

### ***Parish Visitation This Weekend***

As you already know from having attended Mass, this weekend we have welcomed Msgr. James McNamara, Vicar for the Central Vicariate, for his Parish Visitation to OLPH. Msgr. Jim has had a very busy weekend meeting with the Pastoral Staff, the Pastoral Council, and many other parish ministries, societies and organizations, in order to get a sense of where OLPH is at as a parish and to hear the comments, impressions and input of those involved in leadership in the parish. In time, I will receive a report from Msgr. Jim, which will also be forwarded to Bishop Murphy, and this report, which I will share with the Pastoral Staff and Pastoral Council, will help us in planning our direction for the future.

### ***Advent***

So, how are you doing so far in keeping Advent? Admittedly, it can be difficult to keep an Advent spirit of longing and waiting and preparation when everything about our society is prompting us to celebrate Christmas now, and to have it all over and done with on December 26. I think it becomes a question of **balance**. There are some legitimate things that have to get done ahead of time: baking the cookies, shopping for gifts, writing the Christmas cards. While all this is good, let's also be careful of working ourselves into such a frenzy that we create a *"hurry up and let's get this over with mentality"* when it comes to things that are supposed to bring joy and peace. Actually, I was surprised to already have received a couple of Christmas cards — before Thanksgiving! We have to ask the question as to the value of something that becomes such a burden that we have to "get it out of the way as early as possible."

Perhaps part of a real Advent spirituality involves **re-prioritizing**. Given the limited amount of time we have to get ready for Christmas, what things are really worth our time and effort, and what things are perhaps expendable for the sake of creating some spiritual emptiness in our life? What things, though they might be good and nice, might be less important, and therefore perhaps left undone, for the sake of taking time for Advent prayer, reflection, and Scripture reading? How can we **re-order** and **re-prioritize** our life so

that we are not so frenetic and overwrought over what has to get done? Remember, in Advent we are getting ready for the coming of the Prince of Peace, not the Prince-of-Those-Who-Are-Exhausted-from-Overwork-and-Stress. If that's true, what do we need to do to make this Advent a little less stressful for ourselves and our loved ones?

I hope as a minimum each family is taking a few minutes each day or night, perhaps before the evening meal, to light their home Advent wreath and to say some prayers together, perhaps using the prayers we offer in this bulletin.

### ***"Merry Christmas," not "Happy Holidays"***

There's something else I would ask you to keep in mind in the weeks leading up to Christmas. It's well-known that there seem to be forces in our society that would like to eliminate any religious meaning from Christmas, and part of this seems to be a concerted effort to eliminate use of the word "Christmas." As Christians, we must consistently oppose any tendency to turn Christmas into some generic winter holiday. We should not allow "Happy Holidays" to replace "Merry Christmas" (or to replace "Happy Hanukkah," for those who celebrate Hanukkah, for that matter) as a greeting. At this time of year I have been known to wear a button on my coat that says, "It's OK to say Merry Christmas to me!" Maybe you've seen buttons like that around; if you have one, wear it! I would urge everyone to make sure you use religious greetings in your conversations with others.

What surprises and, in fact, dismays me, is that way that Christians, we Catholics included, often play into this and reinforce it. It's subtle; I don't think we are trying to destroy the religious meaning of Christmas, but we are unconsciously reinforcing a bad tendency when we inadvertently repeat a generic "Happy Holidays" greeting. Another example of this might be found in the Christmas cards we send. What do your Christmas cards look like? Do they explicitly affirm the religious meaning of Christmas, or do they portray images and scenes of some generic winter holiday or other cutesy, non-descript graphic? Would a stranger know that Jesus Christ is the meaning of Christmas as

a result of reading your Christmas card? As yet another example, if we are creating something for public display or advertisement, are we being sure to purposefully use the word “Christmas” and religious pictures and imagery, instead of a generic “Happy Holidays” and snowmen and snowflakes?

It’s just something for all of us to ponder...

### ***Liturgy of the Hours: Evening Prayer***

Last weekend we began praying Evening Prayer as a community, and it was wonderful! I was thrilled by the number of people who attended, and those who prayed it enjoyed doing so. The practice will continue indefinitely: each Saturday and Sunday evening, after the 5:00 p.m. Mass (somewhere around 6:10 or 6:15 p.m.) those who wish to do so will gather to pray Evening Prayer. Texts will be provided, and it will take only about 15 minutes or so. Consider joining in as frequently as you can!

### ***Lessons and Carols: A Beautiful Advent Prayer***

Next Sunday evening, December 15, at 7:30, OLPH will celebrate Lessons and Carols. You’ve been reading about it and hearing about it, so I hope you have given yourself the gift of setting the time aside to be there. There is no more beautiful and uplifting way to pray “*Come, Lord Jesus!*” than in the songs and Scripture readings of Lessons and Carols. Please make every effort to attend.

### ***Parish Penance Service, Monday, December 9***

Let me remind you about our Parish Penance Service this Monday, December 9, at 7:30 p.m. in the Church. Celebrating God’s forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a most apt way to prepare our hearts to receive this Lord this Christmas, and so we will celebrate a communal Advent Penance Service. How splendid it is for us to celebrate the gift of God’s forgiveness by together, as a community, reflecting on that forgiveness through prayers and Scripture readings, and then celebrating individual Confessions. That’s what we will be doing this Monday night at 7:30 p.m., so please join us. It’s a great way to get to Confession during Advent!

### ***Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception***

Since this Sunday is December 8, the liturgical celebration of the Second Sunday of Advent takes precedence over the celebration of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The celebration of that Solemnity is transferred to the next day, Monday, December 9, but the obligation to attend Mass is not transferred. However, even though there is no obligation to attend Mass, I encourage all parishioners, if at all possible, to attend Mass, either here at OLPH or wherever might be convenient, in order to mark this important Solemnity, which is also the Patronal Feast of the United States of America.

### ***Youth Ministry Event***

I am very pleased that OLPH will be hosting a special “Advent Evening Prayer and Community Outreach Night” for youth throughout Long Island this Friday night, December 13. This shows some great leadership on the part of our Youth Ministry, and I thank Brittany-Marie Evans, our Youth Minister, for her hard work and leadership not only with this event, but also for all the time and energy she puts into Youth Ministry in our parish on an ongoing basis. Thanks too to all who have worked with Brittany on this event and on everything that has built up and re-energized our Youth Ministry at OLPH. It is growing, growing, growing, and that’s a great thing!

How appropriate, too, that this event is inviting youth to “walk in the light of the Lord” on December 13, which is the Feast of St. Lucy! St. Lucy, one of my favorite saints, is associated with light and with sight, and is a great “Advent saint” as we focus on the light of Christ’s coming into the world overcoming the darkness.

### ***In conclusion...***

Together, let’s aim high in Christ. Together, let’s bring out the best in each other. Together, let’s be the best we can be in Christ.

And let’s always remember: LOVE IS A GIFT.

Sincerely,