

## Christmas is Coming!

December 3rd is the first Sunday of Advent and represents the beginning of a new Church year. As we move through Advent to Christmas, it might help to enjoy the season more, spiritually, to understand a little more about how this fits into the Church calendar and why we celebrate Advent.

Advent is a period of anticipation and expectation but not of fasting and penitence like Lent. The celebration of Advent has its roots in the anticipation of the coming of the Messiah as foretold throughout the Old Testament. During Advent we, as a Catholic Community, pray for the promise of freedom from oppression and injustice and redemption not so much from personal sin but the evil of the world. We look to the birth of Christ the Messiah to vindicate the just, but to do that he must also judge the evil.

So there is a twin theme at work during Lent, the anticipation and expectation of the freedom our Savior delivers and the realization that judgment comes with that joy. So it is fitting that Advent begins the Church calendar focusing on the joy and celebration that comes with the birth of the Messiah. There will be time enough, later in the year, during Lent, for reflection on our personal lives and where we might do better.

Reflecting some of the Scripture readings during Advent, our prayers may focus on humble devotion and commitment, prayers of submission, prayers for deliverance and prayers to see the light of the Savior on Christmas Day.

Perhaps the most appealing aspect of Advent is it is suited for celebration at home as well as the Church and a natural time to involve children in activities that connect to our worship at Church. The Advent Wreath provides the perfect context, lighting the candles before meals in connection with reading scriptures, prayers or reflections joining the home to our Church. The decorations, special foods or baked cookies and treats are all opportunities to remind us of the spiritual side of this special time in the Church calendar.



Advent is a special time of year, the anticipation and expectations of children yearning for Christmas morning is not unlike our yearning for the promise of redemption by our Savior, Jesus Christ. It is a time when we can create new traditions with our children or remember our own old family traditions to connect our homes and lives with our Church. During Advent our prayers can reflect that desire to truly see the light promised to come on Christmas Day by a birth in a manger, a desire shared by each other and all of us as the Catholic Community we call St. Michael's.

## The Pastor's Corner, *A letter from Rev. John P. McGovern*

Christmas is a uniquely Christian holiday. Recently Christians have used phrases such as "Jesus is the Reason for the Season" and "Keep Christ in Christmas," in an attempt to refocus us away from the commercial and secular aspects of Christmas that pervade society. Frankly, I don't mind society, at large, adopting the joyous aspects of Christmas, sharing our hopes and yearnings for Peace around the world. Historically, those aspirations embody our faith and beliefs that Christ's birth was the Savior promised in the Old Testament.

However, it is tempting for us to celebrate the "Holidays" and become carried away to the point we lose sight of Advent and Christmas. As Christmas approaches we must make time during Advent, amid the many lists of things to do, gifts to purchase, to remember to pray, to reflect. Sometimes, in an effort not to offend or to include we may deny or apologize for our own beliefs. I would hope that we respect ourselves and that people understand that our beliefs are important to us and that we are proud of what Christmas really means.

**We should  
celebrate,  
joyously,  
happily**

St. Michael's Church, our sacred space, will be decorated to reflect the Advent season. I invite you to stop in during the day, as time allows, and during services to enjoy the environment, pray and reflect on what Christmas means to you. I hope that as you decorate your own home and prepare for the night we celebrate Jesus' birth, it too becomes a sacred space for you and your family. Take the time of Advent to say a prayer with each ornament you hang or cookie you bake, in anticipation of the joy of our Savior's birth.

Again this year your parish will provide the "Little Blue Book" of reflections on the Infancy Narratives according to Matthew to help you prepare to welcome our Lord and Savior, Jesus. We, as Christians, have the responsibility to keep the true meaning of Christmas alive in our own families, our own homes and our own community. We should be proud, as a Catholic Community of our faith and beliefs. We should celebrate, joyously, happily, by feasting and with gifts the coming of the Messiah. We should remember, during this season, where the "Holidays" come from.

---

## Knights of Columbus

The Knights of Columbus (KofC) is a Catholic men's fraternal benefit society that was formed to render financial aid to members and their families by Father Michael J. McGivney in the 1860's in New Haven Connecticut. From that time and to the Present, the K of C has grown to more than 12,000 Councils worldwide and over 1.7 million members. In 2005, the K of C set new records in charitable giving and volunteer service. Total contributions to charity at all levels reached \$139,711,619 and the reported number of hours donated by Knights for charitable causes grew to 64,039,706 hours. In the past decade, the K of C has donated more than \$1 billion to numerous charitable causes and nearly 400 million hours of volunteer service to worthy causes. The Cranford Council has a strong presence in our community and has been involved in many charitable activities under the leadership this year of Grand Knight, Michael Lynskey. Together with the Cranford Jaycees, the Cranford Council has donated and shipped boxes of personal items to our local troops in service overseas. Each and every year, \$3,000 of scholarships is awarded to worthy high school students off to college and over \$3,000 is raised with our Special Citizen's Drive. On average, the

## On Church and Home

Upon entering the portal of a church, we sense a world larger than ourselves. It is the worshipping community. Whether we know one another or are complete strangers, we are undeniably one body through faith. It is a comforting feeling, like gathering at a festive banquet with some folks you know and others you have yet to meet.

There is a hum of celebration and anticipation in the air, as people are greeted with smiles and seated. We are among the invited guests. Entering this domain we attempt to leave our cares outside the hallowed doors; we are in God's house of hospitality. One He has provided out of love for each of His children. Call it haven, sanctuary, whatever your choice, it is much like home, a safe, secure dwelling. It is not simply a building of stone and marble; the colors, textures, art, and aromas are a creative work. They speak of passion and reverence, rituals and traditions, both past and present, alive and active. We take our seats, much like we do in our respective homes; usually sitting in the same area or place, for we are creatures of habit. If we breathe in the environment of this edifice and truly look at the surroundings, the outside world seems far away, even if only for an hour. We exhale. We listen. We participate. We wish our neighbors peace. We pray. We eat.

Do we truly observe and question what hands created this space, just as home environs are cre-



ated? The placement of furnishings, lighting, window dressings, small niches that display art, the fragrances from candles mixing with the aromas of prepared foods, and always the welcoming entry. The correlation may be clear for some, but in life's hurriedness and demands the essence may be missed. This atmosphere prompts a sense of appreciation and gratitude for the persons who plan the liturgy and the music, place the flowers, and set the altar-table in preparation for the reception of Christ's feast. It bids one to ponder the words, "***How lovely is your dwelling place, our Lord!***" Returning to our personal abodes we may then have a deeper appreciation for the grace God provides in the en-

viron we fashion within our own small churches. Perhaps we need to be more mindful of the time, talent, and love that make our homes a haven, our church a sanctuary. Both are synonymous with caring and kindness, warmth and devotion.

St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, Chapter 2: 20-22, captures this synthesis when he declares, "***You are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God. You form a building which rises on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is fitted together and takes shape as holy temple in the Lord; in him you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place for God in the Spirit.***"

---

*Knights, Continued from previous page,* Cranford Council donates to many worthy causes here in Cranford and nationally, \$17,000 in 2005 and on track to exceed \$20,000 in 2006. The Cranford Council also sponsors and maintains the Internet Web Sites of St. Michael's Church and School as well as Raphael's Life House. For the past three years, the Cranford Council has sponsored and paid for a bus for the Respect for Life Committee so that St. Michael's parishioners can attend the Annual Right to Life March in Washington, DC. Over the past few summers, Cranford Knights have donated their time to paint the interior of St. Michael's School and for the past two years, the Cranford Council has worked tirelessly in support of the Feast of St. Michael. The Cranford Knights of Columbus Council 6226 is a viable, valued and integral part of St. Michael's Parish and the Cranford Community and new members are always welcome.

---

## Make a Joyful Noise

Music is an integral part of every celebration at St. Michael's. The liturgy of the word is reflected each week in the hymns we sing together at Mass. Music enhances the celebration of the sacraments administered in the parish. Musical concerts fill the church with the joyous sounds of special holiday seasons.

Daniel Adamczyk has been the Director of Music at St. Michaels since his graduation in 2003 from Westminster Choir College, where he majored in organ and voice. He brings all of this music to life in its many forms, and he also provides a unique opportunity for parishioners of all ages to become involved in the musical life of their parish.

All you need to join one of the choirs at St. Michael's is a love of music. Daniel strongly feels that part of the joy of his job is to encourage anyone to creatively express their spirituality through music, and to that end there are no auditions held for any of the groups and no experience necessary. There is no reason to feel intimidated, anyone can learn to participate, just sign up and enjoy!



The children's choir rehearses every Wednesday from 4:30 – 5:15 and performs once a month at the 9:00 mass, and also at the annual Christmas Concert. Don't let a hectic schedule stop your child from participating; Daniel will work with you if your child has to miss a rehearsal or two.

Our adult choir sings at the 10:30 mass every week (except during the summer months), and also performs at all the seasonal concerts. The choir rehearses on Wednesday evenings from 7:30 – 9:00 pm.

There is also a unique opportunity for high school students to sing at 12:00 mass every Sunday. Piano and guitars in a contemporary presentation of the weekly hymns accompany these teens. If any teen would like to join this group all they need to do is arrive at 12:00 mass about fifteen minutes early for a quick briefing from Daniel and the group before mass begins.

Whether it's at a seasonal concert, during the celebration of mass or as a member of the choir, take advantage of everything our music ministry has to offer. In the words of an old Swedish proverb "those who would sing always find a song."

---

## Holiday Schedule

### **Parish Christmas Carol Sing-a-long**

December 3, 4:30 pm in the Church

### **Advent Penance Celebration**

December 12, 7:30pm  
St. Anne Parish, Garwood

### **Confessions will be heard:**

Monday, December 18 thru Friday  
December 22, following the 12 Noon Mass  
**No Confessions will be heard on Saturday December 23rd**

### **4th Sunday of Advent**

December 23  
Regular Mass Schedule

### **Christmas Eve Masses**

Sunday, December 24  
Vigil, 5:30pm Church - 5:40pm School  
7:30pm Church  
12 Midnight Mass preceded by 11:30pm Carols

### **Christmas Day Masses**

Monday, December 25  
(Church) 7:30, 9:00, 10:30am & 12:00 Noon  
(School) 10:40am & 12:10pm

### **Feast Of The Holy Family**

Sunday, December 31  
Regular Weekend Mass Schedule

---

## **RCIA, *On Becoming (Fully) Catholic***

The mother of a child preparing for First Communion quietly desires to receive her First Communion as well. A man who's been angry with God for years recognizes God calling him to a new relationship. A baptized Catholic wants to finally receive the Sacrament of Confirmation before getting married in the Church. These are just a few stories among thousands about men and women who've entered the Church through a process called the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults or RCIA. Below are some frequently asked questions about this rite of the Church which welcomes people into the fullness of the Catholic Faith.

### **Who is RCIA for?**

RCIA is for any non-Catholic adult who wishes to enter the fullness of the Catholic Faith as well as for baptized Catholics who have not yet completed all the sacraments of initiation.

### **What do you do in RCIA?**

The process begins with a period of inquiry where individuals may ask questions and seek direction. The next step is the Rite of Welcome and Acceptance where inquirers formalize their intention to enter the Church. From this point on, the group participates in the Liturgy of the Word at Mass and is dismissed before the Liturgy of the Eucharist so that they may contemplate the Word as a group with RCIA team members. They also meet once a week for extended catechesis with members of the RCIA team and the priest staff of St. Michael's.

### **When do participants receive the Sacraments?**

Those who are receiving all three Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist – do so at the Easter Vigil. This is also the night when baptized Christians make a Profession of Faith in the Catholic Church and receive Confirmation and Eucharist. Catholics who have been preparing to receive their first Holy Eucharist and/or Confirmation do so later on the Feast of Pentecost.

### **When is the RCIA process finished?**

The weeks after the Easter Vigil begin the period of Mystagogia. During this time, the newly baptized discern the gifts and talents they have received from God and choose some way to use them to build up the Church. RCIA is a process as well as a journey that brings people into deeper communion with one another and ultimately with Christ in the Eucharist. The process ends with the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation. But the spiritual journey continues throughout the rest of our Christian lives.

### **Where can I learn more about RCIA?**

We welcome inquiries into our Catholic Faith. Contact Father Ed Jocson at the Parish Center, 908-276-0360 or visit [stmichaelsrcia.com](http://stmichaelsrcia.com).



## Bringing Advent Home

Advent, the four-week period leading up to Christmas, is the beginning of the liturgical year. It is a time for us to prepare as we anxiously await the coming of Jesus' birth. We can help our children become more aware of the reason for the season by participating in a variety of Advent traditions.

Having an **Advent wreath** in the home is one of the most recognized of Advent traditions. The wreath, which has German origins, is made of evergreens, bound to a circle of wire, signifying continuous life. The four candles represent the four weeks of Advent. The colors of the Advent candles vary. Some churches use four blue candles to emphasize the hopeful anticipation of the season. Others follow an older custom of three purple candles, signifying that Advent is a season of repentance as well as expectation, and one pink or rose candle, reserved for the third Sunday of Advent, Gaudete (which means "rejoice" in Latin) Sunday. We, at St. Michael's, use the blue candles. For prayers to use with the Advent wreath, go to <http://www.cptryon.org/prayer/adx/adwreath.html>.

There is also the **Advent calendar**, also of German origins. There are no spiritual ties to the Advent Calendar but some families use calendars of a religious nature as a way to "count down" the days to Christmas.

Another Advent tradition is **the empty manger**. Each child may have his or her own individual manger, or there may be one manger for the whole family. The idea is that when acts of service, sacrifice, or kinds are done in honor of Baby Jesus as a birthday present, the child receives a piece of straw to put into the manger.

Then, on Christmas morning, Baby Jesus is placed in the manger, which has hopefully been made "comfortable" through the good deeds.

**St. Nicholas Day**, December 6<sup>th</sup>, is a highlight of the Advent season. Each child puts out a shoe the night before St. Nicholas Day in the hope that the kind bishop — with his miter, staff, and bag of gifts — will pay a visit. Saint Nicholas was renowned for his great kindness and his generous aid to those in distress. He is considered the patron saint of children, unmarried girls, and sailors, among others. Traditional celebrations of Saint Nicholas Day in Northern Europe included gifts left in children's shoes (the origin of our American Christmas stockings). Good children receive treats — candies, cookies, apples and nuts, while naughty children receive lumps of coal.

Families can also **bless their trees**. It is good to remind children that "the tree" relates to many aspects of our faith. For example, we are reminded that our first parents were not allowed to eat from one tree, and that Christ paid the great price for our redemption by hanging on a tree. There are many different stories which attempt to explain why we use a tree at Christmas. For instance, St. Boniface in the eight century gave the balsam fir tree to the Druids in place of the oak tree, the symbol of their idol. He said, "The fir tree is the wood of peace, the sign of an endless life with its evergreen branches. It points to heaven. It will never shelter deeds of blood, but rather be filled with loving gifts and rites of kindness." For prayers to bless the tree, go to [www.catholicculture.org/lit/prayers](http://www.catholicculture.org/lit/prayers).

Sources: [www.catholiceducation.org](http://www.catholiceducation.org); [www.wf-f.org](http://www.wf-f.org); [www.stpaulkingsville.org](http://www.stpaulkingsville.org)



## Heard in the Halls

The goal of technology at St. Michael's School is to help children master computer skills but more importantly, to apply those skills in meeting their academic challenges so they will succeed in our ever-increasingly networked world. St. Michael's considers computer skills as life skills and gives them their due place in the education of your children.

The use of computers at St. Michael's School starts in Kindergarten where students begin their mastery of the mouse and keyboard by creating digital pictures and stories. As they move through the grades, the curriculum introduces additional age- and skill-appropriate software packages through weekly instruction in the full-featured Computer Lab. By the time students are in the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade, they are able to create Word documents, Excel spreadsheets, PowerPoint presentations, web pages and simple programs. By this time, computer-use is integrated into core subjects and computer and Internet access is available in each classroom. By their final year at St. Michael's, 8<sup>th</sup> Graders are creating a variety of projects using computers as a tool to aid in the understanding of the core curriculum. Student academic presentations, using computer artifacts, are common and quite edifying for their classmates.



Throughout their journey at St. Michael's, students learn to use the Internet safely as a research and communications tool. Each classroom has access and the students use the most current learning applications to help teachers teach and students learn and develop key academic skill sets including early reading skills, reading comprehension, and science and math proficiency. Among the programs taught and used in Lab sessions are Kid Pix, MS Word, Internet Explorer, Hyper Studio, Media Blender, MS Excel, MS PowerPoint, The Gimp and Audacity. For actual academic applications, we currently employ *STAR Early Literacy*, *Accelerated Reader*, *Accelerated Math* and *Math Facts in a Flash* where competency results are often included in a student's grade. A new science program is on the agenda for later this year.

St. Michael's uses an Apple iMac G4 Server running IP4 software networked to desktop computers and laptops with filtered Internet access and networked printers. Digital cameras are available for use as needed. Students can work on any school computer, save their work to the shared file server and continue their work at any other i-Mac in the building. Our Internet service is provided by Verizon's DSL service.

## Working The Beat

Do you like to write? Do you participate in a Parish or community activity and want more people to know about it? Do you enjoy reading and talking about Catholicism and want to share your thoughts and ideas? If so, volunteer to work on The Beat. We are looking for new writers, artists, and ideas. Join us for a single issue, or stay and help write 4 to 5 issues a year. If you are interested in participating, or simply have suggestions on how we can improve The Beat, please contact Kathleen Williamson at kmfhoffman@aol.com, or leave a message at the Parish office.

# The Beat

## St. Michael's Church

40 Alden Street  
Cranford, NJ 07016

908 276 0360  
stmichaelscranford.com

## PRAYER SPACE

*Lord, give us a home filled with love, a family that is quick to forgive and seek forgiveness. A family that prays and laughs and heals together, a family that values others more than self, reconciliation more than pride, and God's grace more than anything else. Amen.*

---

*The community of St. Michael's draws its strength from the unique gifts each of its members offers to the others. All are able to give, as all are in need to receive, in order to grow in faith. The parish community encourages each individual to give and receive according to their needs. St. Michael's welcomes full participation of all Catholic members of the parish. We encourage anyone who may have fallen away or does not feel fully connected with our community to "come on back" and explore ways for you to strengthen our community within the Catholic faith.*

---

*Questions and comments about St. Michael's Church, this newsletter, or any of the parish ministries should be addressed to us at: [stmichaelscranford@comcast.net](mailto:stmichaelscranford@comcast.net), or 908 276 0360. We look forward to hearing from you.*