



## **E-NEWS – Sermon December 20, 2015 – Chapel**

*To Members of Saint Mary Magdalene – until Christmas I will send this weekly news, adapted from my Sunday sermon, [remember it is a spoken sermon, not a literary composition]. It is my part to promote our need for additional funds to complete our church construction endeavors. Thank you for whatever you can do to help us.*

*Take a look at the end of my sermon where there is a glass design which attempts to portray simply our current challenge and efforts.*

### **News for December 20th**

**Our Diocese is reviewing our most current presentation. That will take some time because of all the Christmas traffic and busy schedules of reviewers. There is also somewhat more time needed in our case because our request may be the largest single request for a loan of any parish.**

### **Blessing for Expectant Mothers**

There is a tradition on this weekend when Mary, who is expecting her child, visits her cousin Elizabeth, who is also expecting her child. The tradition is to offer a blessing to all expectant mothers in our congregation.

I will not ask the mothers to stand. It has never happened to me, but I heard that when one pastor asked the expectant mothers to stand, there was a big thud in the congregation, and he feared an expectant mother had passed out.

But when he looked into the congregation where the commotion was, he saw it was not an expectant mother; it was an expectant father. [I think I tell that story every year, so you are kind to laugh] I will also add words of blessing for fathers:

#### LET US PRAY

*God, author of all life, bless, we pray, these unborn children;  
give constant protection and grant a healthy birth  
that is the sign of our rebirth one day into the eternal rejoicing of heaven.*

*Lord, who have brought to woman the wondrous joy of motherhood,  
grant them comfort in all anxiety, and make them determined  
to lead their children along the ways of salvation.*

*Lord of the ages, who have singled out these men to know the grace and pride of fatherhood, grant them courage in this new responsibility,  
and make them an example of justice and truth for their children. Amen*

## Mary Visits Her Cousin Elizabeth

In the Gospel for December 22, Tuesday, during her visit to Elizabeth, Mary prays the famous Magnificat song. Here are words I put in the bulletin Reflection today:

*What is noteworthy about this song is Mary's delight, even as an unwed mother in an extremely traditional society, in taking on such an incredible burden. Mary accepted this calling and conviction because God was doing something new and powerful in the history of the world.*

If one is not totally astounded, mystified, amazed, by the mystery of human birth, then that person should never celebrate Christmas.

Having a baby must be the biggest of all life changing events. On the part of God it is a decision that the world will go on.

Any baby born though also has an end point, which is not the most glamorous of topics at Mass the week before Christmas. Here may be a more comfortable way to consider the end of our lives.

## Grandparents & Great-Grandparents

At the school Mass on Thursday the Gospel was Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, the opening words of his Gospel. In his genealogy of Jesus, Matthew lists the names of 42 generations. That means add the word great, great, great grandparent 42 times.

I asked the children at Mass how many knew their great grandparents. I was surprised how many hands went up. [kindergarten and first grade students will put their hands up for anything, but there were also older students who raised their hands.] Apparently there are some quite elderly people around.

Knowing great grandparents was a gift I was not given. Even 2 grandparents had passed on before I appeared on the scene. Some of my earliest memories were of a grandparent funeral.

## Our Chapel

My reason this day for this sermon topic [this is the 8<sup>th</sup> sermon in my series of 9] is that I do want to say a word about our Chapel, planned for our new church building. The Chapel is in the plans, but it is not in the first phase because of financial constraints.

Anthropologists write about the funeral practices of ancient societies. Maybe it is because I am ancient, but just in the last 15 years or so our own American Catholic Apex funeral customs are rapidly changing. Here is what I have experienced:

People's parents and grandparents move into our area because their children and grandchildren are here, but places of final internment are somewhere else where long time family roots are.

Cremation has risen to the level of near 80%. At our 15 listening sessions two years ago about the new church, the only question asked at all 15 sessions was: will there be a columbarium place for ashes? Answer: Yes, there will be.

The number of people who come to funeral memorial services is about 50 or so. That is a small crowd for a large church. Our current chapel seats 60; our new chapel is designed for 120.

I am aware that both St Michael Parish and St. Andrew Parish built their chapels too small and had to move church ceremonies, even daily Mass, into their large sanctuaries.

A chapel is used every day for daily Mass, also for some short Catholic blessings, for Anointing for the sick, for adoration on First Fridays, for private prayer. In our present St Mary Magdalene chapel - that is also the place for baptisms on Saturday mornings.



**Our Current Chapel**

## The Gospel for Today

'Mary set out in haste to the hill country to visit her cousin Elizabeth,' so they could be with one another in their common experience in life, preparing for the birth of their babies. Pope Francis is fond of using the phrase we are to '*accompany one another.*' That is what Mary and Elizabeth were doing.

In Advent we priests are called to assist at many Penance Services. And I schedule a time for our parish children and our school children. That is about 400 of them.

Children are quite clear that they do not always faithfully accompany parents, sibling, classmates, friends. They admit they have wanted their own way. They have little hesitation identifying their sins. And they say they are sorry.

We adults have much more complex accompaniments, many of which are under strain, perhaps more so at this time of year. Family conflict, old wounds that have not healed, are felt again.

Current events commentators are noting and describing a sense of fear in people because of too many, way too many, events of violence. People are scared.

Confessions of the elderly are different from confessions of children. The elderly have too many experiences of diminishment, they have endured losses that are gone forever, they may have an illness that gives little relief, or have known for a long time the breakup of family and friends of the past will never be mended.

## Angels and Camel Drivers

Our Christmas crib angels are here today because they are getting ready for the Christmas angel surprise I promised for my sermon on Christmas. *The angels said to the shepherds at Bethlehem 'do not be afraid.'*

We all want those words, '*do not be afraid*' brought to those who fear, those who are afraid, those who are growing older, those who face the challenge of a new baby's birth.

After the angels said those words, the shepherds went over to Bethlehem. They got involved with the family with the new baby. They accompanied Joseph and Mary and the Child.

There is also another statue here today, one who is new for this year. He will be part of our Fontanini Christmas community. He is Sampson the Camel Driver.

I had a bad experience with a camel drive a long time ago when I visited the Holy Land, with a stop first in Egypt to see the pyramids and a ride on a camel. The camel driver offered to take my picture, but before he would give me my camera back he demanded a dollar.

When I got home and had the film developed [children, ask your grandparents what the term '*film developed*' means] there was a beautiful picture of the camel, the camel driver's assistant holding the reins was smiling, and there was me - with my head chopped off.

That experience was a long time ago and I forgive the camel driver now for tricking me. I was young then and so was he, but he is now probably a doting grandfather or even a great grandfather.

He surely rejoiced in the birth of those grandchildren and great grandchildren. The new children in his life I hope has mellowed him so he will accompany people, especially accompany strangers, with more thoughtfulness and kindness.

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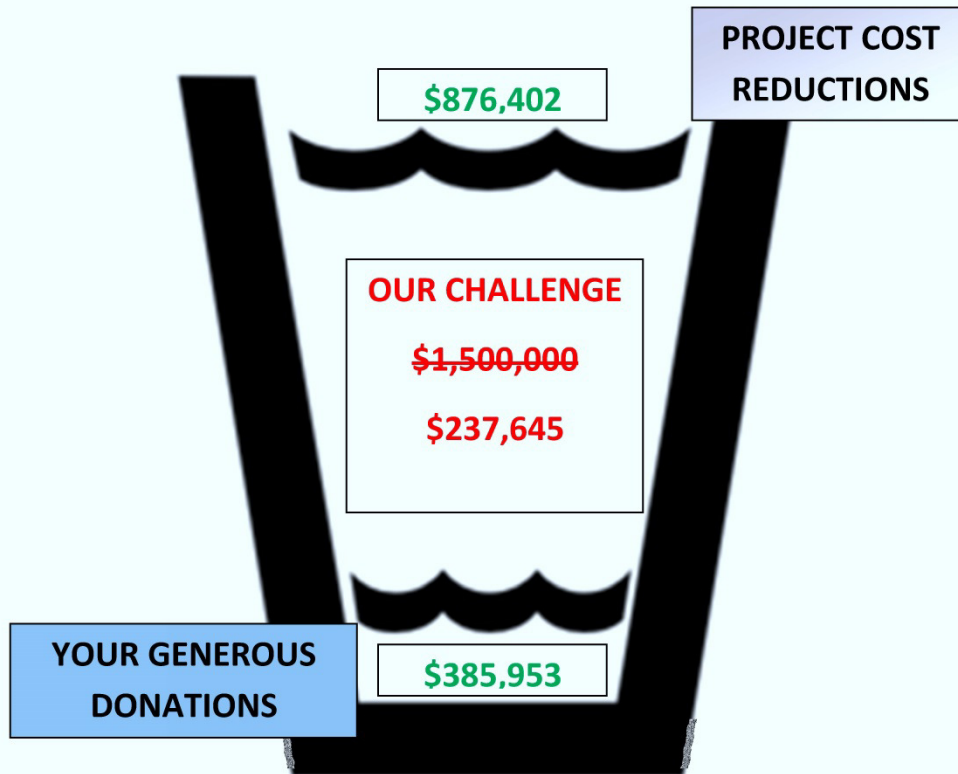
**Our Angels and Camel Driver**

## Fundraiser Glass

# St. Mary Magdalene Church

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AS OF DECEMBER 21, 2015



## Bottom Line

We ask each family in our parish to pledge \$5,000 over 3-4 years. If we had a 100% response we would be underway quickly. For those who have already made a pledge/gift, please consider an additional \$2,000 pledge/gift, more if you can, to help us with these new costs. You are the ones who have brought us this far, and you are the ones who will bring us to the finish line. Many thanks.