically for nearly an hour to the jingling sounds of the Coyolli, the ankle seed pod rattles, and the plumes of their feathered headdresses swaying to their movements.

Rocio Luna, captain and secretary of the Danza Azteca Quetzalcoatl and a dancer and a drummer explains, "The Danza Azteca is an expression of artistic and cultural spirit of the native people of Mexico. The dances are very expressive and represent the forces of nature, the four corners of the Earth, human existence and the struggle for power among the elements...."



Rocio's husband Rogelio explained in Spanish, "The dance is Aztec and it represents the bridge between two cultures that existed when Mexico was conquered by the Spaniards. The dance helped unify the Aztec Indians to embrace the Catholic faith. The dance became an expression and a form in which the Indians were able to keep a

part of their beliefs." According to Rogelio, "The Aztecs said that if you want us to adopt your new religion, then you need to allow us to continue to practice some of our own beliefs. It became the door that existed between the Aztecs and the New World, which was represented by the Catholic religion, and it also represented the fusion in the culture of pre-Hispanic Mexico. For the Aztecs, dance was very important."

The group is made up of about 11 multi-generational families and averages about 25 participants and come from St. Bernard Catholic Church in Blackfoot, ID. Since 2006, they have been dancing to honor Tonantzin. This year they travelled by car, first arriving in Hyde Park by 8:00 pm. After dancing at STA, they were off to Ogden and on Saturday (12/11), they danced in Hyrum at 3:00 pm. Later that night, they travelled to Wendover, NV. During that weekend, they travelled an impressive nearly 700 miles! All their efforts are paid for by donations from the parishes as they don't charge any formal fees. "Of all of the parishes we visit, STA treats us the best and we love coming to dance there," said Rocio, "People tell us nice things and give us words of encouragement; the children draw us nice cards, and they make sure to feed us."

A longtime member of the group, David Figueroa, has Down Syndrome and has been dancing with the group since he was 11 years old. Now in his late 20's, he's still going strong although he has had many surgeries and challenges since birth. According to Rocio, his parents consecrated him to the protection of OLOG and together with the group, David's family has witnessed many miracles.

In case you have never taken the opportunity to attend an OLOG Mass, make sure to attend next year when Danza Azteca Quetzalcoatl of Blackfoot comes to STA to honor Tonantzin-- a dance more than 2,000 years in the making

Annakarenina Reyes--Our New Office Administrator

by Amy Gomez

Annakarenina Reyes joined our parish staff as office administrator in the Fall of 2021. Anna grew up in our parish and for many years she has been involved with our liturgical year celebrations. Anna is 22 years old, bilingual and a native of Logan and St. Thomas Aquinas Parish. Her beautiful name, Annakarenina (all one word), was chosen by her father, Juan Reyes who was inspired by the title of the famous novel of Russian literature by Leo Tolstoy. When Anna was 14, her family moved from Logan to Preston, Idaho where her family lives today. Anna is the eldest of her siblings Juan Carlos Reyes, 19, and Carime Reyes, 14.

Like many of us, Anna's family came to Cache Valley seeking tranquility and opportunity. Anna's grandmother Rosario came to Cache Valley as a young woman from Aguas Calientes, Mexico along with her daughter Graciela, Anna's mother. Both Anna's grandfather and father Juan also emigrated to Cache Valley from Mexico. Thus, Anna's generation of her family is bilingual and bi-cultural, and Anna's openness and sincerity seem to embody the spirit and possibilities this presents. Anna says that she and her siblings benefitted from the excellent public education programs for English as a 2nd Language/ESL programs in Cache Valley and in Franklin, Idaho public schools.

Anna's mastery of both languages and unique lifetime of experience are essential to her work for our parish where she received the Sacraments of Baptism, Communion, Reconciliation and Confirmation. In my encounters with Anna to interview and photograph her for this article, her readily apparent kindness and compassion also make her uniquely qualified for her work as STA office administrator. Of her recent appointment to our office staff, Anna says, "I am just thankful I am able to help Fr. Joseph who has lots of work in ministering to both our parish and our Newman Center." For this article, Anna wishes to remind parishioners to please contact the office if they are able to offer their help in any ministry or for a specific task or project.

Annakarenina has a lifetime of many good memories in our parish, and her family is often involved in



Annakarenina Reyes

helping with the liturgical year celebrations. Anna says, “My favorite celebrations of the liturgical year are the celebrations for Saint Mary the Virgin.” In December, for the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Anna’s grandfather and father made menudo for the celebration that began with praying the Rosary, followed by Mass. Next, Danza Azteca, performed and then a Convivio/Convivial in which parishioners gathered in a spirit of joy and friendship for more celebration in the social hall of the church.

This feast for Mary continued the next day at the Elite Hall in Hyrum. Everyone was invited to donate, enjoy the food and conviviality, and perhaps offer an open-mike/karaoke-style performance and join in the Mexican tradition of singing Las Mananitas, a song of devotion to Our Blessed Mother Mary that is also traditionally sung for birthdays in many parts of Mexico. The celebrations at STA include many food and monetary donations, and all are welcome! We are blessed with Annakarenina’s devotion and involvement as our parish office administrator.

Many hands and voices are needed to help set up, serve, clean up and perhaps offer a song or dance performance in our liturgical celebrations and feasts. You can contact Annakarenina Reyes, our Parish Office Administrator at 435-7521478 to learn more and to offer your help.

An Unexpected Gift...or Two

by Linda Bradak

I grew up in a Lutheran family. I joined the Catholic Church at age 61, having completed the Rite of Christian Initiation in Adulthood (RCIA) program at St. Mary Magdalene Catholic Church in Millville, NJ. As one raised Lutheran, of course I was aware that Mary was Jesus’ mom, and I honored her for that. However, it was not until I became a Catholic that I came to know and to connect with Mary’s real significance. I remember Fr. Paul Olszewski, Pastor of St. Mary Mag’s at the time, speaking of her importance and also her accessibility to us, the faithful. He suggested we can always turn to Mary, the Mother of God. And just as any good mother has a special “in” with her beloved child, Mary will gladly intercede with her Son on our behalf.

Who wouldn’t like that extra help? I sure want it.

Through the 16 years of my experience as a Catholic, I have often turned to Mary as a model of love, faith, and devotion. When I have grieved, I have pondered her unimaginable sadness as she watched her Son die upon the cross. Mary knew the depths of love and of loss, and her faith remained untarnished. I can “offer up” my own sorrows, knowing they are intimately understood and felt, and that God will be with me, that I need not bear alone that which cannot be borne alone. God is with us, as He was with Mary. It seems the

more I can emulate her, the more I can know and feel His presence with me.

Another gift for me upon becoming Catholic was finding the example of Mary’s friend, St. Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene, like me, is often viewed as having a “checkered past.” But we only hear about a few incidents in her life...what about all her good and charitable acts? However, it is probably no small coincidence – rather an example of divine humor – that my faith took root at a parish named St. Mary Magdalene. My heart sings that it was none other than Mary Magdalene who ran to Jesus’ tomb on Easter morning and found it empty, that He is risen!

God is for me the ultimate and divine Alchemist, who can turn dross and sin into goodness and faith. We are surrounded by more invisible love and presence than we can know. We cannot perceive radio waves or even the high-pitched sounds of a dog whistle, but we know these vibrations permeate us. Similarly, the exquisite level of support and love which God offers us may appear subtle. If we conclude that our flaws are so great as to exclude us from His presence, we are missing the point. We can ever “tune in” as did Mary Magdalene. We are blessed to be able to befriend her and also Jesus’ mom, Mary.

Open your hearts and your minds to their reality and to the ineffable gifts to your faith which they can bring. Like me, you will be the richer for it.

Spotlight on Heather Baker

by Linda Bradak



Heather Baker

pure and clear soprano, I knew I had to interview her for The Mustard Seed.

A Newman student and junior at Utah State University, Heather is from Miles City MT. She currently serves as the



president of our Newman Club and cantors regularly at Mass. Heather came to USU to run track and field as a mid-distance runner, which means that she specializes in the 400 and 800-meter dash. The running guarantees breath control that is solid and effortless while singing.

Although Heather's natural singing talent could easily have led her to major in vocal performance, instead she has chosen the field of Public Health. This degree, particularly timely since Covid emerged, readily leads to positions educating and fostering public health in America. Service comes naturally to her: dad was a Marine, serving in Iraq and later in Afghanistan, while mom teaches economic development at Miles City Community College. She has an 18-year old brother, Tommy, a senior in high school.

In addition to singing, Heather Baker plays flute and guitar, though her busy schedule precludes involvement in University instrumental groups. She does sing with the USU Chorale. A cradle Catholic from Sacred Heart Parish in Miles City, Heather started singing in church choirs in 4th grade and has sung in choirs ever since. It is apparent that she has

taken private voice coaching, attested to by her capacity to hold a perfect pitch and to project her voice without struggle.

In response to my question about why she loves to sing in Church, Heather replied, "It's a service for me to sing. It helps the Church. It also brings me closer to God." She continued, "God was always a big part of my life, but now God is central in my life. I've found that once you put God first, everything else just falls into place." She loved singing in our big St. Thomas Aquinas Church at the USU Wintersongs concert in December, saying, "The Church is beautiful. The lovely echoes just feel holy." She concedes that singing in a choir is different from solo performance. "In a solo, I project. In a choir, I blend."

A true Westerner, Heather loves being outdoors and is an avid deer hunter in Montana. Heather can walk all day tracking deer, losing herself in the woods and feeling as close to God in nature as she does in any church. "Though I don't know where I'll be in 10 years, with God as my center I can trust, taking things day by day," she concludes.

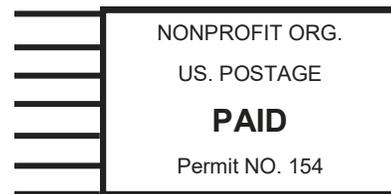
To this we say – or sing along with Heather Baker – Amen!

Thanksgiving Means Sharing

This year's Confirmation class helped assemble baskets for 58 families, 32 adults and 92 children.



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Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church



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Visit us at:

<http://www.sta.thischurch.org/>

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We invite your feedback and are always looking for
volunteers.