



The **PILGRIM**

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December 2003

The PILGRIM is a periodical from the **Pilgrims of Faith Marian Center (PFMC)**. The **PFMC** is a ministry of lay Catholic evangelization and healing through the intercession of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

A PRAYER



Dearest Lord, our lives move at such a fast pace. There is the deception that there is little time to draw close to you and to pray. Open our hearts to make time for you. Give us a deep willingness to see your merciful goodness not only in all the moments of our tasks but also the moments we must take to worship you in the silence of our hearts.

Enter into our homes and cleanse all that has been affected by the effects of sinfulness. Place your healing hands upon each one of us that we may know your quiet strength. Help all families to pray together and to slow us down to listen and to surrender all burdens and all attacks of the evil one.

Lord, bless all those who have financially supported the PFMC this year. Bless them for their prayers that have given us the endurance to continue on each day in evangelization and healing. Bring us dedicated volunteers that will help with all the technical things that need to be completed. Help us to foster an atmosphere of prayerful supportive work. We surrender to your will and to all that you give to us. We are not worthy of all your goodness, and we need your daily guidance.

Lord let us stand before you face to face in the quiet spaces of our hearts, where we can replenish our lives and renew our interior lives, so that they flow in union with your Sacred Heart and the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Give us the peace that is found only when we enter into the cave of your birth. Let us stand before the Manger, and can enter into Your Peace on Earth.
AMEN

(Kathleen prays from the heart for each issue.)

MERRY CHRISTMAS and HAPPY NEW YEAR 2004

All the volunteers at the **PFMC** wish you and your family the best for this Advent, Christmas, and New

"The PILGRIM" for December 2003 is dedicated to "She Who Will Crush the Serpent's Head." See page 3 for an "IN THIS ISSUE . . ." listing.

Year of 2004. We thank you for all your support and for all you have done for us in 2003 especially your prayers. Enjoy the special Christmas card enclosed. Please pray the prayer on the back as requested.

(Kathleen, Keith, and all the **PFMC** Volunteers)

CHRISTMAS GIFT to ALL MEMBERS of the PFMC

Many of you are seeing a copy of *"The PILGRIM"* when you do not normally get one on a monthly basis. This is because every Christmas we send out *"The PILGRIM"* to all those who have participated in our events and those of other ministries who have asked us to mail *"The PILGRIM"* to addresses on their mailing lists. We are sending you this as a Christmas gift. If you do not wish to continue with this gift, please let us know. We certainly do not wish to disturb your peace at Christmas time. We have achieved a capability to do special mailings from our mailing list and will purge names off the monthly and Christmas list but save them for future special mailings. If you wish to be completely deleted from contact by the **PFMC**, please let us know. See Box on page 7 about a regular response to these mailings.

(Kathleen, Keith, and all the **PFMC** Volunteers)

WELCOME – FRIENDS of DOCTOR BOB and ANITA RICE

Doctor Bob and Anita Rice of *In His Omnipotent Presence (IHOP) Ministries* have been sending us names and addresses of those interested in a pilgrimage to **Medjugorje** via **Rome** which we are coordinating. This pilgrimage from *Sunday, 10 October 2004*, through *Friday, 22 October 2004*, is

The *November* MESSAGE, alleged to be from GOSPA, Our Lady, Queen of Peace, to an alleged visionary from **Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina**, is presented beginning on page 12 (centerfold page) with REFLECTION and PRESS BULLETIN items.

detailed in the enclosed orchid color information sheet with reservation forms. In addition to the *IHOP Ministries* newsletter, those addresses will be receiving "**The PILGRIM**" until individually cancelled. If you are interested in the pilgrimage, please complete a reservation form. Couples may use front and back of the same form.

(Kathleen, Keith, and all the PFMC Volunteers)

INVENTORY PICTURE and ORDER FORMS ENCLOSED

The picture supplement to the *PFMC* order form sent out with the *November* issue of "**The PILGRIM**" has been revised with the addition of pictures of some book covers. There is a new order form and a new picture supplement included in this issue of "**The PILGRIM**." Come see the Display Rooms.

Livia and Vince Nocella have been working extra hard to get the *PFMC* inventory ready for the for the **2004 PFMC RETREAT CONFERENCE**.

Please consider using the *PFMC* as one of your sources for religious Christmas presents.

(Kathleen, Keith, and all the PFMC Volunteers)

WHEN YOU GET YOUR 2004 CALENDAR, PLEASE MARK IT for IMPORTANT PFMC EVENTS

See **Conference Corner** on page 23 as well as **Bulletin Notices** on pages 21 through 23. Most *PFMC* events will be preceded by their own *PFMC* information sheets with reservation forms. Many of these are included in this issue of "The PILGRIM."

February 12, 2004, Thursday, at 7 PM: Father Bill Halbing will hold an evening Holy Mass and Healing Service at *Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Berlin, NJ*. Following the Healing Holy Mass, there will be a time of anointing and laying on of hands.

March 5, 2004, Friday, 9 AM to 1 PM: We will host a **Retreat** in the **Upper Room** at **Epiphany House** for **Assumption School Faculty**. This **Retreat** will be conducted by **Father Ken Johnston**, Pastor of **Saint Theresa Parish, Runnemede, NJ**.

Don't forget the **Annual PFMC Retreat Conference (RC) March 12 through March 14, 2004**, the concurrent **Youth and Young Adult Track (YT)** and the **3-Day Extension (3DX) March 15 through March 17, 2004**. See the yellow information packet with reservation forms for details.

March 24, 2004 to April 4, 2004, **Father Thomas Kiely** of **Saint Lawrence Parish in Lindenwold, NJ** will be the Spiritual Director for a *PFMC* Pilgrimage to **Medjugorje (PPM) via Prague**. We will spend 2 *nights* in **Prague** with city tour and visit to the *Infant Jesus of Prague*. Then we will enjoy 8 *nights* in **Medjugorje**. We will stay at **Bronco's House** behind the Pizza places very near to **Saint James Church**. The cost of this pilgrimage is **\$1399** plus **\$130** to cover air taxes, and includes round trip air fare, hotel in **Prague** (3-4 star), private home in **Medjugorje**, guides, land transfers, all breakfasts and suppers. Please call (856) 768-9228 and join us. A cherry color information sheet with reservation forms is enclosed in this issue of "The PILGRIM."

April 26, 2004, Monday, 9 AM to 1 PM: "**Medical Day of Recollection**" with **Father John O'Leary**. This is for any kind of medical personnel including aides, RNs and LPNs, Medical Office Personnel, Student Nurses, Doctors, Lab and X-ray technicians or medical staff from other departmental areas. We also invite Physician Assistants, Orthopedic Technicians, Athletic Trainers, and Physical Therapists. Spend a few hours away from all the rushing and work. **Father John** is the Pastor of **Assumption Parish**, and has been a teacher at **Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital School of Nursing**. Donation for this Day of Recollection is **\$15**. Light breakfast will be provided at **8:30 AM**. Talks will begin **PROMPTLY at 9 AM**.

May 8, 2004, Saturday, **Father Bill McCarthy** of **My Father's House** will conduct a day retreat for "**Healing of Physical and Sexual Abuse**." If you are interested in this day of retreat and prayer, please call (856) 768-9228. Advance reservations must be made for this event. Donation for the day is **\$25** including a light lunch and snacks. Pray for **Father Bill**. He was hospitalized with Bacterial Pneumonia in the middle of *November* and is still struggling with Diabetes and Heart problems.

June 27, 2004, Sunday, **Keith and Kathleen** will be celebrating their **40th Wedding Anniversary**, and

The volunteer Board of Directors and Staff of the PFMC recognize and accept that the final authority regarding the alleged apparitions, locutions and related messages at, and to the recipients from, Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as all other private revelations, rests with the Holy See, to whose judgment we willingly submit. We give total allegiance to our One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church and its Magisterium, particularly Our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II. See page 5 for additional PFMC information. While those presenters who work with the PFMC are selected for their personal qualifications and commitment to the Church, their comments and presentations are those of individual Catholics and no endorsement by ecclesiastical authority is to be presumed.

will be away from *June 12* through *June 28, 2004*. Many of the **PFMC** staff volunteers will be joining Keith and Kathleen from the *19th* to the *26th*, so the **PFMC** will probably be closed during these days. If you have intentions of using the library or visit the display rooms during this time, please call in advance.

August is a busy time for Roman Catholics in the **New England / Mid-Atlantic States**. **God, The Father, Day**, is celebrated at the *National Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima* in Washington, NJ on the *First Sunday in August*. This will be **Sunday, 1 August 2004**. The **Scranton Charismatic Conference** will be on *Friday, 6 August 2004*, through *Sunday, 8 August 2004*. The **PFMC Annual Meeting and Pot Luck Picnic**, scheduled in our by-laws for the *First Sunday in August* may have to again be moved to accommodate those who wish to attend other meetings. How about either *Saturday, 31 July 2004*, or the *Sunday* before **Labor Day, 5 September 2004**? Let us have your vote on the best date, please.

August 1, 2004 through *August 9, 2004*, **Father John Tino** will lead a **PFMC** Pilgrimage to **Lourdes (PPL) via Paris**. Visit the **Grotto of Massabielle**, the **Rosary Basilica**, the **Stations of the Cross**, and much more. Bathe in the healing waters of **Lourdes**, and enjoy a daily full program of Holy Mass and healing prayer. In **Paris** you will visit the **Miraculous Medal Chapel on Rue de Bac**, where *Saint Catherine Laboure* lies incorrupt. You will enjoy seeing the *Sacre Coeur Basilica*, *Notre Dame*, **Eiffel Tower**, and dine in the **Latin Quarter**. The cost of this pilgrimage is **\$1999** plus **\$130** to cover air taxes. This includes air fare round trip, hotels, guides, land transfers, all breakfasts, and all but one supper while in **Paris**. In our planning for seeing more of **France**, we are evaluating the possibility of extensions with limited numbers of pilgrims for visiting areas to the southeast of **Paris (Ars, Paray le Monial, Taize, Nevers)** or the northwest of **Paris (Alencon, Lisieux, Pontmain, Mont San Michel, Chartres)**. Extension plan options will be sent to each pilgrim after sign-up for the main pilgrimage. A blue color information sheet with reservation forms is enclosed in this issue of "The **PILGRIM**." Please indicate your desires as you register for this pilgrimage.

We have planned a **PFMC** pilgrimage to **Medjugorje (PPM) via Rome** for **Doctor Bob** and **Anita Rice** of "*In His Omnipotent Presence (IHOP) Ministries*" with **Father Phil Sladicka** of **Olyphant, PA**. The desired dates have been adjusted to **Sunday, 10 October 2004**, through **Friday, 22 October 2004** in order to facilitate **2 days** in **Rome** with an opportunity for a **Wednesday** audience with the **Holy Father**,

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Pope John Paul II, and then **2 days** in **Rome** before coming home. An orchid color information sheet with reservation form is included in this issue of "The **PILGRIM**." Fill out a reservation form and send it in with your deposit.

(Keith and Kathleen Werner and all the **PFMC**
Volunteer Staff Members)

12-14 MARCH 2004 RETREAT CONFERENCE (RC) / YOUTH TRACK (YT) and 15-17 MARCH 2004 3-DAY EXTENSION (3DX)

The theme for 2004 is "*Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves*" (**Matthew 10:16 [NAB]**).

The Retreat Conference (RC) will feature **Father Bill Halbing** who will speak on *Friday night*. He will also celebrate the opening Holy Mass and give the Homily. We will so enjoy our dynamic speakers: **Babsie Bleasdel** from **Trinidad**, **Father Andrew Apostoli**, **CFR**, who appears on **EWTN**, **Father Michael Semana**, **Father John McFadden**, **Sister**

Claire Marie de l'amore Crucifie of the *Marian Community Oasis of Peace*, our **EMCEE** and singer **Al Barbarino**, and music by **REFUGE**.

Father Robert DeGrandis, SSJ, has had to cancel his presence this year and we pray for his time of rest.

Make your hotel reservations at the **Hilton Hotel in Cherry Hill, NJ** IMMEDIATELY. Our block of rooms at the \$94 rate must be booked by 2/12/2004.

The dates for the RC and YT will be *Friday, 12 March 2004, Saturday, 13 March 2004, and Sunday, 14 March 2004*.

On *Saturday night* there will be a concert with **Father Michael Semana** and the **Gospel Singers from the "People of Praise Prayer Community"** of **Brooklyn, NY**. We have so enjoyed the music of **Father Michael** for our Gala Dinner Concert this last *November*, and we have gone to **Brooklyn** to pray with and sing with the *"People of Praise Prayer Community."* You are in for a wonderful evening of prayer and music. The concert will be followed by a healing service with individual prayer and anointing.

Father John Hampsch, C.M.F., will conduct the 3DX on the *"Holy Spirit Alive in Your Life"* on *Monday, 15 March 2004, Tuesday, 16 March 2004, and Wednesday, 17 March 2004*. He will be accompanied by **Sister Claire Marie de l'amore Crucifie** from the *Marian Community, Oasis of Peace* headquartered in **Passo Corese, Italy**. Sister Claire will speak on the messages of Our Lady.

J. P. Kasperowicz, "Ministry of the Single Hearted" from **Saint Ignatius of Antioch Parish in Yardley, PA**, has agreed to lead the Youth Track (YT). We need volunteers to assist with the YT. Please call (856) 768-9228 and sign up to help.

Please review the **YELLOW** information sheet enclosed in this and previous issues of *"The PILGRIM,"* fill out the reservation form or forms, and return them with your donation check or charge card information to the **PFMC** as soon as possible. If you do not have a form, please call (856) 768-9228 and we will send you one. You may use the Internet www.geocities.com/pilgrimsfaith/2004/04RET3CF.pdf.

Please make your **PFMC** RC, YT, and 3DX reservations using the forms provided by the **PFMC**.

Do not wait to make your Hilton Hotel reservations with the hotel via **1-800 HILTONS** or **(856) 665-6666**. **MANY WAIT UNTIL IT IS TOO LATE AND THEN CANNOT GET A ROOM IN THE HOTEL**. All sessions are held in the **Hilton Hotel** itself. Buffet style hot lunches will be available through advance reservations with the **PFMC**.

Consider giving reservations to this event as Christmas gifts. Ask you family to support your desire to attend even if they will not attend with you.

PLEASE do not wait until Christmas to register with the **PFMC** or reserve rooms at the **HILTON HOTEL**.

(Kathleen and the Reservation Volunteers)

CUSTOMS from VARIOUS COUNTRIES and CULTURES

Centuries ago Christians brought plants and flowers into the celebration of Christmas. Did not Christ come to uphold the dignity of all God's creation? The natural world, as well as humans, angels and animals, should have a part in welcoming him.

Evergreens, from ancient times symbols of life and eternity, have always had a prominent place in Christian celebrations. Holly, with its green leaves, its prickly points and red berries, suggested that the Child born in the manger would wear a crown of thorns and shed drops of blood. Mistletoe, long associated in the pre-Christian world with healing, became a symbol of the healing power of Christ.

The poinsettia, from Central America, with its bright, star-like flowers, is a natural reminder of the Star of Bethlehem. Other plants that bloom during this season are images also of the Root of David that flowered with new life.

Many nations have contributed a rich mosaic of Christmas customs. Among the Latin peoples, the Christmas novena, nine days of prayer before Christmas, is a popular tradition. The Christmas meal after midnight [Holy] Mass, in which all the family participates, is traditional among the French. Among the Slavic peoples on Christmas eve, the father of the family breaks the feast day wafers of bread and gives them to the members of his household, while wishing all the peace of Christmas.

From Ireland came the custom of placing lighted candles in the window during Christmastime. It originated in penal times when the Catholic religion was suppressed in Ireland and priests were forced into hiding. Irish families put a burning candle in their window and left their doors unlatched, hoping that a priest might come to their door and celebrate the Christmas [Holy] Mass with them.

On the feast of the Epiphany, January 6th, the people of South America celebrate the coming of the Three Kings with colorful processions and give gifts on that day.

The Christmas Tree

The Christmas tree probably originated from popular early medieval religious plays, "the Paradise Plays," performed in churches and town squares of Europe during the Advent season. The plays told the story of the human race from the creation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Paradise till the Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. On stage during the play was a great tree hung with apples, symbolizing the Garden of Paradise. Soon people began the custom of putting a "paradise tree" laden with gifts and lighted with candles in their homes during the Christmas season to celebrate paradise regained through the coming of Christ.

Representing many things--the original tree of paradise, the life-giving tree of Christ's cross, the tree John the Apostle saw in the Book of Revelations, "a tree of life, which yields twelve crops of fruit, one for each month of the year for the healing of the nations"--our Christmas tree is rich in Christian symbolism.

Prayers Around the Christmas Tree

The leader may begin:

In the beginning God made the world and saw it was good. Long ago, God placed a tree in the garden of paradise as his gift to all human beings, a tree of wisdom and knowledge and laden with every good thing. Our Christmas Tree reminds us of that tree. Long ago too, God's kindness appeared in the coming of Christ, who is our hope of eternal life. This tree is a sign of Christ's blessings.

A Reading from the Book of Genesis

This is the story of the heavens and the earth after their creation. When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, there was neither shrub nor plant growing on the earth, because the Lord God had sent no rain; nor was there anyone to till the ground.

The Lord God formed a human being from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, so that he became a living creature.

The Lord God planted a garden in Eden away to the east, and in it he put the man he had formed and in the middle of the garden he set the tree of life. Genesis 2: 4-9.

Then all pray:

Lord our God, the heavens are the work of your hands, the moon and the stars you made; the earth and the sea, and every living creature came into being by your word. And all of us, too.

May this tree bring cheer to this house though Jesus Christ your good and holy Son, who brings life and

beauty to us and to our world. Lighting this tree, we hope in his promise.

The lights of the tree are illuminated and a carol may be sung.

(from "Christmas Prayers and Customs" Regina Press, New York, 1990, by Father Victor Hoagland, C.P. and <http://www.cptryon.org/prayer/adx/xcust.html>)

BLESSING for the CHRISTMAS TREE

(When the Christmas Tree is decorated, just before the lights are turned on for the first time on Christmas Eve, the tree may be sprinkled with Holy Water as the following prayer is said.)

Holy Lord, we come with joy to celebrate the birth of your Son, who rescued us from the darkness of sin by making the Cross a tree of life and light. May this tree, arrayed in splendor, remind us of the life-giving Cross of Christ, that we may always rejoice in the new life that shines in our hearts. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

(Anonymous)

THE STORY of GEORGE

The old man sat in his gas station on a cold Christmas Eve. He hadn't been anywhere in years since his wife had passed away. He had no decorations, no tree, and

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OFFICE HELP, ASSEMBLY, LABELS and MAILING: Too many wonderful pilgrims and volunteers to mention them all by name.

no lights. It was just another day to him. He didn't hate Christmas, just couldn't find a reason to celebrate. There were no children in his life. His wife had gone.

He was sitting there looking at the snow that had been falling for the last hour and wondering what it was all about when the door opened and a homeless man stepped through. Instead of throwing the man out, George, Old George as his customers knew him, told the man to come and sit by the space heater and warm up.

"Thank you, but I don't mean to intrude," said the stranger. "I see you're busy. I'll just go"

"Not without something hot in your belly," George turned and opened a wide mouth Thermos and handed it to the stranger.

"It ain't much, but it's hot and tasty. Stew. Made it myself. When you're done there's coffee and it's fresh." Just at that moment he heard the "ding" of the driveway bell.

"Excuse me be right back," George said. There, in the driveway, was an old 53 Chevy. Steam was rolling out of the front.

The driver was panicked. "Mister can you help me!" said the driver, with a deep Spanish accent. "My wife is with child and my car is broken."

George opened the hood. It was bad. The block looked cracked from the cold; the car was dead.

"You ain't going in this thing," George said, as he turned away.

"But, mister. Please help."

The door of the office closed behind George as he went in. George went to the office wall and got the keys to his old truck, and went back outside. He walked around the building and opened the garage, started the truck and drove it around to where the couple was waiting.

"Here, take my truck," he said. "She ain't the best thing you ever looked at, but she runs real good."

George helped put the woman in the truck and watched as it sped off into the night. George turned and walked back inside the office.

"Glad I gave 'em the truck. Their tires were shot, too. That 'ol truck has brand new."

George thought he was talking to the stranger. But the man had gone. The thermos was on the desk, empty with a used coffee cup beside it.

"Well, at least he got something in his belly," George thought. George went back outside to see if the old Chevy would start. It cranked slowly, but it started.

He pulled it into the garage where the truck had been. He thought he would tinker with it for something to do. Christmas Eve meant no customers. He discovered the block hadn't cracked, it was just the bottom hose on the radiator.

"Well, shoot, I can fix this," he said to himself. So, he put a new one on.

"Those tires ain't gonna get 'em through the winter either." He took the snow treads off of his wife's old Lincoln. They were like new and he wasn't going to drive the car.

As he was working, he heard shots being fired. He ran outside and, beside a police car, an officer lay on the cold ground.

Bleeding from the left shoulder, the officer moaned, "Help me."

George helped the officer inside as he remembered the training he had received in the Army as a medic. He knew the wound needed attention.

"Pressure to stop the bleeding," he thought. The uniform company had been there that morning and had left clean shop towels. He used those and duct tape to bind the wound.

"Hey, they say duct tape can fix anythin'," he said, trying to make the policeman feel at ease.

"You hang in there. I'm going to get you an ambulance."

But the phone in his office was dead. "Maybe I can get one of your buddies on that there talk box out in your car."

He went out only to find that a bullet had gone into the dashboard, destroying the two-way radio. He went back in to find the policeman sitting up.

"Thanks," said the officer. "You could have left me there. The guy who shot me is still in the area."

George sat down beside him. "I would never leave an injured man in the Army and I ain't gonna leave you." George pulled back the bandage to check for bleeding.

"Looks worse than what it is. Bullet passed right through 'ya. Good thing it missed the important stuff though. I think, with time, you're gonna be right as rain."

George got up and poured a cup of coffee. "How do you take it?" he asked.

"None for me," said the officer.

"Oh, yer gonna drink this. Best in the city. Too bad I ain't got no donuts." The officer laughed and winced at the same time.

The front door of the office flew open. In burst a young man with a gun.

“Give me all your cash! Do it, now!” the young man yelled. His hand was shaking and George could tell that he had never done anything like this before.

“That’s the guy that shot me!” exclaimed the officer.

“Son, why are you doing this?” asked George. “You need to put the cannon away. Somebody else might get hurt.”

The young man was confused. “Shut up, old man, or I’ll shoot you, too. Now, give me the cash!”

The cop was reaching for his gun. “Put that thing away,” George said to the cop. “We got one too many in here now.”

He turned his attention to the young man. “Son, it’s Christmas Eve. If you need the money, well then, here. It ain’t much but it’s all I got. Now, put that pea shooter away.” George pulled \$150 out of his pocket and handed it to the young man, reaching for the barrel of the gun at the same time.

The young man released his grip on the gun, fell to his knees and began to cry.

“I’m not very good at this, am I? All I wanted was to buy something for my wife and son,” he went on. “I’ve lost my job. My rent is due. My car got repossessed last week.”

George handed the gun to the cop. “Son, we all get in a bit of squeeze now and then. The road gets hard sometimes. But, we make it through the best we can.” He got the young man to his feet, and sat him down on a chair, across from the cop.

“Sometimes, we do stupid things.” George handed the young man a cup of coffee.

“Being stupid is one of the things that makes us human. Comin’ in here with a gun ain’t the answer. Now, sit there and get warm and we’ll sort this thing out.”

The young man had stopped crying. He looked over to the cop. “Sorry I shot you. It just went off. I’m sorry, officer.”

“Shut up and drink your coffee,” the cop said.

George could hear the sounds of sirens outside. A police car and an ambulance skidded to a halt. Two cops came through the door, guns drawn.

“Chuck! You OK?” one of the cops asked the wounded officer.

“Not bad for a guy who took a bullet. How did you find me?”

“GPS locator in the car. Best thing since sliced bread. Who did this?” the other cop asked as he approached the young man.

Chuck answered him, “I don’t know. The guy ran off into the dark. Just dropped his gun and ran.”

George and the young man both looked puzzled at each other.

“That guy works here?” the wounded cop continued. “Yep,” George said. “Just hired him this morning. Boy lost his job.”

The paramedics came in and loaded Chuck onto the stretcher.

The young man leaned over the wounded cop and whispered, “Why?” Chuck just said, “Merry Christmas, boy and you, too, George, and thanks for everything.”

“Well, looks like you got one doozy of a break there. That ought to solve some of your problems.” George went into the back room and came out with a box. He pulled out a ring box.

“Here you go. Something for the little woman. I don’t think Martha would mind. She said it would come in handy some day.”

The young man looked inside to see the biggest diamond ring he ever saw.

“I can’t take this,” said the young man. “It means something to you.”

“And now it means something to you,” replied George. “I got my memories. That’s all I need.”

George reached into the box again. An airplane, a car, and a truck appeared next. They were toys that the oil company had left for him to sell. “Here’s something for that little man of yours.”

The young man began to cry again as he handed back

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the \$150 that the old man had handed him earlier.

“And what are you supposed to buy Christmas dinner with? You keep that, too,” George said. “Now, git home to your family.”

The young man turned, with tears streaming down his face. “I’ll be here in the morning for work, if that job offer is still good.”

“Nope. I’m closed Christmas day,” George said. “See ya the day after.”

George turned around to find that the stranger had returned. “Where’d you come from? I thought you left?” “I have been here. I have always been here,” said the stranger. “You say you don’t celebrate Christmas. Why?”

“Well, after my wife passed away I just couldn’t see what all the bother was. Puttin’ up a tree, and all, seemed a waste of a good pine tree. Bakin’ cookies like I used to with Martha just wasn’t the same by myself and besides I was getting a little chubby.”

The stranger put his hand on George’s shoulder, “But, you do celebrate the holiday, George. You gave me food and drink and warmed me when I was cold and hungry. The woman with child will bear a son and he will become a great doctor. The policeman you helped will go on to save 19 people from being killed by terrorists. The young man who tried to rob you will make you a rich man and not take any for himself. That is the spirit of the season and you keep it as good as any man.”

George was taken aback by all this stranger had said.

“And how do you know all this?” asked the old man.

“Trust me, George. I have the inside track on this sort of thing. And, when your days are done, you will be with Martha again.”

The stranger moved toward the door. “If you will excuse me, George, I have to go now. I have to go home, where there is a big celebration planned.”

George watched as the old leather jacket and the torn pants that the stranger was wearing turned into a white robe. A golden light began to fill the room.

“You see, George it’s my birthday. Merry Christmas.”

George fell to his knees and replied, “Happy Birthday, Lord.”

(author unknown)

CANDY CANE

According to legend, the creation of the candy cane dates back to 1670, at the Cologne Cathedral in

Massachusetts, when a choir director handed out white sugar sticks to keep young singers quiet. He bent the sticks to look like a shepherd’s hook.

The confection didn’t gain its stripes until much later, then, according to tradition, they were added for religious reasons by a candy maker from Indiana.

To some, the red stripes represent the blood Jesus shed on the cross. The white symbolizes purity. The shape of the candy cane, a “J,” stands for Jesus.

(For more information, visit www.candyusa.org, www.emmanuel fellowship.org, or www.christianitytoday.com)

THE LAW that BANNED CHRISTMAS

Did you realize there was once a law that actually banned the celebration of Christmas? December 25th of 1620, the first Christmas spent in the New World by the Mayflower pilgrims was devoted to hard labor! The pilgrims utilized all their holiday energies felling trees “in order to avoid any frivolity on the day sometimes called Christmas.”

The pilgrims interpreted the Bible literally, and nothing in the Scriptures mentioned having a good time at Christmas.

While the rest of the Christian world celebrated the Lord’s birthday, the pilgrims chopped wood. Governor William Bradford had to reprimand several of the colonists who took Christmas Day off “to pitch ye barr, and play at stoole ball and such like sports.

On May 11, 1659, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, the colonial legislature made Christmas illegal: “Whosoever shall be found observing any such day as Christmas ... shall pay for every offense five shillings,” read the law.

One stern old judge, Samuel Sewall, loudly proclaimed that people who made mince pie or plum pudding over the holiday period would surely be “cursed by God for all eternity.”

Many people in other colonies disagreed with Bradford and his radical pilgrims. Their holiday festivities began well before December 25 and lasted until January 6. These people, among them Virginians and the Dutch burghers of New Amsterdam, believed there should be equal parts of religion and revelry during this time.

Although we think of pilgrims as ideal Americans, actually they were a cantankerous group of fervent believers who had little or no tolerance for those who had different opinions or ideas.

To Robert Brown and his pilgrim associates, Christmas was nothing more than “a popish frivolity” at its best and the “dreadful work of Satan” in their midst, at worst. And highest on any reliable and trustworthy pilgrim’s list of intolerable things was any holiday smacking of Roman Catholicism.

The logic?

Hadn’t the people of the Catholic faith celebrated Christmas for centuries? Was this not reason enough to condemn Christmas as a work of the devil?

Because of its association with pagan festivals of early times, the pilgrims went so far as to outlaw the color green. pilgrim preachers used their pulpits to strongly denounce holly and ivy as “seditious badges” which were always to be looked upon as unmistakable signs of the devil at work.

The stern prohibition proved to be extremely unpopular on this side of the Atlantic, causing widespread discontent in the Massachusetts colony.

The lawmakers were forced to issue annual proclamations to remind the people of the ban of frivolity on Christmas Day.

But, according to colonial authorities, like it or not, the harsh legal measure was necessary in order to “prevent the observing of such festivals as were superstitiously kept in other countries to the great dishonor of God and the offense of others.”

Did the colonial leadership finally rescind the outrageous Christmas ban? Did the colonists riot and spill blood over this issue as the people in England did some years before? No, the harsh law banning Christmas lightheartedness remained in effect in Massachusetts until 1681.

So in 1681, Christmas could finally be celebrated without dire consequences in the Massachusetts colony. Yet the pilgrim chill on the holiday persisted for another 175 years. Children in that area of New England were still made to attend school on Christmas Day. This rule applied in Massachusetts up until 1856. Only then was Christmas finally a spirited and happy holiday for old and young!

(By Robert W. Pelton, “The Maryfaithful” January-February 1989)

SEASONS PRAYERS for the HOME

During the Christmas season, the feast of the Epiphany is an appropriate day for praying for a home.

As the household gathers around the manger, the leader may begin:

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On this day we remember the Magi who, guided by the star shining in the heavens, came to the house where Jesus rested in the arms of Mary his mother. They were blessed as they brought their gifts to that holy place. Today we ask Christ our Lord to bless our home and make it his dwelling.

Listen to the holy Gospel according to John:

In the beginning the Word already was.

The Word was in God’s presence, and what God was, the Word was.

He was with God in the beginning, with him no created thing came into being.

So the Word became flesh; he made his home among us, and we saw his glory, such glory as befits the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-3, 14)

Intercessions by household members for various needs are made. Then all say the following prayer:

O God, by your heavenly star, you guided those who were wise to your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. May your blessing come to rest on our home and all of us. Make our lives wise with your wisdom, true to your teaching, and enlivened by your love. May your Word made flesh make his home among us. Amen

(from “Christmas Prayers and Customs” Regina Press, New York, 1990, by Father Victor Hoagland, C.P. and <http://www.cptryon.org/prayer/adx/xhome.html>)

THREE SONGS of MARY

Thank You God, for Baby Jesus;
For His precious hands and feet;
For His smile of heavenly sunshine;
For His joyous laughter sweet!
Thank you God, for Baby Jesus!
(*This, when He was very young,
The lullaby His Mother sung.*)

Thank you God, for little Jesus;
Never was there dearer Lad!
Greater glory that we share Him,
Never mortal woman had!
Thank You God, for little Jesus!
(*Full of reverence, love and joy,
Mary’s heart sang of her Boy!*)

Thank You God, for Thy son, Jesus;
Now my King and Saviour too!
All the mysteries once I pondered
Break in wonder to my view!

Thank You God, for Baby Jesus;
For the Boy, the Son of Man;
For the Cross; my Risen Saviour,

For Redemption's wondrous plan!
For the Son of God, my Jesus!
That with Mary I can sing
Of my soon—Returning King!

(By Phyllis R. Foster, "The Maryfaithful" January-February 1989)

CHRISTMAS THOUGHTS from the EASTERN FATHER

I begin with the Divine Office of Christmas from Matins:

"Come O faithful and let us behold where Christ is born. Let us join the Magi, the Kings from the east and follow the guiding star. Angels sing praises without ceasing, and shepherds abiding in the field offer a joyful hymn. Glory to God in the Highest and to Him this day is born of a Virgin."

These words are very profound. Today is the birthday of the Son of God. Jesus Himself invites us to be His friends. In other words, adopted sons and daughters of God.

Christmas is a Feast of Divine Love. As the magi follow a star, we too must follow the Star of Jesus, by faith and by God's grace. Today and all the days of our lives

Christmas is our answer, for some it is a spirit of 'chill and doom'. Christmas originally was a Christianization of the pagan feast of the Winter Solatis, after which the days become longer. Christ is the true Son of Justice and the true beacon to which we are to be attracted to. Christmas is not a separate entity from Holy Paska (Easter) but a beginning point. The reason for Christmas is Holy Easter.

Let us now look at the simplicity of the shepherds. They came with faith. They were confused and humbled again and again with faith. That is what we should do, no matter how learned or theological that we may be.

What does Christmas require of us? First, we must be honored to be sons and daughters of God. If after this we have sinned, we must through repentance, renew the image of God in us." It is a awesome that God became a Man that He may make us a God." (Saint John of Kronstadt.) Saint Irenaeus says, "Because of His boundless love Jesus became what we are that He might make us to be what He is."

The Jesus of the Nativity of Christ reminds us that we are born of God. We are sons of God. We are saved from sin and must live for God.

If Christ had not come...There would be no Christmas crib, tree, stockings, bells, or holly.

There would be no Church or Gospel of hope.

There would be no message of Resurrection and no Blessed Sacrament. It would literally be Hell. The absence of God; but still a yearning for Him.

A miracle in Hungary... During Communism, a teacher redirected Christian practices. He said, "When you call someone, if he exists, he will come in. "One girl left the room and when she was called she returned back to the room. The teacher said she really exists. The children began calling for the Divine Infant to come in. The door opened, they saw a magnificent light. Then they saw the Christ Child, He smiled said nothing then disappeared! The teacher snapped mentally, and began constantly repeating the phrase; "He is come!" The teacher is now in a mental institution.

I close with the words of the Christmas Canon of Matins:

"Christ is born glorify Him. Christ comes from Heaven go out to meet Him. Christ descends to Earth; let us be raised on high. Let all the earth sing to the Lord. Let all the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad for His sake, who was first in heaven and then on earth. Christ is here in the flesh, let us exult with fear and joy - with fear because of our sins - with joy because of the hope that he brings us."

(“The Maryfaithful” January-February 2003)

AYSAH'S LOVE STORY

Blessed Are The Humble

*Poor patient Aysah donkey
Mistreated from the start
So many scars were on her back
And on her loving heart.*

*Not matter what was done to her
She'd simply turn away
Remembering an act of love
that she had known one day.*

*That's how she was surviving now
Once more she was for sale,
Exhausted little Aysah
Was fastened to a rail.*

*Hunger and thirst consumed her.
Her tether caused more pain,
Then someone gave her water
And followed it with grain.*

*She turned her head and saw him
The man who long ago
Had saved her from a beating
But then he had to go.*

*Part of her heart went with him,
and Aysah never forgot
On every road, in every town,
His was the face she sought.*

*Now here he was beside her,
Paying her price was he.
She heard his name was Joseph,
His trade was carpentry.*

*His pregnant wife called Mary,
was beautiful and kind.
They started on a journey,
and Aysah walked behind
or carried Mary, great with child,
Those moments her delight.
No donkey walked with greater care,
Far into the night.*

*The rhythm of her tiny hooves,
The baby's lullaby,
ears attuned to every sound,
She heard the Virgin sigh.*

*The gentle hand of Joseph
was there to show the way,
And now the turn to Bethlehem,
She hastened to obey.*

*That's why a small gray donkey
Is part of Christmas, too.
She was there when Christ was born
And Life began anew.*

*She used her breath to warm Him,
Her joy was plain to see.
And when she felt His tiny hand,
Aysah knew ecstasy.*

*The Babe was given many gifts,
Like frankincense and gold,
He kept but one, a donkey's heart,
'Twas His to have and hold.*

EPILOGUE

*Loved by the Holy Family,
Aysah lived on for years
She saw the joy of Simeon,
Shared trials, hurts, and fears.*

*Safely to Egypt she bore Him,
Pursued by evil men,
And when it was safe to do so,
She brought Him back again.*

*When dying Christ was with her,
His love remained we see.
For the ass He rode in triumph
Was Aysah's progeny.*

*That's why a lovely legend
Confirms what many say.
On Christmas Eve at midnight
all donkeys kneel and bray.*

*For God blessed every one of them,
Touched them all with glory
When Aysah served the Son of God—
And they recall the story.*

(by Ruth Taylor, with permission from "The Maryfaithful" January-February, 1989.)

READ YOUR LOCAL DIOCESAN NEWSPAPER and YOUR PARISH BULLETIN!!!

We are grateful that we have readers and members of the PFMC in many parishes and dioceses throughout the world. Unfortunately, we cannot tailor material to the activities of all the parishes and dioceses into which we mail "The PILGRIM."

Please subscribe to and **READ** your local diocesan newspaper.

Pick up and **READ** your parish Sunday Bulletin.

Please look at the bulletin notices on pages 21 to 23 and help us place notices in your diocesan newspaper and parish Sunday Bulletin.

(Kathleen and Keith Werner)

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, LITTLE JESUS!

Happy Birthday, Little Jesus!
Merry Christmas to you!
You were born in a manger
On that first Christmas day!

Then the wise men brought their presents
When a star
Led them to the manger
In the stable where you lay!

Shepherds in the nearby meadows,
Who were watching o'er their sheep,
Came and found Him
Stood around Him
With His Mother, asleep!

Light a cake with one candle!
Sing a chorus or two:
Happy Birthday, Little Jesus!
Merry Christmas to You!

(by Russ Murray, with permission from "The Maryfaithful" January-February 1989)

MESSAGE of 11/25/2003 via Maria Pavlovic Lunetti

Dear Children! I call you that this time be for you an even greater incentive to prayer. In this time, little children, pray that Jesus be born in all hearts, especially in those who do not know Him. Be love, joy and peace in this peaceless world. I am with you and intercede before God for each of you. Thank you for having responded to my call.

(The **PFMC** upholds the final decision of the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church led by the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, as to the authenticity of messages to alleged visionaries from Medjugorje.)

REFLECTION on the MESSAGE of 11/25/03

Once again, the Virgin Mary invites us to prayer in this time of Advent that is approaching. Advent and Lent are liturgical seasons in which the Church, as a Mother, invites us to re-examine our life, to make concrete decisions, promises, more decisive turnings on our way towards God. Today, as during all these years, Mary wants that our days do not pass in vain, that our time does not pass beside us, that we do not circumvent God in this time that we live - God who calls us, who seeks us, who stirs us up through Mary.

The greatest joy of a mother is her children. Can we imagine the joy that we are for Mary - the Queen of Peace? She is "the cause of our joy" and she invites us to become the cause of her joy. Her only desire is that Jesus may be born in our hearts. She is most saddened when we lose Jesus, when He is not with us, more precisely, when we are not with Him. It is necessary to undertake everything to return to Jesus, to find Jesus. Humanly speaking, Mary and Jesus suffer when we move away from them, when we abandon them in any way and for any reason. However, our Mother leads us to her Son; with her, it will be easiest for us to find Him and to remain with Him. She has no other more important task than this one, but she can attain it only with our co-operation. This is why she stirs us up and she puts into our hearts the means that the Church offers to her children during the centuries, by leading them to God and by engendering them to a new life in God.

The goal of Our Lady's messages and of her apparitions is that all know God, that everyone encounters God. She wants that - through us - God may reach everyone. We are all linked to one another and we all are responsible for one another. God can come into this world only through human beings, from one to another. God wants to come into this world through you and me. If He does not pass through us, how will he come? The only full meaning of our life is to enable Him to come. If we do not allow Him, then what is the meaning of our life? And what are we on this earth without Him?

Also in this time of Advent, and in Christmas that is approaching, God wants to come. He has time. He has the whole eternity. But we have only today, the present moment. The eternity does not belong to us - it belongs to God. God needs our naturalness, our simplicity. God needs our nearness, and we need his nearness even more.

It is only through the nearness of God that we will be able, from day to day, to become love, joy and peace in this world, as Our Lady tells us. Because works of love are works of peace. And when love is shared, we feel peace that gets hold of the one who gives love and of the one who receives love. When peace is there, God is there, and thus, God touches our hearts and shows his love for us by spreading peace and joy in our hearts.

Blessed Mother Teresa was praying: "Lead me from death to life. From lie to truth. Lead me from despair to hope. From fear to trust. Lead me from hatred to love. From war to peace. May peace fill our hearts, our world and our universe, peace, peace, peace."

We are not alone; Mary is with us, with her presence and the strength of her maternal love, desiring that peace of her heart may enter each heart. Let us allow her that.

(Father Ljubo Kurtović, OFM, November 26, 2003,
<http://www.medjugorje.org/sb0903.htm>
<http://www.medjugorje.hr/ulazakenstipe.htm>)

PRESS BULLETIN 192, 11/26/2003

THE BAREFOOT PILGRIM

Medjugorje is a place where one can hear unusual stories from the concrete life of people, and sometimes of whole groups. It is a fertile ground to make spout out the truth about our past, our present and our future. The presence of Our Lady, her maternal openness and her patience inspire confidence and the certainty that it is possible to leave one's hiding place and face the truth. Thus, in the environment of Medjugorje, I met a young barefoot man walking towards the church. I asked him: "Why

are you barefoot?" He answered me: "I climbed Cross Mountain with the intention to be able to love and accept my wife again!" This is what he told me while continuing his way towards the church.

The answer of this man tells clearly that he understands Jesus, that he realises what Gospa is asking from us. He is not coming on pilgrimage, he is not praying that the others may change and accept him, but he wants to change himself. He has fully accepted the fundamental call of Jesus to conversion. In her messages, Gospa speaks to us about it so often! Her call to conversion is only a reminder of what Jesus told us, and of what He expects from us. Gregory Meyers, a contemporary thinker, wrote: "Humans will not leave the nightmare before they awake". He wants to tell us that it is necessary to wake up, to arouse, to perform a turning. It often happens to us to wait that somebody else does something in our place. However, we know that Jesus wants that we do something, that we adhered personally to Him. The message of Jesus, like the message of Our Lady, is always addressed to us personally.

We approach a time in which we are invited in a special way to awaken our faith and to move ahead towards the manger of Bethlehem. Jesus calls us to vigilance and prayer at all times. Only if our faith is awake we can be able to change, to convert, to leave the "nightmare". In this sense, the Church offers us the time of Advent, in which we can tidy up our interior temple, so that Jesus can be the principal inhabitant there. The Advent is a time of resolutions, of promises and of new endeavours. Let our promises be a pact with God! Let us make the decision to change, like the pilgrim from the beginning of our story, let us try to accept each and every one. May the tenderness and the smallness of new-born Jesus whom we wait take hold of our whole being, conquer and fill our heart. Awake in faith, determined to leave nightmare and despair, ready to remove our shoes and to make a step towards the renouncement and conversion, let us await the new-born King who is the only goal of all Our Lady's pilgrims.

Father Mario Knezovic

COMMUNIONS and CONCELEBRANTS

During the month of October, 142,000 received Holy Communion and 3378 priests from this country and abroad concelebrated Holy Mass in Medjugorje.

MONSIGNOR JESUS A CABRERA, BISHOP of ALAMINOS (PHILIPPINES)

Monsignor Jesus a Cabrera, bishop of Alaminos (Philippines) came on a private visit to Medjugorje

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from October 15 to 17, 2003. He came to Europe, because he went to Rome for the beatification of Mother Teresa. He told us:

"I read magazines about Medjugorje and I heard about Medjugorje through people who came here. In one of the churches in the diocese, people have the statue of Our Lady of Medjugorje. We already have the statue, so Medjugorje is well known.

I would like also to tell you a very interesting story. I think it was in 1990. A group of Philipinos came here. Those who come here are those who have money, those who are rich, but the priest, just like me, he was brought here freely. He went to the mountain, and he was asking the Blessed Mother: "Only those who are rich are able to come here to Medjugorje. What about the poor?" And he heard loud and clear what the Blessed Mother told him: "I am going to them, I am with them." I was very happy when I heard this! Our Lady goes to them! There is a grace for those who come, but Our Lady herself goes to the poor!

The official thinking of the Church in the Philippines is the same as the position of Rome. Medjugorje is not officially recognized by Rome. We think that in this place, many people are inspired to a better life, the Church does not forbid anybody to come here, and many Philipinos come here. We can see the good fruits, the effects on those who come here. There is not an official position. As long as our devotion is in reasonable limits, I am very happy when I see my people pray more. They receive more Holy Communion, they go for [Holy] Mass, they go for Confession, they become better. I think, this is the work of the Blessed Mother. This is what counts a lot. We have to wait maybe for a spectacular miracle to happen that the Church recognizes Medjugorje! There are already many, many miracles of grace that happen. They happen in the lives of people. The fact that they come closer to God, I think, that this is the sign.

As a priest, as a bishop, I always consider myself as a priest of Mary. I am doing the work of Mary. As a priest, as a bishop, I have to bring people to Jesus and I have to bring Jesus to the people. So, the more I myself have the spirit of Mary, the more I can be able to fulfil my mission as a priest or as a bishop.

Personally, I am very, very happy here. Early this morning, when all my companions were asleep, I went to the Apparition Hill all by myself. It was very cold, I did not know the way, but I prayed to the Blessed Mother and she showed me the way. On the way, I lost my handkerchief, but I found a flower. It was the only flower around, I picked it up, and when I reached the statue, I was excited like a child. I said:

“Blessed Mother, I have a flower for you!” I was so much at peace as I prayed. The Blessed Mother made me feel that she was very happy that I was there. I was praying for all, especially for the members of the group. They are also very, very happy here. We had [Holy] Mass here, then we all went up there, and it was so beautiful as we were praying together. The younger ones were helping the older ones to climb... It was the picture of our life here on earth: we have to help one another. When we came up, when we saw the statue of the Blessed Mother, it was something really beautiful.

The messages are very, very timely and they are meant for all of us. I always see the Blessed Mother as a special messenger of Jesus. She wants all of us, all, to be saints. This is why she makes extra efforts to reach us, to help us, to remind us what to do, and how to reach the Kingdom. This is a sign of a great love of the Blessed Mother for all of us. It is also the proof that the Blessed Mother is actively concerned and active for our well-being. She wants all of us to be really happy and to have real peace. All we have to do is to listen to the messages, to read them, and to put them into practice. I remember what is written in the Psalm of today: “If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts!” Make sure that your heart is receptive of the messages and put them into practice!

I am acting as an instrument of the Blessed Mother. She has appeared several times in several places. The message she has been giving is coming from God himself. She tells us to pray and pray. We should place God as the first and foremost in our life. That is why we have to be converted and make sure that our heart, our mind and our whole life are turned to God. Often, our heart is fixed on material things like money, power, and similar things. The Blessed Mother tells us to pay more attention to what her Son is telling us - Holy Mass, Holy Communion, Confession - to be more concerned about other people, making sacrifices, doing works of love for other people.

I believe that if we listen more to the message of the Blessed Mother, and if we are one in loving God and one another, we shall experience real peace among ourselves, no matter what country we come from, because our hearts will be disposed to accept one another and to help one another. That is how we realize that, after all, we are all one family, one big family, brothers and sisters. We are one family and we have only one Father. How wonderful it is when we pray in all sincerity: “Our Father”! We realize that every person is a brother and sister whom we love. This is what the Blessed Mother wants.

The fruit of the mission of the Blessed Mother is all of us, that we become one family, one Church. I feel very much at home here. It is as if Our Lady was telling me, “This is your home!”

**MONSIGNOR THOMAS L. DUPRE,
BISHOP of SPRINGFIELD
(MASSACHUSETTS, USA)**

Monsignor Thomas L. Dupre, Bishop of Springfield (Massachusetts, USA) came to Medjugorje at the end of October 2003. He told us:

“I have heard about Medjugorje from people who have come here over the years. This is the first time I have come to Medjugorje. I came with a friend, Father Henry Dorsch, who has been here five times over the last 15 years. This is his sixth time. He has spoken many times about Medjugorje and he is certainly a very committed, very good, and devout priest. He speaks always very highly about his experience here in Medjugorje. So, needless to say, I have been influenced by him, as well as by a number of other people who have spoken about their coming to Medjugorje. It has interested me and I had the opportunity to come this year. I am coming here to see with my own eyes and hear with my own ears, and then to formulate my own impressions.

I have always been very strongly attached to the apparitions of Our Lady in Fatima ever since I was a little boy. When I was eleven-twelve years old, I already had a very strong devotion to Our Lady of Fatima. I still do and I really believe in that apparition. Lourdes also. When I was ten years old, I saw a movie, “The Song of Bernadette”. It told the story of Bernadette and Lourdes. I was very moved by that, it was very important to me. Those two apparitions have been a very important part of my life. Medjugorje is a little different, because it has not yet received a full approval of the Church, and like many others, I await the final decision of the Church. But there is a part of me that wants to believe in these apparitions. I have come to see with my own eyes. I believe that many wonderful spiritual fruits have been produced here. People obviously are very religious, very devout, very fervent, they receive the sacraments, and they pray a good deal. I think that we can only be impressed by what we see.

I do believe that this is a place where people gather from all over the world. They come to pray and they have very good experiences. Many are converted, many come back to the practice of their religion, some are converted to the Catholic faith. I have heard about healings, I do not have the evidence myself but I have heard about that. I see much good fruit, many good things, and that is the work of God, the work of

the Holy Spirit. There is no question about that. Whether Our Lady is actually appearing here, I am not in the position to say, I do not know that... I am open to that, my mind is open, my heart is open. I do not have a personal conviction to that but I certainly am open for the decision of the Church. I am looking for that answer!

My experience here is an experience of the Christian faith lived entirely. People here are believers and they live faith. You can see. It is in their heart and in their soul. We are all part of the same family; we are all brothers and sisters. That is obvious here: you meet people from all over the world. Many people from Europe, but also people from America, people of different races, white and brown and black... and everyone is a brother and sister here, everyone gets along well together and everyone has the same faith. We all share in the Eucharist together; we share in our belief in God and Jesus Christ and our love for the Blessed Mother. It is an expression of the universal Church, of the faith that we all share together. That is marvellous.

I will say to my faithful that it is a wonderful experience, a good thing for people to come here and to pray, to open their minds and hearts, to see if God is calling them. They will certainly gain much spiritually from being here. I think they will be blessed from coming here."

MALTESE ORDER CONCLUDES THIS YEAR'S SERVICE at the SHRINE

In the beginning of November, members of the rescue and medical services of the Order of Malta from Köln (Germany) and volunteers concluded this year's service to the pilgrims of the Queen of Peace. During these five months, the team of First Aid assisted medically 4060 people. The [Holy] Mass at the shrine concluded the service on October 30.

We thank them for the help they have selflessly offered to the pilgrims of Medjugorje for several years now.

The Order of Malta invites volunteers who wish to join them in this service to contact them in time for next year.

FRANCISCAN NOVICES IN MEDJUGORJE

Fourteen novices of the Franciscan province of Bosnia and the Herzegovinian province, living their year of novitiate at Livno, came on pilgrimage to Medjugorje on November 8. They came with their educators, Father Vitomir Silic and Father Ivan Sesar who also presided the evening [Holy] Mass. The

novices animated the songs and participated actively in the Liturgy of the Word.

MONSIGNOR TARCISIO ZIYAYE, A BISHOP from MALAWI

Monsignor Tarcisio Ziyaye, a bishop from Malawi, was in Medjugorje in the beginning of November 2003. He came with a group of pilgrims from his country. We will inform you about it in the next issue of the Bulletin.

SEMINARS in "DOMUS PACIS"

For "Prayer and Fasting" seminars, contact Father Ljubo Kurtovic, Zupni ured Medjugorje, Gospin trg 1, 88266 Medjugorje, Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Fax: 00 387 36 651 444)

THE 4TH INTERNATIONAL MEETING for MARRIED COUPLES

The 4th International Meeting for Married Couples will take place in Medjugorje from February 11 to 14, 2004. The theme is, "*The fruit of peace is love and the fruit of love is forgiveness.*" (Message of January 25, 1996) Bring with you: a small FM radio with headphones (for simultaneous translation) and a Bible. All the meetings will take place in the New Hall behind the church. Participation per couple: 30 € You may make reservations by e-mail: medjugorje-mir@medjugorje.hr, or at the Information Office personally, or by phone/fax: +387-36-651-988 (for Marija Dugandzic). The number of participants is limited because of the available space in the Hall, so we ask you to send your registration as soon as possible, latest by the end of December. All the participants are invited to individually provide their accommodation in Medjugorje.

THE 11TH INTERNATIONAL MEETING for LEADERS of PEACE CENTRES and MEDJUGORJE PRAYER, PILGRIM and CHARITY GROUPS

The 11th International Meeting for Leaders of Peace Centres and Medjugorje Prayer, Pilgrim and Charity groups will take place in the New Hall in Medjugorje from February 22 – 26, 2004. The theme of this meeting will be, "*Penance and Contemporary Men*".

The number of places is limited, and the number of participants is increasing from year to year. This is why we ask you kindly to make your registration as soon as possible, at the latest by the end of December 2003. You can send your registrations by Tel/fax + 387 36 651 988 (for Marija Dugandzic) or by e-mail:

medjugorje-mir@medjugorje.hr, or personally in the Information Office. The price of the seminar is 60 € per person.

(Published by: Information Center MIR - Shrine of the Queen of Peace, 88266 Medjugorje.
<http://www.medjugorje.hr/ulazakenstipe.htm>)

VOCATION DEPARTMENT

If you need vocation information and you do not find it in your local parish or diocese, please call Elizabeth Wisniewski at (856) 768-9228. She has been collecting vocation information for years and now provides that information willingly to friends of the PFMC. She has been acquiring pamphlets for distribution from religious communities, particularly those who have Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

This month we have enclosed a beautiful pamphlet provided by the Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration Monastery in Cleveland, Ohio. If you are interested in more information about this order, please call Liz or call them directly at (216) 361-0783. If you have a prayer request for them, please call (216) 361-0783.

(Kathleen, Keith, Liz, and all the *PFMC* Volunteers)

THE SEARCH for ROOM at the INN - A SEARCH for LIFE'S PURPOSE

As a Hispanic Catholic Sister, I've always felt there is something very magical and mystical about walking under a starry night with friends and family, the flickers of candlelight guiding the way. Add the melodies of familiar hymns, statues of Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary, perhaps a live donkey, and you have the transplanted Mexican Christmas tradition of Las Posadas. In many Catholic churches across the United States, the Advent season will include this nine-day devotion to the Holy couple's search for room at the Inn on their journey to Bethlehem. Posada in Spanish means "inn" and Las Posadas, is a solemn, yet festive, re-enactment of the many inns and innkeepers who turned away the Divine Child.

The devotional celebration begins December 16 and is reenacted every day to December 24. The nine days are from the tradition of novenas - nine days of private or public devotions for special graces. Las Posadas have their origin in the efforts of the early Spanish missionaries to convert the native people of the Americas. During the Middle Ages, Spain began a devotion of preparation for Christmas and the nine

days also represented the nine months Our Lord was in his Mother's womb.

In the United States, the tradition can take several variations. It begins with a procession, which includes statues of the Holy couple or teens dressed as Joseph and Mary. The couple is accompanied by children dressed as angels or shepherds, musicians, a donkey, and parishioners carrying candles to light the way.

The group stops at different homes to ask for lodging, singing a special Posadas hymn to make their request. In the song, Joseph asks for consideration for his beloved wife, the Queen of Heaven who is to be the Mother of God. The "innkeepers" do not recognize the pilgrims, and sweetly sing their rejection and send them on their way. At last, one of the innkeepers recognizes who they are and invites them in.

All of the guests enter and say special prayers, which may include the Rosary. Singing of traditional Mexican Christmas songs follows, including Noche de Paz (Silent Night). After the singing everyone gathered enjoys light refreshments.

The refreshments might be Mexican chocolate, a drink with a taste of cinnamon, buñuelos (tasty fried tortillas soaked in sugar and cinnamon), tamales (meat-filled corn dough, wrapped and cooked in corn husks), or pan dulce, Mexican pastry. Typically, refreshments are light and simple, to enable even the most modest home to serve as the host each evening. On the 24th, the celebration is larger; the meal is more of a banquet and feast, with a piñata for the children. In some parishes the last home will be the Church hall.

In some communities, Las Posadas has taken on a bilingual flavor where all can enjoy the devotion and celebration. The solemn yet joyous tradition brings people together to be reminded of the need to open our hearts to each other, in a spirit of hospitality and caring. Breaking bread between one another is an act of intimate sharing, and Mexican traditions are rich in the sharing of special foods during feast days. It is no wonder that everyone enjoys a Mexican celebration, and the Advent season has more than its share.

The search for room at the Inn is not unlike our own search for meaning in our lives, as we frantically spend our time knocking on the doors of different activities, careers, and lifestyles. When we stop knocking long enough to listen and see, we might recognize Our Pilgrim Lord knocking at the doors of our hearts. He has been knocking since our Baptism, when we first received His call to become Children of God and proclaim His Kingdom. It's not hard to become deaf to the call, in the midst of so many other

things calling much louder for our attention, time, and commitment.

The symbolic nine days of Las Posadas has meaning for us in the need to spend enough time to listen, focus and prepare for the gift the Lord offers us. When we unwrap it, we may be surprised and delighted to see it is using our talents and gifts in life-giving, life-sustaining ways that answer our Baptismal call. The knocking may be a calling to serve, through a vocation, whether you are married or single, as an activist or teacher, as a day care provider or a business executive. How to know whether that knocking is a calling?

One answer is *LifeChoices*®, a spiritual and vocational guidance program designed to help both young women and men thoughtfully explore big picture questions about career, lifestyle and spirituality and how they all fit together in service to God's people. *LifeChoices*® is a ministry of my Congregation, the Adorers of the Blood of Christ (ASC), an International community with 2,200 sisters in 26 countries, including more than 430 in the United States.

As you take time to reflect and meditate on the magical and mystical reality of Our Lord's Incarnation, choose to say, as the innkeepers of Las Posadas, "Enter, holy pilgrim. Come into our humble dwelling and into our hearts. Here beneath our roof we choose to shelter the Son of God."

(by Sister Josie Mendoza, ASC. For more information about *LifeChoices*®, contact me, Sister Josie Mendoza at 505-541-8084, mendozaj@adorers.org or call Sister Diana Rawlings at 1 (877) 236-7377. You can also visit our web site at www.adorers.org)

PRIESTHOOD and the EUCHARIST

"The priest is the person to whom the sacrifice of the church, the liturgical repetition of Christ's Last Supper, is committed."

All are brought together: men and women, church, God, sacrifice of the cross, living and dead, the poverty of the earth, and the blessings of heaven (P 66-68).

"Authorized by Christ himself, who loves his church and has given {its} his own sacrifice, the priest has the power to celebrate the sacrifice of eternal reconciliation in the name of all, with all, and for all."

Although receiving an elevated call, "the priest is also supremely consumed and swallowed up by the flames of priestly service before God and on behalf of men and women."

And though ministering the body and blood of Christ, the priest is not self-exalted." Rather the goal of ordination is to bring salvation to the whole people of God. Moreover, each [Holy] Mass includes life's ups and downs, the riddles of our existence, the body and blood of Christ. "

A priest is a messenger of God's truth, a dispenser of divine mysteries, and one who makes Christ's single sacrifice present once again." Moreover, the reality of God, which for most is an interior experience, "forces its way out of the depths, flooding every reach of the priest's life," consumed by God and pressed into his service.

The life of a priest is "to dwell completely in the explicit nearness of God," a happy and terrifying life. For this high calling holds dangers of great falls. For example, letting the human side wither, or fleeing from God, " or compromising in an attempt to meet the superhuman demands of the priestly life by cheap mediocrity.

The priesthood is the beginning of something no human can finish. However, "he who called the priest is true to his word, while his graces are given without repentance."

The people should pray for priests to fear and enjoy the Lord and to persevere in faithful service.

The "res sacramenti" is the whole life of the priest and not just the liturgy. "Since the sacramental phenomenon is entrusted to the ministerial priest of the church," the [Holy] Mass is the center of priestly existence and the sacrament of priestly life. And although we celebrate this sign liturgically, it also shows up in the whole life of a priest, poured out like a libation (Phil 2:17) (P215).

(from "The Church Remembers" by James Mohler, SJ in "Emmanuel" January/February 1996, published by the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament, 5384 Wilson Mills Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44143-3092)

HOLY MASS TIMES

If you ever think you will miss Holy Mass because you don't know the times of Holy Mass or the locations of churches in the area that you are going to visit or are currently located, please call **1-410-676-6000**.

If you have access to the Internet and don't already have it book marked, type in the Uniform Resource Locator (URL) www.masstimes.org in the white box near the top of your browser.

You can find maps to the churches in addition to the times of Holy Mass celebrations.

A MESSAGE to PASTORS and to ALL INTERESTED in LIFE

You may already be aware of the bill put together by congress to restore the “Houses of Worship freedom of speech” and so we hope that the “gag” placed over the mouths of any conservative Pastor or Priest will be soon lifted. For more information on this bill contact www.priestsforlife.org.

I would be glad to send along any info that I hear for your use in “The PILGRIM.” You may first want to have your readers be aware that most state governments heavily fund the Planned Parenthood and other so called (non)reproductive rights centers through their appropriations committees usually matching federal dollars through the awarding of “family planning dollars.” This ends up causing 501c3 [organizations] like yours and ours to take greater energies toward obtaining competing dollars instead of being able to do more ministering.

Pass the word to try and help make NJ a NON STATE FUNDED family planning or reproductive rights source of revenue for those who try to defeat all our efforts. We are also working with the Republicans to help them better understand the vicious circle they make themselves party to when they vote to appropriate “family planning dollars” without strings for the agencies to promote Abstinence only programs and non-abortive services, referrals or info. These agencies vote only pro-abortion and are throwing multi-millions of dollars to overthrow the Republican party. Talk about biting the hand that feeds you.

(Kateri from Iowa)

NAZARETH HOUSE

A place of discernment and formation for men aspiring to priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church, Nazareth House is located on the campus of Camden Catholic High School in Cherry Hill.

It houses the Diocese of Camden formation program to help young men investigate whether God is calling them to a priestly vocation.

The mission of Nazareth House is to assist young men between the ages of 18-35 in the discernment and development of the seeds of a priestly vocation.

The staff provides them with the foundation for seminary theologate formation, through a shared community life of prayer and worship; human, spiritual and intellectual development; and pastoral service.

It now houses the Camden Diocese Office of Vocations.

FOR MORE INFORMATION or APPLICATION MATERIALS, CONTACT:

**Director of Vocations, Diocese of Camden,
Father Cadmus Mazzarella,**

mazzarella@camdendiocese.org,

or visit: <http://www.beapriest.org>, or

**Nazareth House, 300 Cuthbert Boulevard, Cherry Hill,
NJ 08002 (856) 910-4930 or FAX: (856) 662-8917**

ONCE an ALCOHOLIC, NOW a LATE VOCATION, PRIEST SEES MIRACLES with ARCHANGEL

Ten years ago my wife and I were in Medjugorje and heard an extraordinary sermon by a luminous, white-bearded, almost Saint Nicholas-like priest who was with a group from Chicago and was up there in the pulpit telling a riveting story. It was about a man who had risen from the despair of alcoholism to become a priest -- at the age of 66! It was a story about a fantastically successful late vocation.

At the end of the sermon, this priest, this homilist, shocked everyone by explaining that he was the man he was talking about, the alcoholic. He was the one who had risen from the pits. He was the late vocation. We didn't get his name at the time -- weren't even sure exactly what city he was from -- but the homily was unforgettable.

Months later, back in New York State, we were trying to find a priest to bless the apartment in which we were living when we first married. It was awkward. It was a new city, and we didn't know any priests to approach. These days, it is an odd request. Some priests have not even been trained to do so. And we really wanted that. We had even asked folks to help us find the right priest but still had no luck when the phone rang one day, the feast of Corpus Christi. It was a priest from Connecticut who identified himself as Father Joseph Whalen. I had never heard of him before. He said that someone at my publisher's told him to call. They knew I was doing research on angels and he was sort of an expert on the Archangel Raphael.

That was his ministry, he told me; he distributed specially anointed healing oil and Saint Raphael cards that many claimed caused miraculous effects.

He was going to be in the area that day, he told me. Would I mind if he stopped in?

By all means, I said. But first I had to go to [Holy] Mass. It was a feast day.

Don't bother, he told me; he would say [Holy] Mass in our apartment. He would bless it. Finally we had a priest to anoint our apartment!

Later that day, when Father Whalen and two companions arrived, I opened the door only to find that he was the same priest we had seen at Medjugorje -- the one who had been with the pilgrim group and had given that tremendous homily!

Out of the 27,000 active parish priests in the United States, and more than 160 in our own little diocese, here he was at our door.

As I was soon to learn, it was only the beginning of extraordinary events that regularly occur around him. His story? Father Whalen was born July 14, 1923, in Quincy, Massachusetts, the oldest of seven boys. His uncle was a bishop who wanted him to be a priest. He wanted nothing to do with it. As a teenager he worked as a clam-digger -- and started drinking whiskey with the men. After graduating from high school, he served in the Navy on a submarine chaser, hunting German subs. And drinking more. By this time he was developing shakes and even blackouts. "Many nights I staggered back on board the ship with my clothes ripped or a shoe missing," he recounts. "Countless nights in nameless ports around the world, I woke up in filthy, alcohol-stained clothes -- too drunk to care where or how I slept."

You get the point. He had turned into an alcoholic at a young age and it grew. After a year in the maritime service, Whalen was hired by the New England Telephone Company as a office equipment installer. By this time he was also married to a woman named Frances and they had children. Over the next 32 years he worked his way up to second-level management.

But there was constantly the alcohol, and it would end his marriage. "Frances was always running interference and apologizing for my stinking behavior," he now recalls of his former wife, who died a while back. "I would slur my words and stagger around yelling at everyone who crossed my path. My filthy and obnoxious behavior sent everyone into hiding."

Finally Frances dragged Whalen into court, where their marriage ended in a bitter divorce.

"I was loaded with guilt and remorse for my lifestyle and for my terrible behavior toward my wife and children. My soul was so stained, my actions so depraved, that I prayed to get cancer and die."

Desperate for help, Whalen went to a Franciscan shrine to see a priest named Father Henry Lawler, who took him to his first Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. The day he met Father Lawler was the last day that Joe Whalen had a drink.

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The priest also heard the future priest's Confession (his first in 15 years) and told him to go to church and speak to Jesus.

"I did," remembers Father Whalen. "I fell on my knees and surrendered to Him, as best I could. That's when I started to go back to church."

And that's when things began to happen. Whalen, not yet a priest, became fascinated by angels, developing a special devotion to Raphael and the Book of Tobit. He read the Bible cover to cover. He read Thomas Aquinas. Along the way, he met a mystical, cloistered nun named Sister Mary Michael of the Precious Blood Monastery in Manchester, New Hampshire.

"At our first meeting, sister looked deeply into my glazed, alcoholic eyes and said softly, 'Joseph, I see you as a priest.' Tears began to stream down my face. 'What do you mean? You must be kidding!' I was bawling my eyes out as I remembered the uncle who once spoke to me about becoming a priest." Sister Mary Michael said she could see Jesus pardoning Whalen's sins and opening the skies to let his mother, who always wanted one of her sons to be a priest, peeking down at his ordination. He knew then that he had a calling.

All he could think of was how unworthy he was. But she kept saying, "Don't talk like that," and shortly after, in 1983, Whalen began receiving visions. "After prayers, with my eyes closed but before going to sleep, I would first see pinpoints of light, then whole fields of brilliant bluish light, pulsating like a kaleidoscope. Then the visions would disappear. The visions continued every night for seven months. Sometimes I would see Jesus suspended from the Cross, one heart with two circlets of thorns around it, or two hearts with thorns around them. Many times I would see a big white dove heading toward me as the field of vision became an intense blue-white. In the last vision I saw two angels suspended with their wings fluttering and a dove gliding toward them."

To make a long story short: Joe Whalen entered a seminary and became a priest. His marriage was officially annulled because of the alcoholism that had predated it and he spent four years in graduate studies at Pope John XXIII National Seminary in Weston, Massachusetts -- where he was the only one in a class of 19 who was a divorced alcoholic with only a high school education! He was ordained on January 28, 1989, and at the age of 80 is a very active priest -- even traveling nationally. A more uplifting, devout priest you will not find. He is a ringing testimony to the value of late vocations, a clarion call for the Church to pay close attention to those who may hear God inviting them late in life at this time when priests are in such short supply.

The prayer cards? They show Raphael appearing to Tobiah and have a special prayer requesting the great angel's intercession. Nearly ten years ago Father Whalen already had gathered the written testimonies of eighty people who claimed relief or outright healing from seizures, leukemia, heart problems, and cancerous tumors. No one knows what the count is now. "I just can't tell you how wonderful it is to experience the prayer power and miraculous workings of the Saint Raphael prayer card," wrote a woman named Ginny. "And day by day I have felt the lump disappearing. My doctor tells me I am one of those people who they cannot explain but I am very much aware of what has happened through faith in Saint Raphael."

"I was diagnosed with leukemia found in my blood tests," wrote another. "I had been sick for some time until my wife obtained a Saint Raphael card from a friend who told us to pray for healing. My family began to pray, and when I went back for more blood tests, the leukemia was gone!" Claimed a woman identified only as Mildred: "My 15-year-old granddaughter, Laurie, had cancerous lumps all over her body. They all disappeared. Now she has only scars. Her cancer is in remission."

Naturally, we can't verify all these claims. There are more. There are accounts of healing for lesser problems also. There are calcium deposits that have gone, there are habits that have been kicked, there are emotions -- like Father Whalen's own -- that have been repaired. This is a man of faith, a man who prays for 12 hours over vats of holy oil, a man who was praying on a stormy day at a Saint Pio shrine in Barto, Pennsylvania, recently when, according to one witness, the clouds suddenly parted (see below) and a ray of sun illuminated the luminous priest!

They swear the clouds formed an image of Padre Pio.

Ah, yes, Father Joe Whalen -- now at Saint James Church in Danielson, Connecticut. He dispenses healing oil and the special Saint Raphael prayer cards everywhere he goes as a Missionary of LaSalette, which is celebrated September 19.

One heckuva priest -- the one God sent to bless our apartment when there was no one else, the one who presided over his former wife's funeral, and has baptized five of his grandchildren. The drop-down drunk who is now a hero to his children, and to us.

"God does draw with crooked lines, you know that," says the priest, who stopped in on us again last week. As for his calling: he urges the Church to promote late vocations at this time of crisis and still thinks of that nun who has been cloistered for more than fifty years now and with whom he remains in touch.

"When I visited Sister Mary Michael again, she said, 'Joseph, I am convinced that your mother got a glimpse of your ordination,'" recalls the priest. "Jesus surely parted the skies to allow her to look down from Heaven and see the fulfillment of her prayers."

(Father Whalen can be reached by writing Saint James Church, 12 Franklin Street, Danielson, Connecticut 06239-3506 or by calling 860-774-6553 or his assistant at 802-872-5956. Mike Brown www.spiritdaily.com)

PILGRIMS of FAITH MARIAN CENTER (PFMC)

The **PFMC** is not a church, store or travel agency but has aspects of all three. The **PFMC** operates as a non-profit, with 501(c)(3) tax exempt status, religious association and ministry whose volunteers are lay persons professing a belief in Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior, as the Only Begotten Son of God the Father, Creator of the Universe.

Most **PFMC** volunteers profess that faith through the apostolic and universal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Those volunteers who are practicing Roman Catholics profess allegiance to the Magisterium of the Church founded upon the Rock (Kephas / Cephas or Petros depending on original or translation) of Simon bar Jonah and led by his apostolic successor **Pope John Paul II**.

Keith and Kathleen Werner, co-founders and co-directors of the **PFMC**, have noted that there seems to be a history of those who approach members of famous families such as the Bushes, Carters and Kennedys as well as the British Royal Family to go through the matriarchs or mothers. They believe that approaching Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, through his Blessed Virgin Jewish Mother, Mary, or Miriam, as she is called in the Quran or Koran of Muslims, may be of benefit in gaining a better understanding God's answers to our prayers. They believe that God answers prayers but humans have a difficult time understanding the answers.

The **PFMC** was established in the Werner home based on pilgrimages to Medjugorje, Bosnia-Hercegovina, and other holy places or shrines worthy of pilgrimage.

Books, pamphlets, and religious articles brought back from pilgrimages were placed on display for others to view and acquire for themselves based on donations. The **PFMC** is NOT a store and does not sell anything. We strongly support the use of Catholic stores for books, pamphlets, and religious articles wherever they are convenient to our readers. We send people to other ministries and commercial

operations such as the **Saint Jude Shops, Abbott's,** and **Angels of Our Lady of Medjugorje** operated by **Ceal Prizer** for things that we do not carry.

For books, pamphlets, and religious articles, the **PFMC** operates like a church pamphlet or bookrack where selections are made and donations offered based on value posted or received. Most of the other outlets are operating on a for profit basis. Your gifts from the **PFMC** may be a tax break for you.

The **PFMC** has items from inventory on display at Epiphany House. Order forms have been produced in the past and enclosed in previous issues of "The PILGRIM" as well as loaded on the Internet as printable pages such as the one for this month <http://www.geocities.com/pilgrimsfaith/12OF03.pdf>.

There is a four page information sheet with pictures showing some of the items in our inventory. There is also a copy of this month's order form included in this issue of "The PILGRIM." If you wish to order, please determine your order request, make out a check or complete the information for use of a credit card, i.e. card type, number, expiration date, and name on card, sign, and mail to **PFMC**, 61 Cooper Road, Voorhees, NJ 08043-4893.

If you do not have an order form, call us at (856) 768-9228 with a FAX number or mailing address and we will send you an order form. If you know what you want and we carry it, you can order over the telephone using your credit card.

The **PFMC** is directed and operated by volunteers who monitor the donations made for all activities. These activities include coordination of pilgrimages to holy places and shrines, retreats in local retreat centers or hotels, and days of recollection at the **PFMC** as well as the inventory management mentioned above.

Through coordination with the appropriate members of diocesan staff in Camden, Metuchen, Newark, Patterson, and Trenton, NJ, as well as Harrisburg, Philadelphia, and Scranton, PA, and now Brooklyn, New York, and Rockville Center, NY, the **PFMC** has been allowed to coordinate events with diocesan permission and often encouragement.

Operating for many years on a cash only basis, the **PFMC** now accepts DISCOVER/PRIVATE ISSUE (NOVUS), MASTER CARD (CIRRUS) and VISA (PLUS) for all transactions requiring donations to the PFMC. This includes for books and religious articles, pilgrimages, retreats, conferences, seminars, "The PILGRIM," or the office equipment replacement fund. We ask that those who use credit cards assist us with the costs associated with their use, about 3%.

Please come and see the **PFMC**. We know you will enjoy what you see and find a way of helping out.

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Thank you and God bless you,

(Kathleen and the Volunteer Staff)

BULLETIN NOTICES for *PFMC* AREA EVENTS

Would you be so kind as to copy or cut out one or more of following BULLETIN NOTICES and take them to your Pastor and / or Parish Bulletin Coordinator?

One per week should not be an overload to you.

Ask your Pastor and / or Parish Bulletin Coordinator to publish these notices to support the events for which you have an interest.

Thanks for your assistance, we really need and appreciate it.

MARCH 2004 *PFMC* RETREAT CONFERENCE (RC), 3 DAY EXTENSION (3DX) and YOUTH TRACK (YT)

The Pilgrims of Faith Marian Center (PFMC) 2004 RETREAT CONFERENCE (RC) will be at the Hilton Hotel, Cherry Hill, NJ. The dates are Friday through Sunday, March 12th, 13th, and 14th, 2004.

The RC theme is "Behold, I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves." (Matthew 10:16) [NAB].

Babsie Bleasdel, Father Bill Halbing, Father Andrew Apostoli, CFR, Father John McFadden, and **Sister Claire Marie de l'amore Crucifie** of the "*Marian Community Oasis of Peace*" will be featured speakers.

Father Michael Semana, founder of the "*World of Hope Foundation*," will return to sing Holy Mass on Saturday, a concert Saturday evening as well as his very generous work with the youth and young adults in the Youth Track (YT). The YT will be led by **J.P. Kasperowicz**.

The **Metuchen Diocese Charismatic Music Group "REFUGE"** will be back to provide the weekend music. **Al Barbarino** has agreed to EMCEE for the Weekend and will be providing music and witness. Other musicians including **Marty Rotella**, "*HEARTS AFIRE*," "*CEDARS in CHRIST*," and "*VOYAGE*," have been invited.

Father John Hampsch, C.M.F., will lead seminars and workshops in the 3-Day Extension (3DX) on "*The HOLY SPIRIT ALIVE in YOUR LIFE*."

The 3DX will be on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, March 15th, 16th, and 17th, 2004.

Rooms may be booked at the **PFMC** \$94 rate with 1-4 persons in a room for both the RC and 3DX as well as up to 7 days before or after the events. Rooms have either one King bed or two Double beds. Roll-away beds are available. This rate and availability of additional rooms expires on 2/12/2004. For Hotel reservations please call NOW: 1-800-HILTONS or locally (856) 665-6666.

Please make your reservations for the RC, YT, and 3DX with the **PFMC** as soon as possible.

Please make your reservations for hotel rooms with the HILTON as soon as possible.

Consider making reservations for the RC, YT, and/or 3-DX and donating for them as a gift to your favorite relative. All donations to the **PFMC** are deductible from your income tax.

For information call (856) 768-9228 or visit

<http://www.geocities.com/pilgrimsfaith>

or find reservation forms at

<http://www.geocities.com/pilgrimsfaith/2004/04RET3CF.pdf>.

**24 MARCH 2004 - 4 APRIL 2004,
PILGRIMAGE to MEDJUGORJE, B-H
via PRAGUE, CZ**

The Pilgrims of Faith Marian Center (PFMC) will coordinate a pilgrimage to Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina via Prague, Czech Republic, with Father Thomas Kiely, Saint Lawrence, Lindenwold, NJ, as Spiritual Director.

Reservation forms are available at:

<http://www.geocities.com/pilgrimsfaith/2004/04PPM04.pdf>.

Departure is on Wednesday, 24 March 2004, from John F. Kennedy (JFK) International Airport, NY. Return is to JFK on Sunday, 4 April 2004.

Requested donation is \$1399 per person double occupancy plus \$130 for air taxes. Single supplement is \$399. As with all **PFMC** pilgrimages, this includes breakfasts and suppers throughout the pilgrimage. A deposit of \$500 is required with reservation. Full payment is due by 24 December 2003.

For more information call (856) 768-9228 or visit <http://www.geocities.com/pilgrimsfaith>.

**1 AUGUST 2004 - 9 AUGUST 2004,
PILGRIMAGE to LOURDES, FRANCE
via PARIS, FRANCE**

The Pilgrims of Faith Marian Center (PFMC) will coordinate a pilgrimage to Lourdes, France via Paris, France, with Father John (Giovanni) Tino, Saint Joan of Arc, Jackson Heights, NY, as Spiritual Director.

Reservation forms are available at:

<http://www.geocities.com/pilgrimsfaith/2004/04PPL08.pdf>.

Departure is on Sunday, 1 August 2004, from John F. Kennedy (JFK) International Airport, NY. Return is to JFK on Monday, 9 August 2004.

Requested donation is \$1999 per person double occupancy plus \$130 for air taxes. Single supplement is \$399. As with all **PFMC** pilgrimages, this includes breakfasts and suppers throughout the pilgrimage. A deposit of \$500 is required with reservation. Full payment is due by 1 May 2004.

For more information call (856) 768-9228 or visit <http://www.geocities.com/pilgrimsfaith>.

**10 – 22 OCTOBER 2004, PILGRIMAGE
to MEDJUGORJE, B-H via ROME, IT**

The Pilgrims of Faith Marian Center (PFMC) will coordinate a pilgrimage to Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina via Rome, Italy, with Doctor Bob and Anita Rice of In His Omnipotent Presence (IHOP) Ministries, Albuquerque, NM, and Father Phil Sladicka, Saint Patrick / Holy Spirit / Saint Michael, Olyphant, PA, as Spiritual Directors.

Reservation forms are available at:

<http://www.geocities.com/pilgrimsfaith/2004/04PPM10.pdf>.

Departure is on Sunday, 10 October 2004, from John F. Kennedy (JFK) International Airport, NY. Return is to JFK on Friday, 22 October 2004.

Requested donation is \$2299 per person double occupancy plus \$130 for air taxes. Single supplement is \$399. As with all **PFMC** pilgrimages, this includes breakfasts and suppers throughout the pilgrimage. A deposit of \$500 is required with reservation. Full payment is due by 12 July 2004.

For more information call (856) 768-9228 or visit <http://www.geocities.com/pilgrimsfaith>.

Thanks for anything you can do to post these notices in parish bulletins or even with local prayer groups. Information sheets with reservation forms are available at or from the PFMC. Please help us to spread the word.

(Kathleen as well as all the PFMC Volunteer Staff)

CONFERENCE CORNER

8th Annual Central California Marian Eucharistic Conference

9-11 January 2004 At Mid-State Fairgrounds, Paso Robles, CA. Theme: *"We Believe, We Adore"* Speakers: Father Benedict Groeschel, Father John Corapi, Sister Briege McKenna, Father Pablo Straub, Father Michael Tapajna, Father Santan Pinto, and David Parkes as MC. Eucharistic Adoration and Confessions available. Contact: (805) 461-1367 or (805) 461-5358 or write: PO Box 615, Atascadero, CA.

16-17 January 2004 Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Glassboro, NJ. "Catholic Life Today: The Dynamic Vision of John Paul II Called to Holiness, Called to Mission." Ralph Martin. Call (856) 858-8909 or contact ApostlesofLife@aol.com. Pre-registration is encouraged using: [Conference%20Form.htm](http://www.apostlesoflife.org/Conference%20Form.htm) from <http://www.apostlesoflife.org/>.

20-21 February 2004 At the John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, DC. "The Immaculate Conception in the Life of the Church" with Doctor Mark Mirivalle, Father Peter Fehlner, FI, Doctor Robert Stackpole, STD, and Father Donald Calloway, MIC. (413) 298-1184 or jp2@marian.org.

26-27 March 2004 At John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, DC. Father Seraphim Michalenko, MIC, and Doctor Robert Stackpole, STD. (413) 298-1184 or jp2@marian.org.

Other conferences will be listed as they become known. A visit to the Internet will often provide links to additional conference information sites. A good start is <http://www.medjugorje.org/medconf.htm>.

BOUNDING FORWARD to KYROS TIME

Is time management a problem for you? Do you struggle a never-ending battle of managing your time and juggling the many different "hats" that you have to wear on a given day? Do you feel as if there are just not enough hours in the day to satisfy all of the

demands placed on you by your family, friends, job, church, etc?

This one-day workshop provides a Bible-based approach to time management. It is designed for people who struggle with balancing the ever-increasing demands of church, work and home life. It will show participants how to focus on living a Christ-centered life and developing the resiliency needed to manage the constant change that is a part of our lives today. These principles are demonstrated with live examples from the Gospel.

Participants will learn:

How to understand time and choice.

Goal setting techniques and standards to create direction towards their attainment.

How to discern what activities are moving them towards the attainment of their goals and what to do when they get off track.

Time management techniques to manage their activities and maintain focus on their goals.

Prioritizing Points – an original, Biblically based, approach to time management and what skills are needed to develop to achieve a sense of balance of all the activities in a day, week, etc.

The presenter, Mary Anne Kochut, spent over 20 years as a trainer and consultant in Corporate America where she presented workshops that helped people improve their skills in leadership, management and personal effectiveness. She now uses those skills to serve the Lord.

Where: **Saint Antoninus Church, 337 South Orange Ave., Newark, NJ 07103**

When: **Saturday, January 10, 2004**

Time: **9 AM to 5 PM, 12 Noon Holy Mass**

Celebrant: Father Bill Halbing

Bring your calendar and/or planner and your own lunch.

Admission is FREE, however, we need to know who will be attending because there are workshop materials. Please call: (973)-623-0258 to register. Donations will be accepted.

IN HIS SIGN (IHS) MINISTRIES

On **Saturday, 1/31/04**, **Father Bill Halbing** will be featured at an IHS event from **9 AM to 4 PM** at **Holiday Inn, Essington, PA**. Registration fee is \$36. Call **1-888-34FAITH** for more information.

CALENDARS:

In *December*, the Church celebrates the Solemnities of **IMMACULATE CONCEPTION (8)** and **CHRISTMAS (25)**, Feasts of **Our Lady of Guadalupe (12)**, **Saints Stephen (26)**, **John, Apostle and Evangelist (27)**, **Holy Innocents (28)**, and **Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph (28)**, Memorials of **Saints Francis Xavier (3)**, **Lucy (13)**, **John of the Cross (14)** and Optional Memorials of **Saints John of Damascus (4)**, **Nicholas (6)**, **Juan Diego (9)**, **Pope Damasus I (11)**, **Jane Frances de Chantal (12)**, **John of Kanty (23)**, **Thomas Becket (29)** and **Pope Sylvester I (31)**.

In *January*, the Church celebrates the Solemnities of **Mary, Mother of God (1)**, **Epiphany of the Lord (4)**, Feast of **Baptism of the Lord (11)** and Memorials of **Saints Basil the Great (2)**, **Gregory Nazianzen (2)**, **John Neumann (5)**, **Anthony, Abbot (17)**, **Agnes (21)**, **Francis de Sales (24)**, **Timothy (26)**, **Titus (26)**, **Thomas Aquinas (28)** and **John Bosco (31)** and Optional Memorials of **Saints Genevieve (3)**, **Raymond of Penyafort (7)**, **Hilary (13)**, **Fabian, Pope (20)**, **Sebastian (20)**, **Vincent (22)**, **Angela Merici (27)**, and **The Most Holy Name of Jesus (3)** as well as **Blessed Andre Bessette (6)**. Most Church calendars recognize **New Year's Day (1)**, and **Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr (15) (observed) (19)**.

for Christmas religious gift selections available for donations. For additional information, call the **PFMC** at (856) 768-9228. Please speak clearly and slowly, leave your name, address, and phone number with area code so that we may return your call. You may FAX your questions to (856) 768-9428.

PFMC PRESENTATIONS

Kathleen and Keith are available to participate in parish or other prayer group meetings with witness, and/or videotape or slide presentations, followed by a question and answer session. The experiences and continuation of the **PFMC** ministries for Our Lady and her Son in this time of manifestation of Our Lord's mercy and graces are shared at no cost. Free will offerings are accepted. This is especially true for books, tapes, and religious articles, when they are made available in displays at the presentation sites. Recipients are asked to donate at or above the suggested value posted on each article made available at the displays. Displays may be set up without presentations. Call (856) 768-9228.

AROUND the PFMC AREA

Please review the announcements on pages 1 through 4, the information sheets and reservation forms on the 2004 RETREAT CONFERENCE and the three 2004 pilgrimages enclosed, as well as the Bulletin Notices on pages 21 to 23. Check out the partial inventory order form with pictures enclosed

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Pilgrims of Faith Marian Center (PFMC), A Religious Association, Inc.
NON-PROFIT and IRS Code 501(c)(3) TAX EXEMPT
Keith and Kathleen Werner, Co-Directors
61 Cooper Road, Voorhees, NJ 08043-4963
(856) 768-9228 FAX: (856) 768-9428

**PRIORITY DATED
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Thursday, 12/11/2003**

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INTERNET / E-MAIL

Visit our web site:

<http://www.geocities.com/pilgrimsfaith>

or send us e-mail at:

PFMCkmw@comcast.net (Kathleen) or
keithwerner@comcast.net.

PLEASE DON'T THROW THIS AWAY!!

If you do not desire to read "The PILGRIM," please give it to a Marian prayer group or return it to sender. If address has changed, please send a change of address.

If there is no time to read it all now, please put it with other reading material in a place where you can read at least an article per day until the next issue arrives. We operate on divine providence and the kind donations of those who can afford to support us. **PRIESTS!** Please note that **HOMILY** ideas have come from priests reading articles in "The PILGRIM!"

