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# Returning to Kenya



Mike and Cindy Karasch, Mary Lauer, and Sue Lind.

## Migori Partnership Team prepares 2025 delegation

During the cold winter months, it is not uncommon for Minnesotans to travel to warmer climates to relax. For Parishes on the Prairie Area Catholic Community members Sue Lind, Mary Lauer, and Cindy and Mike Karasch, their trip during January and February 2025 will be a mission of service and cultural exchange, visiting their sister parish of St. Joseph's in Migori, Kenya.

"We want an awareness, and we want to invite people to join the committee if they're interested," Lind said. "We'd like to have more prayer partners, and donations toward the orphan project are always welcome."

The Sauk Centre-Migori Partnership Committee was founded in 2005, and Lauer and Kathy Knoblach went on the first delegation to Migori in 2007, establishing the sister parish relationship. Lind went on later



delegations, and both she and Lauer found the people to be very welcoming and friendly.

"It was like (being) part of the family," Lind said. "It was very fulfilling and interesting to see a different culture; we're all human beings, and we all want the same thing in life."

In 2009, the Sauk Centre committee wanted to provide more than prayers, so in partnership with the Migori committee, they started an orphan project for 150 children at St. Joseph's Parish.



# Migori

from front

The partnership now provides 80 students with tuition, their school uniform, backpacks, blankets, mattresses, mosquito nets, shoes, socks and other clothing — including a sweater.

“You wouldn’t think it, but in the mornings, it gets pretty chilly, and a lot of these kids have to walk a distance to get to school,” Lauer said.

The committee also provides the students with health insurance, which is about \$25 per year.

“They’ve used it,” Lauer said. “They get sick too.”

The partnership provides food three times a year during the students’ month-long holiday breaks. Older students are often at boarding schools, so during these breaks, they have to stay with family or another caregiver; they may not have the means to support them, so the food goes toward making



sure they are fed when school is not in session.

The orphans also have help from Maryline Auka, a Kenyan social worker sponsored by the parish partnership.

“She’s even taken orphans into her house when they had nowhere else to go,” Lauer said.

There have been many delegations back and forth between Sauk Centre and

Migori, with the exception of 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic. Lind and Lauer have both been on multiple delegations, and they are always struck by the gratitude of their hosts and the cultural differences, particularly evident during their celebration of the Mass.

“They have a dancing procession for each Sunday Mass,” Lind said. “When the priest processes in, there are dancers in front of him, and they have their costumes on, and then they process out again. Sometimes, they dance during the offertory.”

The parish holds a culture day to show the delegation how they live.

“One time, on one of the delegations when I was there — I was making rope. ... and they were showing how they did

their pottery and build their kiln out of mud,” Lauer, who was making her fourth trip, said. “That’s always fun to experience how they cook, how they do all their stuff compared to here.”

The 2025 delegation will leave Minneapolis Jan. 22 and will depart Migori Feb. 12. On the way there, the group will have to stay overnight in Nairobi after a stop in Amsterdam.

The delegation’s visit will include a new opportunity for the women in St. Joseph’s Parish, many of whom have no means of support or are taking care of orphans. The delegation will be purchasing pedal-powered sewing machines in Nairobi as well as fabric and sewing supplies, bringing them to Migori for the women’s group to use. Some of the funds for these sewing machines is coming from rosary bracelets made by volunteers and sold by the committee. The bracelets can be purchased by stopping by the Centre for Christ or call 320-351-5580. The committee will also have them at some Sunday masses.

“As a group, we decided, if we taught (the women) to make something, they could sell it,” Lind said. “This year, we are teaching them how to make tote bags for shopping and sell them.”

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# The Advent within a Mass

Advent is a time of preparation before Christmas, the birth of Our Lord. As we decorate and plan for the season, we would do well to remember another time of preparation, one we should be going through at least every weekend: the Holy Mass, where we prepare to receive Jesus in the Eucharist.

We do a lot of decorating in Advent. We want to make things not just pretty but spiritually uplifting. There are lots of ways we decorate for Advent. Sometimes, it's with Advent wreaths, Christmas trees, or strings of lights. So, too, whenever we prepare for the Eucharist, especially for the Lord's Day celebrations on Saturday evening or Sunday.

We want to dress ourselves up to make it an uplifting experience not only for us but for others who join us in dressing up.

What does it mean to dress up for the Eucharist? My way of thinking is that if we were really conscious and intentional about dressing up for Mass, we would feel like we want to change our clothes when we get home in order to get more relaxed.

Another way we get ready for Advent is calling to mind our sins. We're called to get right with the Lord, to make straight the way of the Lord and to have the spirit of repentance. We examine our consciences, asking, "What are the things I haven't done well this past year, past months or even past weeks that I want to get right with the Lord?" Going to confession in the Advent season is a preparation of our souls.

Also, toward the beginning of Mass, we call to mind our sins. We want to make that gesture in our own hearts and minds: "Lord, I'm calling to mind my sins because I trust in your mercy. Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy."

As another parallel, there's a lot of music we tend to play during Advent in preparation for Christmas. In a secular way, we sing "Here Comes Santa Claus": in a more spiritual



way, we might sing "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." There are many different kinds of music we might play in preparation of Christmas.

So too at Mass, the Gloria we sing is preparation for the Eucharist. It's a recalling of when the angels came on that night before Jesus was born to tell the shepherds to go to Bethlehem; they sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to all people of good will."

Of course, there are lots of stories told at Christmas. There are beloved stories, like "How the Grinch Stole Christmas," "Miracle on 34th Street" and "A Christmas Carol." There are lots of those stories, but one of the things Catholics should always do is set out a Nativity scene and

recall the actual story of Christmas. We tell our children and grandchildren who the people are in that scene and why it was important who showed up. Then, at Mass, our preparation for the Eucharist is hearing the Word of God and reflecting on it, especially in the homily and reflecting on what that word means within the context of the Mass.

Finally, there is the preparation of gifts. In a secular way, we're preparing our gifts; we're going out and buying gifts for our loved ones. We're wrapping the gifts, putting nametags on them and maybe a little bow, and preparing them to be delivered.

At every Mass, we bring our own gifts, usually in the form of money, and the gifts of bread and wine are brought forward to the altar as well. The priest receives those gifts and blesses them so the greatest gift of all, the One we celebrate at Christmas, the Word made flesh in the manger, is the same Word made flesh in the Eucharist. We're so blessed to be able to receive the Eucharist either in our hands or on our tongues and celebrate with thanksgiving and great Christmas joy.

In our Father's hands,

Fr. Greg Puffel

# The main thing

## HFS prepares annual Christmas pageant

There is no Christmas without Jesus, and Holy Family School in Sauk Centre recognizes that with their long-running Christmas pageant.

HFS music teacher Jacque Polipnick has been busy preparing all the grades for their musical performances.

"It's a lovely program," Polipnick said. "I can't really say I have a favorite (song) because there are some very upbeat ones that sound like Christmas, but then the first graders have one that's going to be a tear-jerker ... It has a little of everything, so I don't know if I could pick a favorite. I like them all."

For sixth grade teachers Missy Johnson and Riley Kampsen, whis will be their first time directing the HFS pageant, and the students have been doing well so far.

"I can't believe they all had their lines memorized before Nov. 1," Johnson said. "They're really starting to come into character, so it's fun to watch and hear them as it all comes together."

The pageant will be held Thursday, Dec. 12, in the HFS gym in Sauk Centre. Public performances will be at 1 p.m. and 7 p.m., with a private dress rehearsal for the students at 9 a.m. so they can watch the pageant and practice their parts.

This year's play is titled "The Next Leon," and it is a sequel to the 2023 HFS pageant, "The First Leon," where a boy named Leon is assigned as the innkeeper's understudy



Jacque Polipnick

in a Christmas pageant and offers his room to the Holy Family. In "The Next Leon," Leon, played by sixth grader Joseph Stepan, is directing the Christmas pageant; his plans for it keep getting more elaborate, absurd and self-centered, but he ends up taking the place of a sheep's actor and learns humility.

"It's a fun little play," Polipnick said. "Whether it's in the play or not, we always incorporate the manger scene. There are kids from different grade levels who come in as the animals, the angels and the

three wise men."

Generally, HFS goes through their archive of old pageants for a few years before purchasing any new ones. In the case of "The Next Leon," it had been performed at HFS before, but it was many years ago when there were not as many students at the school; the script the school found was printed on old, recycled paper. The performance has needed to be adjusted accordingly, adding roles and songs.

"We have some traditional Christmas songs as well as some new, playful ones," Polip-

nick said. "When they picked (the play) last year, ... they first looked at the programs we had on hand and then looked at the sixth-grade class (and) their talent, and then we say, 'What play seems to fit this group of kids?' ... It makes sense to do the sequel the year after versus waiting three or four years."

Casting for the play began in the beginning of October, when the students were surveyed to see what roles they wanted. Around Oct. 20, they received their parts and began working on them so they could be memorized by Nov. 1.

HFS has 29 sixth-grade students between its two classes, which is not a large group, but that means it is easier to give every student a part in the performance.

"Sometimes, if there's a narrator, we split it up so we can give more kids more parts, or if there's an angel, maybe we split whatever the angel has to say into three or four different angels," Polipnick said.

As of mid-November, the students have been working on putting all their parts together. They put tape on the floor of the HFS multipurpose room to make a practice stage; their real stage went up before Thanksgiving, giving them about seven days to prepare for their performance.

Students also participate in the production by handling the lights, assisting with sounds and music, handing out programs, leading each grade's choir to the stage when it is their turn and more.

HFS page 8

# Service for Christmas

## ACC youth bring cookies, carols to their communities

Advent has arrived, and the youth of the Parishes on the Prairie Area Catholic Community are ready to make the season a little brighter through their annual events which bring cheer to their neighborhoods.

"These acts of service warm my heart," said Shari Saltmarsh, one of the leaders for the Rise Youth Group in Sauk Centre. "We are growing in holiness through learning God's word and deepening our prayerful relationship."

The youth involved in the program include the Rise Youth Group from the St. Paul's and Our Lady of the Angels churches in Sauk Centre. The group has 15 volunteer leaders and 50-80 youth in sixth through 12th grade who meet on the first and third Wednesdays of each month, rotating between St. Paul's and the Centre for Christ down the street.

The Rise Youth Group has themes for every month, like resurrection in April and the Way of the Cross in September. For December, the theme is acts of service, which fits in well with their Advent activities.

One of the biggest programs the ACC youth have during Advent is their cookie service project, which has been active for over 25 years.

"I was a teenager under Kathy Knoblach's youth leadership in 1994 experiencing this act of service in our community," Saltmarsh said. "It's extraordinarily special to



me to be leading the youth in the project the last few years, knowing the impact it has on our youth and community."

The project was started in honor of ACC parishioners who died in the previous year. The youth prepare 70-80 plates and sign Christmas cards to let the recipients know they are being prayed for during this first Christmas without their loved ones.

"We use various recipes, but the youth's favorite are the homemade sugar cookies they decorate," Saltmarsh said. "We've also made Christmas tree ornaments in the past due to COVID restrictions."

This year, the cookies will be made in the St. Paul's Church basement from 4-6 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 4, and they will be delivered from 9-11 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 14.

The cookie service project benefits its participants along

with its recipients.

"The youth experience empathy and sympathy for the parishioners while baking, preparing and delivering," Saltmarsh said. "Parishioners are humbled and sometimes emotional by the generosity and thoughtfulness of the youth when they deliver to their home unexpectedly."

Another youth activity during Advent is the caroling hayride, happening from 6-8 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 18.

"Hay rides and caroling around town began in 2021 under my youth leadership with my love for caroling, the homebound, hot chocolate, apple cider and tractor-driven hay rides," Saltmarsh said. "It started with Charlotte Johnson volunteering her cute wooden wagon with lights in honor of her late husband, but we can't fit everyone on it anymore with increased numbers of

youth."

To accommodate those numbers, Ron and Amy Klaphake provide and prepare hay racks and a tractor for the event, and Chopper Klaphake drives the tractor.

The caroling route goes down Main Street in Sauk Centre, starting up north at Fairway Pines Senior Living and heading south to Getty Street Assisted Living. The carolers sing any request, and their favorites include "Silent Night," "We Wish You a Merry Christmas," "Angels We Have Heard on High," "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," "Jolly Old Saint Nicholas" and "Jingle Bells."

"We've experienced many tearful emotions, smiles, gratitude, cars honking and holiday cheer," Saltmarsh said.

ACC youth page 6

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## First Saturday Devotions

Saturday, December 7  
Our Lady of Angels  
Confession: 7:45 a.m.  
Adoration: 8 a.m.  
Rosary: 8:30 a.m.  
Mass: 9 a.m.

## St. Alexis Youth Group

Saturday, December 7, 1:30-5:30 p.m. in the St. Alexis Church basement.  
Christmas cut out cookie baking and frosting event for the seniors and homebound of our parish. For students in grades 4-12. Younger students and families are encouraged to attend as long as a participating adult stays for the event. Bake and frost cookies for those of the parish and also some for your family to take home. Please bring a friend. All are welcome. Spend time with friends, have conversations, share in good times and listen to some music. Beverages and goodies will be provided. Bring a rolling pin and hand mixer if you have them. To sign up, please text or call Christina at 320-980-0475 by Monday, December 2.

## Knights of Columbus Meeting

Tuesday, December 10  
Location: St. Paul's Church basement  
Time: Rosary at 6:30 p.m. Meeting at 7 p.m.

## St. Theresa/St. Margaret Mission Group

Thursday, December 12  
St. Paul's Church basement at 1 p.m.

## Holy Family School

December 12 — Christmas pageant  
December 23 to Jan 1 — Christmas break



## ACC Youth from page 5

There are two quotes which come to Saltmarsh's mind when thinking of the youth Advent activities. The first is from Matthew 5:16, "Let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." The second is from St. Theresa of Calcutta: "Prayer in action is love, love in action is service."

"The amount of love in an action is more important than the size of the action itself," Saltmarsh said. "Small things done with love and presence can change your life."

# A light in the darkness



Lessons and Carols 2019

## ACC holds Lessons and Carols program

A musical tradition, longstanding both locally and internationally, is being brought back to Sauk Centre through the Parishes on the Prairie Area Catholic Community.

Margaret Sonnek, an ACC member in Sauk Centre, is organizing a Lessons and Carols event at our Lady of the Angels Church in Sauk Centre on Sunday, Dec. 15, starting at 6:30 p.m. The theme of the event is “A Light Shines in the Darkness.”

“I chose the theme ‘A Light Shines in the Darkness’ based on John 1:1-14 and made selections based on that, while also taking into consideration music done in prior years,” Sonnek said. “The evening will consist of five Biblical readings — the ‘Lessons’ — relating to the birth of Christ and carols relating to them. Singers from different parishes in our ACC have come together to be a part of the choir, (and)

carols will be a mix of choral and congregational pieces.”

Anyone from the community is welcome to attend, whether or not they are part of the ACC. There is no cost for admission, although freewill offerings will be gratefully accepted.

“Coming together to listen and/or sing along is a great way to build community,” Sonnek said. “It is a fun and beautiful way to reflect on the preparatory nature of the Advent season and look forward to the joys of Christmas.”

Lessons and Carols is based on a program of scriptural readings and hymns presented annually on Christmas Eve at King’s College in Cambridge, England. It was brought to Sauk Centre in 1964 and has been held annually except for a hiatus from about 2000-2018 and from 2020-2023.

## Migori from page 2

Many of the 400-plus women in the church groups at St. Joseph’s Parish are widows. The prevalence of widows and orphans in Kenya is mainly due to disease, especially AIDS, as well as accidents.

For younger women, the ACC is purchasing 36 kits from Days for Girls International in Nairobi. The kits contain feminine hygiene products, including washable pads.

The delegation will also be visiting the Maasai Mara National Reserve in Kenya. Other delegations have been there in the past, but this will be the first year a group has stayed overnight.

While the delegation prepares for their journey, they are working on having the orphans’ prayer partners send a card with a family photo to help strengthen relationships within the partnership while letting the orphans know they are cared about individually. They still have four orphans who need a prayer partner.

The Migori Partnership Team also welcomes anyone from the ACC to join their ministry. The team is responsible for fundraising the money sent annually to Migori and for their delegations who come to Minnesota.

“We’re sending them money, but we don’t like to look at ourselves like, ‘we have everything (and) you guys have nothing,’” Lauer said. “It’s not like that; they have things we don’t. ... We want to keep our focus on that this is a partnership of prayer, welcoming each other.”



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### Weekend Mass Schedules

#### Saturday

- 4:00 p.m. St. Paul's, Sauk Centre
- 6:00 p.m. Our Lady of the Angels  
Sauk Centre
- 8:00 p.m. Sts. Peter & Paul, Elrosa

#### Sunday

- 8:00 a.m. Our Lady of the Angels,  
Sauk Centre
- 8:15 a.m. St. Alexius, West Union
- 10:30 a.m. St. Francis de Sales,  
Belgrade
- 10:30 a.m. St. Paul's, Sauk Centre

See our website for a full listing  
of daily Mass & confession times.

## HFS from page 4

HFS has slowly been replacing their old stage equipment, with many of the upgrades benefiting the pageant. The stage recently got new, lighter, sturdier risers for the choirs to stand on, a new sound system and new stairs from the gym floor to the stage. The school is also working on new scenic pageant backgrounds; the existing ones are falling apart after decades of use.

One of the most difficult parts of pageant preparation for Polipnick is the how quickly everything needs to come together. As a music teacher, there is not much time between the Grandparents Day program and the pageant to work on music concepts with the students, but she is still able to work them in where she can.

"My favorite part is just that it's Christmas, and I love Christmas," Polipnick said. "It makes my job fun when I get to do that. ... I can't imagine doing (a Christmas concert) without it being about Jesus, the main thing, so it's an absolute joy to do what I love, which is working with kids, but then to do it about the thing I love the most, which is Jesus."

