



Our Faith in Action

American Martyrs Catholic Community

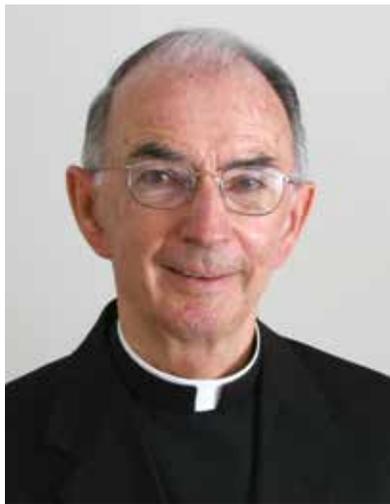
A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

Preparing for and Celebrating the Christmas Season

Dear Parishioners,

As someone who came to this country as a newly ordained priest, I was in awe of how people came together on Thanksgiving Day. On that one day, distinctions and separations faded into the background and everyone seemed to be on the same page for a moment. It is for me the day I love to celebrate and truly feel blessed in many ways as I pause to give thanks to God.

It is perfect that Thanksgiving follows the great feast of Christ Our King as we close out our Church year. It is as if these two great feast days hold open the door of Advent and everything our new Church year brings into our lives as grateful disciples of Christ the King. This season of Advent not only gives us great Scriptural teachers — Isaiah, John the Baptist, Paul, Matthew and James, who help us focus on the expectation and coming of the Messiah — it also challenges us to respond through our actions.



Here at American Martyrs, we do this in many ways. We celebrate the senior members of our community, who have given so much to our parish through the years, by hosting our wonderful Senior Dinner. We witness so many charitable efforts through the various outreach ministries. You will get some idea in this month's Faith in Action. I thank God for the great people who undertake these ministries.

We have many opportunities to prepare for Christmas. The commercial world can really intrude and take us over completely unless we are careful. Vow to yourself that you set aside some time for spiritual preparation. An excellent way might be to participate in the Communal Penance Service here at American Martyrs on Monday, Dec. 16, or at St. James on Tuesday, Dec. 17. Our parishes host these celebrations for our five parish cluster.

I pray you will give yourself one special gift this

SENIORS' CHRISTMAS DINNER CELEBRATES THE FOUNDATION OF OUR COMMUNITY



Anna Taylor, Fr. John and Renay Campbell Labriola at the Seniors' Christmas Dinner.



(From left) Betty Young, Sally Downie, Fr. John, Mickey Emery, Richard and Barbara Reilly, and Laurene and Lloyd Anastasi visit during the Seniors' Christmas Dinner.



Tom and Judith Vavrek with Fr. John

Christmas is a time of celebration, and nowhere is that more apparent in our parish than at the annual Seniors' Christmas Dinner.

"It exudes love, which is what our community is all about," says Anna Taylor, who co-chairs the ministry along with Renay Campbell Labriola. "It honors our seniors who built our community. It is sacramental for all those involved — guests, volunteers, Fr. John. That's what Catholics do — we celebrate! We get together to celebrate the Birth of Christ, our cornerstone. We gather our seniors to show our gratitude and allow them to reunite with each other year after year and reminisce."

The Seniors' Christmas Dinner will be held on Dec. 9, at 6:30 p.m. in O'Donnell Hall. The event includes a short cocktail period, followed by a full turkey dinner. Fr. John bakes Irish Soda bread for everyone. There will be piano music, guest singers, a visit from Santa and many door prizes donated by our parish community. This event is free for the seniors in our parish.

"This is Father's gift to the seniors whom he regards as the foundation of our community," Anna says. "There is no charge to the attendees."

Fr. John also leads the guests in Christmas carols, and he gives the oldest man and the oldest woman a special recognition and gift. Another special gift is from our school children, who hand make cards for each senior.

"The seniors are often found comparing their cards and giggling," Anna says. "It is a wonderful tradition."

Historically, around 250 seniors in our parish attend this annual dinner, and those who do truly love it. One year there was an electrical outage in Manhattan Beach the night of the Christmas Dinner, but the seniors were not deterred.

"We thought the attendance would be low, but no — everyone showed with flashlights and candles," Anna says. "Nothing was going to stop them from enjoying such a festive evening!"

And it's not just the seniors who enjoy the dinner — the 40 or so volunteers also have a great time at this celebration. Anna has been volunteering with the Seniors' Christmas Dinner for 18 years, 16 of them as chair. After her first time, she liked the dinner so much she took over when the previous chair relocated.

"I enjoyed the event," Anna says. "In fact, to this date when it is called a ministry, I cringe because it is so much fun! The seniors are so grateful for anything we do, and they love Fr. John and the community. I love those precious, happy faces!"

Volunteering for the Seniors' Christmas Dinner has even had an impact on her faith life.

"It has allowed me to be part of the bigger picture of our community," Anna says. "My faith is my gift and through my faith, my family and Fr. John, I have learned how to love and to give. I feel so much love from our seniors and they can have all my love that they want! There is no other place where I get to say 'Merry Christmas' two hundred and fifty times in one night!"

For more information about the Seniors' Christmas Dinner or to volunteer, email Anna Taylor at seniorchristmasdinner@americanmartyrs.org.

WHO IS FIRST ON YOUR CHRISTMAS LIST?

The Christmas season is fast approaching. We have already made our gift lists, and perhaps even checked them twice. First on the list is family, followed by friends, our children's teachers and coaches, and maybe even the mailman. Christmas inspires us to give our family and friends gifts of love and appreciation, in gratitude for all they do for us during the year. The very idea of holiday gift giving — a display of love and gratefulness to those who have touched our lives — is parallel to the concept of stewardship. When we give to God, we are effectively saying "thanks" for all He has done for us.

Think of all God has done for you this year. How have His loving arms embraced you? Maybe He has answered a special prayer intention. Maybe He has created a job opportunity for an unemployed loved one. He may

have helped safely bring a new baby into the family, or instilled peace during a particularly difficult time. God's blessings are countless, and the abundant gifts He bestows upon us are given freely out of incomprehensible love — despite our unworthiness.

Think of the ways you respond to God's bountiful blessings. How do you choose to show Him your thankfulness? As we prepare for the coming of Christ during Advent, will we remember to add Jesus' name to our list? Uncle John wants a new drill, and Grandpa definitely needs a new cardigan — but what does Jesus want? It is His birthday we are celebrating, after all.

The very first name on the list — above our spouse, children, relatives and friends — should be God's name. As disciples of Christ, we are called to give God our "first fruits," not our leftovers.

We should joyfully place God first on our gift-giving lists, not out of guilt or as an afterthought, but out of love and appreciation.

Stewardship allows us to tangibly give a Christmas gift to God through our time, talent and treasure. We give God gifts of time through prayer, such as spending time before the Blessed Sacrament or praying the Rosary. We can give our talents to God by way of simple charitable actions, such as bringing a meal to a hard-pressed neighbor, or watching a young mother's children so that she is able to prepare for her own family's Christmas celebration. And as for treasure, we can give God a portion of our income this Christmas by dropping an extra dollar in the collection basket. Whatever choices you make this season, make the decision to be a good Christmas steward.

RECONCILIATION SCHEDULE

COMMUNAL RITE OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE (With Individual Confession)

Monday, December 16

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 17

7 a.m. to 7:30 a.m.

Wednesday, December, 18

5:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Thursday, December 19

7 a.m. to 7:30 a.m.

Saturday, December 21

8:30 a.m. to 9 a.m.

4 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

NO CONFESSIONS ON CHRISTMAS EVE

MATTHEW 25 MINISTRY PROVIDES ESSENTIAL OUTREACH TO THE COMMUNITY

.....

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?' And the King will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.' [Matthew 25:34-40]

This well-known Bible passage is the foundational guide for American Martyrs' multifaceted outreach ministry, Matthew 25. Started back in the early 1990s as the Peace and Justice Ministry, Matthew 25 invites all parishioners to participate in a variety of outreach programs in the parish and in the local community.

"Our purpose is to feed the hungry, clothe the poor, take care of God's planet — it's a bunch of different people just trying to give back," says PJ Murphy, who co-chairs the ministry along with Lynne Hook. "[Former chair and current member] Tom Hoffarth always told Msgr. Barry that every parishioner is a member of Matthew 25. The beauty of Matthew 25 is that everyone is welcome."

Matthew 25 operates as an umbrella ministry encompassing a variety of service programs and activities offered by the parish and local organizations, for which volunteers can sign up and participate. PJ and Lynne send out a weekly email blast of any activities going on during the week or on the weekend. Volunteers do not need



A parish volunteer helps to prepare food at the Catholic Worker.

to RSVP — they only need to show up to help.

Additionally, the ministry holds meetings with the organizers of the individual outreach programs on the first Tuesday of each month. At these meetings, the organizers review the programs from the previous month and plan for upcoming programs. The programs vary slightly from month to month, ranging from visiting the homeless, visiting those in prison, giving support to American Martyrs'

sister parish, St. Lawrence of Brindisi, and simply helping those in our community. This past September, 22 different programs were available for volunteers to choose.

"Matthew 25 has so many projects that it feels like we are 10 ministries wrapped up in one!" PJ says. "People volunteer when they can. It varies — some people can do it more than others, but we usually have a group of people who come every month and try to motivate others to get on board."

For PJ, her involvement in Matthew 25 has been an eye-opening and rewarding experience.

continued on next page

"I get a lot of fulfillment from it — I feel closer to God because I'm doing His work when I'm out there helping people who need it. It's just enlightening to see how you can better someone else's life by donating your time. As a human being, part of being a good person is caring for others." — PJ Murphy

MATTHEW 25

“I get a lot of fulfillment from it — I feel closer to God because I’m doing His work when I’m out there helping people who need it,” she says. “It’s just enlightening to see how you can better someone else’s life by donating your time. As a human being, part of being a good person is caring for others. Actions always speak louder than words. You can talk the talk, but if you walk the walk, your actions will come back to you tenfold. We are following the word of Jesus and the actions that He did in taking care of the poor, hungry and sick. It’s that simple — it is our faith!”

All parishioners, family and friends are invited to serve others through Matthew 25.

“We love new people — they bring new ideas, enthusiasm, camaraderie and focus,” PJ says. “They can join with their entire family, of any age, and could even invite those who are not Catholic. People can bring friends that just want to help people in need. There are so many ways people can join!”

For more information about Matthew 25, or to get involved, please contact PJ Murphy or Lynne Hook at matthew25@americanmartyrs.org



Boys at Camp Miller say a prayer with a volunteer before returning to their dormitory.



Volunteers from the Beyond Borders program traveled to La Limonada, Guatemala in August 2012.

CHRISTMAS MASS SCHEDULE

CHRISTMAS EVE, TUESDAY, DEC. 24

The Church

4 p.m.

6 p.m.

8 p.m.

Midnight

Music

5 p.m. Sunday Choir

9:30 a.m. Choir

Dcn. Derek Brown (Cantor/Guitar)

Sean Mahon (5 p.m. Sat.

Choir — Christmas Carols beginning at 11:30 p.m.)

No 5:00 p.m. Mass on Christmas Day

DAY AFTER CHRISTMAS, THURSDAY, DEC. 26

8 a.m.

NEW YEAR’S EVE, TUESDAY, DEC. 31

8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

O’Donnell Hall

4 p.m.

Music

Bill Svarda (Cantor/Piano)

NEW YEAR’S DAY, WEDNESDAY, JAN. 1, 2014

8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

CHRISTMAS DAY, WEDNESDAY, DEC. 25

The Church

7:30 a.m.

9:30 a.m.

11:30 a.m.

1 p.m.

Music

David Lockwood (Cantor/Piano)

9:30 a.m. Choir/Cantor

11:30 a.m. Choir/Cantor

Nathan Shrake & Sean Mahon

JOHN ALLEN BRINGS THE VATICAN HOME FOR AMERICAN CATHOLICS

Renowned Catholic writer John Allen has a message straight from the Vatican for American Catholics.

“We not only have a pope who is changing what the world thinks of Catholics, but we also have an opportunity to evangelize during this shift in the world’s perception of Catholics. Let’s not squander it,” John said during his talk at American Martyrs on Nov. 3.

For the past 16 years, John has written for the *National Catholic Reporter* and is best known for his column “All Things Catholic.” He has published multiple books on different popes. Among his recent publications are *The Catholic Church: What Everyone Needs to Know*, *10 Things Pope Francis Wants You to Know*, and *The Future Church: How Ten Trends Are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church*.

“Not only is he a prolific writer and speaker, but he is also a very engaging, intriguing and funny person,” says Jenny Attanasio who attended John Allen’s talk. “During his presentation, he was candid in a professional way.”

John’s talk, to a group of 400-plus parishioners, was titled “The Word from the Vatican.”

“He is in the front row of events taking place at the Vatican, and he is able to bring a perspective on what is going on to us here in the States and throughout the world,” says Jenny.

John’s message at the parish highlighted three emerging pillars or foci around the Vatican. These three pillars are the importance of leading through service, the emphasis on Catholic social teaching in the gospels, and the role of mercy in the Church.

“When explaining the first pillar, he quoted Pope Francis who said shepherds need to carry the smell of their sheep,” says Jenny. “He explained how we need to approach the gospel as a social gospel, not as Catholics in isolation. Pope Francis wants to

know his sheep. That is why he moved out of the apartments and why he goes to places where there are marginalized people. He wants to really be there and know them.”

According to John, the second pillar emerging centers on a heightened emphasis of the Catholic’s social teachings as rooted in the gospels.

“During this time in his speech, John mentioned a recent statement of Pope Francis that has sparked contention among us,” says Jenny. “In short, some misunderstood Pope Francis to be downplaying respect for life. John emphasized that he is not doing this on any level. Pope Francis is simply saying that

other aspects of the Church’s social teaching are important as well, such as caring for the poor and the marginalized.”

The third emerging pillar is the importance of mercy, a value that Pope Francis exemplifies for us.

“John said that mercy is first and foremost in this Pope’s mind,” says Jenny.

At the heart of John’s speech was a focus on unity. In his recent article in the

National Catholic Reporter titled “Playing Church with Pope Francis,” John begins with the old joke of a father who walks in on his children sitting in a circle arguing with each other. When the father becomes concerned, the children tell him not to worry – they’re just playing Church.

“There’s a risk that some Catholics may be tempted to ‘play church’ with Pope Francis, turning what ought to be a tremendous missionary opportunity into yet another bone of contention,” writes John in his article. “It’s undeniable he’s got the world’s attention.”

Without unity, John says that the Catholic Church will miss its chance to evangelize by capitalizing on Pope Francis’ popularity.

“What is going on with the Vatican and the Church affects us here, and the Pope is certainly trying to find ways to connect all of us,” Jenny says.



CHRISTMAS DOESN'T END ON DEC. 25

Feast of the Holy Family

It is Dec. 26, and we've celebrated Christmas. We have already opened all of our gifts and practiced all of our favorite Christmas traditions.

What do we do now?

The Christmas season is far from over. The octave of Christmas has, in fact, just begun. The Holy Solemnity of the Nativity of our Lord, on Christmas Day, is directly followed by the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph on Dec. 29.

Following Jesus' birth in the stable, Mary and Joseph were now charged with a great responsibility. Their home would be the place where our Lord grew up! Do you ever stop and think about what it must have been like for Mary and Joseph to raise the Savior of the Universe? They changed His diapers, fed Him, and helped Him learn to walk. No doubt, Joseph taught Jesus how to safely work a saw, and Mary probably helped Him mend His clothes. This puts all of our parenting duties into perspective. Can you imagine caring for Our Lord as He was a vulnerable and helpless child? Regarding the Holy Family in this way gives us a newfound appreciation for family life — with all of its trials and triumphs.

Though little is known about Jesus' early years, we know He grew up just like any human child, and that Mary and Joseph were chosen to parent Him. The Lord chose them as the place for His birth and His growth, thereby sanctifying the fundamental institution of society. From then on, the family was much more than just a group of people living together. Indeed, the Holy Family is the example of how all Christian families are called to be small domestic churches. And as with the humble home of Nazareth, the family is an authentic school of the Gospel, wherein we live our faith on a daily basis. Pope John Paul II explained that "recollection and prayer, mutual understanding and respect, personal discipline and community asceticism and a spirit of sacrifice, work



and solidarity are typical features that make the family of Nazareth a model for every home."

As Christian families, we must follow the example of the Holy Family, and be lights to shine the Truth in the midst of what is sometimes a dark world. Through their humble existence, Jesus, Mary and Joseph remained united to one another and to the Father, working always to remain close to Him and to show His love to the world. So also must we

Indeed, the Holy Family is the example of how all Christian families are called to be small domestic churches. And as with the humble home of Nazareth, the family is an authentic school of the Gospel, wherein we live our faith on a daily basis.

do. As Christians, we are called to show the world "convincingly that it is possible to live marriage fully in keeping with God's plan and with the true good of the human person — of the spouses and of the children who

are more fragile" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte* 47). Then, amidst all of the spilled milk and temper tantrums, all of the birthdays, graduations and marriages, we will serve as a sign of God Himself — three persons united in love!

May Jesus, Mary and Joseph bless and protect all families so that they will extol the peace, joy, justice and love that the newborn Christ has given us as a gift to all of humanity!

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

THE CHRISTMAS SEASON *continued from front cover*

Christmas. Bring Jesus more and more into your soul, your life, your home. He will give you many gifts in return. If you have been away or a little careless about the practice of your faith, this is a great time to reconnect.

I pray that you will have a Christmas of peace, rest for your soul, a circle of love around your heart. If you are hurting in any way, we are here to help you have a Happy Christmas. In our Church year, Christmas does not end for us until the Baptism of the Lord on January 9 — so if possible, keep your Christmas scenes up right through the Season.

Remember, Christmas lights are a public sign that we want to rejoice in the birthday of the Light of the World. We want to keep Jesus, the Light of the World, at the center of Christmas.

God bless you,



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

Our Faith in Action is provided by the American Martyrs Stewardship Commission

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.