

MORE

GOOD NEWS

Father Jim up close and personal
Page 3



Our individual interests wrapped in our faith

This issue of “More Good News,” our parish quarterly newsletter, takes some space to offer an insight into some of the things that make me — Father Jim — as much a unique person as you, or any one of us.

Each person enjoys and clings to hobbies, talents, interests and activities that make us who we are. It might be sports, music, gardening, cooking, shopping, golf or pickleball — possibly painting or fishing.

It doesn't matter what it is. The point is most people have something, or several things, that attract their attention, hold their interest and bring a bit of life into the ordinary world and routine of every day.

What is amazing and a real blessing is that these diversions, hobbies and talents we enjoy are lived out and threaded like a golden string within and around our Catholic way of practicing the faith throughout the seasons.

In October, as autumn envelops us and nature changes around us, this season also prepares people of faith for the coming feasts, holy days and celebrations that mark much of what we



FATHER JIM CESTA

believe and hold within our hearts as companions of Jesus and members of the household of faith. All those diversions, talents and things we enjoy are beautifully wrapped around the things of faith — peace, hope redemption, mercy — the things that are eternal.

As we enter this fall season of the year, let's open our minds, hearts, and schedules to mark and honor those things that are the truths of our faith as much as we cherish those things that fashion each of us as a unique and one-of-a-kind child of God.

“What is amazing and a real blessing is that these diversions, hobbies and talents we enjoy are lived out and threaded like a golden string within and around our Catholic way of practicing the faith throughout the seasons.”

CELEBRATING THE SAINTS

Frances Xavier Cabrini

FEAST DAY NOV. 13

Frances Xavier Cabrini was the first United States citizen to be canonized. Her deep trust in the loving care of her God gave her the strength to be a valiant woman doing the work of Christ.

Refused admission to the religious order that had educated her to be a teacher, she began charitable work at the House of Providence Orphanage in Cadogno, Italy. In September 1877, she made her vows there and took the religious habit.

When the bishop closed the orphanage in 1880, he named Frances prioress of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart. Seven young women from the orphanage joined her.

Since her early childhood in Italy, Frances had wanted to be a missionary in China but, at the urging of Pope Leo XIII, Frances went west instead of east. She traveled with six sisters to New York City to work with the thousands of Italian immigrants living there.

She found disappointment and difficulties with every step. When she arrived in New York, the house intended to be her first orphanage in the United States was not available. The archbishop advised her to return to Italy. But Frances, truly a valiant woman, departed from



the archbishop's residence all the more determined to establish that orphanage. And she did.

In 35 years, Frances Xavier Cabrini founded 67 institutions dedicated to caring for the poor, the abandoned, the uneducated and the sick. Seeing great need among Italian immigrants who were losing their faith, she organized schools and adult education classes.

As a child, she was always frightened of water, unable to overcome her fear of drowning. Yet, despite this fear, she traveled across the Atlantic Ocean more than 30 times. She died of malaria in her own Columbus Hospital in Chicago.

PARISH WEBSITE

Visit 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



St. Mary of Mount Carmel Blessed Sacrament Parish

www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com and www.facebook.com/mountcarmelblessedsacrament

ABOUT THE PARISH

- Address: 648 Jay St., Utica, NY 13501.
- Telephone: 315-735-1482; fax: 315-735-9806.
- Office hours: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Thursday. Closed on Friday and national holidays.
- Faith Formation and Sacramental Center: 315-724-3950.
- Email: stmaryuticabldio.org
- Hearing impaired: Listening devices available in the sacristy.

MASS SCHEDULES

- **Weekend**
 - Saturday: 4:30 p.m. at St. Anthony & St. Agnes Parish
 - Sunday: 8 and 11 a.m. at Mount Carmel; 9:30 a.m. at St. Anthony.

Weekday

- Monday and Tuesday: 8:30 a.m. at St. Anthony & St. Agnes.
- Thursday and Friday: 8:30 a.m. in our parish.
- Please note: No morning Mass if Utica schools are closed due to inclement weather.

Holy Days

- Consult the bulletin and website.
- **SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION**
 - Saturday: 3:45 p.m. at St. Anthony & St. Agnes Parish and by appointment by calling Mount Carmel parish office.

MARRIAGE

- Couples must make arrangements six months in advance.

BAPTISM

- Call the parish office to arrange. Parents must attend a preparation class prior to the baptism of their 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 about this process.

- Welcome to our parish family. We invite you to become an active participant in our community. Call the parish office.

PARISH STAFF

- Pastor: Rev. Jim Cesta
- In Residence: Rev. Luis Olguin
- Treasurer: Riccardo Arcuri Sr. and Tony Leone
- Parish Office Manager: Terri Piazza-Paruzzo
- Faith Formation 6-8: Terri Piazza-Paruzzo
- Faith Formation 7-10: Anne Carbone-Elacqua
- Music Director: Peter Elacqua
- Website Manager, Bulletin Editor: Fran Ferritano
- Buildings and grounds: Lenny Jones



... AND MORE

Scan the QR code below to get the mobile version of the website and save it to your home screen Here's some of what you'll find:

- Wedding Planning Guide.
- Funeral Service Planning Guide.
- Weekly prayers, reflections, photos, videos and more to enrich your faith.
- Photo galleries
- Mass schedules





Two of Father Jim's passions are painting and sailing, both depicted in the sunroom of the rectory. The painting on the wall is his, as are other pieces of artwork hanging in the rectory. On the cover is another interest — music, especially classical music.

Meet the man behind the collar

Father Jim discusses his life, influences, priesthood

By FRAN PERRITANO

Father Jim Cesta celebrated his 50th anniversary of his priesthood earlier this year. He has spent the last 15 years as pastor of our parish. Most parishioners only know Father Jim as the priest who celebrates Sunday Mass, has a sense of humor and preaches great homilies. So, we decided to learn more about the man behind the collar. We sat down last month in the sunroom of the rectory to learn more.

What was your family life like growing up?

It wasn't awfully Catholic, except for Sundays. You know, He never missed church on Sundays, even in the summer when we lived in our summer home. We dress up, go to Mass in Cazenovia on Sundays, but no extra prayers. We never even said grace at meals. We were busy. My father was busy with education. My mother was a real estate broker.

What did you do when you hung out with friends?

Movies. Hiking trips.

Your father was in sports, right?

Well, yeah. He always refereed basketball, and he was a football coach on the side, and assistant superintendent of schools for Syracuse. He was a big athlete in his earlier life.

And your mother got you into music, right?

The Rev. James Cesta

- **Birthplace:** Syracuse. "My birthday is the same date every year — Dec. 18, the week before Christmas." And you're not going to give the year? "Well, these things aren't important."
- **Family:** Father Carmen and mother MaryAnn, both deceased. Sister Ann and her husband, Mark, in Old Lyme, CT; and younger brother Michael and his wife, Angela, in Cicero.
- **Education:** Grant Junior High School, Syracuse; Henniger High School, Syracuse; St. Lawrence University; seminary college in Ogdensburg; major seminary at St. Bernard's in Rochester; Leuven in Belgium with the Jesuits; courses in Rome, Italy, at

the Ancient School of San Anselmo.

- **Parishes served:** St. John's in Rome (first assignment), Holy Family in Fairmont, St. Agatha in Canastota, pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Oswego, Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament since July 2009.

- **Favorite activities:** Painting, music, piano, reading, landscaping, sailing.

- **Favorite TV show:** "Chicago PD."

- **Favorite movie:** "Key Largo."

- **Favorite quote:** "There is a little bit of bad in the best of us, and there's a little bit of good in the worst of us, so no one should talk about any of us."

No, no. I was the only one that liked music. Classical music.

How did you get into classical music?

I have no idea how. The other young kids were listening to The Beatles, and I was listening to Beethoven.

You went to public school and attended religious education classes and Mass on Sundays.

Well, we call the church school on Sunday

for an hour. We had great priests in our parish growing up — famous legendary priests who were a great influence.

That brings me to the next question. As a kid, were you ever thinking of becoming a priest?

Always. From 9 years old.

Why?

Please see FATHER JIM, Page 7

'Never miss a chance to say I love you'

Joe Siniscarco keeps — and lives — the faith

Joe Siniscarco and Mount Carmel are joined at the hip. He attended Mount Carmel School, has been a lifelong parishioner, was married in our church and has volunteered in a host of positions in the parish. It's been a big part of his life.

When you attended college, you majored in accounting and business administration. What drew you to that field?

I always liked working with numbers.

You worked for 33 years at MetLife. What did you do there and what was that experience like?

I worked in management in their Medical, Dental and Vision claims and Customer Service departments. MetLife was a good company to work for and enjoyed my career there.

Many of us worked in jobs for years that helped us raise a family. We all have, however, the "dream job" we would have liked to have. What was yours?

Because I love to cook, I would have liked to have opened up a breakfast and lunch diner. My father and I had these plans in place, but they ended when my dad died suddenly and unexpectedly.

Cooking is a passion of yours. Where did you learn to cook and what are your favorite dishes?

I learned the basics from my father and had friends who also taught me a lot. I love making homemade pasta.

You're a big soccer fan and are a season-ticket holder with our UCFC professional soccer team. Why soccer?

I guess I just learned the sport along with my girls over the years and grew to appreciate it.

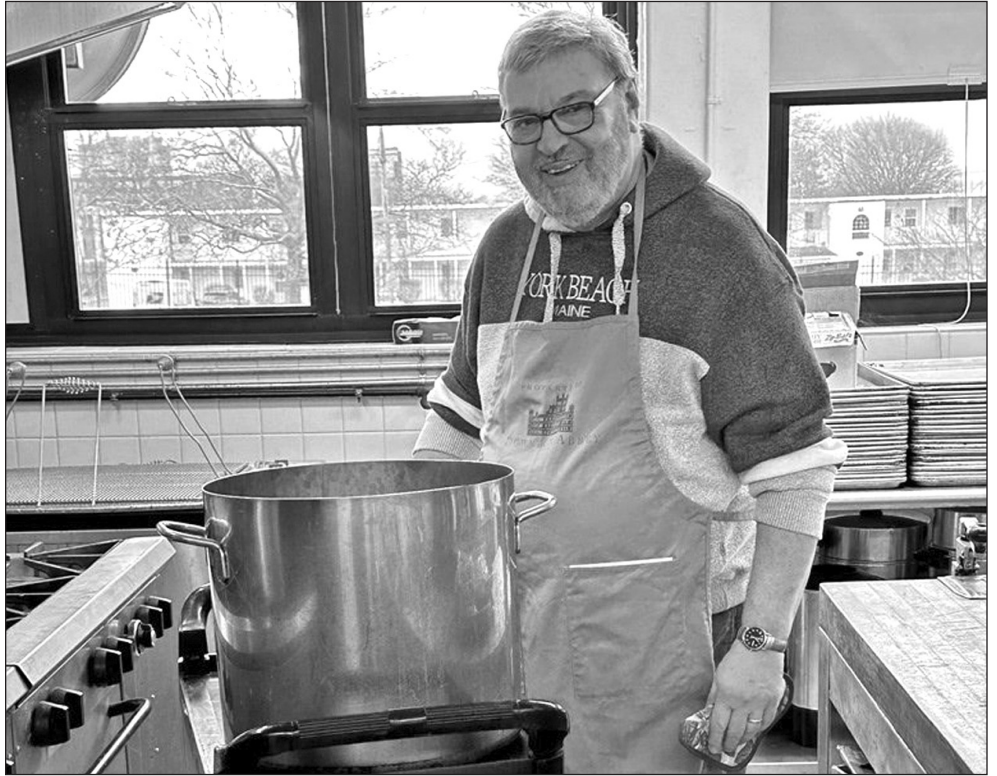
You're a father and now a grandfather. What's the difference between raising your girls and now being a grandparent?

Raising my girls was a big responsibility in so many ways and I cherished every moment with them. They are my legacy. Being a grandparent is just a total joy. Callan and I are best buddies.

You were married to Laurie for 46 years? You knew her since grammar school. Was there a magic moment when you both realized that you belonged together?

Laurie and I went to different high schools and different colleges. Looking back, I think it was right after college and we both started our careers.

Laurie bravely battled cancer for several years. It was an exceedingly challenging time for her, you and your family. How were you able to cope with the ups and downs?



Over the years, Joe has volunteered in the Confirmation program, worked with engaged couples and conducted wedding rehearsals, was president of the Social Committee and continues to be active member of this group, and currently is an altar server for funerals and Sunday Mass, lector and a eucharistic minister. He still continues to cook for special occasions.

Big support from my girls, family and friends. Also, my faith in God and accepting his ultimate plan for both Laurie and me.

What did you learn about life from that experience?

Never miss a chance to say "I love you."

You have been a life-long member of the parish. Over the years you have volunteered in the Confirmation program, worked with engaged couples and conducted wedding rehearsals, was president of the Social Committee and continue to be active member of this group, and currently you are an altar server for funerals and Sunday Mass, lector and a eucharistic minister. What drew you to volunteer so much of your time?

My love of this church and parish.

What does our parish mean to you?

It is an intricate part of my life.

If you could describe Joe Siniscarco, what would you say about him?

A person that hopes he made a difference in someone's life.

Joe Siniscarco

- **Age:** 70.
- **Family:** Married to the former Lorraine Bono for 46 years before she passed away earlier this year. Daughters Krista and Nicole. Grandson Callan.
- **Education:** Associate degree in accounting; bachelor's in business administration.
- **Work history:** 33-year career with MetLife Insurance managing its medical, dental and vision claims departments.
- **Favorite activities:** Playing cards and cooking. Just learned to play mahjong.
- **Favorite vacation spots:** West coast of Florida, Outer Banks and coast of Maine.
- **Favorite book:** "Tale of Two Cities."
- **Favorite movie:** "The Godfather," 1 and 2.
- **Favorite TV show:** "I Love Lucy."
- **Favorite quote:** "Too much of a good thing can be fun."

'Mother and friend'

Re Chiffy shares her experiences with Blessed Mother

Rosemarie Chiffy, 98, gave the following reflection on her relationship with the Blessed Mother during the Nine Week Novena in Honor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Hello everyone. I am fairly sure you all know who I am, and also, approximately how old I am, as well.

Father Jim asked me to speak of my relationship with Our Lady through the years. I am sure you all have your own interesting stories to tell, but I'm here to relate some of my own.

My devotion to Mary began at a very early age. My grandmother Mary Carmella was married in this church, or should I say in the basement of the church, because the main building was not completed at that time. Her mother, my great grandmother, had a devout relationship to Our Lady of Mount Carmel. She started the Mount Carmel Society, and later my grandmother took over. Grandma was so devoted to Our Lady that both of her daughters were named Mary, Mary Rose and Mary Magdalena, who was my mother.

Mom, of course, inherited the same immense devotion to Mary and passed it on to all of her children. Whatever we did, even the simplest tasks, were offered up to our Blessed Mother. It was this mindset and devotion that has carried me through some of the most difficult times of my life.

One of the first times I can remember leaning on Mary for strength was when my brother Sal contracted scarlet fever and he wasn't expected to survive. We all prayed to Mary and her infant son Jesus. My brother got well and lived a long and happy life. When my brother Fran went off to fight in Korea, again we turned to Mary. The rosary was said every day as we prayed for his safe return home. She was there for us yet again.

I guess it was easier for me growing up — there was no television, no cellphones, internet or other distractions. Our lives were centered around our families and the church. I am sure many of you remember those days. It was a beautiful time. My siblings and I attended Mount Carmel School where, under the guidance of the lovely Franciscan sisters, our relationship to Mary was strengthened.

The nuns taught us our prayers. One in particular comes to mind, "The Memorare" — *"Remember Oh most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession, was left unaided."*

Those words spoke to me, and I believe in them with all my heart. Mary will never abandon us.

There were many moments in my life where I thought I was faced with something I couldn't handle, when I wasn't sure of myself, when I doubted my ability. Mary carried me through all of those difficult moments, my faith in her intercession always unwavering.



"Throughout my life, Mary has been my constant companion, going with me to the hospital, to nursing homes, during every important moment of my life, even my trips to Las Vegas! She has never let me down and has never left me alone."

When I adopted my children, my relationship to Mary changed, as I had now become a mother myself, and I turned to her when I faced those challenges. My son is disabled, and some days were really hard. I didn't know how to handle things sometimes, doubt filling my mind with anxiety, and I turned to Mary for guidance. Mary has always watched over my son and my daughter, who also has a very strong devotion to Our Blessed Mother.

Some years ago, I was told I had to have a very difficult surgery, and I was very scared. I had scans that confirmed the need for this dangerous procedure. As I prepared for the day of the surgery, I prayed to Mary to keep me safe and to intercede for me. At the pre-op appointment, further tests concluded that I no longer needed the surgery, and the doctors weren't sure how that was possible. I knew though. I knew Mary had been there for me yet again.

In 1988, I became a divorced Catholic. I was mortified and so afraid that Mary and Jesus were disappointed in me. I didn't feel I could lector anymore and felt unable to face the congregation. Again, through Mary's assistance, I regained my confidence, and here I am.

As Father has pointed out, Church isn't a place for saints, it's a place for all of us to ask for and receive God's grace. We are all imperfect, striving for perfection with the assistance of our most Blessed Mother, who loves us as our own mothers here on Earth.

Throughout my life, Mary has been my constant companion, going with me to the hospital, to nursing homes, during every important moment of my life, even my trips to Las Vegas! She has never let me down and has never left me alone.

She was, and always shall be, my most devoted mother and friend.

Coro Italiano rises to a new crescendo

Over the last two years, the parishioners of St. Mary of Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament Parish have been reacquainting themselves with an organization that was born on its campus some 40 years ago.

In those days, the former convent next to the church housed the newly founded Italian-American museum. Inspired by Alex Haley's success with his historical novel "Roots," not only the Black community but ethnic groups of every origin experienced a renewed interest in their stories. The museum, and a small group of singers who began rehearsing there — known as Coro Italiano — were an outgrowth of the interest in Italian-American history and culture.

The founder of Coro Italiano was a familiar face on the entertainment scene in the Utica area. Pasquale SantaCroce, an educator in the Utica schools, had moonlighted for years as the in-house singer at the former Trinkaus Manor and as lead singer for the Banda Rossa. He and his



A.J. VALENTINI

wife, Alberta, organized Coro Italiano with a handful of singers and a few local musicians. With these modest beginnings the group continued to grow to include up to 30 singers.

The repertoire included well-known traditional Italian songs and Italian-American standards made popular by such artists as Dean Martin, Al Martino, Jerry Vale, Tony Bennett, Julius LaRosa and Louis Prima. Soon, the group was performing in nursing homes, festivals and school functions throughout the area.

After a good long run, Pasquale passed away on Feb. 24, 2020. For that and the cessation of most social functions during the COVID pandemic, Coro Italiano ceased to exist. But the love of the music and the joy of sharing it with their audiences was alive in several of the Coro members. They had a successor to Pasquale's leadership in mind.

Alfredo (Fred) Valentini (the author of this article) was a familiar face in Utica's Italian-American community. A veteran of 33 years teaching Italian in Utica schools and more than 20 years at local colleges (there was overlap — he's not that old), he had collaborated with the Coro on several events in the schools, at the Sons of Italy Lodge and at the former Riverside Mall.

Valentini had a long history in the performing arts, having participated in community theater, danced with the Mohawk Valley Performing Arts, taught dance locally and at the University of Albany, and sung with multiple vocal groups



Pasquale Santa Croce and his wife, Alberta, formed Coro Italiano about 40 years ago. After his death and the COVID pandemic, the group disappeared for a while until Alfredo Valentini, above, helped resurrect the group, which this year has performed at more than 30 events.

How to join

Coro Italiano always welcomes new singers. Rehearsals are at 11 a.m. on Thursdays at the North Utica Community Center on Riverside Drive. Interested? Call 315-542-2144.

in Utica and in the Capital District. He also was associated with, or director of, Proctor High School's after-school theater arts program for 30 years. Valentini had shown his dedication to Italian culture through his professional career as a teacher and author of a textbook series and rising to the presidency of the former Utica Lodge of the Sons of Italy.

The "Professore" jokes that the Coro members snagged him during a lull in his schedule. Trying to teach remotely through COVID convinced him to cease teaching at Utica University. Passing the time creating mediocre art wasn't cutting it either. So, after repeated approaches by former Coro members, Valentini said he would try directing the choir on a "trial" basis.

Taking a different approach to presenting their music, Valentini researched songs and found prerecorded tracks to accompany the singers.

This instilled more life into performances and helped create a more polished product. He still included some of the old familiar "chestnuts" in the repertoire but also introduced some more contemporary songs to bring a fresh representation of Italian culture.

Prof. V can explain to audiences what the songs they are about to hear mean. Also, as a former dancer, he likes to get audiences involved by having them clap in rhythm and dancing in their seats. A nurse at one of the facilities in which the Coro performs said this is "great therapy for the residents."

The formula must work. From the first year under his direction, when the group performed at a handful of events, the demand has increased for new performances. From January through September this year, the Coro has performed 33 "gigs." The geographical breath of venues has grown as well. Coro Italiano has performed from Little Falls to Rome (NY) and will perform in Syracuse this month.

With its resurrection and new life, the group now bills itself as the "Coro Italiano of the Mohawk Valley." It represents one of the best things about Italian culture in our area and is proud to be a part of the entertainment scene of Central New York.

FATHER JIM

Continued from Page 3

Because I like the rituals and everything about it.

When did you finally know that this was it? It doesn't sound like it was the bolt of lightning.

No, no. It was always there. And actually, my grandparents were an influence, too. They always said you should be a priest — you'll never starve! And I like people. And events and gatherings.

And so, you're biggest influencers were some priests and your grandparents?

And the example of the family very devoted to weekend Mass worship.

I've been told by a good friend of yours that you weren't very outgoing in the seminary, and that you were kind of laid back a little bit. We know you as the outgoing joke-telling priest.

Well, it was the time to study. I mean, you know, you can't play around for nine years in the seminary. You have to study and write. But I was in with fun groups. Seminaries are not fun.

So, no going to bars after lessons?

Oh yeah, sure — later in the graduate school era, when you're 23, 24.

That's where you got your taste for ...

Wine!

From whom did you get your sense of humor?

My father. He was known in the whole Syracuse school district.

When did you realize, as a priest, that you can draw people in using your sense of humor?

From the beginning, even as a deacon. When you would give a talk or run a meeting or something, if you start by humor, you can get their attention. Humor is a great hook.

You're also known for your homilies. How did you hone that skill?

I've kissed the Blarney Stone three times in Ireland! I don't know. It's just that some have it and some don't. And one thing the Catholic priests are not known for is preaching or homilies. The one mistake they make is they talk about all the readings at Sunday Mass — first, second, the gospel. From the very beginning, my priests who taught me said you're ordained to preach the gospel. The other two are for your background. Your homework. Don't feel like you have to treat all three. People get bored, and it takes too long.

And you always seem to talk about, when you're reflecting on the gospel, what does it mean to us now.

For today. That's right. They don't want a history lesson.

Is that from the generation you grew up with, because I guess we would consider you guys the young radical priests at the time (1970s and '80s)?

Well, the younger priests today are a little more theological and historical. But they finally get around to applying it to people's daily living, but that's what people want to hear.

And where did you learn to keep it short? You're about eight minutes every Sunday.



Father Jim holds a book in his living room about Italy, one of his favorite places to visit. As far as retirement, he says it's not going to happen. "Until death do us part," is his philosophy.

Well, Pope Francis recently said that sermons should be eight minutes, but I knew that 40 years ago. A good sermon has a good beginning, a good end and about eight minutes in between.

Do you have a highlight of your priesthood?

Well, let's see. One would be about 30 years ago when I arranged for the big Holy Saturday Easter service in the Penn-Can shopping mall in North Syracuse because our church then was too small. I turned the whole place into a cathedral, setting the candles, banners, all kinds of things. And we had about 4,500 people filling the mall. It made the New York state news. Another highlight would be living in Rome, Italy, for a while and having Mass with St. Pope John Paul II in his private chapel — just eight people. A couple of times I was there for that. And, well, weddings, funerals, baptisms. I enjoy them all. They're all very special.

Obviously, in everybody's life not everything is a highlight. How do you cope with disappointments?

Just move on, move on. You're not going to bat, what is it, 300? What is it? You're not going to bowl 300 all the time.

Why do you think people stop coming to Mass?

Well, there's too many diversions and distractions. Now, you can't get people to sign up for a bowling league or a card club because there's 600 channels, Netflix, so on and so forth. People are very busy, both parents working. Sunday is a day not to get dressed up and go to Mass, but to just do your own thing.

What's going to get people back?

What gets people back is the people that are showing up to do their part of the task, which is to share the good word, encourage and even entice. Their relatives and friends to come to

weekend Mass. The people that are showing up should be the fishermen to bring in the ones who are away. That would be very helpful. Some do, but most don't. They're timid. They're shy. They've been taught not to talk about religion or politics.

Why is it hard for Catholics to talk about religion?

Because, well, because we are a sacramental church — baptism, marriage, confession, communion, priesthood, confirmation — and they don't know how to talk about the thread running through it, which is a personal relationship with Jesus, with God. Where the churches that aren't sacramental, that's all they have is the relationship with the Lord, so that's all they have to talk about, and they talk about it. Because we're set up as a sacramental system, they talk about, well, they made their First Communion at such and such a church, but they don't talk about who they met in communion.

Do you ever question God?

Not really. Maybe someday if I have a great tragedy I will. It hasn't happened yet.

After 50 years of priesthood, what still motivates you?

The people. I enjoy people and the points in their life with baptism, marriage, death. Things like that I'd like to be there when they face those things. I'm motivated by people who are fun and have humor and don't sweat the small stuff.

How would you like people to remember you?

By the street that they named after me! I don't know. I don't. I have no idea how they feel we're remembered.

Is there anything else about Father Cesta that we need to know?

No intention of retiring. Until death do us part.



Summer scenes of parish fun

We couldn't have asked for better weather for the parish's two major summer events — the Italian Festival and Golf Tournament. Thousands attended the July festival with numerous parish volunteers giving of their time and talent. In late August, the 11th Golf Tournament drew more than 90 players to Twin Ponds Golf & Country Club. Let's not forget to thank Our Lady of Mount Carmel for the beautiful weather and summer safety.



View more photos on the parish website at www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com