

**MORE**

# **GOOD NEWS**

## **Coming home**

**What can be done  
to bring  
the absent  
back to church?**

**PAGE 3**

Salvie and Carmen Perritano are among many who wandered away from the church. Then, they found each other and together renewed their commitment to their faith.





## PASTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

# Despite COVID concerns, it's time to be church again

We know that famous saying, "Sometimes, you don't see the forest for the trees."

It means that we become so wrapped up in the smaller issues or details that we miss the larger and more significant point or message. We miss the big picture.

In these last 19 months or so, dealing with the COVID pandemic, much thought and speculation has been about why some of our Catholic people, individuals and families, have refrained from being present for weekend worship — coming to Mass.

Being church — being present with others before the altar of the Lord, hearing the Word with others and taking part in the "communion" Eucharist with others — this is the source and summit of a full healthy and happy Catholic life.

Just maybe the details and tactics of staying safe and cautious at our community worship has made us forget to remember and see the big picture. Do we miss the forest for the trees?

To be a practicing Catholic person or fam-



FATHER JIM CESTA

ily allows us to share the wisdom and wealth of more than 2,000 years of faith tradition and a heritage that encourages personal and social transformation, healing, learning and the gifts that flow from sacramental life.

Being church, especially on the weekend, can be so helpful in satisfying a person's deepest needs and spiritual yearnings.

Of course, we take precautions these days and encourage things that might block COVID, but the big message remains so true — be the CHURCH.

## CELEBRATING THE SAINTS

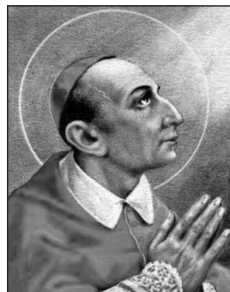
### Charles Borromeo

Feast day: Nov. 4

The name of Charles Borromeo is associated with reform. He lived during the time of the Protestant Reformation and had a hand in the reform of the whole Church during the final years of the Council of Trent.

Although he belonged to the Milanese nobility and was related to the powerful Medici family, Charles desired to devote himself to the Church. In 1559, when his uncle Cardinal de Medici was elected Pope Pius IV, he made Charles cardinal-deacon and administrator of the Archdiocese of Milan. At the time Charles was still a layman and a young student. Because of his intellectual qualities Charles was entrusted with several important offices connected with the Vatican, and later appointed secretary of state with responsibility for the papal states. The untimely death of his elder brother brought Charles to a definite decision to be ordained a priest, despite his relatives' insistence that he marry. Soon after being ordained a priest at age 25, Borromeo was consecrated bishop of Milan.

Working behind the scenes, Charles deserves the credit for keeping the Council of Trent in session when at several points it was on the



verge of breaking up.

Eventually, Borromeo was allowed to devote his time to the Archdiocese of Milan, where the religious and moral picture was far from bright. The reform needed in every phase of Catholic life among clergy and laity was initiated at a provincial council of all the bishops under him. Specific regulations were drawn up for bishops and other clergy:

If the people were to be converted to a better life, Borromeo had to be the first to give a good example and renew their apostolic spirit.

Charles sacrificed wealth, high honors, esteem and influence to become poor. During the plague and famine of 1576, Borromeo tried to feed 60,000 to 70,000 people daily. To do this he borrowed large sums of money that required years to repay. Whereas the civil authorities fled at the height of the plague, he stayed in the city, where he ministered to the sick and the dying, helping those in want.

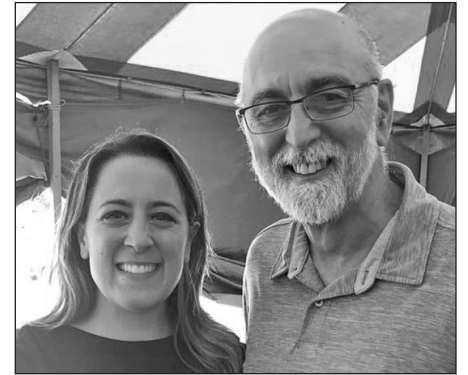
Work and the heavy burdens of his high office began to affect Archbishop Borromeo's health, leading to his death at the age of 46.

*The Scalabrini Missionaries, who served our parish for more than 90 years, also is known the Congregation of the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo.*

## PARISH WEBSITE

Visit [www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com](http://www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com) for the latest parish news and announcements. There's even a mobile version for your smart phone. You can donate online and check out our social media sites and more.

## PHOTO GALLERIES



## BULLETIN

SUNDAY, SEPT. 12, 2021  
CELEBRATING 125 YEARS: 1896-2021

### St. Mary of Mount Carmel Blessed Sacrament Parish

**ABOUT THE PARISH**  
Address: 648 Jay St., Union, NY 11551.  
Telephone: 516-735-1482; fax 516-735-2806.  
Office hours: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday through Thursday. Closed on Friday and national holidays.  
Faith Formation and Sacraments Center: 315-724-3950.  
Email: [smayrca@bpydio.org](mailto:smayrca@bpydio.org)  
Hearing Impaired: Listening devices available in the sacristy.

**MASS SCHEDULES**  
**Weekend**  
Saturday: 4:30 p.m. (livestream on parish YouTube)  
Sunday: 8 and 10:30 a.m.  
**Weekday**  
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 8:30 a.m.  
Rosary for the Union and Divine Mercy Chaplet: Thursday after Mass.

**Holy Days**  
Consult the bulletin and website.

**RECONCILIATION**  
Saturday: 3:45 p.m.

**MARRIAGE**  
Make arrangements six months in advance.

**BAPTISM**  
Call the parish office to arrange. New parents are encouraged to attend the parent class before the birth of your child.

**RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS**  
Adults or children, 7 or older who have never been baptized or confirmed or received the Eucharist, are invited to call the parish office for information.

**NEW PARISHIONERS**  
Welcome to our parish family. We invite you to become an active participant of our parish community. Please be sure to register by calling the parish office.

**PARISH STAFF**  
Pastor: Rev. Jim Cesta  
In Residence: Rev. Luis Ogilvie  
Trustees: Rocco Ariotti and Bill Thibault  
Faith Formation K-6: Terri Piazza-Panuccio  
Faith Formation 7-12: Anne Corfene-Cicco  
Music director: Peter Esposito  
Buildings and grounds: Fran DiDoro  
Website manager: bulletin, publicity: Fran Perritano

[www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com](http://www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com) and [www.facebook.com/mountcarmelblessedsacrament](http://www.facebook.com/mountcarmelblessedsacrament)

**Other photos in the mid-1990s:**  
Morning Glories group in 1996.  
Rachel Sciorino and Antonette LaFaglia at the parish festival.  
Altar servers in the mid-1990s.

## ... and more

- Weekly prayers, reflections and videos and more to enrich your faith.
- Father Jim's "Wise and Otherwise"
- Father Jim's video homilies
- Wedding, funeral guides.
- History of the parish
- Parish history video series
- Lector and minister schedules
- Mass schedules
- Parish news
- Ministries
- Event calendar
- Reflection on Sunday's readings
- "More Good News" articles
- Links to Facebook and YouTube.

## COVER STORY

# Hope for lost sheep

## As Mass attendance continues to decline, what can be done to bring people back into fold?

By FRAN PERRITANO

When Salvie Perritano and Carmen Nease met several years ago, attending weekend Mass was not a priority.

Though both were baptized and attended Mass regularly as young children, they each eventually found themselves growing further away and stopped coming to church.

"Shortly before turning 6 years old, my father married into the Episcopal Church," Salvie said. "I used to spend every other weekend at my grandmother's house. ... (When) I was at gram's I went to Mount Carmel."

"When I got into my mid-teens, I didn't spend weekends at gram's anymore. My father and stepmother didn't go to church as often as when I was younger. The older I grew, I became disenfranchised with the concept of religion. I still very much believed in God but didn't see the need for this man-made institution. The growing controversy surrounding the Catholic Church certainly fueled that fire."

Salvie and Carmen are among millions of people who strayed from church over the last several decades as Mass attendance has declined severely in the United States. The question: Can anything be done to reverse the trend?

Before COVID 19 struck, 21.1 percent of American Catholics attended Mass every week, compared with 54.9 percent in 1970, according to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. In addition, the percentage of Catholics who say they are a member of a church has dropped nearly 20 points since 2000, according to a March 2021 Gallup poll.

Among those who said they were Catholic, 58 percent said they were a member of a church. This figure is down 18 points from the 76 percent of Catholics who said they were a member of the church in a Gallup poll from 1998-2000.

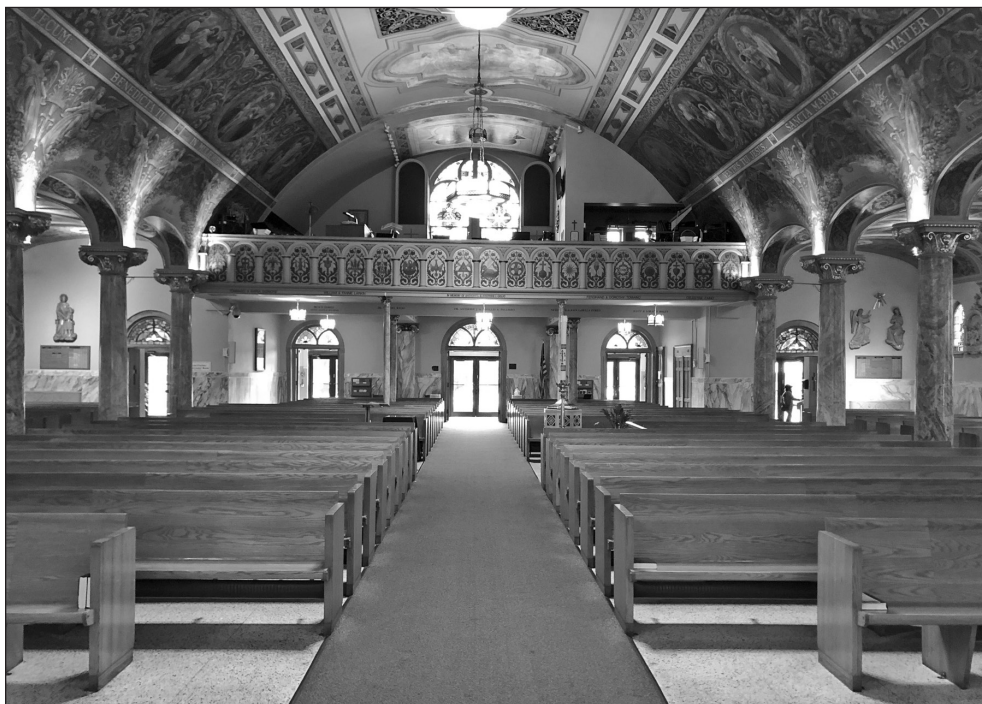
In the past decade, Catholics saw a twice-as-steep decline in members than did Protestants, which saw a 9 percent decline in professed members from 73 percent to 64 percent.

The decline is not limited to the Catholic Church.

According to the Gallup report, overall membership in houses of worship has continued its pre-existing decline in the U.S., reaching a record-low point of 47 percent in the survey conducted from 2018-2020.

### One couple's story

Carmen's story is similar to other absent Catholics.



**Before COVID 19 struck, 21.1 percent of American Catholics attended Mass every week, compared with 54.9 percent in 1970, according to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. In addition, the percentage of Catholics who say they are a "member" of a church has dropped nearly 20 percentage points since 2000, according to a March 2021 Gallup poll.**

"I attended Mass as regularly as my parents did (all the main holidays) or the extra times when I would visit my grandmother for the weekend," she said. "I was baptized as a child but never took the regular religion classes. As a child I always remembered asking why did we have to stand and kneel so much. I loved pulling out the choir book and finding the songs so I could sing along with the choir. (I) always wanted to be able to do Communion like everyone else, but not understanding why I couldn't. Believing so whole heartedly in God and that He was always there for me, I was taught and raised as a Christian but wasn't fully brought into the church as some families are raised into them."

Things changed when Carmen became an adult.

"As a young adult, I became a young single parent," she said. "It wasn't that I let faith go. It was trying to work, raise a child, and remembering what day of the week it was was hard enough, let alone trying to go to church. I never stopped having faith in the Lord or trying to remember to have time for him, but the pres-

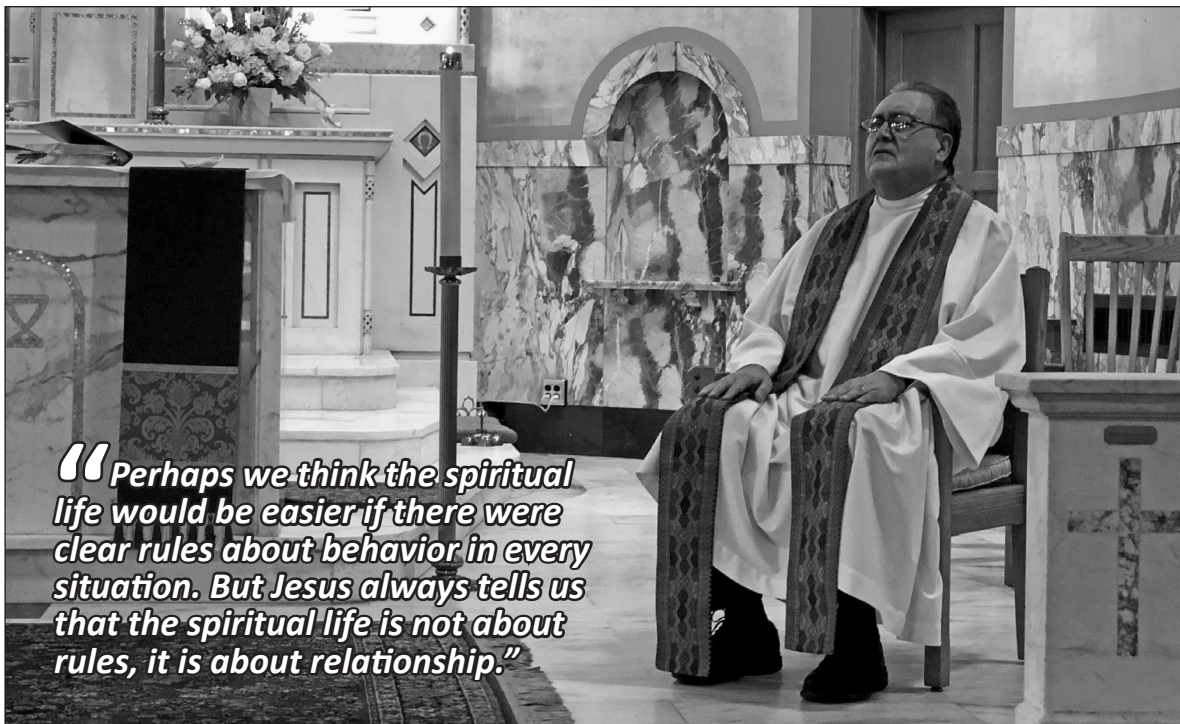
sures of life caused me to not have the time. So, coming to church other than for Christmas Mass or Easter wasn't a priority."

Things changed for this couple when they started dating in August 2017 and eventually married a year ago in October 2019.

"I don't know if you could categorize it as a calling or not, but there were a few factors that came into play at the same time," Salvie said. "I had started to date Carmen. .... God was important to her, though she had a mixed religious background as I did. Also, my niece was going to be going through her Confirmation and had asked me to be her sponsor. She is someone who is very important to me, and I wanted to be able to say yes. But to do that, I needed to be confirmed myself, a sacrament I had not partaken in up this point. I asked Carmen that if I were to undertake this venture, if she would do it with me. She happily agreed. Going through that journey together strengthened our relationship and gave us a foundation for our marriage going forward."

**Please see COVER STORY, Page 7**





*“Perhaps we think the spiritual life would be easier if there were clear rules about behavior in every situation. But Jesus always tells us that the spiritual life is not about rules, it is about relationship.”*

# Is there a right way to worship God?

By THE REV. LUIS OLGUIN

What is the “right” way to worship God so that we can be sure that we will get into heaven?

People perpetually ask some version of this question. The Bible give us more than one example:

“Which commandment in the law is the greatest?” (Matthew 22:36)

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25)

“What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30)

The “woman at the well” engaged Jesus in a conversation about where and how to properly worship God (John 4).

Discussions about what we must “do to be saved” strike a deep chord within us. Why? Because behind them is the abiding human need to feel secure. We want to know that we are OK with God, that we are doing what we are supposed to be doing.

But Jesus refused to reduce the life of faith to mere rules. Instead, He always turned these questions into discussions about relationship.

One of my favorite stories showing this is Jesus’ encounter with the scholar of the law recorded in Luke 10: 15-37. The scholar asks one of the questions above — “What must I do to inherit eternal life (verse 25)?” Jesus responds

## Father Luis Olguin

**About:** Father Luis has been in residence in the parish for more than 25 years. For a number of years he ministered to prisoners in area correctional facilities. He also has served in several locations around the world.

**Native land:** Chile.

**Education:** Attended Catholic schools for 12 years; graduated from Catholic University with a degree in civil engineering; attended Florida International University in Miami for two years and earned a degree in philosophy; graduated seminary in San Rafael, Chile.

**Family:** Three brothers, three sisters and 14 nieces and nephews.

by asking another question, “What is written in the law (verse 26)?”

The scholar of the law responds, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself. (verse 27).”

This is not a list of rules. This tells us that the life of faith as God wants us to live it is about a continuing deep, loving relationship with God

and with people.

Jesus acknowledges this saying, “Do this, and you will live.”

According to Jesus, loving God and others is the door to eternal life.

But the scholar of the law can’t leave it there. He comes back, asking again for rules: “And who is my neighbor (verse 29)?” In other words, which people and how many people do I have to love? Where is the line between enough and not enough? The scholar of the law wants Jesus to set some minimum standards, to tell him exactly when he can know he has done enough, when he is OK, when he is “in”.

In response Jesus tells the story of The Good Samaritan, which ends with the Samaritan committing himself to a continuing, open-ended responsibility for the injured man he has rescued (Luke 10:25-37). There is not enough in this story. Jesus is saying to the scholar of the law and to us that rules cannot describe what God asks of us. God calls us into relationship, and that consists of much more than rules.

Perhaps we think the spiritual life would be easier if there were clear rules about behavior in every situation. But Jesus always tells us that the spiritual life is not about rules, it is about relationship. Every relationship is unique, and

Please see FATHER LUIS, Page 7

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

# Anastasia's journey

## Decade later, her life has taken a different path

Ten years ago, in the first issue of "More Good News" in October 2011, the first of our "Next Generation" articles featured then-16-year-old Anastasia Mancuso. Ana's life has changed considerably over the last decade, becoming a wife, mother and business owner.

**You were the first young person to be featured in the first issue of "More Good News." How has your life changed over the last 10 years?**

My life has changed drastically since 2011. I graduated high school and college. I also got married, had two children and opened a business in Utica.

**You're married now and have two young children, quite a big difference from that 16-year-old. How would you describe your family and your life together?**

I love my family and I always knew I wanted to be mom. It has been such a fun and different adventure. I met my husband when I was 16 and started dating two years later.

**In addition to raising a family, you also own Luna's Mexican Bar and Grill in Utica. You majored in psychology and said way back when you wanted to become a doctor. Please describe how Luna's came into being.**

Being a doctor came to a screeching halt when I started my clinicals and had to deal with blood. I changed my major to psychology after working at Insight House. After I graduated, I did not feel that was the path I wanted to follow at the time. So, my husband supported me in opening our first business, which was a food truck. I did the food truck for about two years and then we found a beautiful building for sale in the prime location of Varick Street. I sold the food truck and made shop at Luna's.

**You chose Mexican fare for your restaurant. How did that decision come about?**

Our first choice was Italian, but the Utica and New Hartford area have so much good Italian food. We knew we had to choose something different. We love Mexican food and we thought it would be a great choice for people to pair with some cocktails in the fun Varick bar scene.

**Of course, like many other eating establishments, you were hit by the pandemic. How have you been able to cope and keep the business running?**

The pandemic hit seven months after we opened. It was definitely a shocker, and we would not have made it without the amazing support of our community through takeout orders.

**Back in 2011, you said your dad was the biggest influence in your life. How has he been influential over the last 10 years.**

My dad has always supported my goals even



"My life has changed drastically since 2011," says Anastasia Ferrone, with her husband, Richard, and children. "I graduated high school and college. I also got married, had two children and opened a business in Utica."

### Anastasia Ferrone

**Age:** 26.

**Family:** Husband Richard, children Stassi (2) and Bruno (1), father Michael Mancuso, mother Michelle Mancuso, sisters Isabella and Angelina Mancuso.

**Education:** Bachelor's degree in psychology from SUNY Polytechnic Institute.

**Employment:** Owner of Luna's Mexican Bar and Grill on Varick Street in Utica.

**Favorite movie:** "Titanic."

**Favorite TV show:** "Grey's Anatomy."

**Favorite quote:** "Live every day like it's your last."

if he did not totally agree. He did not want me to open a restaurant at first because he knows the amount of work and dedication it takes to succeed in this industry. But he is the reason that I am and will be successful in food service.

**Your dad has owned Tasty Treat in North Utica for many years. Did you learn any business skills from him that you employ at**

**your restaurant?**

I was taught from a very young age by him how to do all I know. He has taught me everything from customer service, to hiring people, to the back-of-the-house jobs. In fact, he even works for me during his off season.

**At age 16, you said, "God is like my best friend." Is he still your best friend?**

I think God will always be like a best friend to me because He is always there and never judges. To me, that is the definition of a best friend.

**Your children are very young now, but what do you hope to teach them about your Catholic faith?**

I hope my children get to have the same experiences as I did growing up in the Catholic Church. I made many friends and I still have those relationships today. I want them to explore their faith within the church and I know they will.

**What do you hope the future holds for you and your family?**

I hope that I have continued success in my business and, hopefully, some day my husband can quit his job and work alongside me.



# Above the altar of sacrifice

## Getting to know those men on ceiling above sanctuary

*Chapter 1 in a series on our parish history and its artwork. Today, meet Isaiah. Coming this spring, Booz.*

Once the eyes have been drawn to the apse of our church above the sanctuary, where the magnificent reproduction of the upper half of Raphael's "Dispute of the Holy Sacrament" resides, they wander over other artistic representations around the church.

If we follow the height of the apse and draw back just a bit, we encounter the figures of four gentlemen on the sides of the arch formed over the altar of sacrifice. On the left side of the arch are found the figures of Isaia and Booz. On the right side of the arch are Balaam and Esdra.

Isaia, or Isaiah in English, was one of the five major prophets of the Old Testament. Modern biblical scholars believe that there were three writers whose names have come down to us as one. Together (or singularly) they are the most influential of all the Hebrew prophets.



A.J. VALENTINI

Isaiah's writings (we will refer to him in the singular to avoid confusion) are cited more than any other Hebrew text in the New Testament and continue to be among the most influential to Christians everywhere, even in our own time. Isaiah called out the men of Judah for their political decisions and the women for their wicked behavior. He was harsh and he even challenged the religious order of his time.

Seven hundred years before Jesus told his first parable, Isaiah taught the Jews through his parable describing God as a vintner, tending his vines, yet disappointed by their fruit. It was an analogy that his listeners could understand — and it struck home.

The successive "Isaiahs" may have co-opted the first's name to give their musings more gravitas. Isaiah can sometimes be zealous in his criticism of other religions (such as that of Babylon) without really understanding his targets. There is evidence that one of the "Isaiahs"



Source: <https://searchisaiah.org>

**Isaiah's writings are cited more than any other Hebrew text in the New Testament and continue to be among the most influential to Christians everywhere, even in our own time.**

might have been a man named Meshullam of the house of David, and therefore a kinsman to Jesus.

The goal of Isaiah's teaching was to exhort the Jews to faithfulness and proclaim the coming of the Messiah. He foretold many things about Jesus' life and His Second Coming. As Isaiah's prophecies about Christ's life came to fruition, Christians believe his predictions about the Second Coming also will be fulfilled.

Isaiah is a fitting character to hover over the altar as he, like John the Baptist, was a harbinger of Jesus Christ.

Sources: Staff, B. "Who Was Isaiah? Biblical Archaeology Society." <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/people-in-the-bible/who-was-isaiah/>; White, "Who is Isaiah in the Bible and Why is He Important?" Beliefnet. <https://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/christianity/who-is-isaiah-in-the-bible.aspx>



Isaia (Isaiah) as depicted in our church above the sanctuary.

**I**saia, or Isaiah in English, was one of the five major prophets of the Old Testament. Modern biblical scholars believe that there were three writers whose names have come down to us as one. Together (or singularly) they are the most influential of all the Hebrew prophets.

## COVER STORY

Continued from Page 3

The couple attends church regularly now and Salvie is a lector at the Saturday Mass.

### Why the decline?

Why have people turned away from the church?

Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament pastor, the Rev. Jim Cesta, said societal changes have contributed greatly to the problem.

"We live in a practically post-Christian kind of culture," he said. "We are enveloped in entertainment, media, teaching on all levels, especially higher education, that clearly are hostile to the teachings and values of our Christian, and especially Catholic, ways.

"The degrading of family life, separation and divorce so often seems to be rough ground for faith, Catholic traditions, holy seasons and sacraments to be nurtured," Father Jim said. "Of course, in the last few years the revealing of scandals among clergy and other church personnel, reaching back even 50 years, have given some the amount of disappointment to leave practicing faith and our public worship."

The Rev. Tom Servatius, former Mount Carmel parishioner and current pastor of Historic Old St. John's Church, said many factors have over a long period of time have contributed to the decline in attendance.

"A lot has happened since 1970 — Vietnam, several Gulf conflicts, Berlin Wall, 9/11, technological advances, social media, climate change, the decline of unions, the evolving meaning of the word 'family,' the list goes on and on," he said. "Meanwhile, we've had five very different popes leading a church which is still trying to figure out Vatican II. Historically, it takes a century or so to make sense out a council as major as that one. As we have tried to do so, our message has sometimes been mixed, and there's been some confusion and infighting. People get plenty of that during the week. They don't need another dose on a Sunday morning.

"Meanwhile, other issues have turned people off from Mass attendance," Father Tom said. "These include the sexual abuse crisis and our initially poor response to its manifestation. Clericalism, particularly when the clergy act like they are better than others, also has been quite damaging. I think there also is an issue of



Father Tom Servatius and Father Jim Cesta.

irrelevance, and this lays heavily on those who occupy the pulpit. Many people do not find our message to be overly relevant to their lives, and in response many have moved on to something else. Some have developed pretty sophisticated and useful spiritual lives. But they had to do so elsewhere."

Some reasons are closer to home for many people.

"I also think that a number of people, after working a particularly stressful week, are just too mentally exhausted to deal with church," Father Tom said. "They're opting for sleep, quality time with loved ones, laundry, grocery shopping, working out, sports programs, etc. I'm not justifying it. It is just the reality right now."

Father Jim said the divide is very personal for many.

"I think one of the most significant, and sad, obstacles that militate against people taking part in weekend Mass is the popular and currently growing trend to say that a person's faith is spiritual but not 'religious,'" he explained. "By religious they mean no need to gather in community with others or take part in ritual public shared worship. Many young people, 20s to 40s, have fallen prey to this way of making excuses. When asked of a person who professes 'no faith' puts into practice their 'spiritual' life, usually there is no answer. The Good Lord always gathered folks to a special place and made it sacred, many times a table. We are summoned and invited to the table of the altar in the company of our brothers and sisters in faith."

### What can be done?

We all know people — even family and friends — who have strayed from church. What can we do to encourage them to return?

"My suggestion for encouraging practice of the faith is to remind them that the table for Thanksgiving or Christmas, your parents' anniversary dinner, a family birthday all would be lacking, not as good, without you," Father Jim said. "We are at our best when we are gathered together, especially at the table of the Lord.

"I tell Confirmation-age young people that God gives us 168 hours each week ... God only asks for one hour a week to offer thanks and worship. If I give a young person \$168 and only ask for \$1 in return, isn't that a very good deal?"

Father Tom said too often we embrace a one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to evangelization.

"We need to avoid engaging people with where we think they are, or where we think they should be," he said. "Instead, start with where the people actually are and accept them for where they actually are. This applies to all aspects of parish life, not just Confirmation programs.

"All of us — not just the hierarchy, not just the priests — but all of us need to talk less and listen more," he added. "This should apply to anyone we encounter, regardless of age. Talk less. Listen more. Indeed, we need a solidarity with those who are not coming to Mass. Sure, there are good things we can teach them. But there is much they can teach us as well."

Salvie and Carmen also offered advice.

"Try to zoom out and see the bigger picture," Salvie said. "It's not always easy and it's not always immediately obvious. See the value in community and coming together and building relationships with God as a foundation. God is in what we do and what we give to each other."

His wife agrees.

"God has a way reaching of out to say, 'You need me, you need to hear my words and you need my family for strength,'" Carmen said. "Listen. There is a reason He is calling you. The more we allow Him in our lives the more of a blessing He brings to us. He knows we all wander, but he forgives and allows us to come back. So don't think because it's been so long that he won't be there for you. He's always there. He's just waiting and calling. Just listen."

(Note: Salvie Perritano is the writer's nephew.)

## FATHER LUIS

Continued from Page 4

each of us has a unique relationship with God.

Parents who have more than one child know that their children are different, that what works in a relationship with one child might not work with another. Each child relates differently to parents than his or her siblings do.

So, when we commit ourselves to loving others, we are not committing ourselves to a one-size-fits-all religious practice. We are committing ourselves to give our attention to the unique individuals around us, to listen to them, to know them, to respond to their unique needs.

No set of rules could ever fit everyone and every situation. Looking at each person and decision requires more effort and attention than responding automatically, but when we do so, we honor the other person.

Similarly, when we commit ourselves to a relationship with God, we are committing to a unique relationship that we each nurture in individual ways. We pray differently, we serve differently, we deepen our love for God by different spiritual practices.

Such indefiniteness makes some people uncomfortable. But when the jailer in Philippi asked them, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas did not give a list of rules about

future behavior and practice. They invited him into a relationship, saying simply, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." They did not stipulate how that believing had to begin or what form individual believing had to take, because Christ relates to each of us uniquely.

As we follow Christ, we will learn to recognize the spirit's nudges; we learn to recognize how God leads us individually. We cannot know where a such open-ended commitment will take us, but if we are following Christ, we can trust that our destination is somewhere deep within the heart of God.

Rules can be comforting, but the spiritual life is not about rules. It's about relationship.





# A little bit of normal in 2021

We all remember what 2020 was like. The pandemic upended our lives, even in our parish where the church was closed for months and all activities were canceled. This year, however, we were able to open our lives just a little bit, celebrating First Communion and Confirmation

(even in masks), Holy Week and Easter, acknowledging our 125th anniversary with an outdoor pasta dinner and the return of the Communion Brunch. It might not be full normal, but we were glad to be able to have some semblance of life as we once knew it.

