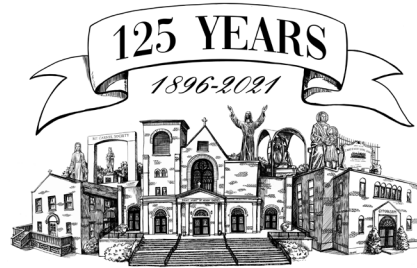


• SPECIAL EDITION: 125TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE •



SAINT MARY OF MOUNT CARMEL
BLESSED SACRAMENT PARISH
UTICA, NY

MORE

GOOD NEWS

**Celebrating
125 years
of faith,
family,
fellowship**

*“Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace.
Here the love of Christ
shall end divisions.
All are welcome in this place.”*



1896-2021: CELEBRATING 125 YEARS OF HISTORY



Mount Carmel Church during its 50th anniversary in 1946.

What does our parish mean to you?

We asked parishioners the question above. Here are some of their responses:

'Community and friendship'

I started attending Mass at Mount Carmel about 15-plus years ago after becoming engaged and (after) a long absence from attending any church.

As with many Catholics we hear about, I made First Communion as a child, then mostly stopped attending. My parents gave me the choice and there was always something more compelling to do with my time.

It became important to my soon-to-be husband and I to start our marriage journey with faith and so we recommitted ourselves. I chose to be confirmed in this church as a demonstration of that commitment.

What I've found here at Mount Carmel that I've not found in other churches is the sense of community and friendship. Our family has grown to include two children who have been baptized and received First Communion here.

Over the years we have gotten to know fellow parishioners whose kindness and welcoming spirits help foster a sense of belonging. Many of these people provided a young, tired mom with much-needed encouragement to keep coming back with two small, boisterous kids when frankly it was a lot easier to stay home! And for that, I am always grateful.

I am proud to be a part of a church community that is so giving not only toward each other but the larger community as well. There are many volunteer opportunities and other ways to give back through this church. Through various church experiences such as participating in making SOS lunches or donating food, candy and Christmas presents for various causes, our family has not only developed routines but traditions.

My hope now as a parent is that my children will remember these experiences fondly and connect them to this church to inspire

and instill a deep sense of faith to carry them throughout their lives.

— Colleen Bottini

Major events celebrated here

I have been going to St. Mary of Mount Carmel since I was 7 years old, being one of six children in East Utica.

My mother always made sure we all went to church. Coming from a large family, my mother, of Polish descent, made sure we all went to Mass and religion classes. Father Berton and Sister Canessia come to mind while growing up at church.

I received my baptism, First Communion, Confirmation and I married the love of my life, Larry Bova — today it's been 52 years of blessed love for each other.

While attending church every Sunday, we had two daughters who were baptized and received First Communion. Both daughters were married at Mount Carmel before Blessed Sacrament joined the parish. My youngest daughter's three children were baptized and had their First Holy Communion here.

The Church Family, the people who we meet, Peter and Karen (Elacqua) and others in the musical family of the church through the years have grown to love and respect one another.

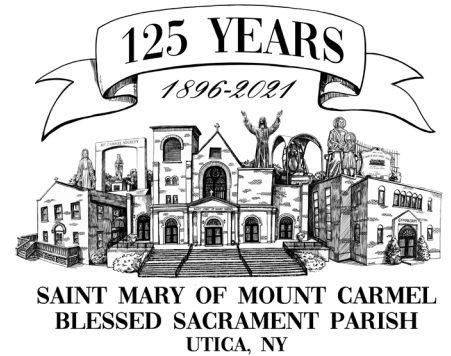
My husband and I taught fourth-grade religion for several years, were Eucharistic ministers, helped with funerals and the famous church festivals.

I remember when Father Joe had the 100th anniversary of the church that we sang for the congregation. This was great.

We like helping out church fundraising by the donation of one or more quilts to be raffled, baking cookies, helping do food drives — I could go on, but this is what it means to me.

— Marie Bova

MORE RESPONSES, Page 7



ANNIVERSARY EVENTS, ACTIVITIES

- **Coloring contest:** Terri Panuccio's Faith Formation students colored images of the Blessed Mother and Blessed Scalabrini. The results of their talents can be viewed in church.
- **Pasta dinner:** Sunday, July 18. Catered by Joey's Restaurant.
- **Golf tournament:** Sunday, Aug. 29, Stonebridge Golf and County Club.
- **Special anniversary Mass:** 10:30 a.m. Sunday, Oct. 17.
- **Communion Breakfast:** Sunday, Oct. 17.
- **Christmas ornament:** Depicting the 125 anniversary logo developed by Maria Vallese.

Visit the parish website at www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com for details on these events.

ONLINE: THROUGH 125 HISTORIC YEARS

Visit www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com and *St. Mary of Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament - YouTube* to learn more about our parish history. You will find:

- A six-part video history of the parish written and narrated by Fred Valentini and recorded and produced by Vito Valenzi.
- A six-part written history of the parish adapted by Fred Valentini.
- You can download the PDFs of the history series that was presented in "More Good News."
- There also is the parish history in a narrative form compiled for the 100th anniversary in 1996.

1896-2021: CELEBRATING 125 YEARS OF HISTORY



Gina Batson, left, and Terry Reale have led the difficult task of celebrating the 125th anniversary amid a pandemic.

The best-laid plans ...

Pandemic forces major anniversary adjustments

By TERRY REALE and GINA BATSON

When our 125th anniversary committee first met on June 3, 2019, we had grandiose visions of the events that might take place during our anniversary year, and we were fortunate to have a number of wonderful parishioners who stepped up to contribute ideas and fine tune those aspirations.

Besides discussing a special anniversary liturgy and anticipating Bishop Douglas Lucia as the celebrant, we developed a list of proposed special social events to take place just about monthly during the year:

- January: Trivia night.
- February: Valentine's dinner open to all couples who were married in the parish.
- March: Carnival/Mardi Gras or possibly an Italian cookie bake-off.
- May: Open house tours with display boards of historic pictures that would remain in church throughout the year.
- July: Special events for our festival, possibly to include neighborhood outreach and a

Mount Carmel School reunion during festival weekend.

- August: Picnic and family fun event.
- September: Our yearly golf tournament.
- October: A gala starting with a special liturgy.

We met again on Oct. 22 and Nov. 19, 2019, and Jan. 15, 2020, to continue honing the plans as a committee.

In January 2020, members were broken into committees that were following up on the tasks we were hopeful to be able to put into place. There was some winter vacation hiatus involved as well. Just as that was winding down in March — COVID 19 TOOK OVER!

We started to brainstorm about what we could do to still mark our anniversary and make it special since all of our previous plans revolved around social events that had to be abandoned. Although it seemed like we had plenty of time, we knew it would quickly slip by and we wanted and needed to still make this anniversary year special.

Enter our new ideas.

First, we needed a new logo. We enlisted the artistic talent of Maria Vallese, owner of Retro

Sorrento, daughter of parishioners Mark and Ann Marie Palleschi Vallese, and granddaughter of Pete Palleschi.

With that in place, we would develop ideas that we hoped would invoke nostalgia about happenings in the parish over the years: why not send the original "Italian-American Cookbook" developed and published in the 1970s to reprint as so many had expressed an interest in it. The project was sponsored by Adirondack Bank.

We were so happy Father Jim decided to bring back the novena for our 125th year and celebrate all of them himself. We saw this as an opportunity for an outreach to Mother Marianne's Kitchen. We asked for nonperishable food items to be donated during the nine weeks, as the kitchen is in special need of pantry items during the summer months, and this will make our "Feeding Mary's Children" theme even better.

In the process of developing the logo with Maria, we needed to incorporate artifacts from our merger with Blessed Sacrament in 2006. It

See **PLANNING**, Page 8

A PROUD PAST

Now at age 94, Rosemarie Chiffy recounts what made 'God's house' her 'home'

By ROSEMARIE CHIFFY

When it came time for me to verbalize what Mount Carmel means to me, one word kept coming to me over and over — home.

Mount Carmel not only is the sanctuary of Christ, the place of worship my grandparents helped to build, but it has become a second home for me. It has been my mainstay during difficult times, the place I longed to be during this terrible year of the pandemic.

When Masses were first livestreamed, I found myself in tears many times, wondering when I would be able to be back in the place where I felt safe and where I loved being surrounded by lifelong friends who share my faith. This has been a very difficult year, and I look forward to returning to some sense of normalcy.

Normal for me always has included Mount Carmel. I was baptized there, received my other sacraments there, had my children baptized there, and as many others have done, I have said goodbye to beloved family there as well.

I attended the school as a child and have many happy memories of the beautiful nuns who taught us reading, writing, arithmetic, and most of all, about the love of God. I sent my children there as I hoped they also would experience the joy of growing up in such a beautiful place.

The values I learned in the halls of our school have proven invaluable. They have sustained me through the ups and downs of life.

Many of the priests who led our worship over the years have proven to be some of my dearest friends: Father Henry, Father Joe, Father Paul and Father John Rose, to name a few. They came to our parish and quickly became like family.

That's what I have always loved about Mount Carmel. The sense of family, a strong community of faith. It's not just God's house; it's our home.



“ Normal for me always has included Mount Carmel. I was baptized there, received my other sacraments there, had my children baptized there, and as many others have done, I have said goodbye to beloved family there as well.”

— Rosemarie Chiffy

1896-2021: CELEBRATING 125 YEARS OF HISTORY

A PROMISING FUTURE

Siniscarco siblings among young people grounded in their faith by this parish

The Siniscarco siblings — John, Shaelin and Fallon — are among a number of young adults who have grown up in our parish and have carried on the great legacy begun by generations past. They have participated in many ministries of the parish since their childhood as altar servers, lectors, eucharistic ministers, among others. They reflect on what this parish means to them.

John Siniscarco

24; Utica College graduate in cybersecurity; employed as an analyst for Office of Foreign Assets Control at BNY Mellon in Oriskany

It's been eight years since I last formally reflected on my faith as per the "More Good News" at Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament Church.

As I look back on my experiences at Mount Carmel, especially as a young child, it really shaped my faith and my belief in God. Most of my friends from New Hartford went to a different church, but I always felt fortunate that I attended Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament.

I really enjoyed my religious education. I had great teachers who really shared their faith and worked hard to make sure we all had a strong faith in God. My father and his entire family grew up in the Mount Carmel parish and my parents were married at Mount Carmel. My sisters and I also made all of our sacraments at Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament.

Since making my First Communion, I was an altar server for many years until I made my Confirmation. After that, I served as a lector, which was also a positive experience. As I mentioned before, when I think of Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament, I think of family as my father grew up in East Utica and at Mount Carmel. He went to grammar school at Mount Carmel, and I remember all of his stories from his school days and playing basketball. He would always show me his basketball team picture in the hallway leading to the gym. He always speaks of his Mount Carmel days with a lot of pride.

Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament Church represents family. As far as family, my Uncle Joe and Aunt Laurie also attend Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament. My family and I recently attended church as a family to celebrate my Uncle Joe and Aunt Laurie receiving the Immaculata Award. The award is for those who volunteer and dedicate their time and faith to serving others in the parish. My Uncle Joe was also my confirmation sponsor; my Aunt Laurie



From left: Fallon, John and Shaelin Siniscarco

was my sister Shaelin's Confirmation sponsor and my cousin Krista was my sister Fallon's Confirmation sponsor.

My parents have always reinforced how important having faith really is, and that no matter what happens in life, you can always count on your family and your faith in God.

Shaelin Siniscarco

21; Utica College graduate majoring in nursing; employed by SUNY Upstate Hospital in adult psychiatry.

The importance of having a strong faith was instilled in my life at a very young age.

I don't know how my parents did it getting three little kids up and ready for church every Sunday, but somehow they managed.

I went to religion class every Sunday, followed by going to church and then finishing our Sunday with a trip to Café Caruso's afterwards. I can still remember patrons of Café Caruso telling me and my siblings that they remember us being there when we were little babies.

Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament is where I feel most grounded and connected to my faith. I was an altar server for eight years and I also became a lector afterward. One of my best memories I've had was when Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament helped sponsor a Catholic

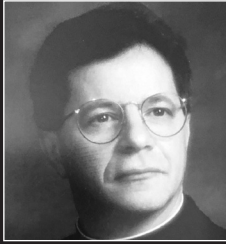
retreat trip to Notre Dame University in Indiana and it was one of the best, most life-changing experiences I've ever had and it took my faith to a whole new level.

I remember venerating the cross and sitting in silence, simply connecting with God. During that experience, it reinforced how important it is to truly connect to God away from all the distractions of everyday life. It is there where I learned how to pray with actual intent, and it deepened my faith as a whole and it made me have a greater appreciation for my Catholic faith. I was surrounded by fellow Catholics from all over the country. It was so powerful and amazing!

I also have great memories of altar serving for Holy Week. Our Holy Week Masses are so beautiful, and I loved being part of it. I remember one particular time when my mom and I watched the movie "The Passion" together. I was just 10 years old. I remember my mom saying that maybe I was too young to watch such a graphic film, but that concern was short lived as I remember my mom telling me that it was so important to realize that Jesus suffered and died for us so that we could go to Heaven.

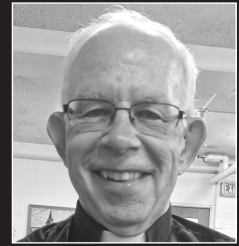
During that particular Holy Week service, I finally realized what Good Friday was all

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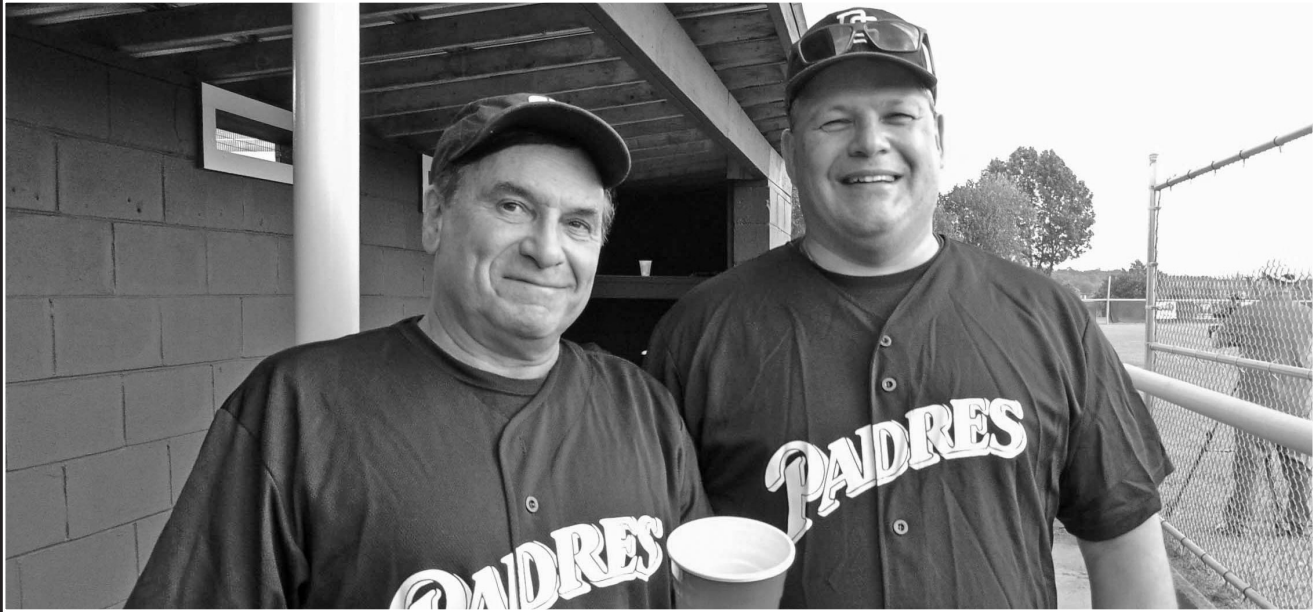


FATHER JOE SALERNO

Keeping parish vibrant, alive



FATHER JOHN ROSE



Father Jim and Bishop Douglas Lucia at the Men in Black softball game in 2019.

This is the last in a series of articles highlighting the history of our parish leading to its 125th anniversary. Previous articles and issues of "More Good News" are available at www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com.

1991-present

The next pastor after Father Henry was the first native son to assume that position.

Father Joseph Salerno became one of the most popular modern shepherds of the parish, leading the way to build the Mount Carmel Apartments for seniors, finally installing air conditioning in the church, rewiring the building and rebuilding the front steps.

He had the gift of establishing successful collaborations with neighboring parishes, which has become a standard for ecumenicalism in our city. He, along with Deacon Bob Riggalls, planned and executed the 100th anniversary of the parish, which culminated at the end of the anniversary year on the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

It took 10 months to find a replacement for Father Joe when he left to become pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes in 2002. Father John Rose saw us through the difficult and



A.J. VALENTINI

sensitive consolidation of Mount Carmel and Blessed Sacrament parishes. After five years Father John left to work with troubled priests and we gained our present pastor, Father James Cesta.

Father Jim's humor and his homilies have endeared him to an increasingly diverse community. He has used his artistic abilities to embellish and preserve our facility. His attention to the mechanical systems, a new pulpit, organ and the roof of the building ensure its viability for future generations.

He continues collaborative initiatives with priests from neighboring parishes, often trading good natured barbs during shared services. It is common to see him, shirt sleeves rolled up, working at the parish feast or tilling the soil in the gardens. He is not shy about sharing his Italian heritage and in his own folksy way is able to drive home the messages of the gospels through comic stories and shared common experiences.

As the parish of St. Mary of Mount Carmel/Blessed Sacrament goes forward, we hope to add more pages to our shared history. We can see the changes happening within our community but are comforted by those things that remain constant and dear. May the parish live on at least another 125 years.

1896-2021: WHAT DOES OUR PARISH MEAN TO YOU?

'Aroma of the food'

I have many memories, but most of all, getting ready for the bazaar — cutting the peppers, preparing the fried dough and can't wait to taste it; the aroma of the food was enough to send you flying. The Red Band always there in the good old days and hope they remain.

I enjoy Father Cesta's humor. It's a very homey parish and very decorative (not overpowering).

Other memories: holidays in church, Christmas Eve Mass and the beautiful choir.

— **Josephine Clerrico**

'Warmth of the parishioners'

On April 2, 1977, my wife and I were married in then, just St. Mary of Mount Carmel Church.

I was a transplant to Utica, having moved here from the Albany suburbs to pursue my carrier in education. I had grown up accompanying my father to church on Sundays. We first attended the Italian parish of St. Rita's Church in Cohoes, which now no longer exists. When we moved to the suburbs, we attended Mass at a parish that built its church in the '60s in the ubiquitous A-frame style so prevalent then. Perhaps with that modern architecture, I felt part of my connection to the history of our faith had been cut off.

I was fortunate to be able to study a year abroad in Italy while in college. Entering the ancient and storied temples to Christianity there, I once again felt kinship and a part of the 2,000-year-old faith of my ancestors. I surprised myself, a typical university student, and attended church regularly and absorbed the traditions in which those Masses were said. I also took a history of art class which helped explain to me the iconography and of those beautiful buildings.

Two years after my return from studies and having begun my career, I met my wife and she introduced me to her home parish, Mount Carmel. I at once felt at home there in a basilica-planned temple with arches, apse and even, occasionally, the sound of the Italian language.

After our marriage we moved out of the area and worshiped and raised our daughter in another parish whose building was again built in the '60s A-frame style. We developed friendships with some of the parishioners, but there was still something missing in the atmosphere.

When our daughter went to college, we felt a loss of connection to our parish and decided to return to St. Mary of Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament Parish. That ephemeral connection to the building and the warmth of the parishioners made us feel in the right place and at home.

We were invited to join ministries: my wife as a Eucharistic Minister and I as a lector (something that had never happened in our previous parish). We volunteered at the summer festival and I was later asked to write a column for "More Good News." Most recently, I had the privilege of producing a video series on the history of our parish for its 125th anniversary and have begun to cantor as part of the music ministry.

Often one will hear uninformed individu-

als say something to the effect that the church is run by a clique. I disagree! Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament is run and sustained by people who unselfishly give their time to sustain and carry forward our parish. I personally know of no instance when a person said, "I'd like to help out" and was turned away.

We encourage all to partake in our mission, "All are welcome," and not only become part of our parish's activities but be a part of 2,000 years of history.

— **Fred Valentini**

'Second home that I call family'

The parish is not only just a church to me but also a second home.

I've been to this parish since I was 8 years old and I'm 25. So, it's been such a long time that I've been a parishioner at this parish. I've continued coming to this parish ever since and I've grown in it and through it.

This parish means a lot to me. I enjoy being at church as it feels peaceful, calm and much love when people are around. Just by being there, I can feel the presence of the Lord, especially when receiving the Eucharist. If I were to be accidentally locked in the church, I wouldn't mind staying there at all. I'd enjoy it.

What would I do if I was locked in? I'd turn on the mics, sing hymns, practice my Bible reading skills, go to the room with the statues of the saints to pray to them, walking around the church praying, and clean up anything that needs to be cleaned, too.

No matter where I go, where I move to, I'll always come back to visit my second home and the many people at the second home that I call family. I love you all.

— **Jennifer Tran**

'Easy transition' from elsewhere

I became a member of St. Mary of Mount Carmel when my parish closed. My parish was Blessed Sacrament.

It was an easy transition for me. In fact, I was on the parish council and just continued with Mount Carmel and their members. Very nice!

What makes St. Mary of Mount Carmel so special to me is that my parents were married here. As a young girl that was one of our favorite churches to visit on Holy Thursday.

When my first parent passed away, my parents would have been married 70 years within a few months.

Celebrating our 125th year — we are so fortunate!

— **Connie Watkins**

Parish inspires her to serve

Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament means a great deal to me.

I was baptized on May 10, 1964, at the 8 a.m. Mass offered by the Rev. Joseph Berton. My parents, Nicholas and Dolores (Dardano) Martellotto, instilled the Catholic Church values in me.

I have been called to be a nurse, like my mother and godmother, Emily Dardano Leavitt, and serve God's people. The scripture that keeps me in health care since 1970 is Colossians 3:23-24: "Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving

the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ."

With recent health changes, my faith has sustained me and brought me closer to our heavenly Father.

— **Susan Januszewski**

'I got the music in me'

Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament Parish is a place where everyone knows your name — like in "Cheers."

The music ministry, of which I am a member, means a great deal to me. Our music is both uplifting and prayerful.

I lived in the Syracuse area for almost 17 years and never found a parish whose music was comparable to ours. I enjoy singing in the choir and being a cantor. I've sung at weddings for several years and like being a part of a couple's special day.

As a singer in the funeral ministry, I hope to bring comfort to grieving families.

Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament means home to me. It has a warm and friendly atmosphere where "all are welcome."

— **Regina George**

Best days are ahead

St. Mary of Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament is a parish that welcomes all. It is a true reflection of the love of Christ and has touched so many. Its liturgies and music and events always reflect this deep hospitality and care for those who seek a spiritual home.

The memories I cherish are those events that reflect the great diversity of gifts and people in our parish community. The liturgies of Holy Week celebrated over many years are memories I most cherish. The unity liturgies of Mount Carmel and Blessed Sacrament were especially touching.

When the parish began 125 years ago — the Italian immigrants who founded the community with the Scalabrini fathers — who among them could have guessed what the community would look like in 2021?

So much has changed, even in the church and its liturgy and its theology. They all knew they had a limited time on Earth. They all gave of themselves to this community, knowing that the time, treasure and spiritual commitment they gave to the church was like giving to Christ a few small loaves and fish.

Look at how many baskets of God's abundance have fed us all those years from humble beginnings; 125 years from now will be the year 2146. By then we, too, will all be with God, but if we maintain the same spirit as our parish founders, the little bit we all give today will become God's abundance for generations to come.

We must remember that our best days as a parish are ahead of us. Good and wonderful history is behind us and is cherished. But that history also pushes us forward. Christ reminds us that it is from the future that God calls to us and toward which he draws us.

— **Marc DelMonico**

1896-2021: CELEBRATING 125 YEARS OF HISTORY

PLANNING

Continued from Page 3

was important to recognize that during the span of our 125-year history, we were fortunate to be able to welcome the parishioners of that church into our parish life.

Additionally, we have been blessed with members of the Burmese community becoming a part of parish. Many of them have joined our Sunday morning Masses where they have graced us with their music and participate as Eucharist ministers and altar servers. We are planning on having them sing on Sunday, July 18. They also have taken part in our annual festival for a few years, offering their ethnic foods made by them and donated for sale, cost free. Thus, we became the community we have evolved into in our 125 years.

You also are able to enjoy our new logo on our sign at the corner of Mohawk and Jay streets. Maria's rendering was transferred to the sign through the expertise of our parishioner John Vella, owner of Utica Sign and Graphics, who also created the new banner above the center doors in front of church: "CELEBRATING 125 YEARS."

Maria's rendering was so spot-on in its depiction of our church's campus, we asked her to develop her artwork into a Christmas ornament. We are hopeful to be able to offer this ornament to you in the fall for consideration as a keepsake of this special year.

Again, in line with the idea of nostalgia, it was absolutely wonderful that with the treasure



From left: Gina Batson, Terri Panuccio, Father Jim and Terry Reale discuss anniversary plans.

trove of pictures from our files and from parishioners such as Rosemarie Chiffy, with the expertise of Fran Perritano and Fred Valentini, we were able to enjoy so many memories of times past each week in our parish bulletin and be educated on our website and YouTube channel about the history of our parish's involvement in a six-installment video narrative.

As you many have noticed, in an effort to include our Faith Formation children, Terri Panuccio distributed coloring sheets of the Blessed Mother and Blessed Scalabrini to them for a coloring contest. The results of their talents can be viewed in church.

We are planning an event on July 18, our traditional festival weekend, where we can all break bread together with a pasta dinner catered by Joey's Restaurant. While it's a far cry from a formal event in a banquet venue, we are hoping

to be able to accommodate as many as space will allow. The outdoor venue also helped us to keep expenses down so that the proceeds will be used as an outreach to assist the Veterans Outreach Center.

Father Jim is excited to be hosting his golf tournament for the eighth year on Aug. 29. It always is a great hit and we're sure it will be a welcome event this year.

Finally, we plan to end our celebration year with a communion breakfast hosted by the Mount Carmel Society on Sunday, Oct. 17, at Club Monarch. We'll have a special liturgy celebrated by Bishop Lucia. Following will be a wonderful breakfast/brunch where we will hopefully be uninhibited by the pandemic that derailed everything.

Here's to God's blessings on our beautiful parish for many years to come.

PROMISING FUTURE

Continued from Page 5

about. Jesus died for us so that we could live and do God's will.

I just graduated college and will be a nurse at SUNY Upstate Hospital this August and I feel as if Mount Carmel has helped facilitate the realization of the gifts God has given me in order to do His will: listening, empathy, compassion, patience and bringing a sense of calm.

I feel I am called to help and serve people especially the most in need, and I could not think of a better way to start my nursing career while also doing God's will at the same time. I feel like nursing is my vocation in life and I look forward to sharing my faith as well as continuing my spiritual journey throughout my nursing career.

No matter where life takes me, Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament will always have a special place in my heart.

Fallon Siniscarco

19; attends Utica College majoring in occupational therapy.

I have been a part of Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament Parish for as long as I can remember. I have so many positive memories.

One of my favorite memories was making my First Communion with the help of my teachers Terri Panuccio and Anne Elacqua.

That's where my faith journey began. That was my first step into devoting myself to my faith.

Shortly after, I was asked to participate in the May crowning of our Blessed Mother Mary with my best friend Nick Elacqua. I also participated in the Christmas pageant since I was in the first grade. I was a shepherd, then an angel and then was given the honor of being Mary while my friend Nick portrayed Joseph. I still remember all of the pictures my mom and Mrs. Elacqua took of me and Nick. The pageants were a great way to teach children it's not all about Santa and presents, but the incredible birth of Jesus Christ.

I also remember all of the years of Breakfast with Santa and Christmas Eve Mass. I still remember the first time watching Santa bring up his gift to our Lord. It was magical and spiritual at the same time.

The church has always been a great place for me to relate to those who have similar beliefs, particularly when it comes to altar serving. I have so many great memories of altar serving with the assistance of John Reale. He always took the time to teach us how to serve God with respect and reverence. But he also just made it really fun.

It truly feels like a family when we all come together to serve the Lord especially during Holy Week. There is a special feeling that I

get that I just can't explain. Nothing else can replicate it. You have to actually experience it in order to feel it. I really feel blessed to have been able to experience that feeling.

Last year during COVID, it was the first time ever that I didn't participate in altar serving for Holy Week. It felt so empty as Holy Week is my favorite time to serve. The music is so beautiful, the readings so special and I just love Peter Elacqua's voice, as well as the entire choir. My most favorite song ever is "Kindle the Fire of Love," and it just captures the Holy Spirit of our Church.

I feel really connected with my faith when I'm serving God. I plan on continuing to strengthen my faith by altar serving for Holy Week for as long as I can. Since making my Confirmation, I have also become a eucharistic minister. That was a really big step for me as it represents a more responsible, adult role in the church. I really appreciate Rosemarie Chiffy for allowing me the opportunity to be a eucharistic minister. She has always been and remains such an inspirational role model to me.

Being a eucharistic minister truly represents being part of the Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament community by distributing the Body and Blood of Christ. It is a responsibility that I take seriously. I encourage everyone to get involved in our church because it has truly made me a better person and a better Catholic.