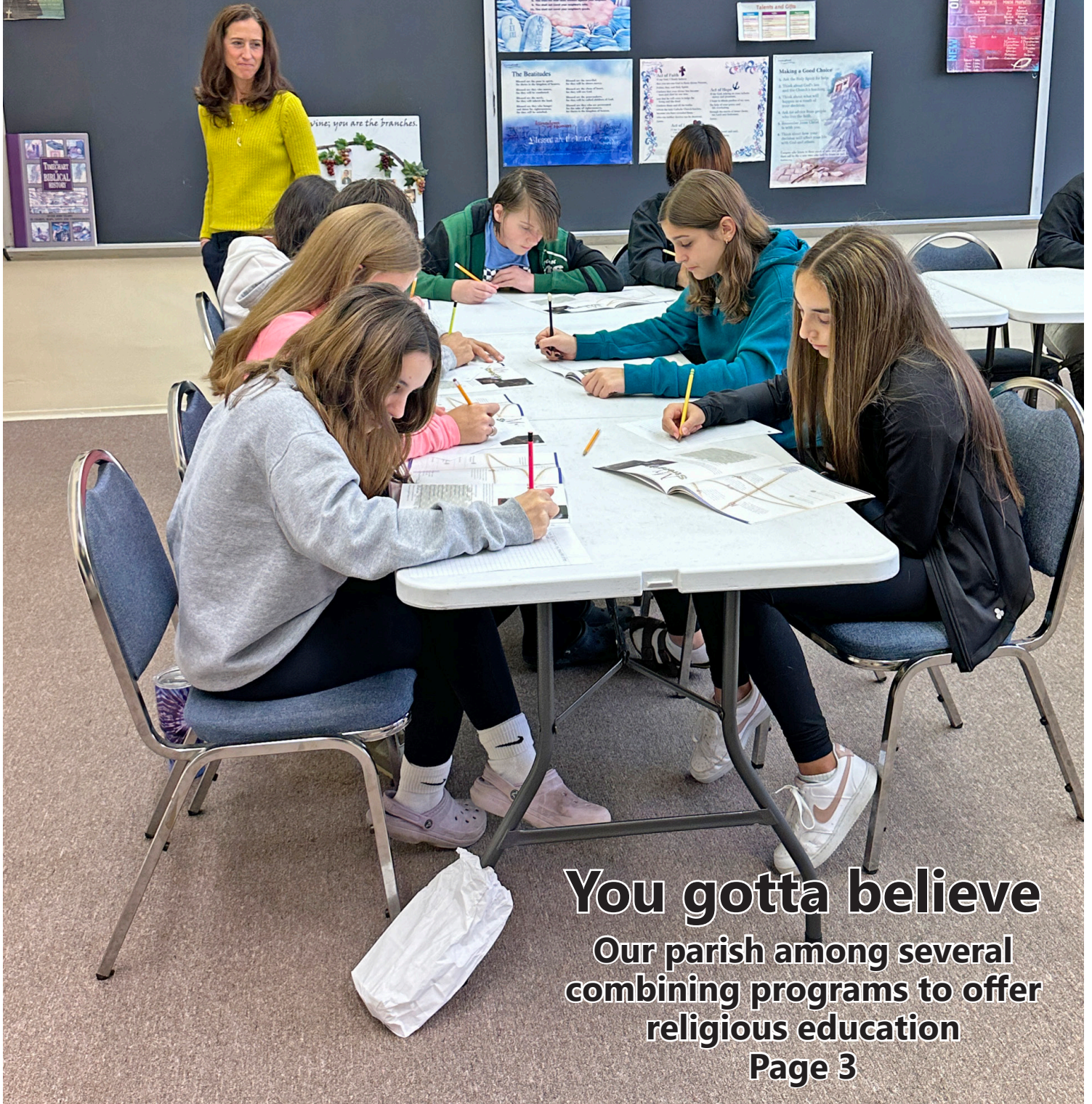


**MORE**

# GOOD NEWS



**You gotta believe**  
Our parish among several  
combining programs to offer  
religious education  
Page 3

# Stay tuned: Changes are coming pretty soon

In this issue of “More Good News,” we focus on how the Catholic parishes and communities of faith are cooperating in religious education and looking forward to sharing ways to schedule services and utilize buildings to meet the challenges of the present and future.

As our bishop has shared with pastors and priests, deacons and professed religious, as well as parish leadership teams and the blessed faithful, are in many ways, reforming and re-shaping how to deal with the realities staring us in the face.

Knowing there is a priest shortage as well as a decline in church attendance, this is not new — we’ve been aware of this for many years. For a good number of years in our area there have been small groups and larger meetings among clusters of our parishes and with officials from the diocese that will lead to some changes in the coming months on the way to spring and summer.

There is a need to condense the Mass services — in some ways during the week and even weekends. Fewer Mass times could happen by rotating churches with more folks gathering at one place, rather than duplicating in multiple places. This is happening now at St. Anthony



FATHER JIM CESTA

& St. Agnes on Monday and Tuesday mornings and on Thursday and Friday mornings at Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament. It is good to see more people together as one.

The task of cooperating among parishes regarding Faith Formation for our young people is taking place now, with good results. (See Page 3).

To consider Mass schedules, use of buildings, office staffs and financial resources, this conversation will continue; however, real developments are going to come — probably sooner rather than later.

We will strengthen the fabric of the faith in part of the Lord’s vineyard.

## CELEBRATING THE SAINTS

### St. Joseph

Feast Day: March 19

The Bible pays Joseph the highest compliment: he was a “just” man. The quality meant a lot more than faithfulness in paying debts.

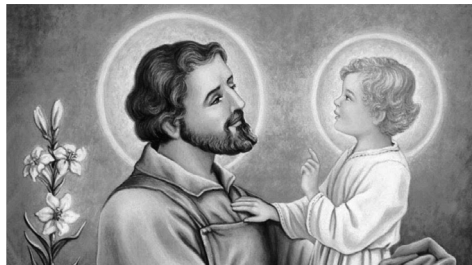
When the Bible speaks of God “justifying” someone, it means that God, the all-holy or “righteous” one, so transforms a person that the individual shares somehow in God’s own holiness, and hence it is “right” for God to love him or her. In other words, God is not playing games, acting as if we were lovable when we are not.

By saying Joseph was “just,” the Bible means that he was one who was completely open to all that God wanted to do for him. He became holy by opening himself totally to God.

The rest we can easily surmise. Think of the kind of love with which he wooed and won Mary, and the depth of the love they shared during their marriage.

It is no contradiction of Joseph’s manly holiness that he decided to divorce Mary when she was found to be with child. The important words of the Bible are that he planned to do this “quietly” because he was “a righteous man yet unwilling to expose her to shame” (Matthew 1:19).

The just man was simply, joyfully, wholeheartedly obedient to God — in marrying Mary, in naming Jesus, in shepherding the precious pair to Egypt, in bringing them to Naza-



reth, in the undetermined number of years of quiet faith and courage.

The Bible tells us nothing of Joseph in the years after the return to Nazareth except the incident of finding Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:41–51). Perhaps this can be taken to mean that God wants us to realize that the holiest family was like every other family that the circumstances of life for the holiest family were like those of every family, so that when Jesus’ mysterious nature began to appear, people couldn’t believe that he came from such humble beginnings: “Is he not the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother named Mary...?” (Matthew 13:55a).

It was almost as indignant as “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” (John 1:46b).

Joseph is the patron saint of Belgium, Canada, China, carpenters, families and fathers.

Source: [www.franciscanmedia.org](http://www.franciscanmedia.org)

## 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)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>ABOUT THE PARISH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address: 648 Jay St., Utica, 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 Sacrament Center: 315-724-3950.</li> <li>• Email: <a href="mailto:stmarynyc@nyntio.org">stmarynyc@nyntio.org</a></li> <li>• Hearing impaired: Listening devices available in the sacristy.</li> </ul> <p><b>MASS SCHEDULES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Weekend</b></li> <li>• Saturday: 4:30 p.m. (livestreamed on parish YouTube channel)</li> <li>• Sunday: 8 and 11 a.m.</li> <li>• <b>Weekday</b></li> <li>• Monday and Tuesday: 8:30 a.m. at St. Anthony &amp; St. Agnes.</li> <li>• Thursday and Friday: 8:30 a.m. at Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament.</li> <li>• <b>Holy Days</b></li> <li>• Consult the bulletin and website.</li> <li>• <b>RECONCILIATION</b></li> <li>• Saturday: 3:45 p.m.</li> <li>• <b>MARRIAGE</b></li> <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 Accorci Sr. and Bill Thibault</li> <li>• Parish Office Manager: Terri Piazza-Panuccio</li> <li>• Faith Formation &amp; RCIA: Terri Piazza-Panuccio</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> |
|---|--|



## ... 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



# Working together

## Parishes collaborate to offer Faith Formation to junior and senior high students

By FRAN PERRITANO

Faith Formation for junior and senior high school students in the Utica region has a fresh look.

Six parishes are collaborating to offer one program taking place at two locations, giving parents and their children an opportunity to pick which location to attend.

This follows the lead of two parishes that joined their programs in fall 2022.

Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament, Historic Old St. John's, St. Anthony & St. Agnes, St. Joseph & St. Patrick, Sacred Heart & St. Mary's, and Mary, Mother of Our Savior parishes are working in unison to present religious education to these young adults.

In fall 2022, St. Patrick-St. Anthony's Parish in Chadwicks and St. Mary's in Clinton joined Faith Formation forces. This year, St. John the Evangelist in New Hartford and Annunciation in Clark Mills have been added.

"We leaders have been working together for many years on large events," said Anne Carlone Elacqua, junior-senior high Faith Formation coordinator at Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament. "I approached our group leaders and asked if we wanted to collaborate our programs to get our kids together so they can be with other Catholic youths. ... There are more kids in the area than what we have in our own parish. We decided to join together."

### Why collaborate?

Kathy Poupart, parish life director at St. Patrick-St. Anthony's Parish, and Cheryl Smith, catechetical leader/youth minister for grades 7-12 at St. Mary's in Clinton, launched their program in fall 2022.

What prompted the merger?

"Students went through the entire ninth- and 10<sup>th</sup>-grade program and disappeared from the parish after Confirmation," Poupart said. "It was not an effective use of our resources and time. Collaborative efforts throughout the diocese are being encouraged with a thought toward pooling staffing, resources, energies and finances to make for more dynamic programs and processes within the parishes. It is clear, throughout all sorts of industries, that collaboration is essential for growth, stability and endurance. As we move forward in building the Kingdom of God, this approach will help sustain us."

Smith said she and Poupart realized that by working together they could provide more choices for the families and a schedule that works best for them.



**COVER PHOTO:** Students work on an assignment in Mary Beth Harrod's class at St. Mary of Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament Parish. Harrod is Faith Formation leader for grades 7 through 10 at Historic Old St. John's Church in Utica. **ABOVE:** Students participate in catechist Vanessa Jones' Faith Formation class at Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament.

"We decided the best way to do this was to offer 'blocks,'" Smith said. "Each block was three weeks. Some blocks were offered at St. Mary's on Monday or Tuesday evenings and some at St. Patrick-St. Anthony's on Sunday at noon. Families could choose the day and time that worked best for them, and they could change the day/time/place any time during the year if needed. They were never tied to only one option."

Dick Vetere is coordinator of Faith Formation and Youth Ministry at Mary, Mother of Our Savior Parish. He assisted in helping Poupart and Smith get their program off the ground.

"(They) were the pioneers," he said. "I served as a consultant to this group. I learned that we

Please see **FAITH FORMATION**, Page 7

### Faith Formation connections

These Utica-area parishes are collaborating in two groups to offer religious education to junior and senior high school students:

- **Organized in fall 2022:** St. Patrick-St. Anthony's Parish in Chadwicks and St. Mary's in Clinton. This year, St. John the Evangelist in New Hartford and Annunciation in Clark Mills have been added.
- **Begun in fall 2023:** Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament, Historic Old St. John's, St. Anthony & St. Agnes, St. Joseph & St. Patrick, Sacred Heart & St. Mary's, and Mary, Mother of Our Savior.



Vanessa Jones became a parishioner in late 2022. She was fully initiated into the Roman Catholic faith at the 2023 Easter Vigil. She now sings in the choir and teaches Faith Formation classes.

# Singing Vanessa's praises

A parishioner for more than a year, she loves being a member of the choir and teaching our teenagers

*Vanessa Jones is a relative newcomer to the parish, having joined the congregation a little over a year ago. But in that short time, she has made quite an impact. She became a fully initiated Rome Catholic at the 2023 Easter Vigil, sings in the choir and teaches in the Faith Formation program. Not bad for a rookie.*

**You majored in inclusive elementary and special education at Syracuse University. Why did you choose that field and was it what you expected?**

I have wanted to be a teacher since third grade. I wasn't sure exactly what I wanted to teach. I was a physics education major and then I switched to elementary after many long discussions with my advisers and my close friends.

**Describe a typical day as a first-grade teacher.**

Being a first-grade teacher is a lot busier than I expected. We have a pretty rigorous schedule every day. However, I try to make time for fun things like arts and crafts, GoNoodle brain breaks and dance parties.

**What motivates you to mold the minds of such young children?**

Last year, I took over as a seventh-grade ELA teacher in March and it was a clear divide between elementary and middle school. Our building is pre-k through 8, but it felt like two separate schools. My goal this year is to try and bridge this divide to make all students feel loved by everyone. First grade is a time when students start to really enjoy or dislike school since they start a more rigorous schedule, and I want to make them enjoy it for as

## Vanessa Jones

- **Age:** 23.
- **Education:** Bachelor of science degree from Syracuse University majoring in inclusive elementary and special education.
- **Occupation:** First-grade teacher at Edward Smith School in the Syracuse City School District.
- **Things you like to do in your spare time:** Act (I have performed in a few plays with Players of Utica); arts and crafts.
- **Favorite places to visit:** Florence, Italy; Old Forge.
- **Favorite musician:** Taylor Swift.
- **Favorite TV show:** "Grey's Anatomy."

long as possible.

**Do you teach special-education students? What are the challenges and rewards of that occupation?**

My classroom is not a CT room, but I do get to work with the special-education students during recess and when we do whole-grade activities. I love that SU gave me the chance to dual major in special education and general education. My favorite aspect of special education is being able to work a bit more one on one with students to meet their goals. I love when you can see students click with material, and it is often harder to do that with the special-edu-

cation students, so getting to see that moment because of work that I do or someone else does is an incredible feeling.

**What got you interested in acting and what satisfaction do you get from it?**

I started acting at Proctor when I was in ninth grade. I did it all throughout high school and then took a break from it in college. I recently got involved with it again at Players of Utica. It has been incredible to be back on the stage. I did not realize how much I missed it. It is nice to be able to tell a story for people and have them experience it in different ways.

**Italian immigrants founded our parish, and one of your favorite places to visit is Florence, Italy. Why do you like that part of the "Old Country?"**

In 2022, I studied abroad with my university in Rome, Florence, Venice and a bunch of small towns. Florence was the best part of the trip. I like that you got the city feel, but it was not as busy as Rome was. During my time in Italy the food was the best in Florence, and I was able to visit a school, which I really enjoyed. I always tell my friends and family that I would move to Florence right now if I could.

**You love Taylor Swift. What makes her so special?**

I have not seen her in concert, but I did watch the concert film. I like Taylor Swift because she has a way of making you feel heard with her music.

**Are you willing to make a prediction on Please see VANESSA, Page 7**

# Music meets medicine

## David living one dream while envisioning another

*David Elacqua has the music gene. He grew up in a musical family, plays in the parish choir and is choir director at Historic Old St. John's. Even with all that, he's considering going to medical school. He's marching to his own beat.*

**You majored in music and biology at Colgate University. How did you decide on those majors that seem far apart?**

I had been interested in biology for a long time, and after taking it in high school, I knew I wanted to major in it in college. I was planning on doing a music minor from the start, but the difference in a music minor and a major at Colgate was only two classes, so I figured I might as well do a double major. I'm very glad I did.

**Music is a major part of the entire Elacqua clan. You play the organ, piano and clarinet. How did your love of music evolve?**

My love for music started at a very young age. I have vague memories of sitting on the organ bench with my mother while she played Mass both here at Mount Carmel and during the summers at St. John's when she would substitute. I started taking piano lessons when I was 5 and continued with that for many years. I picked up the clarinet in the fourth grade as part of the elementary school band, and I started playing the clarinet in the Mount Carmel choir a few years later. During college, I played the clarinet in the Colgate Orchestra, the Colgate Chamber Players, and I also played in the pep band where I was the drum major (the conductor) for almost three years. For the organ, I always had an interest in it with my mom playing it and with my grandfather's love for organ. When he passed in 2016, I became even more interested in learning the organ, and then in 2018 during my freshman year at Colgate, I decided to start taking lessons.

**You're 23 and have been a Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament parishioner since you were born. You've been an altar server and part of the music ministry. Now, you're choir director at St. John's. How did that come about, and do you have any mixed feelings about working in another parish?**

I started playing the organ in my freshman year at Colgate, and during my sophomore year, I began taking lessons in Utica with Steven Best. This continued until the COVID shutdown. During my junior year at Colgate, I was approached by Father Jason Hage (now the pastor at Mary, Mother of Our Savior) to be the organist at St. Mary's in Hamilton and St. Bernard's in Waterville. I played at both churches for a while and eventually transitioned to just playing at St. Mary's. In 2022 I was approached by Father Tom Servatius at St. John's about their position and started in October of that year. At the very start, I was slightly apprehensive about working in another parish, especially one so close to Mount Carmel, but everyone — including the choir members, the staff and the congregation — has been extremely welcoming and supportive of me there.



David Elacqua plays the organ at Historic Old St. John's Church, where he is choir director.

### David Elacqua

- **Age:** 23.
- **Family:** Parents David and Anne Elacqua, brother Nick.
- **Education:** Bachelor of Arts from Colgate University, majoring in biology and music.
- **Occupation:** Organist / choir director at Historic Old St. John's and scientist at ICON Lab in Whitesboro.
- **Things you like to do in your spare time:** Spend time with my family, my two cats and playing music.
- **Favorite music genre or musician:** I enjoy many different types of music, but I tend to listen to pop and classical music the most.
- **Favorite composer:** Tchaikovsky.
- **Hobbies:** Playing video games, learning new music on the piano or organ, listening to music, and watching TV and movies.
- **Favorite TV show:** "The Crown."
- **Favorite movie:** "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix."
- **Favorite book:** "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy.

I've loved every minute of it.

**In addition to your music, you also are a scientist at ICON Labs in Whitesboro. What does your job entail?**

ICON is a contract research organization, so pharmaceutical companies that are developing new drugs send samples to us from their clinical trials, and we run tests on them. I work in the large molecule pharmacokinetics (large PK) lab where we run tests on the samples that help the sponsor pharmaceutical company determine dosage.

**You're now considering going to medical school. What field of medicine are you interested in and why?**

I'm not entirely sure what field of medicine I'd like to go into. The nice thing about medical school is that you get exposure to many different specialties during your clinical rotations, so you don't have to go into it knowing what you want to do. I could see myself working in pediatrics because I work well with kids; however, I could also see myself in anesthesiology as I can imagine how rewarding it must be to be the person to comfort someone and place them at ease right before an operation.

**Mount Carmel has been an anchor for your family for several generations. What does that familial connection mean for you?**

Our connection to Mount Carmel means a lot to me. My grandparents were very active in our church, and while I don't have many memories of them as I was very young when they passed, I've heard countless stories of their involvement in the church and in our faith community as a whole. For many years now, there have been many Elacquas up in the choir loft on a

Please see DAVID, Page 7

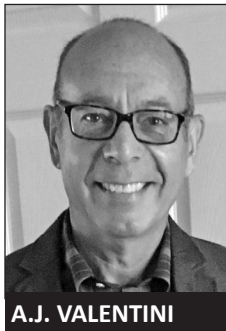
# Preserving Italian culture

## Club dedicated to continuing proud heritage

Our parish is composed of individuals from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Our population includes people who trace their heritage to Europe, Central and South America, Africa and Asia.

There is no mistaking, however, the profound influence of the Italians and their culture on St. Mary of Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament.

From its founding more than 125 years ago as a bulwark of Italian immigrants in Utica, the imprimatur of Italians can be seen in our building's architecture (Romanesque) and decoration (Italian Baroque). We see it in our holiday cookie sales (Sicilian cuccidati), and festival fare (such as sausage and peppers). Our pizza frita remains the biggest seller at our festival raising thousands of dollars. The way we remember saints from the "Old Country" in our "Hall of Saints" and the special ways we celebrate holidays recall Italian roots.



A.J. VALENTINI

Recently, the parish collaborated again with the Italian Heritage Club of the Mohawk Valley to host our annual Italian Christmas Gathering.

Approximately 100 guests shared a delicious meal, followed by Italian pastry and cookies, Italian songs and communal dancing.

Some people, however, are unfamiliar with the organization and what it does. To that end let's delve into its history and some of its goals and projects.

When the former Sons of Italy Lodge on Bleecker Street closed in 2012, the presence of the Italian-American community in Utica took a severe blow. A group of 60 former members wanted to reaffirm the Italian presence in Utica without the encumbrance of a building to support and maintain. Thus, The Italian Heritage Club of the Mohawk Valley was born. Composed of 275 members, the organization has supported a variety of initiatives that preserve the Italian heritage throughout the Mohawk Valley.

Under the leadership of Joann Cavo-Campbell and her officers and board of directors, the organization has contributed the following:

- Recognized the historical importance of the Italian Community Bake Oven in Little Falls in a special ceremony there in October 2022.

- Since 2020, has led flag raisings of the American and Italian colors in recognition of Italian Culture Month each October at municipal buildings in Utica, Rome and Herkimer.

- Also, since 2020, honored the contributions of Italian immigrants and their descendants to the city of Utica by laying a wreath at the foot of the Columbus statue on Utica's Parkway.



Joann Cavo-Campbell, left, and the Italian Heritage Club of the Mohawk Valley recognized the historical importance of the Italian Community Bake Oven in Little Falls in a ceremony in October 2022. At right is Philomena Cerone, a club member and board member of Preserve Our Past in Little Falls.



### Become a member

The Italian Heritage Club of the Mohawk Valley welcomes new members. One needn't have Italian roots to join, only a love for Italian and Italian-American culture is required. Contact Joanne Cavo-Campbell at 315-733-6106.

- Sponsored an exhibit of Italian and Italian-American artifacts at the Oneida County History Center in October in 2022
- Sponsored a cruise on the Erie Canal and luncheon from Herkimer in 2022.
- Hosted "La Dolce Vita" at Rutger Park Landmark Society of Utica's mansions, featuring Italian music, artwork and sweets.
- Collaborated with the Landmarks Society of Utica for a special tour of the Rutger Street mansions in 2021.
- Sponsored a reception at Sculpture Space to celebrate the arrival of an Italian artist-in-residence.
- During COVID, hosted a pizza frita event

at the Presbyterian Home for residents.

- Sponsored two tours of F.T. Proctor Park with Olmstead City President Phil Bean before and after the lily pond restoration (to which several members contributed).

- Conducted an honors banquet in October recognizing contributors to the good reputation of the Italian community.

- Has supported the revival of the Coro Italiano of the Mohawk Valley, increasing requests for six concerts its first year back to 30 requests this year.

- Informed the public of its activities and the promotion of Italian culture through its membership newsletter and the maintenance of its Facebook page viewed by thousands of people all over the country.

- Through its basket raffle at the parish Christmas parties, raised hundreds of dollars to support the good work of the Veterans Outreach Center of Utica

- Had informal lunches where people can gather and share stories and history.

- Sponsors regular cultural evenings to learn about Italian culture and dine on regional delicacies from all over Italy.

- Bestows annual scholarships on exceptional graduating high school seniors.

- And finally, made other monetary contributions to a variety of charitable causes in the community.

# FAITH FORMATION

Continued from Page 3

can work together in collaboration rather than competing with one another to bring our collective resources to our mission of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to our community. It was successful and continues this year.”

## Lessons learned

Looking back, what did they learn?

“The brilliance of collaborative efforts,” Poupart said. “The power of new relationships between students when they meet students from other school districts. The possibilities, as we move forward, in new courses, new service opportunities, new prayer experiences, etc.”

Smith said that since the teens from the parishes have been in sessions together, “They have gotten to know and feel comfortable with each other.

“When we offered a Teen Gathering Night, some of these same teens came together and were comfortable sharing faith and fun outside of Faith Formation sessions because they had gotten to know each other.”

## Journey of faith

Mary Beth Harrod is the new kid on the

block among the Faith Formation leaders. She has been a catechist for 11 years, teaching First Communion children at Historic Old St. John’s for eight years. She’s now the Faith Formation overseer for grades 7-10.

“It is my hope that by coming together, the kids and leaders can make connections with each other, make new friendships, all while journeying together in our faith and creating individual relationships with God that will deepen and grow over time,” she said.

Elacqua said merging six programs “is a way to join our resources in catechists, ideas, programs to provide the students with the best possible program filled with ways to have a relationship with God, learn more about their faith and grow.”

She said there are about 120 students in the new program, which will offer classes at Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament or Notre Dame Junior-Senior High School on Sundays.

“We hope that kids will enjoy coming and want to share their faith with others,” she added. “I have learned that we all have the best interest of our kids in our hearts, and we want them to have a fabulous experience in growing in their faith.”



Young adults in Anne Elacqua’s Faith Formation class at St. Mary of Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament Parish in Utica are “Good Samaritans” tending to the injured person from the Gospel parable. Elacqua is junior-senior high Faith Formation director in the parish.

# DAVID

Continued from Page 5

weekly basis, and especially when everyone is there, it is so special to all of us to get to make music together. It’s a very unique bond that we share with each other through this familial connection to our church (especially through our music) that I don’t think many people get to experience.

## How has your faith influenced your life and your decisions?

My faith has been a big part of my life since I was very young. I’ve been going to church for as long as I can remember, and my parents have always instilled a strong sense of faith in my life. My faith has gotten me through grade school, college, all of my music endeavors, and now it is helping me discern where my life is going to take me. I know I can turn to my faith whenever I need to, in good times and in difficult times.

## How would you describe yourself and how do you hope people view you?

I would describe myself as a kind, intelligent and comforting person. I love helping people whenever I can in ways physically, emotionally and spiritually. I would hope people view me in the same way.

## Music. Medicine. Who knows what else. In your dream world, what does the future hold for you?

I love directing the choir and playing the organ at St. John’s, but there is also something that is strongly pulling me toward medicine. If accepted and I attend medical school, unfortunately I would need to give up being the organist for a church for a while, but it’s possible I could pick it back up after my schooling is over. In a dream world, I would be able to do both at the same time.

# VANESSA

Continued from Page 4

## the Taylor-Travis Kelce romance?

I think they will end up together. However, I wish she picked a Giants player instead of a Chiefs player.

## You joined our parish at Christmastime in 2022, then became a fully initiated Catholic when you were baptized, confirmed and received First Communion the Easter Vigil in 2023. Please describe the process and your mindset about making the decision to become Catholic.

I had been consistently going to church since my junior year of high school. I used to attend Historic Old St. John’s and then Lourdes for a while. I have always found peace at church no matter which church I have been with. I had been thinking about officially becoming Catholic for a while, but it was too complicated with college. I graduated from SU in the fall of 2022 and decided that it was time to finally get baptized, confirmed and receive First Communion. I reached out to Father Jim, who was happy to have me become Catholic. I had class with Father once a week for a few months to talk about what being Catholic meant. It was an enjoyable class, which I attended with my sponsor, Joanne Vanderwood. I met Joanne through choir and knew that she was the right person to be my sponsor. Father Jim made the RCIA process less complicated and enjoyable.

## Why did you choose Mount Carmel / Blessed Sacrament as your parish?

I decided to join Mount Carmel at Christmastime in 2022 because of my friend David Elacqua who said that the choir at Mount Carmel was the best. I sang in the choir loft at Midnight Mass and found a home. It was a beautiful night and David was right about it being the best Midnight Mass. Ever since then, I have been singing every Saturday for 4:30 Mass and

most Sundays for the 8 a.m. and 11 a.m. Mass.

## You sing in the choir and teach seventh-graders in the Faith Formation program. Why did you choose those ministries?

I love teaching my first-graders, but after teaching middle school for three months at the end of last school year, I grew an appreciation for the older kids as well. I was starting to miss the older kids, and Anne Elacqua asked me to teach the seventh-grade teen program here at Mount Carmel and I knew that this was the right path for me. My class consists of reading about the Catholic faith, playing games and discussing our favorite aspects of church. We have an open dialogue about our faith, and the kids seem to enjoy it. I sing in the choir because I love music and love getting to hear the incredibly talented people who are in our choir loft.

## What do you think of our parish and parishioners so far?

I love Mount Carmel. I found a second family in the choir loft. There are a bunch of people that I know that I can go to at this parish if I ever need anything. I loved the other churches that I have gone to, but they do not compare to this one.

## You’re just 23 years old. In your perfect world, what do you hope your future holds for you?

I hope to have some involvement in education for my whole life. I like being able to make a difference in the lives of children, whether that is by teaching them or working to improve their lives indirectly. I have students who I taught for as little as two weeks who still come to me to give me hugs, come talk to me because they trust me, or just come to see how I am doing, and that is why I do what I do. I plan to get a PhD in education at some point, but that will not happen for a while. I hope to live my life with a family, a few dogs and a fluffy gray cat.



# Holiday magic

The celebration of the Christmas holidays was in full swing in November and December. The Craft Fair and Bake Sale drew many vendors and customers; the annual Italian Christmas Gathering offered the holiday spirit at Twin Ponds Golf & Country Club; the return of “A Festival of Lessons and Carols” featured the combined choirs from our parish and Historic Old St. John’s (plus Chelsea Opera musicians); and it all was capped off by celebrating the Birth of Jesus at Christmas Masses and the Epiphany.



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