



# AMERICAN MARTYRS CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

## *A Christmas Letter From Our Pastor*

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### *Prepare the Way of the Lord*

Dear Parishioners,

**I**t is hard to believe that we are already in a New Church year. We are already doing all of the usual things we associate with the Season of Advent, leading us *in hope* to the celebration of the Birth of Jesus.

Despite my resolutions, I find myself caught up in the commercial side of this time of year and I'm struggling to keep my focus on the essential – my spiritual renewal. I ask myself, are there some “firewalls” that I might put in place to protect my sacred space during this Advent time? Here are some of my ideas:

- Tithe my time – if I spend two hours running around shopping, I am going to take 12 minutes for the quieting of my soul. I can sit in the church, stroll the prayer walk, or visit the peace garden.
- Read an Advent reflection each day like that found in the little purple books.
- Reread the Sunday Reading from the Gospel of Luke
- Meditate on one of the Psalms.
- Read and reflect on the first chapter of John's Gospel.

These are just a few of my ideas to retake the “stolen” season and once again claim it for our own. In this way, when Christmas arrives we will open and share something deeper than colorfully wrapped presents (although we can still do that) and have a deeper appreciation of the Mystery of the Incarnation – the Son of God, born of Mary, and given as God's Perfect Gift to the world.

God bless you with a Holy and Peaceful Christmas.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. John Barry".

Rev. Msgr. John F. Barry, P.A., Pastor

## *Be Stewards, Not Consumers During the Advent and Christmas Seasons*

The secularization of the Advent and Christmas seasons celebrates the “holidays” with full fury all the way up to the 25th of December. Between the gift buying, partying and rushed errands, we miss the true purpose of the Advent season, which was meant to be more austere, contemplative and penitential.

Indeed, through our hectic schedules, we often fail to properly grasp the significance of this season, due in large part to the successful secularization of our Catholic “holy day,” which is now simply reduced to “the holiday season.” This fact serves as a metaphor for our examination of conscience and confession of sins in the Sacrament of Penance during the season of Advent.

Look to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and reflect upon the “Infancy Narratives” concerning the incarnation and birth of Jesus Christ. If we only had the “Infancy Narratives” of these Gospels and no other information, we would have the Gospel of Christ in miniature. The angelic choir makes clear that Jesus is God and Man, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. The message to the shepherds makes clear that Jesus came for the outcast and rejected – for the sinner. The adoration of the Magi shows that conversion is for all people and Jesus’

message is universal. It makes clear that Jesus will suffer and eventually die, but by way of paradox, this will fulfill His mission to redeem the world from sin and death. The wood of the manger and the swaddling clothes anticipate the wood of the cross and the burial shroud. Jesus is placed into a “feeding trough” for animals, symbolizing the Risen Lord who will become the Eucharistic Food for the world at Mass.

As stewards, we should have no anxiety that is rooted in buying gifts or being “ready” in the secular sense. We can ease our anxieties by focusing on our relationship to God, Church and one another. Am I right with God? Do I use His many gifts of Grace for conversion and true stewardship and discipleship? Do I repent of my sins and make a firm purpose of amendment? Do I go to confession regularly, especially when I am in a state of mortal sin? Am I ready to meet my Lord and Savior either at my particular judgment at the hour of my death, or at the General Judgment when Christ will return in glory at the end of time?

Pray that this season will truly be a season of “holy days,” not just a holiday. Let us not be consumers of religion, but true stewards of God’s manifold gifts.



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## *Altar Society Gives Back to God*

**F**or years, the Altar Society has been quietly working behind the scenes here at American Martyrs. Indeed, current member Dorothy Higi remembers her own mother's involvement in the ministry.

"As far as I know, it goes back to 1942, when my family first moved to California and my mother was in the Altar Society," she says. "I've been a member at American Martyrs since I was a kid. When my husband passed away eight years ago, I decided I really wanted to keep busy doing something. As fate would have it, I was walking at the beach one day, and along came Msgr. Barry. He asked me if I would be the president of the Altar Society, and I said 'yes.'"

The Altar Society meets every Friday morning after the 8 a.m. Mass, and cleans the church for about an hour.

"This includes washing the sacred vessels and cups, polishing brass, vacuuming, polishing the altar, cleaning the floor, the works," Dorothy says. "There are no set rules – whoever can come, comes. We usually have about six to eight people who show up each week. Also, the Altar Society isn't just limited to women – we have three men that do it along with us!"

The ministry also includes a group of 25 women who care for the altar linens. They alternate weeks, which gives them each a chance to serve every other month. The Altar Society also holds several social and fundraising events, such as a Christmas luncheon in December and another one in May. They also have a general meeting that allows members to come together to listen to a speaker.

By being a part of the Altar Society, members are able to grow in fellowship and friendship with one another.

"We just have a great time with each other!" Dorothy says. "There's a lot of camaraderie. We'll often go out to lunch or to the movies. I just like being around everybody. I also think that this is a great ministry for women who have raised their families or who have retired from the workforce – it's a great way for them to do something, get involved in the church and make new friends."

Dorothy sees the Altar Society as a great way to give thanks to God for all the blessings He has bestowed on us.

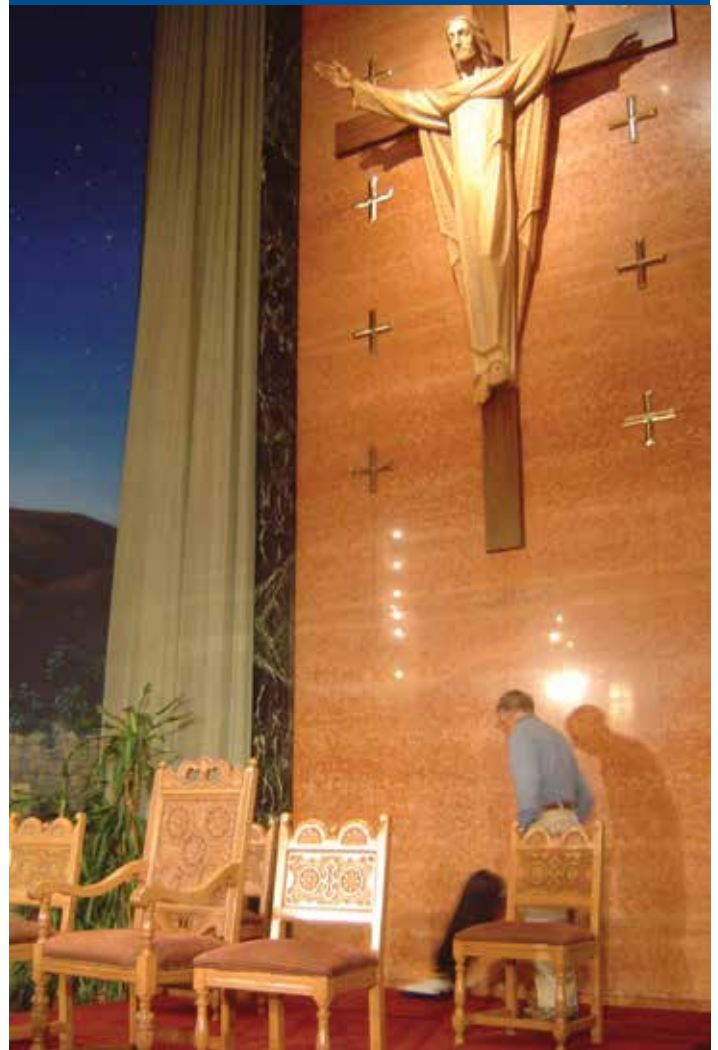
"I am grateful for the gifts I have received from God, and I just want to give back," she says. "That's how everyone [in the ministry] feels about their faith – it's very

important to all of us. It just comes back to gratitude for everything we have been given."

The Altar Society is always looking for new members of all ages, and all parishioners are invited to get involved.

"We do it quietly, and we do it well," Dorothy says. "When you go to Mass on Sundays and you see how nice everything looks, it's a nice satisfaction to see that you've been a part of it. But really, it's all for God – the church is His home, and it's our job to keep it clean, just as we keep our own homes clean. We do it as a service to God."

*For more information about the Altar Society, or to get involved, please call the parish office at 310-545-5651.*



## *Historical Ministry Keeping Our Story Preserved*

**O**ld documents. Faded photos. Scrapbooks. The stuff that too often goes into the dumpster. But it's the stuff of history – the stories of our lives – and the Historical Ministry at American Martyrs Parish is making sure that our history is saved and conserved.

Our story goes back to Nov. 9, 1930, when six families gathered in a Hermosa Beach private home to celebrate Mass. That gathering grew to a parish of some 40 families in Manhattan Beach – fulfilling a prophecy given by St. Francis Xavier Cabrini when she visited the area in the early 1900s as she collected donations for an orphanage in Los Angeles.

The story goes that she climbed the high dune that overlooks the Santa Monica Bay, took in the panoramic views of the ocean, the farms, and the little village below, and proclaimed: “Here is where a church should be built, on this hill, a beacon for the villager and the sailor. And it shall be.”

Nicole Cokkinos, one of the founders of the Historical Ministry, is adamant that artifacts and documents about our past be maintained for our future parishioners. Although she does not have a museum conservation background, she has been meticulous in making sure items are properly stored. Bart Price serves as Director of the ministry.

The Historical Ministry was founded in 2000 when it was discovered that there was a large cabinet at the church filled with a wide variety of material dating back to the parish's founding. Nicole and a friend decided to investigate the material.

“That's how it started,” Nicole says.

The first church building was at 10th and Highland in downtown Manhattan Beach. This was a small church, Nicole says, but the congregation grew to the point that in 1958 the new one was built. The school was built in 1947.

Currently, the collection holds documents dating back to the original church.

“We have the Altar Society minutes books from 1930 to 1937,” Nicole says. “There were a few

scrapbooks, photo albums and documents. There was an assortment of things.”

In 2005, the parish celebrated our 75th anniversary, and the Historical Ministry was asked to prepare an exhibit.

“We asked people for donations of items, and had a large exhibit that went on for about three weeks,” she says. “That was the largest one we ever did. I think this is important to keep the history of the parish for future generations.”

Three years ago, the parish provided funds for the ministry to buy museum software that allows documents to be digitized and made accessible for research. About three quarters of the material is now in the system, Nicole says. The ministry is housed in the Holy Family House that was used as a library.

“I'm not sure the majority of the parishioners have been through to see what we have,” she says. “We keep getting items all the time.”

*continued on page 5*



*A detail of one of the church's stained glass windows is displayed.*

## *Historical Ministry* continued from page 4



*Members of the Historical Ministry study a collection of photos.*

For a number of years, the ministry set up an exhibit at the Pancake Breakfast.

"The older generations could see what had happened with the parish, and the parents could show their kids what had been going on," Nicole says.

Parishioners may recall the words Msgr. Barry wrote about our parish's history during the 75th anniversary celebration. In paying homage to St. Francis Cabrini's words from her vantage point years ago, he said, in part:

*"We are a church set on a hill. Our church tower is a navigational beacon. It is a reminder to us that we, too, must be a beacon of light for all who travel life's ocean. How blest we are to have the privilege of making the Lord visible through the many ministries which enable us to touch lives. Our Lord teaches us not to hide our "light under a bushel basket, but to let it shine... so that all in the house may see our good works and give praise to our Heavenly Father" (Matthew 5:14-16).*

*Anyone interested in helping with the Historical Ministry may call the parish office at 310-545-5651.*



*Vestments from the pre-Vatican II era are displayed.*



*Historical Ministry members gather during an exhibit of parish artifacts and cherished items.*



*One of the displays featuring items from our parish's history.*

## *“We Are Supposed to Be of Service to Others”* Opportunities at American Martyrs to Help Others During Advent and Christmas

Advent is, of course, a time of preparation for Christmas, and Christmas itself is a time for great celebration. What are we celebrating? Perhaps the greatest gift we will ever receive! What this season means is that our loving God gave us the greatest gift possible – His own Son. God gave us a Savior, the Prince of Peace, the promise of eternal life – and all the wisdom, peace, and comfort the little child Jesus would grow to give us as a very way of life and a pathway to God.

We often describe stewardship as a way of life. It is our way of responding to that incredible gift we have received in Jesus, and in all those other blessings and gifts each of us has received. At this joyous time, we need to seek ways to give back, ways to serve others. Our American Martyrs Parish Family offers many opportunities to give back during Advent and Christmas. Here are three of the most significant ones.

### *Our Family to Family Ministry*

For almost 20 years, we have been sponsoring families from our sister parish, St. Lawrence of Brindisi. Each year, we assist nearly 300 families by providing meals and gifts. Family to Family helps support families of all sizes – families selected and interviewed to assure and identify needs.

Some of our American Martyrs families have been assisting the same family year after year. This is a spiritually rewarding way to reach out and be good stewards of our own gifts.

“As Christians, we are supposed to be of service to others, and each of us needs to spend some extra time during this season to help someone else,” says Eileen Knox, prior Co-Chair of this ministry. “You are making a difference in someone’s life and providing them the joy we should all feel at Christmas.”

### *Our Annual Seniors Christmas Dinner*

Another ministry that well represents the concept of reaching out and serving others is our Annual Seniors Christmas Dinner.

“This dinner serves multiple purposes,” says Anna Taylor, who serves as a Co-Chair of this wonderful event. “It honors those in our faith community who literally built it. As Catholics we celebrate, and especially at this time of year, so gathering our senior citizens to show them our gratitude and to reunite with them and see them reunite with one another and reminisce is truly a joyful celebration.

*continued on page 7*



# Opportunities at American Martyrs

continued from page 6



“This is Father’s gift to those he regards as the foundation of our parish community,” Anna adds.

Every year there is entertainment, including piano music, singers, a visit from Santa Claus, and many door prizes. There is a short cocktail period followed by a complete turkey dinner.

“Each year, we are proud to serve between 200 and 300 people at no charge,” Anna says. “This year was no different. As much as our older parishioners enjoy the dinner, I think the more than 40 volunteers enjoy it just as much. How can you not love seeing those precious, happy faces? My faith is a gift and this is a way I can share it with the community. What a pleasure it is to say ‘Merry Christmas’ over and over.”

## *Christmas Project*

In addition to the above ways that we reach out to others, each year at this time we conduct our Annual Christmas Project to collect supplies and nonperishable food items for families in our local community. Through the generosity, Christmas spirit and sense of stewardship of our parishioners, we are able to help a vast number of families in our community. Cathy Goodhue, the coordinator, and her team of volunteers each year collect donated food and wrap gifts to send to those in need.



# AMERICAN MARTYRS CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

624 15th Street :: Manhattan Beach, CA 90266  
(310) 545-5651 :: [www.americanmartyrs.org](http://www.americanmartyrs.org)

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## LITURGY SCHEDULE

**Saturday** :: 5:00 p.m.

**Sunday** :: 7:00 a.m., 8:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 5:00 p.m.

**Monday/Wednesday/Friday** :: 8:00 a.m., 12:10 p.m., 5:00 p.m.

**Tuesday/Thursday** :: 6:30 a.m., 8:00 a.m., 12:10 p.m., 5:00 p.m.

**Saturday** :: 8:00 a.m.

**Holy Day** :: 5:00 p.m. (Vigil), 6:30 a.m., 8:00 a.m., 12:10 p.m., 5:00 p.m., 7:30 p.m.

## Christmas Mass Schedule

### CHRISTMAS EVE, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24

THE CHURCH	Music
4:00 P.M.	5:00 P.M. Sunday Choir <i>(There will be a Livestream of the 4:00 P.M. Mass in St. Kateri)</i>
6:00 P.M.	5:00 P.M. Choir
8:00 P.M.	Cantor/Guitar
Midnight	5:00 P.M. Saturday Choir

*Christmas Carols begin at 11:30 P.M.*

O'DONNELL	Music
4:00 P.M.	Cantor/Piano

### CHRISTMAS DAY, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 25

THE CHURCH	Music
7:30 A.M.	Cantor/Piano
9:30 A.M.	9:30 A.M. Choir
11:30 A.M.	11:30 A.M. Choir
1:00 P.M.	

No 5:00 P.M. Mass on Christmas Day

**NEW YEAR'S EVE, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 31** - 8:00 A.M. AND 5:00 P.

**NEW YEAR'S DAY, FRIDAY, JANUARY 1** - 8:00 A.M. AND 5:00 P.M.

