

St. Irene Church NEWS



Christmas 2018

In this Newsletter:

- Advent Thoughts
- Invitation to Social Action
- St. Irene's Volunteer Award Winner 2018
- Bishop Cheverus Award
- Thunga Primary School Update
- Collaborative – Seeking Feedback
- Peer Leaders
- Women's Club
- Knights of Columbus; Birthday Cake Blessing
- Adult Faith Formation
- Women's Club
- Finance Council Update
- Three Kings' Party
- Calendar of Events

Guiding principles for St. Irene's e-newsletters include:

- We respect your time -- Only one hit to your inbox every three months.
- We respect your attention -- Only information provided that is important to your family and your choices within the parish. You can skim to find what you need.
- We want your input. Email feedback@stirenes.org with your suggestions.
- We respect your choices. You can unsubscribe at any point, but we hope you'll keep subscribing instead.

Past newsletters can be found on the [Newsletter page](#) of St. Irene's web site.

Advent Thoughts

Thanksgiving is behind us and Christmas is in full swing it seems with decorations, music and shopping solicitations all around us, even if the day hasn't come yet. Growing up, for many of us, the Christmas Tree was kept out of sight, decorated by parents behind closed doors, and not until Christmas Night were we finally allowed to take in the sights of the sparkling tree and the Nativity scene. These days, such practice can seem futile, when decorations are all around us. But when we take the Advent season to prepare ourselves, to await the Lord's coming, the celebration is that much more joyous.

"There is no more dangerous... habit than that of celebrating Christmas before it comes... It is the very essence of a festival that it breaks upon one brilliantly and abruptly, that at one moment

the great day is not and the next moment the great day is."

- G.K. Chesterton

Let us not celebrate Christmas until it happens. Let us instead prepare by reflecting on our own response to the coming of Christ into our lives. Turning Christmas into jingles and consumerism cheapens a momentous occasion, a watershed moment in human history: Our God chose to come to us in human form - as a defenseless Child. We are a festive and a sacramental people. We will celebrate, but in due time and duly prepared for the awesome gift of Christmas, and the responsibility to share the Good News with all of our neighbors!

Invitation to Social Action

St. Irene's encourages you to become involved in taking care of our neighbor as ourselves. We have many parishioners working to help you bring the spirit of Christian love into the world. These parishioners would love to have new people involved. Here are some opportunities available for your support right now.

The Giving Tree for Those in Need

"Lord, who is my neighbor?" Each December, a Christmas Giving Tree appears at the entrance to St. Irene's Church. The tree branches carry small rectangular note cards identifying a Christmas gift that can make a difference for a local family. The notes specify what a local family needs, rather than the more common what a family wants for Christmas. A typical note might simply state: "Warm pajamas for a four-year old boy named Joseph. Size ..." For more information or to help carry out this work, visit St. Irene's web page on [Outreach Ministries and Christmas Gifts](#).

Prison Ministry - Christmas Gifts for Prisoners

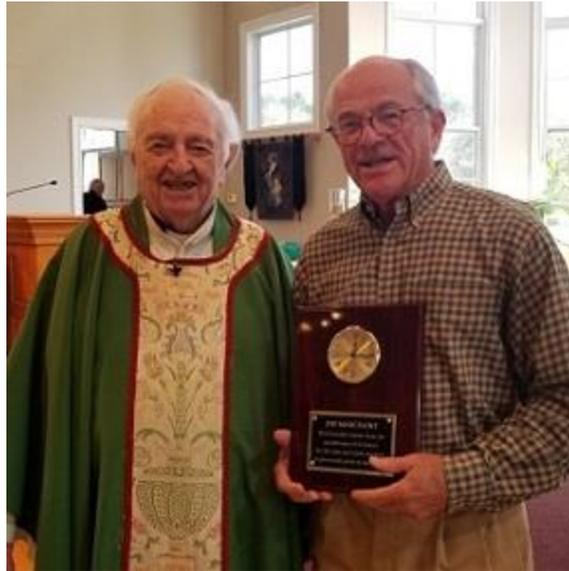
"To visit the imprisoned". Each year St. Irene's participates in the Concord Prison Holiday Gift Bag Project that provides simple gifts for prisoners at MCI Concord. Usually the gifts (consisting of basic needs such as stationery, stamps, warm socks, etc.) are sent in a decorated shoebox assembled by adults. For more information, or to help carry out this work, visit St. Irene's web page on [Prison Ministry](#).

Deployed Military

Each year our Women's Club donates about 40 boxes of food and necessities to our soldiers serving our country in Cuba, Iraq and Afghanistan. The response from these soldiers and support civilians was heartfelt. They were so grateful for the gifts and the fact that we took the time to remember them. Members of St. Irene's parish have served in civilian and military capacities in these and other locations. For more information or to help carry out this work, visit St. Irene's website on outreach to [Deployed Military](#).

Winner of St Irene's Volunteer Award 2018: Jim Marchant

This fall, St. Irene's honored an extraordinary parishioner for his generous contributions of time and effort in service to the parish community – Jim Marchant. We asked one of the peer leaders, whom Jim has worked with, to interview Jim. You can find her report [here](#). In it, Jim has key advice to those looking to get involved as volunteers, and also important advice about sustaining true faith.



Fr Tom & Jim Marchant, Oct 14th 2018

On behalf of all parishioners, we extend our deepest thank you to Jim for his years of effort & leadership.

Bishop Cheverus Award: Patricia Barry

Father Tom: Each year Cardinal Sean O'Malley presents the Bishop Cheverus award to parishioners who have been outstanding in their volunteer service to their parish. This year, Father Tom chose Patricia Barry as the recipient from our parish. Over the years Pat has volunteered in many ways. She led our Religious Education program under Father Byrne and later, she directed the Confirmation program. She serves as a member of our Parish Pastoral Council, as a Eucharistic minister and is a member of the Women's Club. Pat has also written and directed our annual mystery play. She runs our Protection for God's Children program for volunteers and staff. This year she stepped up to coordinate the Catholic Appeal for St. Irene's. She is an outstanding parishioner and is deserving of this award which was presented on Sunday, November 25 at a Prayer Service at the Immaculate Conception Church in Malden. Congratulations Pat!



Pat Barry

Thunga Primary School Update

Parishioner Kelsey Bradley has recently returned from [Thunga, Malawi](#), where she designed and supervised the construction of new primary school classrooms, for which St. Irene's parish helped raise most of the funds. Kelsey sent the following update at the conclusion of the project. [Note: 'Design Cause Inc' is Kelsey's non-profit organization for this type of work]

Thunga Primary is Finished!

This email is long overdue. [Design Cause's work in Thunga](#) has come to an end and everyone couldn't be happier. This project was very challenging for a number of reasons. Working on an American timeline in Malawi is not something I would recommend to anyone, but we pulled it off and the students only had to go two weeks without their new classrooms. Here is what we accomplished in Thunga, Malawi.

1. Four new, airy, and bright classrooms that will accommodate 60-70 new students. These classrooms are spread apart in two different buildings that together with the old classrooms create an exterior courtyard for students to play in
2. Four new latrines for female students. These new latrines have proper ventilation and doors for privacy
3. Extensive landscaping to mitigate erosion and properly direct rainwater away from the new and existing buildings. The landscaping also creates defined places for students to enjoy breaks from the classrooms. Local plants have been extensively used throughout the landscaping to help absorb rainwater and help to make the school unique and beautiful
4. Repaired the roof of the existing building including replacing structural trusses that were rotten and on the verge of collapse
5. Purchased school supplies for entire school so all students can benefit
6. Provided two schools (Thunga Primary and Thyolo Primary) with emergency period kits for female students



New classroom in Thunga, Malawi, 2018

There are so many special things about this project. We were able to use entirely local labor and many pieces of the project were made in Malawi. The windows were made in a large ghetto in [Blantyre](#) from a welder who was born in Thunga. All the plants were purchased from the side of the road from local Malawians growing small plants. The design of the classrooms, especially the second block, was unique and something that I personally am very proud of. The use of

color in each room and the large chalkboards on both the front and back of the classrooms is something completely new to the students and teachers. We extended the covered exterior walkways in front of the rooms so more students can be protected from the sun and rain and we created a large courtyard area in front of the new and existing classrooms. Our work has enabled Thunga Primary to have an upper campus for younger students and a lower campus for older students.



Celebrating project completion in Thunga, Malawi, 2018

What we were able to achieve in Thunga surpassed my expectations. The number of students these classrooms and latrines will serve over the next few decades will leave a lasting mark on the struggling community of Thunga. I am also proud of the work we did specifically in support of female students. My hope is that girls will continue to pursue an education in this region and help to break the cycle of poverty that is rampant in Malawi.

Collaborative – Seeking feedback

We've known for a while that St. Irene will enter a collaborative with Holy Family Parish in Concord on June 1, 2019. As that date draws nearer, we, the Web & Communications Committee, are seeking your feedback specifically on the communication efforts and how you would like to see these efforts align with the new collaborative.

1. For each *existing channel*: Bulletin, Newsletter, Web site and Social Media, would you like to see them continue separately, or share some material, or merge into fully shared channels (i.e. one bulletin, one newsletter, etc). Why? What's important to you in parish communications?
2. For potential *new channels*, what would you like to see? Such as podcasts, videos, more material in local newspapers, more use of direct e-mails to parishioners, or other ideas. Tell us your ideas and preferences, please.
3. Are there *new topics* we need to cover more? Tell us what's on your mind.
4. And to get all this done, are you perhaps interested in joining the effort as a *volunteer*? We spread out tasks so no single volunteer is overloaded. If you can maybe write one piece for a Newsletter, or contribute graphic design, or web design, we'll carve out tasks to match the skills and time you can offer.

On any of the three topics above, please send us your thoughts, and we'll contact you to discuss best options. E-mail us at feedback@stirenes.org, and your mail is automatically forwarded to the Web & Communications Committee.

Peer Leaders

Fundraising teaches us to give our time and efforts freely, but with a purpose. The Peer Leaders in the parish have been learning the art of fundraising and the enormous commitment it requires. Their book "Food for Thought" was launched in the late fall in the presence of family, parish members and Ms. Gray, their 6th grade Language Arts teacher. It was a small but successful event. The Peer Leaders were all asked to speak about their role in writing and compiling the book.



"Food for Thought"



"Cook book authors"

Women's Club

September began with the Pot Luck dinner. It was very well attended with plans forming for the Ham and Bean Supper. The Ham and Bean Supper was held in October. Despite the weather, it was a wonderful New England dinner with plenty of food, desserts and good company. A good time was had by all.

November was very busy! With the making of 68 pies! All 68 pies were sold! The money raised will be used to help fund Parish Programs, Thanksgiving Baskets for families in need and the Soldiers Care Packages.

December continues the busy pace with the packing of Soldiers Care Packages on Dec. 4 and making Boxwood Trees on Dec. 6. The Boxwood Trees will be sold after all the Masses on Dec. 7 and 8. Proceeds from the tree sales will be used for Christmas gifts and food baskets for those in need. We will close out December with a Yankee Swap on Dec. 20. All the women of the parish are invited to attend. Please bring a \$10.00 gift for the Swap.

The Women's Club would like to thank all the parishioners for the continued support we receive. Without you, none of this would be possible.

Knights of Columbus; Birthday Cake Blessing

For the past three years, on the fourth Saturday each month, the St. Irene Knights of Columbus have been preparing and serving a meal to families and individuals staying at the Lazarus

House Ministries Emergency Shelter in Lawrence. As you are aware, the recent gas explosions in Lawrence, Andover and North Andover has put a strain on the resources of the Ministry. Our Parish provided clothing and other necessities to help those displaced from their homes by the event.

The Knights have responded by increasing its food preparation for the increased number of people staying at the shelter. At the most recent dinner prepared by the Knights, a little girl, whose family was staying there, was turning four that day. The manager asked if there was something special we could do for dessert to recognize her birthday. Kevin Donnelly and Nick Gioioso from the Knights took the ice cream that had been planned to be used for dessert and created an awesome ice cream birthday cake, which was presented to the girl, candles and all, after dinner. While cleaning up and preparing to leave, the girl stood in the doorway to the kitchen and personally thanked the Knights for the cake. That made freezing in the walk-in freezer, while cutting and forming the cakes, all worth it. Being able to serve others at a place like Lazarus House is truly a blessing. (To join the Knights, open to male parishioners of at least 18 years of age, contact kofc@stirenes.org).

Adult Faith Formation – Reserve the Dates

The [Adult Faith Formation program at St. Irene's](#) continues into winter and spring with more gatherings, scheduled at various times to reach as many parishioners as possible. All sessions take place in the Parish Hall. We give time to encourage discussion among attendees. Refreshments will be served at each session. All are welcome, young and old, parishioners and non-parishioners, with the hope that we can learn more about our faith, learn more about how our faith “works” in our busy lives, and learn more about those on the journey with us. Our next sessions will be on March 11 and 25, 9:30-11:30 am with light breakfast both days. Topics will be announced in the Lent Newsletter. Finally, we'll wrap the 2018-2019 Adult Faith Formation season with “Theology on Tap” on Saturday, April 6 at 7:30 pm, featuring local craft beers and religious topic discussion. Check [St Irene's Adult Faith Formation web page](#) for more information.

Finance Council Update

The Grand Annual Collection started on the weekend of November 17/18. The amount collected the first two weekends (thru Nov 25th) was \$54,182 toward our goal of \$125,000. The goal for 2018 is the same as 2017. St. Irene Parish has had very few major expenditures related to facilities this past year, but we anticipate some work will need to be done to the air conditioners and the roof in the next few years. The Grand Annual Collection makes up the shortfall in operating expenses every year and allows us to replenish the maintenance fund. Please help us to maintain our beautiful church and continue our important work. If you have not yet contributed, you may send your donation in to the rectory. Your generosity over the years has been outstanding and we are most grateful for your continued support of the parish.

Three Kings' Party

Please join us for St Irene's very special Epiphany celebration! We will celebrate the Three Kings' Day on January 6th, 2019, right after the 11:00 am Mass in the Parish Hall. There will be entertainment for the children and a potluck for all. The event is free of charge and always a great time! If you wish to participate in the potluck you may sign up at:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20F0C4CACA723AAFC1-three3>.

Calendar of Events

You can always find upcoming Masses and events on [St Irene's online calendar](#). Special events coming up soon include:

- Dec 6th, 9:30 am: Women's Club Making Boxwood Trees
- Dec 9th, 9 am: Christmas Pageant with 8th grade pancake breakfast following
- Dec 9th, 12 noon: Parish Christmas Party
- Dec 20th, 6:30 pm: Women's Club, Yankee Swap
- Dec 24th, 4:00 & 5:30 pm: Vigil Mass
- Dec 24th, 11:15 pm: Lessons & Carols
- Dec 25th, 12:00 am: Nativity of the Lord; Midnight Mass
- Dec 25th, 11 am: Christmas Mass
- Dec 31st, 5:00 pm: Solemnity of Mary Mass
- Jan 1st, 8 & 11 am: Solemnity of Mary Mass
- Jan 6th, 12:00 pm: Three Kings' Party
- Jan 17th, 6:30 pm: Women's Club Pizza & Bingo
- Jan 26th: [Trivia Night](#)
- Feb 10th, All Masses: World Marriage Day
- Every Tuesday 7:30 pm Adoration and Evening Prayer
- First Sundays of the month, 3:30 pm: Peer Leadership
- First Sundays of the month, 7:00 pm: Parish Council
- Second Tuesdays of the month, 7:30 pm, St. Irene's Knight of Columbus meet at the Parish Hall



Saint Irene