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# Celebrating 50 years of serving God's people

As the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ordination to the Catholic priesthood comes very soon in the month of May for me and a few of my classmates, many thoughts and reflections come to mind.

Of course, the church has changed and progressed in many ways since the late 1970s — in ways that recognize the church as a living, growing and pulsing people of God who exist in the times and circumstances of the years as they go by.

There have been so many seasons and moments of wonderful triumph and joy and celebration, as well as moments of some shame and setback. What always is present and always has been is the faith and delight found among the regular and loyal practicing people of the parishes where I have been privileged to serve.

Our faith-filled seasons — whether Advent, Lent, Christmas or Easter; holy days and cel-



FATHER JIM CESTA

ebrations of saints; special festivals and customs; traditions and family and friends' gatherings — bring back many memories to me.

When it comes right down to it, if you love the Lord and you love all kinds of people, the Catholic parish priesthood is a terrific life!

Best wishes to all those priests who mark their anniversary this month.

***When it comes right down to it, if you love the Lord and you love all kinds of people, the Catholic parish priesthood is a terrific life!***

## CELEBRATING THE SAINTS

### Our Lady of Fatima

FEAST DAY: MAY 13

Between May 13 and Oct. 13, 1917, three Portuguese children — Francisco and Jacinta Marto and their cousin Lucia dos Santos — received apparitions of Our Lady at Cova da Iria near Fatima, a city 110 miles north of Lisbon.

Mary asked the children to pray the rosary for world peace, for the end of World War I, for sinners, and for the conversion of Russia.

Mary gave the children three secrets. Following the deaths of Francisco and Jacinta in 1919 and 1920, respectively, Lucia revealed the first secret in 1927. It concerned devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The second secret was a vision of hell. When Lucia grew up she became a Carmelite nun and died in 2005 at the age of 97.

Pope John Paul II directed the Holy See's Secretary of State to reveal the third secret in 2000. It spoke of a "bishop in white" who was shot by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows into him. Many people linked this vision to the assassination attempt against Pope John Paul II in St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981.

The feast of Our Lady of Fatima was approved by the local bishop in 1930; it was added to the Church's worldwide calendar in 2002.

The message of Fatima is simple: Pray. Unfortunately, some people — not Sister Lucia — have distorted these revelations, making them



into an apocalyptic event for which they are now the only reliable interpreters. They have, for example, claimed that Mary's request that the world be consecrated to her has been ignored.

Sister Lucia agreed that Pope John Paul II's public consecration in St. Peter's Square on March 25, 1984, fulfilled Mary's request. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith prepared a June 26, 2000, document explaining the "third secret."

Mary is perfectly honored when people generously imitate her response "Let it be done to me as you say" (Luke 1:38). Mary can never be seen as a rival to Jesus or to the Church's teaching authority, as exercised by the college of bishops united with the bishop of Rome.

## 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



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

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

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| <p><b>ABOUT THE PARISH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address: 648 Jay St., Uxco, NY 13501.</li> <li>• Telephone: 315-735-1482; fax: 315-735-9806.</li> <li>• Office hours: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., Monday through Thursday. Closed on Friday and national holidays.</li> <li>• Faith Formation and Sacramental Center: 315-724-3950.</li> <li>• Email: <a href="mailto:stmaryscatholic@ny13501.org">stmaryscatholic@ny13501.org</a></li> <li>• Hearing impaired: Listening devices available in the sacristy.</li> </ul> <p><b>MASS SCHEDULES</b></p> <p><b>Weekend</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saturday: 4:30 p.m. (livestream on parish YouTube channel)</li> <li>• Sunday: 8 and 11 a.m.</li> </ul> <p><b>Weekday</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monday and Tuesday: 8:30 a.m. at St. Anthony &amp; St. Agnes.</li> <li>• Thursday and Friday: 8:30 a.m. in our parish.</li> </ul> <p>• Please note: No morning Mass if office schools are closed due to inclement weather.</p> <p><b>Holy Days</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult the bulletin and website.</li> </ul> <p><b>RECONCILIATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saturday: 3:45 p.m.</li> </ul> <p><b>MARRIAGE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Couples must make arrangements six months in advance.</li> </ul> | <p><b>BAPTISM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call the parish office to arrange. Parents must attend a preparation class prior to the baptism of their child.</li> </ul> <p><b>RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> </ul> <p><b>NEW PARISHIONERS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> </ul> <p><b>PARISH STAFF</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pastor: Rev. Jim Cesta</li> <li>• In Residence: Rev. Luis Olguin</li> <li>• Trustees: Rocco Arcuri Sr. and Bill Thibault</li> <li>• Parish Office Manager: Terri Piazza-Panaccio</li> <li>• Faith Formation 6-6: Terri Piazza-Panaccio</li> <li>• Faith Formation 7-10: Anne Carlone-Elacqua</li> <li>• Music Director: Peter Elacqua</li> <li>• Website Manager, Bulletin Editor: Fran Ferritano</li> <li>• Buildings and grounds: Lemmy Jones</li> </ul> |
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## ... 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



# A few good men

## Lack of priests forcing pastors to take on more parishes



FATHER JIM CESTA

By FRAN PERRITANO

For nearly a year, Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament's pastor, the Rev. Jim Cesta, has been splitting his weekend worship between Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament and St. Anthony & St. Agnes parishes.

The Rev. Tom Servatius, pastor at Historic Old St. John's, also shepherds St. Joseph-St. Patrick, St. Peter's and St. Mark's parishes. In addition, he also is vicar for the Greater Utica Area in the Syracuse diocese.

The Rev. Jason Hage is pastor of Mary, Mother of Our Savior Parish, which is two churches — Lourdes and Our Lady of the Rosary. Prior to that, he also pastored four parishes along Route 20. And, if that's not enough, he's also director of the diocese's Office of Vocation Promotion.

Welcome to the reality of being a priest in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

With the number of priests continuing to decline, clergy have had to take on more than one parish — sometimes two, three, four or more.

Bishop Douglas Lucia acknowledges those demands have affected the clergy.

"The feeling of being pulled in different directions, greater demands being made of them, harder to get their days off or vacation/retreat time, multiplication in bookkeeping and administrative duties, lessening of priestly fraternity due to schedule and distance," the bishop listed as the challenges. "For our younger priests, either self-expectations or those of others, especially centered on their youthfulness, may be unrealistic and lead to burnout."

In the Syracuse diocese, there are 69 active priests serving 116 parishes. That's down from 97 in 2019, 126 in 2014 and 196 in 2004. Forty-seven of those are older than 60; others are in their 70s and some in their 80s.

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate reports that in 1965 there were 59,426 priests in the United States. In 2022, there were 34,344. Over much the same period, the number of Catholics has increased to 72.5 million in 2022, from 54 million in 1970.

### Our local challenge

Fathers Cesta, Servatius and Hage have found their calling more challenging.

"Higher levels of fatigue," said Father Servatius, 64, a priest for 21 years. "I know I'm a lot more forgetful these days. And sometimes I feel pretty overwhelmed by everything that is not done. Days off and vacations are elusive sometimes, as has quality time with close friends."

It is very demanding emotionally, physically, spiritually and psychologically, said Father Hage, 38, who shepherded the four Route 20



The Rev. Tom Servatius, left, and the Rev. Jason Hage take a break from their busy schedules and enjoy last year's Parish Festival. Father Servatius is pastor of four parishes while Father Hage, who is pastor of the two churches that comprise Mary, Mother of Our Savior Parish, once managed four parishes along Route 20.

parishes for six years.

"Bringing together all four parishes, especially after two priests died in the same year in our one Pastoral Care Area (was a challenge). I was the only pastor/priest for the entire PCA."

Among the three priests, Father Cesta has been doing it the longest — 50 years. He's taking things in stride.

"Personally, I enjoy the two parishes, similar in being strongly of Italian heritage but different in tone," he said. "I enjoy sharing the Gospel message with many people."

He does acknowledge there are many concerns to deal with, including scheduling Masses, funerals and weddings; arranging extra clergy to cover services; and being present to both parishes as much as possible. He also said fundraising for both parishes, inviting more participation in ministries and practicing Catholics at Mass and weekdays are challenging.

"The ongoing solution is the arranging of scheduling in such a way that most people are content — although not everyone will be," Father Cesta said. "Also, the merging of religious education and some programs and special events will also take place."

Father Servatius said he sometimes feels like he can't adequately respond to the spiritual needs of his flock.

"While I know that I frequently fall short of

what is needed, I remind myself that I'm doing the best I can. I'm grateful for those who are understanding, and at arm's length I keep those who are not. I have to do that for my own survival.

"Too many in most parishes, not just mine, think that while there are changes to be made — the changes are to take place in a parish other than one's own. Closely related is the belief that we should continue just as we are, when clearly that is not the case. We have to make some serious and significant changes and do them soon. Meanwhile, there are way too many people simply concerned about going to 'their Mass' in 'their pew' in 'their church' at 'their time.' That's got to change."

### Finding solutions

So, what's to be done?

Bishop Lucia, in a meeting with Utica area parish clergy and leaders in March, said parishes need to look at consolidating and collaborating in things such as Mass scheduling, use of buildings, religious education and more. He said cooperation among parishes is key to survival. He noted that the Catholic churches in the city of Rome, while remaining open, are devising a plan to become one parish.

"I don't think each parish," he said. "In my

Please see **PRIEST SHORTAGE**, Page 7

# It's nice to be like Mike

## Michael Arcuri happy where his diverse life has led

*Michael Arcuri has accomplished a lot in his years on the planet. He has been a college football player, a lawyer, district attorney, Congressman, family man and much more. Most of all, he loves the area and the people in it.*

**You're Utica born and raised, have traveled the country and the world, served in the U.S. Congress — and yet, after all that, you returned home.**

Utica is my home. It's where I grew up, where my family and friends live. I could not imagine going to church on Saturday and not seeing old friends.

**You played football at the University at Albany. What lessons did you learn from that sport that you use in your life?**

Football taught me discipline and the necessity for hard work in order to succeed. But most importantly as a center, I learned that without teamwork you can never achieve the goals you set.

**You majored in history and minored in economics. Somehow, you ended up being a lawyer. How was that decision made?**

My grandfather Dominic always pushed me to be a lawyer and my mother knew I liked politics, so she thought being a lawyer might be the safer and smarter career path. When I lost my Congressional seat and was able afterward to immediately get a job practicing law, I stopped to see her, gave her a hug and thanked her for her foresight and wisdom.

**You were Oneida County district attorney for 12 years. What do you remember most about serving in that position?**

I tried 10 murder/attempted murder cases and oversaw hundreds more, which helped to put some bad people in jail. But we also worked hard to not deal with the effects but to address the cause. To that end, we created the first-ever county-wide Drug Task Force, we helped usher in Drug Courts in Utica and Rome, we set up victim impact panels, and I am most proud of having set up the first Child Advocacy Center in New York state.

**Why did you decide to run for Congress?**

There were a number of reasons ... but I think most salient was my opposition to the war in Iraq and my desire to get the troops home.

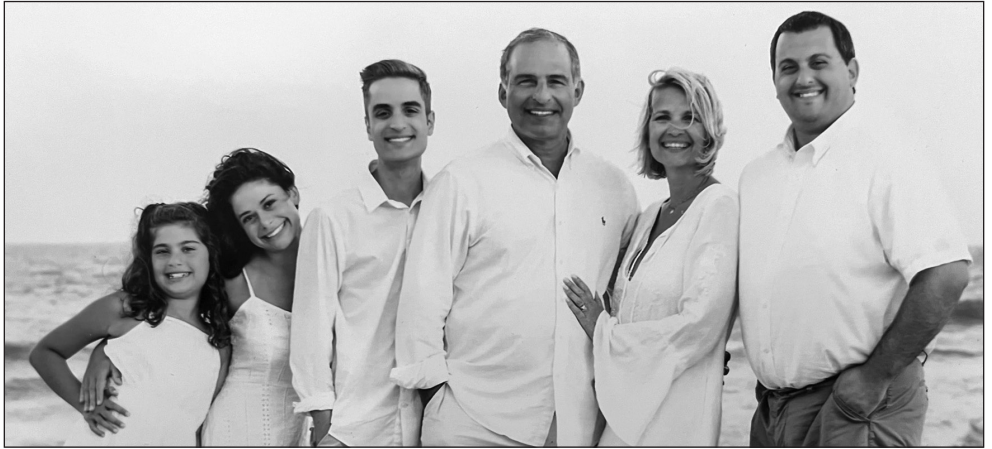
**What was that experience like?**

My experience in Congress was like nothing I had ever experienced. It was the hardest most time-consuming unappreciated job I ever loved. I made many good friends that I still keep in regular and close contact with. I would never trade my time there, but on the other hand I am the happiest I have ever been with my current life.

**You served for two terms. How did losing an election affect you?**

While it is always difficult to lose, I looked at it as having been incredibly lucky to serve the people of Central New York for four years. In politics sometimes you ride the wave and sometimes you get knocked down by it. That's just the way it is.

**Your thoughts on politics in 2024.**



Michael and Sabrina Arcuri with their family: sons Carmen Joseph and Nicholas Francis; daughters Dominique Terese and Sophia Rose.

### Michael Arcuri

- **Family:** Wife Sabrina; children Carmen, Dominique, Nicholas, Joseph and Sophia.
- **Occupation:** Partner at Ward Arcuri Foley & Dwyer Law Firm; former U.S. Congressman and Oneida County district attorney.
- **Things you like to do in your spare time:** Read, travel, garden, family vacations, evening and Sunday dinners.
- **Favorite vacation spots:** Italy; Old Orchard Beach, Maine.
- **Favorite movie:** "Moonstruck."
- **Favorite TV show:** "Ancient Aliens."
- **Favorite musical artists:** Lynyrd Skynyrd, Dean Martin, Bruce Springsteen.
- **Favorite quote:** "Success is how high you bounce when you hit bottom." (Gen. George S. Patton)

It is hard to imagine how much things have changed just in the short time that I have been out of office, but the partisan divide has grown to the point where it seems less about accomplishing what is best for our country and more about obtaining and maintaining personal power.

**You're a member of a loyal Mount Carmel parish until his death. Your mom, Betty, also was very active in the church. Share your thoughts on how Mount Carmel and your family have been instrumental in your life.**

Having attended school and received all of my sacraments at Mount Carmel it only stands to reason that the church has always been the center of our lives. From the highlight of the summer, "The Feast," to Christmas Eve Mass, I could not imagine life without Mount Carmel. It's not the bricks and mortar that make Mount Carmel what it is, although it is truly one of the most beautiful churches in Utica. It is not the music and liturgies, although they are very spe-

cial. To me Mount Carmel is about East Utica and the people and history that Mount Carmel is such a large part of. While I no longer live in East Utica, it will be a part of me, and I will always be a part of Mount Carmel.

**You volunteer as a lector, offer your legal services and open clams at the festival. Why is opening clams your favorite?**

Opening clams is my favorite volunteer work I do at the church. I think because my daughter Dominique (who I taught to shuck clams) joins me and we open with the Leone Family and a number of other families from the parish. The work can be tough, but we laugh, reminisce and I get to see people I haven't seen in years. For me it is like reconnecting with my past.

**You also volunteer and are a member of many area organizations? Why do you do that and why is it important to you?**

I often think of the old saying my father use to say to me, "To those who much is given much is expected." I have been incredibly lucky in my life! God has blessed myself and my family so many times and in so many ways, whatever little I can do to make my community a better place is the very least I can do.

**How has your faith shaped your life when things were going good and when rough times came along?**

Like so many others, faith and family have always been what have helped to keep me grounded and focused on what is important. Faith to me is the road map I rely on when I've lost my way. Faith and family are the crutch I lean on when I am hurting or grieving, and family is who I celebrate with when all is good.

**What advice would you give others that you've shared with your children?**

I try to impart on them that life is a bumpy ride and on the trip of life there are two things you can always count on. First, it will not be easy; and second, when God closes a door, he always opens a window and sometimes that window is much better than the first door, but it is up to you to find that window and have the courage to climb through.

# FIRST COMMUNION CLASS OF 2024



**Liliana E.**  
**Age:** 7  
**Parents:** Dan and Marisa  
**Brother:** Deacon  
**If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?**  
 Does God or the angels bring you up to heaven when you die?



**Anthony G.**  
**Age:** 8  
**Parents:** David and Jodie  
**Brother:** David  
**If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?**  
 Could you bring more peace to the world?



**Serafina G.**  
**Age:** 7  
**Parents:** Nicholas and Serina  
**Brother:** Nicky  
**If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?**  
 Please watch over and protect my family.



**Audrina G.**  
**Age:** 8  
**Parents:** Gianna and James  
**Sister:** Mila  
**If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?**  
 I wish for my dog Jeffy and my Poppa Ralph and Poppy.



**Gabriella H.**  
**Age:** 7  
**Parents:** Rick and Sarah  
**Brother:** Aiden  
**If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?**  
 Watch over me and my family.



**Joidon H.**  
**Age:** 8  
**Parents:** Day and Chi Chi  
**Brothers:** Petrucci, Johncci and Jackson  
**Sister:** Alena  
**If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?**  
 What's Heaven like?



**Layla J.**  
**Age:** 8  
**Parents:** Greg and Madeline  
**Brother:** Blake  
**If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?**  
 Could you help with world peace?



**Dominick L.**  
**Age:** 8  
**Parents:** Brang Seng and Maran Lahtem  
**Sisters:** Patricia and Nova  
**If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?**  
 I want to be a doctor.



**Sophia S.**  
**Age:** 7  
**Parents:** Stephen and Maryangela  
**Sisters:** Tressa and Natalie  
**If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?**  
 Is my dog Ariel in heaven?



**Charles S.**  
**Age:** 7  
**Parents:** Rosie and Khun Su  
**Sisters:** Christina Meh and Angelina Meh  
**If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?**  
 What is Heaven like?



**Ethan T.**  
**Age:** 8  
**Parents:** Lawrence and Laura  
**Sisters:** Alzaina, Amerah, Adalind and Antonia  
**If I could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?**  
 To grow up to be strong and healthy.



**Marco V.**  
**Age:** 8  
**Parents:** Chris and MaryLisa  
**Brothers:** Christian, Colin and Carson  
**If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?**  
 How was your father, God, made?



**Tkaw W.**  
**Age:** 7  
**Parents:** Jue Nay Paw and Wah Nay  
**Sister:** Thaw Thaw  
**If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?**  
 For peace, faith, love and joy.



**Amalia W.**  
**Age:** 8  
**Parents:** A.J. and Danielle  
**Brothers:** A.J. and Geno  
**If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?**  
 Can I have a baby sister?

# 'He who sings, prays twice'

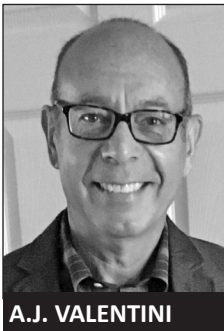
## Short lesson in Christianity's musical history

Our parish has a long history of worship with music.

In fact, one of our former pastors, the Rev. William Pizzoglio, surprised the congregation in 1948 during the celebration of the church's 50th anniversary when he composed a work with full orchestra for its Golden Jubilee Mass.

The musical roots of our parish date back years from the likes of organists George Schindler and Helen Ehlinger to our present Music Ministry Director Peter Elacqua, who has continued that noble tradition of orchestrating hymns and creating original pieces.

The Roman Catholic faith is not unique in its use of music. In primitive cultures the use of drums and choral chant were quite common. In Islam, the calls from the minaret of the mosques and five-time daily prayers are sung often. In Buddhism, chanting is used as a means of centering the mind for meaningful meditation. Hindus use "bhajan" songs to express their love and devotion to the divine. Jews have cantors during their religious service.



A.J. VALENTINI

Music cuts across cultural and language barriers. It is truly a universal language. St. Augustine said, "He who sings, prays twice."

### Old Testament beginnings

The tradition of music in Catholic worship goes back to the Old Testament. One only need listen to the psalms that we still intone today. Though we may not know the exact tonal sequences of the past, the lyrics remain with us, and modern composers invent ways to approach these historic praises to God. Those that we sing in our own liturgy are based on the old texts accompanied by music of contemporary composers such as Marty Haugen, David Haas, Rory Cooney and others.

In the 6th century St. Gregory gathered and codified the existing chants used in services. These meandering melodic lines became known as "Gregorian Chant." As the Church evolved, the challenge to keep singers on the same melodic line proved difficult.

Guido d'Arezzo (991-circa 1033), a Benedictine monk, is regarded as the developer of musical notation. He realized that the monks consumed enormous amounts of time to memorize each piece. There needed to be a code to follow so that songs could be quickly and accurately learned.

People say d'Arezzo used his hand to indicate the various pitches, but the technique developed as a mnemonic tool after his death. In any case, by referring to the joints and knuck-



"A Festival of Lessons & Carols" in December featured the combined choirs of Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament and Historic Old St. John's, the Chelsea Opera singers and the Chelsea Live Jazz Band conducted by Peter Elacqua. Music is a major part of worship in our parish.

### 'Mozart's Requiem'

For anyone interested in hearing a full production of one of the greatest sacred works ever composed, the Mohawk Valley Choral Society will present "Mozart's Requiem" with full orchestra at 4 p.m. Sunday, May 19, at Mary, Mother of Our Savior Parish's Lourdes campus. Tickets can be purchased in advance for \$12 from an MVCS member or at the door for \$15.

les to which various pitches and intervals were assigned, multiple singers would get a "road map" of a song and the director was able to direct the singing monks on a specific melodic line. Later, these positions were synthesized into a written form using dots on a written staff.

### Middle Ages harmonies

In the music of the Middle Ages, simple harmonies were added. To our ears today, the addition of a vocal line a third above or below the melody doesn't seem so unusual (you can get electronic apps and / or devices that do this automatically for a solo singer). It did meet with some resistance but is nothing compared to what followed.

In the late 1300s to the 1500s, the idea of having multiple voices with individual melodic lines coalescing around specific chords was introduced. Thus, we have the birth of polyphony (many tones). This allowed singers to embellish the sound with the various timbres of their voices much like instruments of different types: soprano as a high register, contralto as a medium high register, tenor as a higher male voice, bari-

tone as a full mid-range male voice, and basso as a deep low male voice. This allowed the music to take on new textures and rhythms.

With multiple harmonies being sung, the Latin text, often staggered across many parts and voices, became harder to understand. Clergy complained, arguing that the sacred text was taking a backseat to musical flourishes. In addition, the "theatrical showiness" seemed secular to many. In fact, some of the early church songs of this period were set to tavern songs!

Palestrina's Pope Marcellus Mass (1562) was specifically composed to address some of the critiques about the intelligibility of the text and the secular origins of many melodies. Using this piece as a reference, St. Carlo Borromeo, at the Council of Trent, was able to convince other prelates that polyphony could be intelligible, and that music such as Palestrina's was all too beautiful to be banned from the Church.

### Famous composers

In the Renaissance and Baroque periods, music took on an almost mathematical approach to harmonies and tempos. Composers such as Bach, Vivaldi, Handel, Mozart, Gabrieli, Schubert, Scarlatti and others created pieces that challenged the virtuosity of the performers but also the ears of the listeners.

As many sonic layers such as those in fugues — where one melody or phrase is introduced by one part then taken up by another with embellishments and interwoven with the other — bounced off the walls of the churches and cathedrals, worshipers were immersed in a musical cocoon. The effect was intended to elicit emotions and to transport listeners to ethereal places.

We still enjoy these musical works today, which again, speaks to music's universality.

# PRIEST SHORTAGE

Continued from Page 3

mind, some of our parishes need to be merged in the areas of personnel, pastoral service and schedules. For me, the viability needs to not be seen so much in Church A or Church B, rather it comes from the Catholic community they form and nurture. There can be one parish with more than one worship site, but you also can consolidate both the worship schedule and parish services — such as, one parish office, one Catechetical program, youth program for area young people, etc. On a different note, the priest must be willing to collaborate with deacons, trained lay ministers and other volunteers and not feel that he has to micromanage or do it all whether liturgically or administratively.”

The bishop said another solution is “greater involvement of the laity in the administration of parishes and reminding folks that our churches are not fast-food restaurants with drive-thrus.”

In Utica, plans are underway to combine St. Peter’s and St. Mark’s into one parish by July 2025. The people of those parishes will decide where to hold worship, what to do with unused buildings and other important details.

Not all is negative, however. Father Servatius said there are exceptions — case in point are the two parishes in North Utica.

“The leadership of both parishes have set aside the silo mentality and are naturally pulling together,” he said. “Sometimes, members of one parish will express concern for members of the other parish. Other times, they naturally choose to work together on something. At those moments, I just sit back and think, ‘Wow. I wish I could bottle this.’”

Father Hage said there is a crucial factor to keep in mind when parishes collaborate.

“When doing pastoral planning, we should always keep in mind that there is no greater evangelizing force than a happy, healthy and holy priest,” he said. “There is also no greater encourager for a young person to consider a vocation than one encounter with a happy, healthy and holy priest.”

## Vocations’ challenge

In decades past there were several priests for each parish.

No more.

Father Hage said there currently are 10 seminarians in formation for the Diocese of Syracuse. He said that’s typically the average number in formation each year.

“I believe the reason for the vocations crisis today is a deep fear of commitment among young people as well as the lack of support for vocations in Catholic homes,” he said. “The recent CARA study out of Georgetown University suggests that the greatest discourager of a vocation to the priesthood and consecrated life today are parents.”

What about allowing married priests?

“Married men are already allowed to get married in the Catholic Church,” he said. “There are 23 Eastern Catholic Churches in communion with the Holy Father in Rome that allow for married clergy. Some Protestant pastors who enter the Catholic Church are allowed to serve as married clergy as well.

“I do not foresee the ordination of women

## Recruiting young men to clergy is a team effort

In the era of a shrinking priesthood, the Rev. Jason Hage has a tough job — trying to recruit more men to the clergy.

As the director of the Syracuse diocese’s Office of Vocation Promotion, he’s optimistic as he tries different approaches.

Father Hage offered some of the efforts being made in the diocese:

- With the help of Rhonda Gruenwald and her Vocations Ministry, we trained more than 200 lay people representing 90 (out of 119) parishes in our diocese.

- Every single Catholic school administrator, principal and teacher received formal extended training on how to create a culture of vocations in our Catholic schools.

- We hosted training sessions for all the Youth and Young Adult Ministers of our diocese, our catechetical leaders, our college campus ministers and our chancery staff.

to the priesthood,” Father Hage added. “In my time as the director of vocation promotion, I have learned that even though other Christian denominations allow for married clergy, women clergy, etc., those denominations are in a worse vocations crisis than we are in Catholicism. The only reason I point to this fact is to dismiss the notion that allowing for these things would bring immediate relief to the vocation crisis in the Catholic Church.”

Father Servatius said he finds hope in the priest shortage.

“I don’t see this as much as a problem but an opportunity to move toward a Church being called for by the Spirit,” he said. “Lay involvement is absolutely needed, but well-trained lay involvement.”

## Down the road

Is closing and merging parishes a good idea to alleviate the situation?

“The closing and merging of parishes is the writing on the wall — unless there is a resurgence of faith being practiced by Catholics from 20 to 50 years of age,” Father Cesta said. “These are the sons and daughters, the grandchildren of those who faithfully walk in the way of Catholic faith now, but do not challenge those younger.”

Father Servatius said closing parishes is inevitable.

“With springtime upon us, we welcome the return of parishioners who we affectionately call the ‘snowbirds,’” he said. “They’ve been down south a few months. Every spring I hear the same thing: How big their parish down south is, how big the collection is, how big the staff is, how involved the parish is, how many priests and deacons the parish has, etc. And their weekend crowds are sometimes bigger than all the parishes in Utica combined.

“Why is that?” he continued. “Because they don’t have a parish on every street corner. They’re rightsized. We could have that same kind of dynamic and vibrant experience of faith, but it is not likely as long as we insist on hanging on to all of our campuses. We have the resources to make it happen, but we are spend-

• We had 52 parishes as well as all our Catholic high schools agree to host the traveling vocations icon of St. Joseph, which means that there has been a Holy Hour for vocations and a rosary for vocations offered every week in our diocese without pause throughout this year of grace.

- The Office of Vocations called together and now facilitates a Vocation Promotion Team for Religious Life.

“What we collectively realized as a diocesan family is that everyone is called to be a vocation promoter in the Diocese of Syracuse,” Father Hage said. “We know now more than ever that we are co-responsible for the future of our local church.”

*For information about vocations, visit <https://vocations-syracuse.org>.*

ing way too much on buildings. In the meantime, there is the human resource piece: our priests are spending less time with the people on a Sunday and more time in their car. Is this what we want?”

Bishop Lucia said closing parish buildings might be an option in the future, and many factors will go into those decisions.

“It has to be so because the demographics and birth rates in the Northeastern U.S. have drastically changed, and this is reflected in our parishes,” he said. “In actuality, it is not parishes being closed as much as parish boundaries being changed, whereby they might become part of the territory of another existing parish, or the decision is to take two or three parishes and form them into one new parish.

“What may be closed as result of such changes or mergers are church buildings or other facilities, after an examination of whether they are needed. In this instance, the faithful would become members of the new parish and the worship site that is designated for it. In turn, this is an opportunity for growth and a renewal of understanding of what it means to be Church.”

The bishop added those decisions will be made with the help of the PCA (Pastoral Care Areas), local pastors, parishioners and the guidance of the diocesan bishop and his staff.

“Some factors involved in such decisions are Mass attendance and sacramental records, financial status, parish/pastoral services available, viability of the community, the condition of the parish facilities, the location of other Catholic churches in the area, and demographics,” he said.

Father Servatius said that he now believes that the diocese finally is taking appropriate steps to address the situation.

“Over the long haul, I think we’re moving in the right direction — slowly and intentionally growing lay involvement,” he said. “It takes time if you are going to do it right. It takes proper discernment to determine if you have the right person in the right ministry, and it takes proper training so they do it well. Plus, it takes time for people to understand that their needs might be met by someone other than an ordained person. We’ll get there.”



# Celebrating Easter, Holy Thursday



*View more photos on the parish website at [www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com](http://www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com)*