

MORE

GOOD NEWS



Myanmar refugees find a home in our parish — Page 3

“Lately, some in government are making moves to whitewash and do away with aspects of American life, history and anything that fosters the diversity among us.”

Parish a melting pot and not ‘cookie cutter’

One of the things that brings blessings to most Catholic Christian communities of faith — in other words, parishes — is the diversity and mix of peoples with their various traditions, customs and languages, styles of prayer and devotions, their stories of good times and difficult times back in the “old country.”

In most Catholic parishes there is a blend of rich and not so rich, educated and otherwise, very religious and those on the fringe of faith — all kinds gathering around the table of the Holy Eucharist and God’s word.

It recalls the words of St. Paul in one of his epistles: “We are neither Greek nor slave nor free.” In other words, a diverse coalition of unique and one-of-a-kind children of God.

We are not a people made from the same “cookie cutter” — we’re from Italy, Myanmar (Burma), Vietnam, Haiti, Poland, Ireland and so on. Far from being a cult that seeks to delete and erase the diversity, these ethnicities fash-



FATHER JIM CESTA

ion the Body of Christ — the Church coming together, especially on the weekend.

Lately, some in government are making moves to whitewash and do away with aspects of American life, history and anything that fosters the diversity among us. Hopefully, the Catholic church and the experience of Catholic culture and life will not fall to recent attempts to put everybody in the same “cookie cutter”

CELEBRATING THE SAINTS

May 13: Our Lady of Fatima

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.

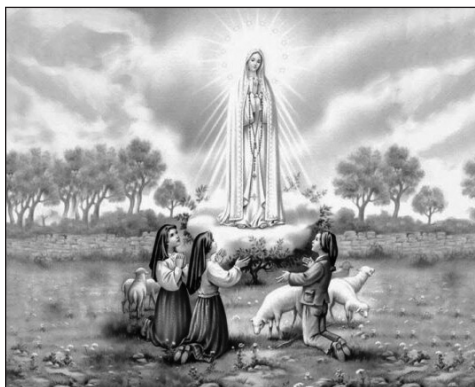
Mary asked the children to pray the rosary for world peace, for the end of World War I, for sinners and for the conversion of Russia.

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 John Paul 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 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 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: 665 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: stmaryutca@hytel.org
 • Hearing impaired: Listening services 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.

Stations of the Cross
 Stations of the Cross will be offered at 12:15 p.m. in our parish every Friday during Lent, including Good Friday.

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.

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



... 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





ABOVE: At the Parish Festival for the last few years, parishioners from Myanmar have cooked their traditional dishes that were enjoyed by festival attendees. ON THE COVER: Singers pay tribute in their native language to Father Jim on his 50th anniversary in 2024.

Escape to freedom

Despite hardships, refugees find peace, hope

By FRAN PERRITANO

We Americans often take things for granted. Need groceries? Head to the supermarket and choose from thousands of items.

Hungry? Go to one of the numerous restaurants or fast-food places.

Not feeling well? You can visit a doctor of your choice, an urgent care facility or even a hospital. Much of it is covered by health insurance.

Want to practice your faith? You can worship in a church, synagogue or mosque without fear of being arrested or persecuted.

Now, just imagine life without those and many other conveniences and freedoms we enjoy. What if you were forced to leave the United States, travel thousands of miles to a foreign country to live where you didn't speak the language and the culture was entirely different? You would have to settle in, find a place to live and a job, all among strangers who might not be accepting of you.

That's what Mar Koe and Khun Suaung and their families were forced to do along with many other people from Myanmar who had to abandon their native land due to war, violence, rebellion and dictatorship. And now, a deadly earthquake in March that killed thousands in that country and Thailand.

Both men and their families are among about 100 people from Myanmar who are parishioners of Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament. Though we refer to them as our Burmese community, they said they all speak

“I remember we were in a war zone and didn't have much freedom. We were constantly moving to other refugee camps. Our country was experiencing a military dictatorship, as government soldiers were fighting the people and still are to this day.”

— Mar Koe

the Myanmar language and are made up of Burmese, Kayan, Karen, Karenni, Kachin and many other cultures.

Mar Koe, 55, came to the United States in October 2009.

“I remember we were in a war zone and didn't have much freedom,” he said. “We were constantly moving to other refugee camps. Our country was experiencing a military dictatorship, as government soldiers were fighting the people and still are to this day.”

Khun Suaung, 42, said he fled for the same reasons in 2014.

“For many years ago, the military coups and ongoing civil war has resulted in the deaths of countless citizens, leaving a permanent mark on our memories,” he said. “So, there are reasons for us to leave the country.”

Transitioning to the United States was challenging.

“It was very difficult to learn and understand the culture because of the language barrier,” Mar Koe said. “We also had a hard time adjusting to the harsh winter weather since it never snowed in my native country.”

“Culture and tradition are very different,” Khun Suaung added. “For example, language, food, lifestyle and behaviors.”

Myanmar struggles to be free

Their native land, once called Burma, has a checkered history.

Now known as Myanmar, the county gained independence from Britain in 1948, but its post-independence history has been characterized by unrest and conflict, according to the BBC.

It was long considered a pariah state while under the rule of a military junta from 1962 to 2011 that suppressed almost all dissent and stood accused of gross human rights abuses, prompting international condemnation and sanctions.

Gradual liberalization began in 2010, leading to free elections in 2015. But a 2017 army operation drove more than half a million Muslim Rohingyas to flee to neighboring Bangladesh, in what the United Nations called a “textbook example of ethnic cleansing.”

It damaged the new government's international reputation and highlighted the military's

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Antoinette confronts life's challenges for 104 years

She thanks Blessed Mother, God for her longevity

At 104 years old, Antoinette LaPaglia is one of our longest living parishioners. She resides in Wylie Hall assisted living at the Masonic Care Community, where once a month she cooks for about 30 residents. It's a nice place, but she still longs for her home. She's had a rugged life but has survived for more than 10 decades. She thanks the Blessed Mother and God for guiding her for more than a century.

The obvious question is, since you're 104, what's your secret?

Well, all my life I like to help people. As years go by, I didn't think about my birthday anymore. You know, it just came and went and came and went. But I thank the Blessed Mother for me to be here. And I pray to her every day. And I think she watches me. And I ask her that I know I'm living in an assisted living home, but I don't like it here.

A little birdie told me that you want to go and live by yourself.

Yes. You tell that little bird that it's not going to happen.

You were just mentioning your birthday. Did you ever think about getting this old?

I know I'm getting older. I can't do things like I used to do. But it's not like being at home and sitting down and saying, "Well, this is my home and if I want to make something, I make it. If I want company, I have company, and this is what I want." I really can't do it, but that's what I like to do.

OK, this might be a delicate question. Here you are 104 years old. Do you ever think about having eternal life, what's beyond?

Oh yes, I do that every day. Every day I think of that. I think about going to heaven. I got a mother, and 20 days after I was born, my mother died, and I pray to her. I say, "Ma, I don't know you, but someday I'm going to meet you, and I love you." And I say a rosary to her.

So, you're looking forward to meeting her someday?

Oh yes, I do.

You were born in 1921 and lived through a lot. What do you remember over those years?

I didn't think too much of it because you know I was too involved with my family. I lived upstairs. My (step)mother lived downstairs, and when she needed me I was there, and when my family needed something, they got me. I worked hard. I worked all my life. I worked at GE and Oneita Knitting Mill. And I took care of a little boy that lost his mother, too. Yeah, until he got married. My dad was a wonderful man and a church-goer. We always went to Mount Carmel Church. I remember Mount Carmel as it was in 1936. I got married, and



"I want to be remembered that Antoinette was a good woman, and I try to help my grandchildren, and I try to help everybody, and that's all I could do. And I wish the Lord would keep me on this Earth as long as he could. But I still want my home. That's what I want. I wish I could live across the street from Mount Carmel Church."

that's the year that Mount Carmel was getting remodeled.

Speaking of marriage, you were married to Carmen for 61 years. What was that like?

Oh, don't talk about that. I was a very young girl when I got married.

How old were you?

Oh, God, I hate to say it — 16. And my husband was 17. But I didn't even know my husband. I just knew him by speaking to him. My father found out I had a little boyfriend. Don't forget, I had two stepsisters and a brother. And I told Father Berton. And I was questioned just like I was going to the jury. "Anything wrong with you. Anything wrong with you?" There was nothing wrong with me.

What were those early years like?

Well, I have four children. A little girl died on me. I mean, things were pretty rough. I couldn't afford a doctor. Nobody helped me and my baby (died). And I had a rugged life. That's why I lived close to my parents because my marriage wasn't that great.

On the bright side, you have grandchildren, great grandchildren and great, great

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Antoinette LaPaglia

Age: 104.

Resides: Wylie Hall assisted living at Masonic Care Community.

Family: Husband Carmen (deceased), married 61 years; sons John (deceased), Carmen (84); daughter Florence Gianotti (deceased); another daughter died at 6 months old.

Grandchildren: 13.

Great grandchildren: 21.

Great, great grandchildren: Four.

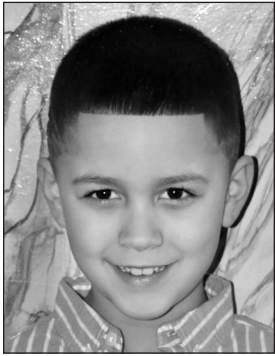
Employment: GE, Oneita Knitting, Utica City School District.

Favorite activities: Cook, clean, pray.

Favorite things to do now: Bingo, Mass on Tuesday, all the activities at the center, hairdresser every Saturday.

Past volunteerism: St. Cosmo and Damiano on Kossuth Avenue, help with pizza frita, Novena to Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. Rosalia Society.

FIRST COMMUNION CLASS OF 2025

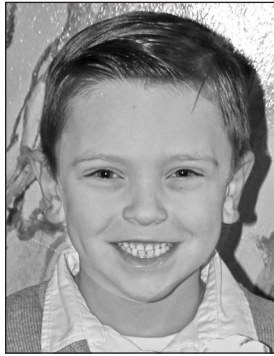


Christian

Age: 7

Parents: Christina and Ryan
Siblings: Emilia, Elijah and Samuel

If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?
Why did you want to die for us?



Daniel

Age: 7

Parents: Amanda and Dan
Sibling: Joseph

If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?
What is Heaven like?



Stella

Age: 8

Parents: Danielle and Mel
Sibling: Luke

If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be? Is Heaven fun or just a cloud place where you sit on clouds and do nothing?



Jackson

Age: 7

Parents: Day and Chi Chi
Siblings: Petrucci, Johncci, Joidon, Alena

If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?
How do I live a good life without the badness?



Jessie

Age: 8

Parents: Cathy and Rob
Siblings: Connor, Bella and Madison

If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?
Will you ever come back down and be with us?



Thee

Age: 9

Parents: Mu Thu and Ah Klain

Sibling: Thee Paw

If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?
To heal my body.



Lennox

Age: 7

Parents: Sarah and Benjamin, James

Sibling: Louis

If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?
Can I hug you?



Shadrach

Age: 7

Parents: Pa Sor Wah and Nay Min Tun

Sibling: Wah Seh

If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be? What is your favorite animal?



Kelsey

Age: 8

Parents: Pat and Dielle

Sibling: Patrick

If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be? What is your favorite animal?



Domenico

Age: 8

Parents: Karla and Rob

Sibling: Joseph

If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?
Can you help me be a better person?



Joseph

Age: 8

Parents: Karla and Rob

Sibling: Domenico

If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?
Can I see Bailey again and my parents when they die?



Freya

Age: 7

Parents: Jennifer and Jason

Siblings: Greyson and Caroline

If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?
To please take care of my family.



Naing

Age: 8

Parents: J. Sebastian Basso and Mar Tar

Sibling: May Thu Aung

If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?
To bless me.



Sophia

Age: 7

Parents: Raena and Christopher

If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?

To look after my family and friends and keep them safe and healthy.



Scarlett

Age: 8

Parents: Amanda and Crispino

Siblings: Gemma and Lilah

If you could ask Jesus one thing, what would it be?
Is Maddy okay?



The major basilicas of Rome, clockwise from upper left: St. Peter's, St. Paul Outside the Walls, St. John Lateran and St. Mary Major.

Jubilee Year history lesson

What began in 1300 continues centuries later

On Christmas Eve 2024, Pope Francis opened the “Holy Doors” of St. Peter’s Basilica signifying the beginning of a “Jubilee Year.”

This tradition can be traced as far back as the Book of Leviticus in the Old Testament. It was a time of release and renewal every 50 years, with debts forgiven, slaves freed and the land allowed to rest. The beginning of the Jewish Jubilee was marked by the sounding of a ram’s horn. In Hebrew, this horn is called *jobel*, from which the Christian term jubilee comes.

In 1300, Pope Boniface VIII declared the first Catholic Jubilee Year and that a Jubilee should be take place every 100 years. The next one, however, was declared just 50 years later. During the 1340s, the people of Rome were upset at the exile of the popes to Avignon and sent delegations there to the reigning pope, Clement VI, to plead with him to declare a Jubilee Year in 1350. They argued that Rome was in miserable condition and human life was too short to allow a person to gain the plenary indulgence



A.J. VALENTINI

gained by a pilgrimage to the tomb of Peter if it could be obtained only every 100 years. Clement VI agreed to declare 1350 a Jubilee Year.

Pope Paul II (1464-71) issued the bull “*Inefabilis Providentia*” on April 19, 1470, decreeing that a jubilee be celebrated every 25 years. That tradition has happened ever since with only a few exceptions. He also established that the Jubilee pilgrimage should include visits to the four main basilicas: St. Peter’s, St. Paul’s, St. John Lateran and St. Mary Major. He died a year later, and it fell to his successor, Sixtus IV, to celebrate the Jubilee of 1475.

Those who participate in a Holy Year pilgrimage are granted a plenary indulgence; those who are unable to attend in person for concrete reasons are invited to participate spiritually, “offering up the sufferings of their daily lives and participating in the Eucharistic celebration.”

Each of these year-long celebrations has a theme. The Holy Father has declared 2025 as a “Year of Hope,” which is appropriate at a time when conflicts in the world seem to be escalating and it’s easy to despair about how things are developing. In fact, Pope Francis made history on Dec. 26 by opening another Holy Door in the chapel of Rebibbia, Rome’s largest prison,

as a sign of hope for the inmates there. He is the first pope to open a Holy Door in a prison. Following tradition, the pope’s legates (probably to alleviate some of the pope’s stress over mobility problems) opened the Holy Doors in the three other major basilicas in Rome.

During this Jubilee Year, Francis implores us “to discover hope in the signs of the times that the Lord gives us” and “to recognize the immense goodness present in our world, lest we be tempted to think ourselves overwhelmed by evil and violence.”

He suggests ways in which we can be agents of hope in today’s world. He encourages the world to desire peace. He promotes openness to life and responsible parenthood. He suggests the restoration of hope to prisoners through amnesties, pardons, improving prison conditions and the abolition of the death penalty.

Francis asks us to be “signs of hope” for the young, the elderly, the sick and those in hospital or affected by illnesses or disabilities, and for migrants. He asks the most affluent nations to “forgive the debts of countries that will never be able to pay them” and to address “the ecological debt,” describing this as “a matter of justice.”

Though we may not be able to visit Rome and its holy sites, we all have the possibility to be beacons of hope.

MYANMAR

Continued from Page 3

continuing grip. This was confirmed when Aung San Suu Kyi and her government were overthrown in a coup in February 2021, according to the BBC.

Many from Myanmar fled to the United States in the early 2000s, — more than 4,000 of them coming to our area by 2019, according to The Center in Utica, formerly known as the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees.

Though he knows he and his family had to escape Myanmar, Mar Koe still experiences sadness.

“I do miss my native land because my brothers and sister were left behind,” he said. “But it is difficult to return because there are still war conflicts. If there was peace, I would go back and visit for a bit.”

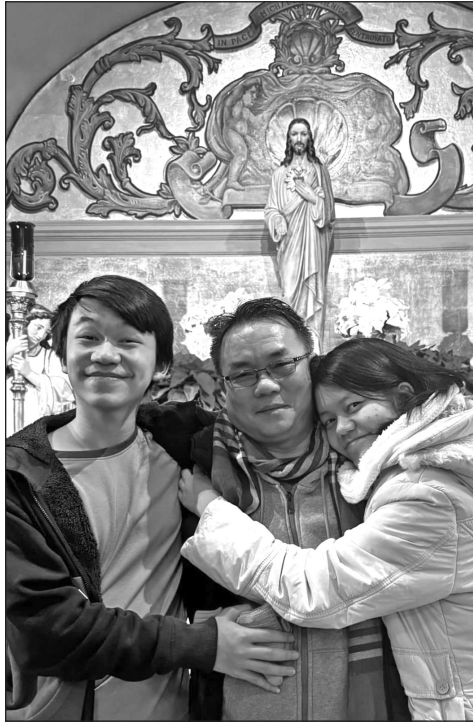
Faith sets them free

Khun Suaung and Mar Koe are eucharistic ministers who cherish their religious beliefs.

The Catholic faith was instilled in Mar Koe as a child, and he finds peace and strength at Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament.

“Each family had a tradition with whichever religion was practiced by the ancestors would be passed down for their future generations to learn,” he said. “In my family, it was the Roman Catholic belief that had started from my great-grandparents.

“When my family came to Utica,” he continued, “I saw a lot of churches, but they were always closed, which had always made me sad. But one day, an Oneida County social worker came to interview my wife and I about any mental health problems. I told them I didn’t have any mental health problems, but I was sad because I wanted to go to church. And then they introduced me to teacher David (Struz), who was working for the refugee center. Teacher David helped bring my family to St. Mary of



Mar Koe with his son Richard and daughter Nan Zar.

Mount Carmel every Sunday.”

David is a lifelong parishioner who teaches at The Center in Utica

Khun Suaung — who is a school bus driver, is married and has a child — also credits David for guiding him to the parish.

“First of all, I arrived at this church with the help of my friend who got here earlier and with the assistance of teacher David,” he said. “As for why I am here to worship, my parents have been Catholic since my childhood, so I have also been Catholic since I was young, and I come here to worship for my spiritual reasons.

“Attending Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament church is truly a joy, as the beauty of the church and the music enhance the experience and provide great spiritual strength. Father Jim Cesta is very welcoming. The people at this church are also very friendly. It is a truly wonderful and joyful experience.”

Parish becomes home

Mar Koe works at Wynn Hospital. He and his wife, Rebalka, have two daughters, Skylynn Koe and Nan Zar; and two sons Bas Kar Reh and Richard Koe. He said the parish has become an integral part of the refugees’ life.

“Mount Carmel/ Blessed Sacrament is very important for the Myanmar community to stay together and help each other out,” he said. “My faith is very important to me and my family. I would like other parishioners to know that our Myanmar community is always eager to help, such as if they need a minister for communion service or would like us to sing for a festival.

“I would like to say families should gather every Sunday to go to church — elders, young people and babies. It is important that we raise our kids in Mass to help teach them respectful manners and patience.”

Khun Suaung said his faith is the bedrock of his life that has carried him through trials and tribulations.

“Belief is very crucial. No matter what you do, you need to have faith,” he said. “This is especially true for someone who is a Catholic, as it is even more significant for both the spirit and the body. ... I believe we (Myanmar community) need to engage with other parishes so that our group can better know other parishioners.”

And what would he say to those in America who take everything for granted?

“It is essential to appreciate the freedoms and opportunities available,” he said. “Gratitude can lead to a more fulfilling life.”

ANTOINETTE

Continued from Page 4

grandchildren. How amazing is that for you?

Where the hell are they? (She laughs). You raise them up, you give them your help, they’re given everything, and they disappear. No, but I got a few of that are very close to me.

You worked at General Electric.

I worked for the military. I was an assembler. I was hired in 1953, and I retired, I think, in 1982. Oh my God, that was a beautiful plant. Too bad that plant couldn’t stay here. It was a good place to work. They didn’t even want me to retire. I retired because my husband got sick, and I had to be home to take care of him.

One of your favorite things to do is cook. I’ve been told occasionally you cook for residents here.

Yes, once in a while. I make sauce for them. I made stuffed peppers, baked lasagna, whatever they asked.

How many people do you cook for here?

Oh, I cook for 30 people. I showed them just how we make it, not the way they make it!

What are your memories of Mount Carmel?

Oh, it was beautiful! We had beautiful priests, and I really enjoyed it. Every time there was a novena (many people came). Then my brother used to sing in the choir. I used to love Mount Carmel Church. I got married there, and when I had children, they all took their Communion, Confirmation, got married. And that’s the way I brought them up.

Did you have a favorite priest?

Father Berton. He was wonderful to me. When I lost my baby, I had my Johnny, who was about 18 months old. (Father Berton) used to come every Friday to see me and he was teaching my son how to how to ride the bike. He was a wonderful man. He used to come to my mother’s house every Sunday afternoon. And my brother and his friends came over. Oh, we had a good time.

What advice would you give some people

about trying to cope with the difficulties of life?

People today are not like they used to be. The people years ago were more loving. You know, they give you their heart. Today (it’s about) what you got. “Oh, she’s got better than her. I gotta do a little better than her. And you’re on the side.” If you haven’t got much, you’re on the bad side. If you were on the good side, got a little money, then you’re my friend. It isn’t that. It’s from the heart what you do today. You do with your heart; you don’t do with your mouth.

How would you hope people will remember you?

I want to be remembered that Antoinette was a good woman, and I try to help my grandchildren, and I try to help everybody, and that’s all I could do. And I wish the Lord would keep me on this Earth as long as he could. But I still want my home. That’s what I want. I wish I could live across the street from Mount Carmel Church.



Taking chill out of winter

We may be only four months into 2025, but many things have already happened in our parish: engaged couples were celebrated at Mass on March 9; the Italian Heritage Club and the Social Ministry celebrated “Carnevale” on Saturday, March 1, in the gymnasium; and the parish’s first Epiphany Gala took place on Saturday, Jan. 4, at Twin Ponds Golf & Country Club in New York Mills where attendees were treated to a night of good food, friendship, dancing and entertainment — and a visit from La Befana.



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