

ST. MARY OF MOUNT CARMEL / BLESSED SACRAMENT PARISH – WINTER 2015

MORE GOOD NEWS



*'Give me your tired, your
poor, your huddled masses
yearning to breathe free.'*

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THIS ISSUE IS A GIFT OF ROMA SAUSAGE & DELI

Thankfulness beats winter doldrums

As January bids farewell and February advances in a cloudy, chilled way — though short of days — some complain and feel only the harshness mid winter.

But a spirit and heart of thankfulness, even an attitude of gratitude, really carry the faithful person of any age toward the promise of spring.

They say money can't buy everything, but it can buy a lot of things. The thrill to shoot an endangered rhino in Africa goes for \$250,000. For some people, a doctor's private cellphone number goes for \$1,500 in large cities.

Much can be bought, but not thankfulness. Thankfulness is an acquired gift, a virtue like any gift or talent that needs practice.

A prominent Duke University Medical Center researcher said, "If thankfulness were a drug, it would be the world's best-selling product because of its health benefits for every major human organ system."

For some who practice this art and virtue, it means, simply, living with a sense of gratitude and taking time to recognize and focus on the things we have instead of the things we wish

we had.

The Word in scripture we celebrate so often takes the idea of thankfulness to a deeper level. The act of giving thanks causes us to recognize the God who provides our ordinary and special blessings (Epistle of James 1:17)

Thankfulness cannot be bought or purchased. Sure, you might wish ice, slush and windy cold instantly could be changed to blue sky and a warm breeze. But being grateful for bare tree branches painted with a brushing of white snow or crystal-like ice reminds one of the Creator's surprises.

Even in mid winter, there's Good News and more — Good News, especially for the person of faith who sees with a spiritual eye.

The famous painting by the Italian artist Giotto, "St Francis Preaching to the Birds," glows with vivid color and shows the saint leaning toward the birds perched in branches and the birds leaning toward Francis, as if the saint and God's humble creatures are fascinated and thankful for the gift of each other.

More winter days and weather are ahead of us, and always more sad moments, setbacks, problems and challenges in our ordinary living, but let's polish up and practice the gift of being grateful and what we can say "thanks" for.

Just a suggestion!



FATHER JIM



Parish supports fire department's Christmas greeting

On the kneeler in front of our parish Nativity scene rests a T-shirt that reads, "Happy Birthday Jesus." It was from the Utica Fire Department that received national attention once again because it posted its yearly Christmas sign that read, "Happy Birthday Jesus. We love you." According to the Observer-Dispatch, it all started when the Wisconsin-based Freedom from Religion Foundation sent a letter to Utica Mayor Robert Palmieri asking him to direct Fire Chief Russell Brooks to remove the sign immediately. Brooks told the O-D he would take the sign down right after the first of the year. "I'm kind of amazed at how a simple sign is getting so much attention," Brooks said. "It's not a big extravagant display. It's a simple sign."



Check out our parish website

If you've never been to our parish website at www.mountcarmelblessedsacrament.com, you don't know what you're missing. It's constantly updated with the latest parish news and announcements. There's even a mobile version for your smart phone. Here is some of what you will find on the site:

PHOTO GALLERIES



PARISH BULLETIN

ST. MARY OF MT. CARMEL BLESSED SACRAMENT PARISH
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... AND MORE

- > Father Jim's "Wise and Otherwise"
- > History of the parish
- > Lector, minister, altar server schedules
- > Links to Faith Formation website and Facebook page, parish Facebook page, Daily Readings, Catholic Sun
- > Mass schedules
- > Parish news
- > Ministries
- > "More Good News" magazine
- > Videos

Parish beacon of hope again for immigrants far from home

St. Mary of Mount Carmel Church was founded nearly 120 years ago as a neighborhood parish that ministered to the spiritual needs of immigrants.

It served the newly arrived and burgeoning Italian-American population that supplied laborers to the busy textile mills, foundries, and brick and railroad yards.

Today, as Italian-Americans have assimilated, many moving out of the neighborhood, the population has shifted to include Hispanics, Asians and members of various Muslim communities.

Many from Southeast Asia have found a new home at Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament, and it's a trend that's been happening all over Utica for several decades.



A.J. VALENTINI

According to the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees, foreign-born residents of Utica constitute 17.6 percent of the city's total population. The percentage of foreign-born residents in Utica is higher than any other city along the Thruway corridor. A language other than English is spoken in 26.6 percent of households in the city.

In recent years, Utica has seen the addition of more than three mosques, multiple Buddhist temples, a Latino Association, a Hindu Association, a Somali Bantu Association, a Sudanese Association, and multiple Burmese ethnic associations.

The largest groups ever resettled to Utica in the late 20th and early 21st century include Bosnian, Burmese, individuals from the former Soviet Union, and Vietnam.

Dan Hkawng La, a Kachin, emigrated from Myanmar in 2007. He now lives in Utica and works at Chobani Yogurt in New Berlin.

He said he likes worshipping at Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament because it is "familiar" to him. When asked what he finds different about church here, he said that there are more "old" people at Mass. In Myanmar there were more young people.

"Everybody goes to Mass there," he said.

Mary Yu, an ethnic Karin who arrived here in 2004, comes to Mass on Sundays in her native dress. You might have seen some of the boys wear their characteristic tunics over their western garb.

John Kun Su and Rosie Ann, ethnic Kayahs, are among our most recent arrivals, having come to Utica in November. They say they like it here but still are getting used to the "cold" weather.



COVER PHOTO AND PHOTO ABOVE BY A.J. VALENTINI

ABOVE: Several of Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament's newest communicants carry and escort the statue of the baby Jesus during the Christmas Eve family celebration. **COVER:** Sai Koncarng and Mary Yu. Mary, an ethnic Karin who arrived here in 2004, oftentimes comes to Mass in her native dress. Her boys often wear their tunics to Mass.

BACK COVER: A PICTORIAL LOOK AT LIFE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Like the Italian influx in the early 20th century, those from foreign lands continue to find a home away from home in Utica. In addition to the nearly 4,500 Bosnians fleeing their war-torn country in the mid-1990s, more than 2,400 have emigrated here from the former Soviet Union since 1979; more than 3,000 from Myanmar, formerly Burma, since 1979, most arriving here since 1997; and nearly 2,100 Vietnamese since 1979.

Some of those immigrants are in the pews every weekend at Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament. To understand these refugees and immigrants, we must delve into their history and the reasons why they came to the United States.

The entrance of European interests in Southeast Asia began in the early 16th century and, though they may have brought Christianity, it wasn't all pretty.

Violent skirmishes between Portuguese, Dutch and English resulted as each tried to

drive out the other for the valuable spice trade. It was the Dutch who prevailed until the entrance of the French in 1799. It was only in the 20th century that they left. The only country of all the Southeast Asia to maintain some sort of autonomy through it all was Thailand.

With Christianity's arrival came revived ideas about nationalism that fueled conflicts between indigenous people and their colonial rulers. In World War II, the Japanese sought to take the territories. After the war, the United States granted independence to the Philippines and the British withdrew from Burma.

Indonesia fought the Dutch, and the French didn't withdraw from Indochina until 1954. The power vacuum was ripe for a growing Communist presence producing the Vietnam War, which spilled over into Laos and Cambodia. By 1975, all those countries were

Please see **HOME AWAY FROM HOME**, Page 7

A CONVERSATION WITH ... LAURA WEIMER



Laura Weimer with her children Ilana Faith, 3, Michael Andrew, 2, and Joseph Jude, 9 months. INSET: Laura's husband Andy, with Michael.

'God put me on Earth to be a mommy'

You might have seen Laura Weimer in church. She sits in the west-side pews, usually by herself, sometimes with her husband and children. If you haven't noticed her there, you surely have seen her on those Jay-K Lumber commercials and billboards. She's the spokesmodel for Jay-K, but that's not her profession. Her favorite job is being called mom.

Once people read this or see your photo, they instantly will say, "Oh yea, I know who she is — she's on TV." How did the Jay-K spokesmodel job come about?

I am a shy gal, the one who always runs from the camera, but when I was called to audition for this shoot, I threw on the overalls and gave it my all. I had done a few commercials for The Romanelli Marketing Agency in the past, so when this gig came about, they thought I was a good fit. Hey, I know paint ... and windows 'n' doors ... and lumber ... and decks.

When you see yourself in those ads, what runs through your mind?

Ah, it is awkward to see myself. Jay-K Jill is such a quirky character, and I am not. I usually cover my hands over my face and squeamishly look through my fingers as I watch the commercials. For a long time I would send my family into Jay-K because there is a 6-foot stand-out of me at the entrance and I was too embarrassed to go in there and see it, knowing my 3-year-old would shout out, "Hey mommy, it's you!"



Laura is "Jay-K Jill," spokesmodel for Jay-K Lumber. "I usually cover my hands over my face and squeamishly look through my fingers as I watch the commercials," she admitted.

You were an English teacher for several years before the birth of your daughter. Was it a tough decision to stay home?

No. When I first met Andy we agreed that I would stay home and we would raise the babies ourselves. Fortunately, we're both busi-

ness owners and create our own schedules, so there rarely is a time when one of us isn't home with the kids. I don't really miss the regulations of the education system, and having the alarm ring at 5:25 a.m. or correcting essays until midnight. I do miss the students and their dynamic personalities, but we more than make up for that in our house these days.

You say you love being a mom and feel it's your calling. Why do you feel that way?

Well, after going to the grocery store or off to a photo shoot, whether it is 10 minutes or three hours, I genuinely miss my children and can't wait to be with them. I hear often, "Wow, you have your hands full" and "three kids so close in age, you're crazy." And my response is, "Yes, I am crazy and yes, my hands are full; I wouldn't have it any other way. God put me on Earth to be a mommy to many children. I'm truly blessed." I thank God every night for who he gave me. (Now I am getting teary-eyed).

In addition to being a wife and mom, you also run a photography business out of your home. How did the business come about and how do you squeeze that in with three kids?

My business is Laura Lynn's Photography. I specialize in portrait photography. I photograph newborns, families, moms-to-be, engaged couples, seniors, for a few local restaurants' menus and for VP racing. Anyone can find me on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/LauraLynnsPhotography>) or on my

Please see LAURA WEIMER, Page 7

Mike likes to make a difference

16-year-old involved in activities that help other people

Mike Peterson leads a very active life for a 16-year-old high school student. He loves sports, playing basketball and baseball. He's a musician who enjoys a wide range of genres. He's also a person who tries to be a role model who helps his fellow students and others.

You play CYO basketball, AAU basketball and baseball for Adrean Post. How did you get interested in sports?

I got involved with sports because as a child my uncles and older cousins would always be talking about and playing sports. My family is really involved with and pays attention to sports. As a child I looked up to them and wanted to be like them. I got involved with sports and then became passionate about it.

What have you learned about sports and playing on teams?

I learned how to be a team player and how to show good sportsmanship. I also learned how to persevere. But I also learned that a future in sports is rare. I don't rely on sports for my future. Education is more important; sports are just hobbies.

You are involved in a lot of school activities. Why do you participate in them?

I enjoy all of my activities so I find time to put them in my schedule. It ends up with me having a very busy schedule, but it is worth it in the end. I participate in them because I enjoy helping people, giving back to the community and making people smile.

You're vice president of a club called Spartan 2 Spartan at school, where students work with other students who have social or academic disabilities and setbacks. Please tell us a bit more about that.

I am assigned a "Spartan" who has either social or academic disabilities. I spend time with them, talk to them, socialize with them, and help them with school or social issues. Just basically be there for them. Since I am also vice president of the club, I also help assign the "Spartan" and help plan club activities.

Why are you interested in helping those students?

I have two friends whose brothers have autism. I met them and interacted with them and really enjoyed putting smiles on their faces, making a difference in their lives, so I joined the club.

You also are vice president of Project Purple, a club that battles substance abuse and promotes a healthy lifestyle. Why did you get involved in that?

I thought it was a good cause that I believe in and wanted to get involved and help.

Do you know people at school who have



Mike Peterson said if there's one thing people should know about him is that he "really enjoys life and tries to make a positive contribution."

MIKE PETERSON

Age: 16.

School: Junior at New Hartford Senior High School

Family: I am an only child and I have a large extended family – grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles that I see frequently.

Things I like to do in my spare time: Spend time with family and friends, play sports, listen to music, watch movies.

Favorite movie: "A Bronx Tale."

Favorite TV show: "Teen Wolf."

Favorite music or musician: I enjoy many types of music and listen to many different musicians.



abuse problems and have you ever tried counseling them?

I do know people who have problems with substance abuse, but I have not tried counseling them. At school we have professional counselors whose job it is to talk to those students and get them help. However, I have directed students to the counselors.

You say you have a "passion" for music. What kind of music moves you and why do you love it so much?

I enjoy many types of music. I listen to rap, pop, R&B, rock, theater and some religious

music. I love music because it is a great and healthy way to relax your mind and express yourself.

Along with being a lector, you sing in the choir, make meatballs and help set up for and work at the church festival. You said you would love to get involved with helping out with religious education and getting more youth involved with the church. What attracts you to helping out in parish?

I have a strong faith, and also my family has belonged to the church since the doors opened. I love the fact that I am keeping tradition going in my family. Also, I love helping people in general and I feel like the church is a great place to start.

It seems as though you take your faith very seriously. Where does that come from, and do you ever talk to or encourage your friends about your faith?

I have always gone to church since I was very young. My strong faith starts there. However, I love the idea of believing in something good. I believe in God and the church, and love investing my time in it. I don't talk about faith with my friends because I am a firm believer that people should choose whether or not to believe in God on their own. I don't encourage them. I believe that it is personal choice.

If you could plan your future, what would it look like?

I would love to stay strong in my faith. In the future I hope I have a beautiful, healthy family. Also, I would like to be a practicing attorney or orthodontist.

They help keep parish life fun

By FRAN PERRITANO

Christmas Gala. Breakfast with Santa. Vernon Downs Night. Bistro. Murder Mystery Dinner. Mardi Gras. New York Yankees trip. Ladies Tea. Chicken Barbecue.

Parishioners of St. Mary of Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament Parish are very familiar with these events. They take place every year and are organized by the dedicated people on the Social Committee.

“Our mission is to bring our parish family together and celebrate,” said Carmelann Scalzo, who with husband Mario co-chair the committee along with Joe and Laurie Siniscarco. “It brings people together for affordable social events that they would not normally do on their own but enjoy being part of a group.”

Mario seconds that sentiment.

“We host several events for socialization and hopefully build camaraderie within our parish family,” he said. “We also assist other ministries with their missions, whether they are within the church or outside.”

Carmelann and Mario joined the Social Committee when Father Joe Salerno was pastor. They’ve been working hard ever since.

After years of experience, the difficulty of planning events has become a bit easier for the husband-wife team.

“At this point, having many years under our belt and with the entire committee and volunteers, it has become much easier to manage and host the events,” Carmelann said.

“The hardest part is not hosting the activity but working to bring the right activities to the parish and trying to be a fortune teller of attendance,” Mario added.

Putting on social events costs money, and the committee works hard to keep the price down for parishioners.

“Our money comes from a few fundraisers throughout the year such as our pizza frittata sale, fall bake sale and an occasional 50-50 raffle at an event,” the Scalzos said. “The costs of the events are covered in the ticket prices and we do not make a profit from the events. The fundraisers are used to subsidize the costs of events to keep the ticket prices reasonable, and also used to contribute to our ministries within our parish and outside organizations such as

SOCIAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Social Committee is a ministry organization of parishioners who want to socialize and have some fun. It is open to all and anyone who would be willing to help with an event, chair an event or just bring new ideas to the group.

Mario and Carmelann Scalzo and Joseph and Laurie Siniscarco are co-chairs.

Bill and Jackie Thibault

Terry and Gina LaBella

Terry Reale

Angela Ferdula

Theresa Ianno

Annette Marro

Pat Matrulli

Mary Lou Mazza

Mike and Marsha LaBella

Vanessa Conkling

Joanne Gerace

Rescue Mission, Veterans Outreach, Abraham House and John Bosco House.”

The Scalzos said there are a lot of events that are great but the parish can’t host them because they are cost prohibitive, their timing is not good or they just don’t have the manpower.

Since there is a lot of work involved, what is the impetus for a parishioner join the group?

“We always have fun planning and hosting activities and we can use the help,” Carmelann said.

“We are always looking for fun activities that our parish would enjoy and we relish new members with some new activities,” Mario added.

The Scalzos said the work the volunteers do is worthwhile because they know it’s for the people of the parish they love.

“It brings great joy to see our parish family socializing and have a good time,” they agreed.

When an event is over, the work is done and the place is cleaned up, what does that feel like?

“We usually sit back, have a drink and bathe in the euphoria – another job well done,” Carmelann said. “But that lasts five minutes and we are on to the next event.”



BREAKFAST WITH SANTA



VERNON DOWNS NIGHT



YANKEE STADIUM TRIP

“Our mission is to bring our parish family together and celebrate.”

Carmelann Scalzo

LAURA WEIMER

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website (www.lauralynnsphotography.com).

Photography allows me to use creativity and my peppy personality. Ever since I was young, I enjoyed capturing moments via the camera, so it was quite natural for me to pick up. One of the best aspects of what I do is knowing I helped a mom and dad capture their little ones as they grow. I am truly grateful for each and every client. My business has connected me to thousands of people in the area, and through it I have met some lifelong friends while doing something I love.

You're married to a former professional baseball player. What were the years like while Andy was in the minor leagues?

We met in late February of 2006, literally days before he left for spring training; at that time, he was playing on the farm team for the Cincinnati Reds. We spent the first six months apart. I enjoyed visiting him wherever he played, especially Florida. Those years were difficult in the sense we weren't together as much as other couples, but how many can say they had the opportunity to do what he did for so many years? He returned at the close of the season, and after three months in the same zip code, he proposed. Then he hit the road again.

When Andy finally made the decision to quit baseball, it must have been really tough on the both of you.

It was solely his decision (I never wanted that decision on me). His last season was his best and didn't get the "call," so he knew it was time. We'd been married a few years and were ready to start a family, so the timing was right. I was proud of him and know he gave it his all, but I was ready for him to hang up the glove.

LAURA WEIMER

Age: 34.

Education: 1998 graduate of Whitesboro High School and 2002 graduate of Cortland State.

Employment: Stay-at-home mom, started Laura Lynn's Photography in 2011, spokesmodel for Jay-K Lumber since 2013, taught 12th-grade English at Whitesboro High School for eight years prior to the birth of her daughter in 2011.

Family: Husband Andrew; children Ilana Faith, 3; Michael Andrew, 2; and Joseph Jude, 9 months).

Things you like to do in your spare time:

If I could spare a moment for myself, I dabble in gardening, researching, interior decorating, and pre-children, I loved adventure sports. The scarier the better.

Favorite book: It all depends on the stage of my life. My current favorite is "Gorgeously Green."

Favorite musician: Billy Joel.

Andy now is pitching in the financial world. Tell me something about the business.

He is a financial adviser with Northwestern Mutual in New Hartford, primarily focusing on investments, life insurance and retirement planning. He's very honest and straight forward with his clients and not pushy, so he's been able to build a great business. His staff is great, too, which allows him to be a very

involved dad. His email is andrew.weimer@nm.com or call 731-5432.

You were a communicant of St. Paul's in Whitesboro before joining Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament. What are your impressions of our parish?

It's quite a contrast in some ways, but the basics are all the same. Mount Carmel has the ethnic feel and St. Paul's is more of a melting-pot parish. Andy and I wish we had more time and energy to commit toward the parish; hopefully down the road we will be more involved. If we were to make one request it would be to see more focus on younger families and couples. On a side note, my great-grandparents (Vincenzo Carlo and Mary Fiore) were communicants of Mount Carmel back in the early 1900s.

Faith appears to be a big part of your life and Andy's life. Can you describe the role it plays?

Andy and I were both extremely close with many of our grandparents and fortunate enough to have them in our lives for many years. They were all such faith-filled and unselfish people who lived their lives with the utmost of integrity. Because of them and, of course, our parents, we learned what it takes to be a good person and a good Christian. Our faith allows us to be grateful for all of our blessings as well as humbled by our humanly flaws. Now it's our turn to help our little ones on their journey.

How do you manage to cope when life throws you a curveball?

Prayer and ... I call my mom. No matter a girl's age, mommy always knows what to say and do.

HOME AWAY FROM HOME

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ruled by Communists, but conflict continued, the most infamous of which was the Cambodian genocide by the Khmer Rouge.

Today, the region is a dichotomy of success and failure.

The tiny nation of Singapore boasts the richest economy and safest environment in which to live, followed by Brunei. Vietnam has had an economic boom (Utica College has had several students from there and recently tabled intentions to build a campus there). Measurable growth has occurred in neighboring Malaysia and Thailand as well.

At the same time the economic growth of Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos has struggled.

In Myanmar, where there are more than 100 ethno-linguistic populations, the military government cracked down on resistance from mountain tribes, including the Wa, Kachin and Karen population, forcing many to flee (some came to Utica and worship in our parish).

The 1991 Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung

San Suu Kyi has been arrested several times, even after her political party has won democratic elections. Cambodia's military government has been accused of keeping citizens in forced labor, using excessive force in killing hundreds of students in protest rallies and the executions of monks and citizens.

Even Mother Nature has been unkind to Myanmar. In 2008, more than 130,000 people were killed during Cyclone Nargis that brought 135 mph winds and massive flooding. The government obstructed relief efforts by the UN and other nations at unprecedented levels. Most recently, there has been a standoff between the people of Northern Myanmar and the government as they refuse to work on the Chinese sponsored expansion of the valuable copper mines there.

Those who fled that region in hopes of a better life for themselves and their children are counting on Utica and its diverse population. Hopefully, the warmth of our parish and its parishioners will make these new brothers and sisters in Christ feel welcome and safe.



PHOTO BY A.J. VALENTINI

From left: Rumon Gying Dan, Dan Hkawng La, Wun Dan Hkawng and others attend Mass. Dan Hkawng La, a Kachin, emigrated from Myanmar in 2007. He works at Chobani Yogurt.



A WORLD AWAY



Frank Fazekas of New Hartford captured some scenes of life in Southeast Asia, an area from which many refugees and immigrants have arrived from to start a new life in Utica. Many of them call St. Mary of Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament their home parish. Fazekas, former chief of operations at Griffiss Air Force Base, had a long career in the military and turned it into a second career as proprietor of Apex Tours Inc. planning and accompanying tours here and abroad.

ABOVE: Sunrise at Ankor Wat in Cambodia.

LEFT: A woman carries fried tarantulas.

BELOW: Shopping day in Southeast Asia.

RIGHT: Traditional dancers.

