

### Dates of Interest

November 28-December 13  
Advent Giving Tree

M-T-W, November 30, December 1-2  
EFF Advent Prayer Services  
4:45 PM Monday and Wednesday  
6:30 PM Tuesday

Tuesday, December 8  
Immaculate Conception  
Masses: 7:30 AM, 12:00 PM, 7:00 PM

Thursday, December 17, 7:00 PM  
Advent Penance Service  
with Individual Confessions

Saturday, December 19  
Christmas Confessions  
9:00-11:00 AM

Thursday, December 24  
Christmas Eve  
Masses: 4:30 PM and 7:30 PM

Friday, December 25  
Christmas Day  
Masses: 8:00 AM, 9:30 AM, 11:30 AM

December 31-January 1  
Holy Day - Mary, Mother of God  
Masses: 5:30 PM, 9:30 AM, 11:30 AM

January 23-24  
Blessing of Sacramental Candidates at  
Weekend Masses

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### Saint Elizabeth Parish Debuts Pre-Cana Program

After many months of planning by the Family Life Ministry Team, Saint Elizabeth parish has designed and introduced its own Pre-Cana marriage preparation program. In previous years, couples arranging to be married at our church needed to fulfill the Pre-Cana requirement at another parish.

“The Family Life Ministry Team formed a subcommittee to create the Pre-Cana program at Saint Elizabeth” explained Gen Miceli, Saint Elizabeth Director of Parish Services.

During the formation of the program, the team looked at several different Pre-Cana models, visited existing programs at parishes in our region, and interviewed many newly married couples about their Pre-Cana experiences.

“We looked at many program resources. The personal interviews were very helpful as well. We found out what married couples liked and disliked about the programs they attended,” said Gen.



Saint Elizabeth’s Pre-Cana program is conducted by a team of married couples from our own parish community. Brian and Laura Whitaker serve as the chairpersons of the team. They were inspired to join the program after having a positive Pre-Cana experience at Saint Joseph Parish in Downingtown. They were married by Father Mullin at Saint Elizabeth in November, 2013.

“Pre-Cana was enlightening and profound for us. We thoroughly enjoyed it, and gained a deeper appreciation for each other. It was interactive and educational; Brian and I laughed a lot and had a complete blast performing couple and group activities,” Laura acknowledged. “The atmosphere was fun, inviting and relaxing. The presenters talked about personal challenges any couple may face – such as household chores, communication, and finances.”

Team members Chris and Michaela Mamele were married at Saint Elizabeth in 2008. They joined the team because they had a very different experience with their Pre-Cana program. “We were not overly thrilled with the program itself. We thought this was a wonderful opportunity to help create a Pre-Cana program that was fun, interactive, and educational...three things that were lacking in the program we participated in,” Michaela explained.

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## Nurturing Sisterhood with Visitation BVM

In January 2011, Saint Elizabeth formed the Sister Parish Planning Team with the intention of developing a long-term, reciprocal relationship with Visitation BVM parish in Kensington, Philadelphia. What started out as a team of 10 parishioners has nearly doubled in just four years. More importantly, what started out as just a distant link between our two parishes has blossomed into a warm friendship built upon a mutual respect and genuine concern for one another.

“In a relatively short span, we have established a caring comradery with the parishioners at Visitation,” said Team Co-Chair, Susan Brennan. “Today, they are familiar faces rather than faceless names on a list... we even bumped into a group from our sister parish while on the Parkway during the Pope’s visit. They called to us from across a crowd and we scooted over to exchange hugs. It was like seeing old friends.”

Our relationship with Visitation BVM parish has grown steadily, as have the number of activities we now share. The first and largest event is the food sharing luncheon, where parishioners from our sister parish come to Saint Elizabeth to dish out their signature cuisine from across a diverse ethnic background and share their stories. There is also a choir exchange each year where the Celestial Choir from Visitation BVM and Saint Elizabeth’s Guitar Group sing together during the 11:30 AM Mass prior to the luncheon. Likewise, one of the Saint Elizabeth parish choirs travels to Kensington on another Sunday during the year to join our sister parish community at Mass.

Beyond these two events, our parish is connecting with Visitation BVM in a number of new ways. This year, several Saint Elizabeth parishioners attended the Vietnamese New Year's celebration, which kicks off with Mass, followed by a dragon dance, food, and games.

Saint Elizabeth parishioners also provide assistance with a food pantry and vegetable garden at our sister parish. The vegetables grown in the garden are shared with Philadelphia-area food kitchens, providing fresh produce for those in need. In the last two years, the Saint Elizabeth parish Girl Scout troop joined in a special Easter celebration for pre-kindergarten through fourth-grade students at our sister parish. The Girl Scouts also met with Visitation BVM students who are preparing to receive First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion, culminating with a celebration in May.

“The parishioners of Visitation BVM are devout Catholics and demonstrate their faith in all that they do. They model such enthusiasm and fervor in their faith – it’s inspirational and spiritually energizing,” added Tim Brennan, also a member of the Sister Parish Planning Team. “We’ve learned a lot about the diverse cultures that make up our communities. In fact, I think we all would agree that we have gained more from this relationship than we expected and hope to continue to expand our friendship.”

Pope Francis has indeed set the tone and the mission for all Catholics – to nurture the family and take care of those in need. Through our sister parish relationship, we are doing both and we have become part of each other’s extended families.

~ Lisa Barbadora



*Student Council designated October 23 as Pink Out Day. October is the month when both survivors and those battling breast cancer are remembered and celebrated.*



## Family Spirits: Meet the Odikes

Meet John and Nkemjika (Kem) Odike, who have been members of Saint Elizabeth parish since 2012. Both started their faith journey more than 5,000 miles away in Nigeria. John was raised by devout Catholic parents who hoped that at least one of their three sons would become a priest. In fact, John even attended a seminary for a time. Kem was raised in a Protestant tradition, but after meeting John, joined a Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA) program and was received into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

One of the major differences between Nigeria and the U.S., say the Odikes, is the ready availability and special importance of a strong family support system in their native land. While distance and the current culture work against such ties, the Odikes believe that a strong church community helps to fill the gap. Kem feels that Saint Elizabeth parish fosters a great spirit of community.

Although John, a human resources consultant, and Kem, a marketing manager, have demanding job commitments, both attended the *Christ Renews His Parish* renewal program. They found that one of the benefits of the program is the strong community spirit it generates. Kem, in particular, experienced this recently when she suffered a broken ankle and women who made the renewal with her jumped in and started helping out right away, picking up the children after school and cooking dinners for the family.

Both John and Kem completed un-

dergraduate programs in Nigeria and came to this country to pursue advanced degrees. They met, through friends, while attending grad school in the U.S., married and now have three children: Olivia (10 years), Jonathan (8 years), and Sarah



From L-to-R: Olivia, John, John Jr., Kem and Sarah Odike

(4 years). To ensure that their children are grounded in faith, the school-age children attend Saint Elizabeth's Elementary Faith Formation program. Kem believes that children "definitely need the discipline and moral molding" that a religious education offers.

Now that the family is settled into the area, Kem and John are considering both family-centered and adult stewardship opportunities. Before moving to Chester County, the couple served as volunteers for the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in New Jersey. They believe that such work will bring them even closer to the tight-knit Saint Elizabeth community, and at the same time, benefit others.

~ Kathy Link

## At Work in the House of the Lord: Liturgical Environment Committee

The Liturgical Environment Committee at Saint Elizabeth provides a unique stewardship opportunity which evokes a special feeling of closeness to God. This group ensures that the church décor is worthy of the Lord and reflects the liturgical seasons. 'Elegant Simplicity' is the underlying theme to guide the committee's efforts and helps to ensure that the group creates an attractive visual display to enhance celebrations throughout the liturgical year.

The Liturgical Environment Committee consists of two subcommittees. Once a month, the Vessels and Vestments sub-committee polishes all the brass, cleans and presses the albs for the altar servers, altar linens and vestments. This group is always looking for new stewardship volunteers to lend a hand.

The Decorating sub-committee places less ongoing demand on a volunteer's time, but during a few of the seasons (Advent/Christmas, Lent/Easter and harvest time) when many parishioners are already challenged for time, more volunteers are needed so that no one person is spending more than a few hours. As group leader, Maria Jacobs says, "many hands make light work."

Advent/Christmas is a very demanding time. Over several days of decorating, the entire parish is invited to help transform Saint Elizabeth! Volunteers assemble the Nativity

(continues on page 4)

## School Spirits: New School Year—Exciting New Updates

The onset of a new school year brings with it new faces and new goals. It also brings with it opportunities for a new year of learning and growth. Teachers began their learning process over the summer. Primary teachers and aides were trained in the *Dibels* process so that each student in grades K to 4 can measure student performance on important reading skills. The students' progress has already been assessed this fall and will be reassessed again in the winter and spring. Teachers of Science in grades K to 6 were in-serviced in the use of *Carolina and Foss Science Kits* to add a new dimension to our lab work. The Next Generation Science Standards are in place and will be phased in this year with complete adoption taking place next year. *Go Math*, an algebraic-based method for teaching math now covers grades K to 2. The addition of a part-time math and science teacher, Mrs. Pamela McHugh, has enabled the school to add two new math sections—one in grade 4 and one in grade 8—to

better meet the varied ability levels of the students. The *Rosetta Stone Spanish Program* will allow students in Kindergarten through grade 3 exposure to the language. The addition of our new Spanish teacher, Senora Patricia Guzman, is a welcome change for students in grades 4 to 8 who are now instructed in Spanish classes once a week.

Members of the Parish School Advisory Council (PSAC) have been diligently working on several areas of development within the parish school. The PSAC is a group of appointed and elected members from parish school families, faculty and staff. The group, launched last school year, works in cooperation with Father Mullin and Principal Dr. Diane Greco, offering insights and recommendations for the ongoing improvement of Saint Elizabeth Parish School. Recognizing the importance of extracurricular activities as integral to the overall learning process, the council was able to recommend and help in the organi-

zation of additional after-school programs.

One example of these extracurricular initiatives is the acceptance of our school as an X-Stem School, a program under the umbrella of Lockheed Martin. It aims to promote engaging programs focusing on the areas of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). Saint Elizabeth is one of only 350 schools nationally to be certified in this exciting program. A group of innovative student ambassadors have been diligently working, along with parent volunteers and Dr. Greco, to develop challenging engineering and science projects to take place throughout the school year. Then in the spring, student ambassadors will have the opportunity to participate in the USA Science and Engineering Festival, as well as other exciting programs that further support the educational mission of the parish school, and provide a competitive edge to its students.

~ Julie Krumenacker

## Liturgical Environment Committee—cont'd

scene, hang beautiful wreaths, install large floral displays, set up the Christmas trees, and adorn everything with twinkling white lights—the stage is set for an elegant Christmas celebration.

Lent/Easter comes with different challenges because the decor changes several times during Holy Week. Just before Palm Sunday each year, as a bonus to parishioners and a nod to the traditions of the many ethnic backgrounds that make up this parish, Maria offers training in palm braiding to any and all in the parish community.

The need for volunteers continues during all seasons as live floral arrangements need watering.

Please keep this ministry's efforts in mind and express your appreciation when you meet any of the church decorators. If you can spare a few hours to assist in the decorating, offer your stewardship service to the committee. For contact information, visit [www.stelizabethparish.org](http://www.stelizabethparish.org).

~ Kathy Link



## Saint Elizabeth's Pre-Cana Program— cont'd

In contrast to these more recently married couples on the team, Melinda and Jeff Arcara have been married for 19 years. They joined the group because they enjoyed a rewarding Pre-Cana experience in California. "Pre-Cana was so good that we saved the workbook that we wrote notes in, and use it now in our own presentation. The topics that were presented to us years ago helped us create a strong foundation for our own marriage. We wanted other couples to start their union with that same positive experience," Jeff said.

During their session, Melinda and Jeff discuss the topic of the Individual and Family of Origin. "We explain how each couple grew up in certain environments (good or bad), different ethnicity, customs, traditions and religious backgrounds that helped shape the persons that they are today. But as a couple, you can identify what you want to bring into your own marriage. For example, I grew up in a large family that had strong traditions at Christmas. Jeff didn't, so we adapted many of my family's traditions for that particular holiday," Melinda said.

"So many things are assumed when you go into a marriage that really need to be discussed openly. For example, who will handle the finances? Where will the holidays be spent? How many children would you like to have? This program begins to open lines of communication and equip couples with tools to

build a marriage that will stand the test of time," she continued.

Saint Elizabeth's Pre-Cana program is offered twice a year (winter and late summer). The first program took place in January 2015, with six engaged couples from various parishes. The second program, held this past September, also had six couples



*Saint Elizabeth Parish's first Pre-Cana program was held in January 2015 and has since received an overwhelmingly positive response.*

in attendance. The next scheduled Pre-Cana program, being offered on January 29-30, 2016, is already filled to capacity with 15 engaged couples planning to attend.

The sessions begin on a Friday night, with the couples returning the following morning for a full day of activities. The program concludes with Mass at 5:30 PM on Saturday evening. Topics covered include Family of Origin, Communication and Lifestyle, The Sacrament of Marriage, Intimacy, and Personal and Couple Spirituality.

"There is also a panel discussion

with Q & A; quiet time allowing the couple to talk with each other, and social time at meals," noted Gen Miceli.

The Saint Elizabeth Pre-Cana Program has already received an overwhelmingly positive response. But the team plans to continue making adjustments based on ongoing participant feedback.

"We solicit feedback on each presenter and topic, and on the overall weekend structure. From the constructive comments we have already received, some enhancements have been implemented – for example, we have incorporated a second panel discussion for Q&A, and now provide each couple with a Bible and rosary," Laura said.

The Family Life Ministry Team is excited to finally be able to offer a "home-grown" Pre-Cana Program to our parishioners as well as parishioners of other local parishes. Thanks to all who prepare these engaged couples for the Sacrament of Marriage and their lives together in Christ.

~ Sara Richardson

**Engaged couples can sign up for Saint Elizabeth's Pre-Cana program at [stelizabethparish.org](http://stelizabethparish.org). Start by clicking on 'Our Parish,' then follow the prompts to get to Pre-Cana Program Registration.**

# From the Pews of Saint Elizabeth:

The whole world watched, captivated. Pope Francis' historic visit to the U.S. this past fall moved millions of Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Many faith-filled people jumped at the chance to see, even if only from a distance, our Pope preach about family life, hope, and caring for others. Here are a few reflections from Saint Elizabeth parishioners.

"Since I am in formation for the Permanent Diaconate, my wife, Debbie, and I were fortunate to be invited to St. Charles Seminary while Pope Francis was staying there. It was amazing to be in a room with so many Cardinals and

Bishops from around the world. **But it was overwhelming when Pope Francis entered the Chapel.** At the conclusion of his talk, since we were near the front pew, he reached out and shook my wife's hand. We feel so very blessed."

- Kevin Mead

"My experience was indeed wonderful and faith strengthening."

- Imelda Vargas

"The weekend with Pope Francis whose humble spirit and compassionate acceptance of the disabled, imprisoned, elderly, underprivileged, abused, and even sinners like me was inspiration on steroids! Through the actions of Pope Francis, I could see and feel the teachings of Christ alive in present day."

- Susan Brennan

"The World Meeting of Families was a week of abundant, overflowing joy!"

- Linda Hammill



"We were on the Parkway for the papal visit, and what impressed us most was the peaceful atmosphere, sense of communion, and the outpouring of support for attendees and public employees. Overall, we were left refreshed. You can't help feeling better about being part of such a welcoming church with a great and well-rooted message of reverence, love and community."

- Bob and Laurie Masino

"Being on the Parkway for the World Meeting of Family Festival and the Papal Mass is a memory that will last a lifetime! Highlights included Pope Francis' animated talk focusing on the family at the Festival and the beauty of the closing Mass including the sacred silence of all after both the Homily and Holy Communion. While it was a thrill to see Pope Francis, the more compelling experience to me was seeing the impact of His presence on so many before, during, and after His visit."

- Shirley Puccino

"We had a very moving experience during Pope Francis' time in Philadelphia. We were privileged to be in the chapel as he addressed the bishops of the world. **It was such an honor to represent our city and parish this way.** We ended the weekend by sharing Mass with our family and hundreds of thousands of visitors in our city."

- Sandy Hess

"My daughter and I had a wonderful experience. We caught the 9:30 am train in Paoli, walked and then waited in line 3.5 hours to get through security. However, we ran into some fellow Bishop Shanahan friends and made a few new friends. **When Pope Francis came near us, I was overwhelmed with emotion,** and struggled to hold my camera steady. It was wonderful to also see my 13-year-old daughter so moved by the experience. It was a chance for her and me to connect even more through our faith. And, there's nothing more powerful than 800,000 people all praying the Our Father together!"

- Kim Greenhut

# Reflections on the Papal Visit

*"It was inspirational to watch the 850 priests file down each side of the parkway in a long line, escorted by uniformed Knights of Columbus, with volunteers carrying papal umbrellas to distribute the Holy Eucharist to the hundreds of thousands of faithful that traveled to attend the Papal Mass."*

- Andrea Fiorillo



*"Saint Elizabeth's WMOF service project was inspiring... to see how everyone, grown-ups and children, participated in packaging food and wrote notes of encouragement for the homeless. We also wrote prayers and petitions on ribbons for the Our Lady, Undoer of Knots project, and then to see it on TV was amazing."*  
- Kate & Ralph Hannum

*"I was so delighted our parish offered an opportunity to participate in a service activity supporting the efforts of the World Meeting of Families. Since I was not able to attend any of the events in Philadelphia, it meant a lot to still feel a part of the spirit. The event was so well organized. Not only did we help feed the homeless by making breakfast bags, we enjoyed a wonderful potluck dinner with old and new friends. Most of all, I was extremely grateful to be able to write on some ribbons for the inspiring sculpture of Our Lady, Undoer of Knots. Seeing Pope Francis later bless each of these knots really touched me."*

- Chris Zubrick

*"It's hard to describe the WMOF – but I'll try: unconditional brotherly love. Everywhere you went, you were greeted with smiles, friendship, hugs, and a warm welcome. One moment that stands out for me was seeing some Kenyans dancing in the middle of the street out of sheer joy."*  
- George Marshalek

## Dates of Interest

*cont'd*

*January 31-February 5*  
Catholic Schools Week  
Open House: Sunday, 12:30-2:00 PM

*Ash Wednesday, February 10*  
Masses: 7:30 AM and 7:00 PM  
Liturgy of the Word & Ashes  
11:00 AM and 4:30 PM

*Lenten Fridays, 7:00 PM*  
Stations of the Cross & Benediction  
February 12 - March 11

*Saturdays, February 20 and 27*  
Confirmation Retreats  
8:30 AM - 12:30 PM

*M-T-W, February 22-23-24*  
EFF Lenten Prayer Services  
4:45 PM and 6:30 PM

*Saturday, March 12*  
Confirmation Ceremonies  
10:00 AM and 2:00 PM

*Friday, March 18*  
Living Stations of the Cross  
1:30 PM and 7:00PM

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## Watch this Space!



It may not look like much right now, but construction on Saint Elizabeth's new onsite residence for priests will begin very soon. This will complete the original design of the parish's "Field of Dreams." Parish staff have been working with South-down Homes of Downingtown on this project. Proceeds from the *Bring it Home* one-time gift appeal, and the sale of the current rectory in Glenmoore will provide funding for the entire construction project. As of press date, more than 400 parish families have contributed over \$500,000 to the appeal.

~ Sara Richardson



*Eighth-grade Saint Elizabeth Parish School students, as part of the Saint Joseph (Downingtown) Parish field hockey team, won the Archdiocese of Philadelphia Championship this fall. Remarkably, the powerhouse team went undefeated for 22 straight victories, and defeated Saint John Neumann in the championship 4-1. Congratulations to all! From L-to-R: Bridget Finley, Taylor Barbadora, Natalie Fardone, Madison Parke, and Angelina Perre*

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