

# St. Raphael Sodality February events

Everyone is invited to join Sodality on February 7 at 10:00 am in the Parish Library to hear about the apparition and message of Mary in Kibeho, Rwanda. Thirteen years before the bloody genocide that swept across Rwanda and left more than a million people dead, the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ appeared to eight

young people in the remote village of Kibeho. Through these visionaries, Mary and Jesus warned of the looming holocaust, which (they assured) could be averted if Rwandans opened their hearts to God and embraced His love. After the genocide and two decades of rigorous investigation, Our Lady of Kibeho became the first and only

Vatican approved Marian site in all of Africa.

Sodality will host an Irish Country Tea in the Parish Library on February 12 at 1:30pm. Members will have an opportunity to sign up to bring a treat to the Tea, which has become a favorite annual tradition.

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K-8 students bring down the house with "Happy Birthday, Baby Jesus!" in St. Raphael School's annual Christmas program. Photo by Tom Carrington



St. Raphael Sodality joined the fifth-grade students of St. Raphael School for the annual Christmas party at Raphael House. Sodality provided gifts for each resident that the children pulled in on a toboggan. After handing out the gifts while wearing their Christmas hats, the students and Sodalists led the residents in Christmas caroling. There were smiles of pure joy all around.

St. Raphael School fifth graders spread holiday cheer by visiting residents of Raphael House senior home. Photo by MJ Zafis-Garcia



St. Raphael School students vie for top honors in the Spirit Day shooting contest. Photo by MJ Zafis-Garcia

## St. Raphael School and Nursery School Make Spirits Bright

By MJ Zafis-Garcia

St. Raphael School and Nursery School wrapped up the second semester with Christmas traditions that have become a special part of our school and parish family. For almost 25 years, St. Raphael Parish has hosted its annual Mother Teresa Luncheon for residents from two Washington, D.C., shelters run by the Missionaries of Charity. The guests attended Mass, accompanied by the fourth-grade class, and were treated to a hot meal served by our seventh and eighth grades. The event was sprinkled with Christmas carols, including a performance by

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# National Prayer Vigil for Life at Shrine, January 23-24

The National Prayer Vigil for Life will be held from Thursday, January 23 to Friday, January 24, at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Over 20,000 pilgrims from around the nation are expected to gather there and pray for an end to abortion before the annual March for Life on the National Mall. The Vigil marks the 47th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 Roe v. Wade and Doe v. Bolton decisions legalizing abortion through nine months of pregnancy. Since those decisions, over 60 million abortions have been performed legally in the United States.

The principal celebrant and homilist at the opening Mass for the National Prayer Vigil for Life on January 23 will be Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City in Kansas, who is chairman of the Committee on Pro-Life Activities for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Many of the nation's bishops and priests will concelebrate the Mass with Archbishop Naumann in the basilica's Great Upper Church. The principal celebrant and homilist for the closing Mass for the National Prayer Vigil for Life on January 24 will be Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D. of the Military Services, USA, who is secretary for the USCCB. After the conclusion of the Mass on Friday, the partici-

pants make their way down to the national mall for the annual March for Life.

The schedule for the National Prayer Vigil for Life:

## Thursday, January 23:

- 5:30 PM Opening Mass in the Great Upper Church
- 8:00 PM National Rosary for Life
- 9:30 PM Byzantine Rite Night Prayer
- 11:00 PM ~ Holy Hours led by seminarians (through the night)

## Friday, January 24:

- 6:00 AM Eucharistic Adoration in the Crypt Church
- 6:30 AM Morning Prayer and Benediction
- 7:30 AM Closing Mass in the Great Upper Church

For those seeking the Sacrament of Reconciliation, confessions will be heard in the Our Lady of Hostyn Chapel of the Crypt Church over the course of nine hours before and after the opening Mass. See [www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/january-roe-events/national-prayer-vigil-for-life-schedule.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/january-roe-events/national-prayer-vigil-for-life-schedule.cfm) for additional details.

"Even if you aren't able to physically be present with us in DC, we invite everyone to join in our witness and pray for an end to abortion," said Kat Talalas, assistant director for pro-life communications at the USCCB. "Thousands of

Catholics across the country have already signed up for 9 Days for Life. . . , the pro-life novena taking place January 21-29. We ask all of the faithful to unite in prayer to protect the rights of unborn children, to end the violence of abortion, and for greater respect for human life."

The National Prayer Vigil for Life is co-sponsored by the USCCB's Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, and The Catholic University of America.

Media are invited to attend the opening Mass and interview pilgrims who have traveled to Washington from around the country for the fourteen-hour vigil. Advance registration is requested via the media request. . . form on the basilica's website. Video footage from the Mass may also be obtained by satellite feed, courtesy of the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN). For coordinates, please contact Jacquelyn Hayes, director of communications for the basilica, at 202-281-0615 or [jmh@bnsic.org](mailto:jmh@bnsic.org).

For more details on the overnight National Prayer Vigil for Life and other pro-life events in the Washington area, please visit [www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/january-roe-events](http://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/january-roe-events). To join -- and help spread the word about -- 9 Days for Life, visit [www.9daysforlife.com](http://www.9daysforlife.com).

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## NURSERY SCHOOL

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our 4-Plus students.

The Christmas program put on by the students of SRS and the two pageants by SRNS are magical shows that everyone looks forward to every year. This year's K-8 program included such classics as "What Child is This?" and "The Little Drummer Boy," as well as a new entry for SRS, "Breath of Heaven" by our seventh grade, which was, in a word, breathtaking. Our preschoolers did not disappoint as they delightfully told, through song, the story of the birth of baby Jesus. It's the best 12 minutes ever.

Because Christmas is a time of giving, our fifth-grade class made its annual visit to Raphael House next door to spread holiday joy. Donned in Santa and elf hats and carrying festive bells, the students serenaded the senior residents with carols and then presented each one with a gift and homemade card.

CYO basketball is in full swing. We marked the start of the season with SRS Spirit Day, which celebrates our Angels and all things St. Raphael. The highlight is the students-vs.-teachers basketball game, which, in a stunning upset, the staff dominated this year. P.E. teacher Andrew Price introduced a new addition to Spirit Day -- boys' and girls' shooting contests, where sixth-graders Damien Quesnel and Reagan Alexander came out on top.

Catholic Schools Week is almost here, and everyone -- from our preschoolers to our eighth graders, to our parents, staff, and clergy -- gets in on the festivities. We kick off with a Sunday Mass, where students wear their uniforms to show their school pride, followed by a full schedule of events. Our students write letters to teachers and priests, make sandwiches for the hungry, listen to presenters on Career Day, and enjoy games and activities. The week is topped off with Family Fun Night.

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## SESSION

Con't from page 2

will oppose any efforts to enshrine abortion in Maryland's constitution and to legalize the practice of physician-assisted suicide.

Support for our most vulnerable. The Conference will support efforts to protect immigrants, provide for our poor, curb human trafficking, protect the environment, provide services to individuals with disabilities, and violence protection

programs.

To stay up-to-date on the work of the Conference throughout the next 90 days, be sure to visit the Legislation page on the Maryland Catholic Conference website: [www.mdccatholic.org](http://www.mdccatholic.org). This is the hub for all Conference activity during the next 90 days. The Conference shares every piece of testimony it submits and keeps a tracker of all the bills it is weighing in on throughout the session. Be sure to bookmark the page and check back often.

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## GIVING TREE

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all sizes-- young children, youth, and adults. The gifts received also come in all forms: toys, educational games, clothing, and gift certificates for a meal out. The gifts are tailored to meet the needs of the individuals supported by the various charitable organization with whom we partner -- which gives this outreach a very personal touch.

Arc Montgomery County, one of our Giving Tree partners, expressed their gratitude in a letter. "We have a lot to be grateful for, and the kindness and generosity of Holy Cross Church sits high atop our list," their letter read.

The Social Concerns Committee has much to be grateful for as well. The generosity of Holy Cross Church and School families is astounding--more than six hundred gifts were donated this year! So many volunteers work joyfully

every step of the way--to generate the gift-giving tags to put on the tree; to select, purchase, and wrap gifts; to organize and sort the gifts as they arrive; to help load trucks and cars for delivery; and, even making deliveries to various partner organizations. The entire effort, from beginning to end, is a manifestation of Jesus' love and through it, all of our lives are enriched.

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## CHOIR

Con't from page 7

to the notes on the page and they must pay attention to every cue of the director. As children grow older, their natural inclination is to rebel against authority of any type. Singing in a choir shows them how submitting to authority helps them achieve something that is otherwise impossible.

Music stimulates mental development. Studies have shown that kids who do music also do better in school.

Singing in front of others develops a child's self-esteem and confidence. Fear of speaking in public regularly tops the lists of the most debilitating phobias. The experience of facing the on-looking gaze of congregation, leading them in song, and successfully cantoring under pressure goes a long way toward developing confident and competent adults.

Singing hymns and other sacred music helps children (and adults) learn scripture and the beliefs of the church. It is one of the best catechetical tools we have. Children in choir memorize, without knowing it, a vast portion of the Bible

and they internalize our beliefs. They memorize our prayers and responses, and they develop a love of the Liturgy.

A children's choir gives value to children as worshipers. These days, it's more and more tempting to leave performing to the professionals. Even adults have bought into the concept of "church as a spectator sport." We could help change this by celebrating the contributions that children make while leading the congregation's song. We can show them that their voices count -- that THEY count -- in the Kingdom of God.

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