



CENTRAL WASHINGTON CATHOLIC

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Newsletter

Preparing for Christmas: Remember the Reason for the Season

By Christine Corbett Conklin

With Christmas just around the corner, stop and think for a moment. What's truly important to you this season? Years from now, will you and your children look back upon memories of standing in the cold, waiting for a department store sale to begin in the early hours of the morning? When January arrives, will your strongest impression of Christmas be the stack of bills waiting to be paid? Will the young people in your lives follow your example and carry on these same traditions for years to come?

Take the time to remember the "reason for the season": the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Gently weave some religious elements into the days leading up to and immediately following Christmas.

There's still time to construct a simple Advent wreath of greenery, with three purple candles and one rose candle. Even though Advent is already underway, you can "jump-start" the first week by lighting two purple candles, then one more candle each Sunday before Christmas. Take time to say a short prayer while lighting the candles.

Young children, in particular, enjoy Advent calendars, with one "window" to open each day before Christmas. Try to find a calendar with a religious theme.

Consider delaying the lighting of your Christmas tree until Christmas Eve, or at least until December 17, when the "O" antiphons begin the church's liturgies each



An Advent wreath helps us focus on the coming of Christmas.

day. Taken from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, and familiar to us from the song "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," they should heighten our anticipation of the coming birth of the Christ Child.

Be sure to include religious elements in your Christmas cards and decorations. Be proud of your Catholic Faith and let others see that Faith come shining through! Consider following the Latin tradition of having children write a letter to Baby Jesus instead of to Santa Claus.

Check your local parish calendar for special religious celebrations including Posadas, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, the Feast of Our Lady of

Guadalupe, Christmas Masses and Catholic school Christmas programs. Help out with a local food, clothing or toy drive, or buy a gift for a "giving tree" in your parish.

On Sunday, January 4, when the Solemnity of the Epiphany is celebrated, or on the actual day, January 6, celebrate this feast that recalls the visit of the Magi to the Christ Child by baking a King Cake. This can be any type of cake you choose, with a small, sturdy plastic doll baked into or pushed into the bottom of the cake (avoiding choking hazards for small children). Whoever receives the slice of cake with the doll inside may receive a special privilege or honor. Use this opportunity to tell the Epiphany story.

Some Hispanic families wait until this date to open presents brought by Los Tres Reyes Magos (The Three Kings) instead of opening presents from Santa Claus on December 25.

And remember that the Christmas season begins – not ends – on Christmas Eve. The season ends Sunday, January 11, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Try to keep the Christmas spirit well into the New Year.

It's surprising, at times, to realize how closely the children in our lives watch and learn from our actions – even more than from our words. This year, be sure to give them the gift of example by making more of an effort to observe the religious significance of the Christmas season!

Christmas Collection To Support Catholic Charities Agencies

"I invoke the Christmas gift of joy and peace upon all: upon children and the elderly, upon young people and families, the poor and the marginalized. May Jesus, who was born for us, console all those afflicted by illness and suffering; may he sustain those who devote themselves to serving our brothers and sisters who are most in need." ~ Pope Francis, Christmas Day, 2013

In the spirit of these recent Christmas wishes from Pope Francis, it is time once again to begin preparing for the Annual Christmas Collection for Catholic Charities.

This collection will be taken up throughout the Diocese of Yakima at all Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Masses. It will help to support the network of nine Catholic Family & Child Service offices,

plus Catholic Charities Housing Services and Saint Vincent Centers in our Diocese.

A year ago, the collection brought in \$185,488.12, with a focus on a new initiative called Prepares (Pregnancy and Parenting Support) which is designed to help parents throughout a crisis pregnancy and on through the first five years of the child's life.

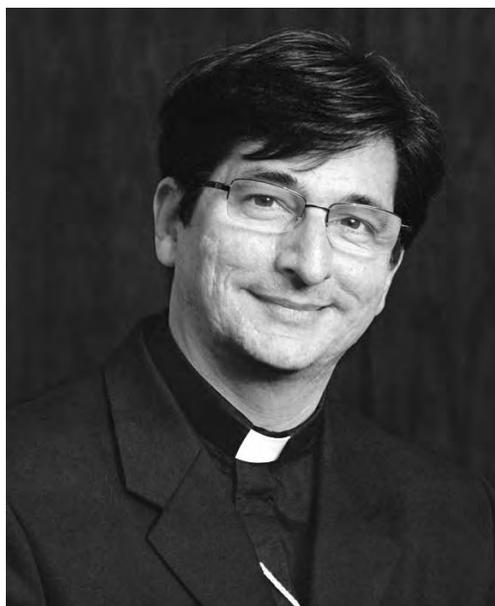
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A Message from Bishop Tyson...

Dear Friends,

My hope and prayer for you is that this latest issue of our Central Washington Catholic newsletter helps you prepare for the coming of Christ. In the midst of holiday activity and the consumer side of our culture, it's quite easy to lose touch with the spark of this season: the birth of Jesus Christ. Yet I'd also like to believe it's the very beauty of God becoming flesh as a baby that first attracts our culture's attention.

As our Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI noted several years back, "God comes as a baby." Each Gospel account during the Masses for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day reminds us of this. The Vigil Mass Gospel from St. Matthew notes the long list of ancestors that lead up to Christ's birth in Bethlehem. The Gospels from St. Luke for the Mass at Night and the Mass at Dawn capture the beauty of angel choirs alongside the simplicity of shepherds from the fields being drawn to the birthplace of Christ. In the light of Christmas Day, we hear from the Gospel



Bishop Joseph Tyson

of St. John of the Word – the Word made flesh – in Jesus. God, indeed, comes as a baby.

Drawing from this very image, the Irish rock star, Bono, noted a few years ago

that it seemed to him to be a kind of poetic justice that Christ is born in the midst of – and this is his image – “straw poverty.” Might this be the same “straw poverty” which challenges us to discover God in our midst, too?

As you read about parish life in Grandview, our recent “Cornerstone” conference and our new “Cornerstone” ministry or about our support for these initiatives through the annual Catholic Charities Christmas collection, I am hoping you may become attentive to the way Christ breaks into your life in your own moments of “straw poverty.”

Be assured of my thoughts and prayers for you and for your families, far and near. I pray that you discover the joy of Christ's birth anew!

With my every best wish and blessing,

Devotedly yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Joseph J. Tyson
Bishop of Yakima

Christmas Collection To Support Catholic Charities *Continued from page 1*

Because of last year's generous donations, and the receipt of grant funds, this year's collection will be more widely distributed. Donations will help fund the expansion of a much-needed Autism Classroom concept into Wenatchee, and help fund services for an increased number of low-income children in early-learning programs in the Yakima Valley. Housing Services also has benefited from past collections, and this year is scheduled to build and sell 100 homes to first-time home buyers with 25,000 hours of “sweat equity” contributed by the new homeowners. CCHS has served over 250 families with foreclosure prevention counseling since 2012.

“I ask you to be as generous as you can to support the many good works of Catholic Charities,” said Yakima Bishop Joseph Tyson. “Each day, the staff of Catholic Charities reach out to bring hope to those mentioned by Pope Francis in his Christmas prayer. I thank you for your meaningful support which will touch the lives of so many.”

Seminarian Endowment Challenge Is a Success

The people of the Diocese of Yakima have once again stepped forward, meeting – and surpassing – our goal for the Seminarian Endowment Challenge issued by Catholic Extension!

To date, \$100,305.15 has been pledged and \$96,521.83 collected in this opportunity to raise funds for our seminarians and have up to \$50,000 matched by Catholic Extension. Contributions have come from many sources, ranging from the annual Priest-Seminarian soccer match to Young Ladies Institute breakfasts at Holy Family Church in Yakima, to donations from individuals and families from throughout the Diocese.

The diocesan goal for this one-year challenge program, which ends on December 31, was \$75,000. Qualifying donations need to be in the amount of at least \$1,000.

Thank you to everyone who has helped to meet this challenge and support our seminarians – the future priests of our Diocese. And it's not too late to make a pledge! Next fall, the Diocese has the potential to have more than 20 seminarians, and your donations will help to meet the increased costs this would bring.

For information, contact Alma Benitez, Director of Stewardship, at (509) 965-7117, or by e-mail at alma.benitez@yakimadiocese.net.



Proceeds from YLI breakfasts at Holy Family Church helped us reach our challenge goal.

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If you have been abused or victimized by a member of the Catholic clergy, please believe in the possibility for hope and help and healing. We encourage you to come forward and speak out.

The Yakima Diocese has a sexual abuse hotline for those who wish to report some incident concerning that issue as regards a bishop, priest, deacon or diocesan employee or volunteer. (888) 276-4490

Cornerstone Catholic Conference Builds Support For Life

More than 900 people gathered October 24-25 at the Greater Tacoma Convention & Trade Center for a spirit-filled Cornerstone Catholic Conference.

"The conference was phenomenal, uplifting and challenging," said Deacon Mikhail Alnajjar of Christ the King Parish in Richland, who is the new coordinator for Cornerstone Ministry (which includes Respect Life and Social Justice issues) for the Diocese of Yakima. "There were so many good speakers."

Sponsored by the Washington State Catholic Conference, the event included Mass, opportunities for confession and presentations on a variety of issues related to respect for life at all its stages from conception through natural death, Alnajjar said. These topics included everything from abortion to social justice, human trafficking, immigration reform and poverty of children.

Highlights included a talk by Immaculee Ilibagiza, a Rwandan genocide survivor, who testified to the power of the Rosary in seeing her through her time of captivity, Alnajjar said. "She said that forgiveness opened her heart to the grace of God," he noted.

Another powerful presentation was given by Abbey Johnson, a former Planned Parenthood director in Texas, who spoke of witnessing "more than 10,000 abortions," Alnajjar continued. Later becoming a Catholic and outspoken advocate for human life, "she found that the power of grace through Reconciliation healed her wounded heart." Johnson challenged clergy everywhere to become more involved in standing up for life, resulting in a standing ovation from the crowd, he said.

Other speakers included Seattle Archbishop Peter Sartain who noted that, "Jesus is the cornerstone of all we are and all we do in upholding respect for life," Alnajjar said.

Yakima Bishop Joseph Tyson pointed out that "we have many 'living stones,'" such as the defense of the unborn; care of the poor, prisoners, and the needy. Another is support for women and their children during the first five years of life, Alnajjar added. The newly founded pregnancy and parenting program called Prepares will accomplish just that, he noted.

Bishop Tyson encouraged a commitment to the whole spectrum of life – from the unborn through neglected children, victims of human trafficking, the homeless and immigrants – he said.

"He told us that we must teach the truth – that without the (right to) life of the unborn and the dying, all rights of the poor and vulnerable remain endangered," Alnajjar noted.

Auxiliary Bishop of San Francisco Robert McElroy suggested a threefold approach to advancing the life issues: opposing "intrinsic evil" such as abortion; remedying "structural evil" such as social poverty and social sin, and promoting the good in our society; and educating people on these issues, he continued.

"Bishop Robert said that educating people on these issues is paramount to eliminate intrinsic and structural evil in the world," Alnajjar commented.

Other speakers included Serrin Foster, president of Feminists for Life, who is known for her slogan, "Women Deserve Better Than Abortion." She pointed out that many feminists are pro-life, Alnajjar said. It is vital to say "yes" to the resources needed by pregnant women and their children, both before and after birth, Foster maintains.

In the months ahead, Alnajjar, a senior scientist with Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland, active pro-life advocate and Knight of Columbus, said he will begin meeting with representatives of deaneries throughout the Diocese of Yakima to determine the needs surrounding the life issues. The goal is to help keep the spirit of the conference moving forward toward positive action on behalf of "life in all its aspects."



Deacon Mikhail Alnajjar

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Two Sisters Coming to Diocese to Assist with Faith Formation

Within a few days, the Diocese of Yakima will receive some valuable assistance in faith formation programs, as two Catholic nuns from Michoacan, Mexico, join our ranks.

Sisters Isabel Donate Vadez and Irma Lerma Cantor are currently taking English language classes in San Antonio, preparing to come to the Yakima Valley on December 11. They will arrive just in time to celebrate the feast of Our



Sisters Irma Lerma Cantor (L) and Maria Isabel Donate Valdez (Used with permission of Catholic Extension. Copyright 2014.)

Lady of Guadalupe on December 12.

The Sisters plan to spend five years serving in our Diocese, with annual breaks to continue their English classes in Texas, said Isaac Prieto, assistant director of Hispanic Ministries for the Diocese. Their assistance is made possible through the U.S. - Latin American Sisters Exchange program, funded through Catholic Extension.

“The Sisters will help us minister to everybody, but especially the migrant and Spanish communities,” Prieto explained. Although they will be based in Yakima, there are plans for them to help out at various sites throughout the Diocese in everything from the Magnificat program to visiting migrant farms with our seminarians and holding retreats.

In turn, the Sisters also will benefit from the experience.

“They will have the opportunity to learn the (English) language and take back to their community what they have learned about migrant ministry,” Prieto said.

Yakima is one of 10 dioceses nationwide selected to participate in the sisters exchange program, based upon a growing Hispanic Catholic population and a lack of resources and trained ministry leadership to meet the needs of the community, according to information from Catholic Extension.

Please join in welcoming Sisters Isabel and Irma to the Diocese of Yakima!

From Humble Roots, Grandview’s Blessed Sacrament Parish Has Grown, Generation By Generation

The proud history of Grandview’s Blessed Sacrament Church, set in the midst of farm land rich with apple orchards, hops and grapes, began very humbly. So humbly, in fact, that when some initial building materials for a church were ordered in about 1916, they were held in a railcar until the necessary \$120 owing for the freight charge could be collected!



Blessed Sacrament Church: “generations growing in faith.”

At first, an altar donated by the Extension Society was set up in a rented building in Grandview. Then, a room was rented in the Odd Fellows Hall for Mass. Finally, in 1918, the first Blessed Sacrament Church, which held about 150 people, was built on Cherry Lane Drive.

A few more moves were to come, including relocation of the church to a site on Second Street, a move of parish headquarters to Sunnyside from 1926 to 1954, and finally, the construction of the current church at 1201 Missouri Street.

Today, Blessed Sacrament Church has about 500 registered parish families, many more people who attend but are not yet registered, and standing room only at some of the Spanish Masses.

“Generation by generation, we’re growing in faith together,” says Kathy Sharman, Director of Religious Education and a parishioner for almost 40 years. “To me, it feels like a family.”

It’s not unusual, Sharman says, to see several generations of the same family attending Mass and engaged in programs at the church. She adds that, in the 1970s, for example, the parish religious education program had about 60 to 100 students, while today there are nearly 500 students.



Father Herrera celebrated Mass, surrounded by children who were receiving their First Communion.

“What’s special about this community is the participation of the people,” agreed Father Jose Herrera, who has served as pastor since summer of 2013. “When we have an event, many people volunteer.”

To accommodate the growing congregation, there are two English Masses and two Spanish Masses every weekend.

There also is an attempt to bring the

English-speaking and Spanish-speaking communities together as one parish at events including an annual Christmas dinner, summer cookout and festival, and a fall harvest dinner.

“The people, throughout the years, are always very giving of their time and talent,” observed Terri Moore, who has served as parish secretary for 29 years and been a parishioner for all of her 52 years. “Our parishioners always come through, are always willing to lend a hand.” Some of the most active parish organizations include the altar society, youth group and Cursillo group, she noted.

Isaac Prieto, Assistant Director of Hispanic Ministries for the Diocese of Yakima and a parishioner since 1976, describes Blessed Sacrament Parish as “a close-knit community.”

For many years, he and his family knew almost everyone who came to Mass, he recalled. Now, the parish has grown so much, that there are many people the family have yet to meet.

Prieto, his wife, Blanca, and four of their children sing in the Spanish choir for the church, while a son plays keyboard for the group.

“We enjoy serving God in any way we can and helping the community,” he says, seeming to reflect the spirit of the congregation. “This is a religious, a faithful community.”

Moore echoed his enthusiasm.

“I just love this parish,” she said. “I grew up here. I’ll probably die here. The parishioners are what make it special!”