



# Garden of Gethsemane

B L E S S E D T R I N I T Y P A R I S H



## *Returning to Gethsemane*

by Leo Carroll

I have hesitated to write this article, because the subject is so volatile and is like touching the proverbial third rail. I left the Catholic Church more than 20 years ago, and the reason was the

sexual abuse crisis within the Archdiocese of Boston and in other dioceses throughout the United States. I was absolutely stunned by what was revealed. To me, the Church, my spiritual home since I was six years old, had lost her moral teaching authority! Although I have returned to the Church, the scandal still simmers, so egregious and ingrained was the evil which came to light. Even today, it is a subject which is rarely, openly discussed within the Church.

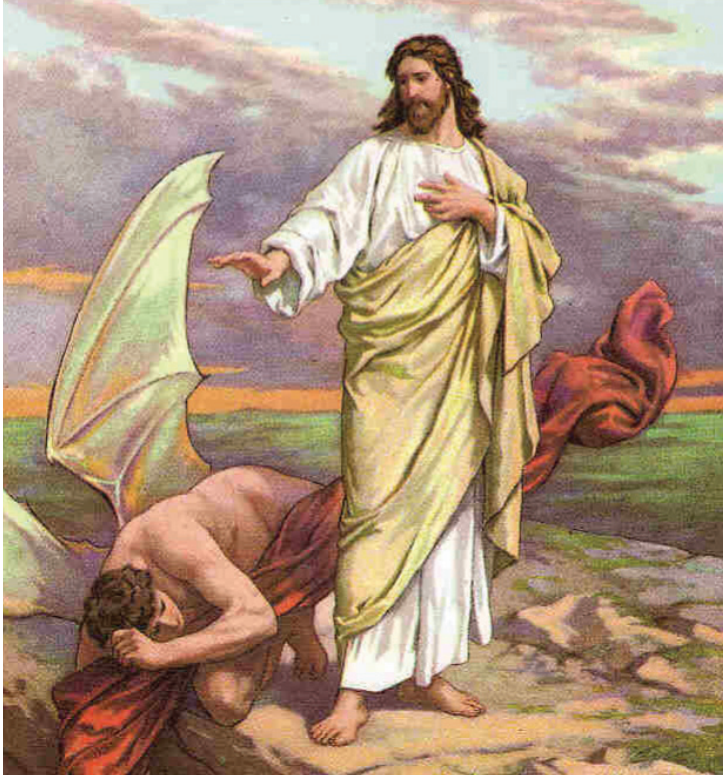
My decision to return evolved slowly. I started to feel that if I resumed my Mass attendance, it could serve as my

personal rebuke to the evil which came to exist within the Church, and I could reclaim my place in the pews. I missed receiving the Holy Eucharist. I did not feel comfortable in any other religious setting. As Jesus said, *"For where two or three are gathered together in my Name, I am there among them."* I had been raised Catholic, and that was the only 'gathering' I knew. I believe the Holy Spirit was intervening to bring me back.

I also wondered if my absence had been abetting evil's wretched ripple effect! I started to realize I was not only hurting myself, but was also affecting my entire family. Just as the Church on a macro level was mired in spiritual warfare, so I on a micro level was also ensnared! My heart had hardened in anger. I was damaging and dimming the image and likeness of God implanted in my soul. In short, my absence had been an aspect of evil's unspeakable carnage! I felt my anger had added to the pain and suffering of Jesus upon His Cross. I had turned my back on Jesus, although He had never turned His back on me. I had refused to sit watch with Jesus in Gethsemane.

Saying this, my return today remains a work in progress. In my heart, I now believe the Church is GREATER than any evil which could ever come to exist within her walls. How could it not be!? Jesus established the Church as He hung on His unconquerable Cross. In His final moments

*continued on page 2*



on Golgotha, He symbolically gave His mother, Mary, to the Apostle John, and, in turn, the Apostle John to His mother, Mary. At that moment, His mother became our mother, the Mother of the Church. Jesus would never give His mother to an institution built upon quicksand! Jesus was the cornerstone. And, furthermore, Jesus, the Bridegroom of the Church, had Himself successfully resisted the temptations of Satan after His 40 days and nights in the desert. Jesus did this by invoking Sacred Scripture, the living Word of God, to counter and refute all Satan's overtures and arguments. Said another way, Jesus, the Son of God, the Word Incarnate, had demonstrated that evil held no power over Him! Therefore, evil might attempt to fracture the Church, but evil could never overcome the Church, because her Bridegroom was invincible. Alleluia!

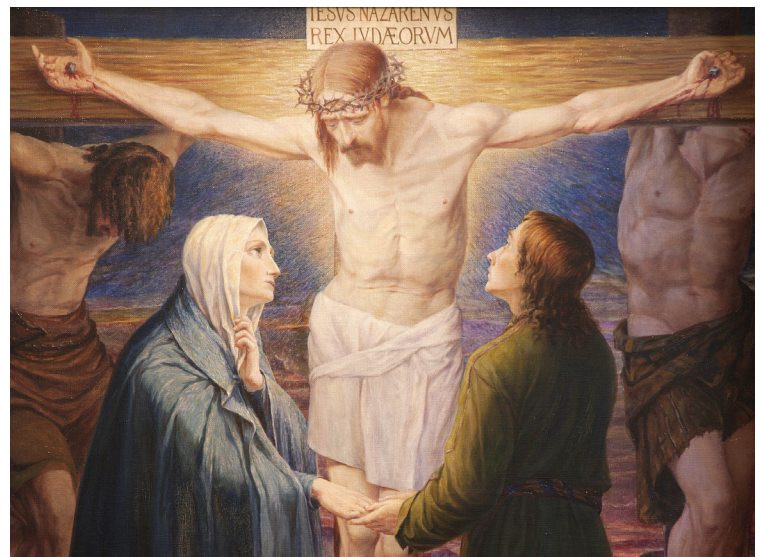
Nevertheless, Jesus had forewarned His disciples about how an evil spirit, once expelled, could later return. That was clearly a red flag warning to the emerging Church to always keep a vigilant watch and to have its spiritual armor on high alert. However, as became apparent in the ensuing revelations pertaining to the sexual abuse crisis, the Church had infamously and notoriously let her guard down, and had flagrantly ignored and disregarded Jesus' admonition to His early followers. Evil was allowed to flourish unchecked! In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus drove out all those who were buying and selling in the Temple in Jerusalem. He vehemently said to the moneychangers, *"It is written in the Scriptures that God said, 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a hideout for thieves!"*

Fast-forward 2000 years to the sexual abuse crisis, and it is NOT hard to imagine Jesus' same wrath excoriating all the failed Church authorities, "You have allowed into My house a den of demons!" Harsh yes, wrong no!

So, in summary, I left the Church in anger, but I came to realize that all I had achieved was an existence in the vacuum of emptiness. I have returned wiser, but also humbled, chastened, and contrite. Who was I to walk out those Church doors? I am a sinner. As I have said, I turned my back on Jesus in Gethsemane! I am hoping, however, the Church has learned her bitter, sorrowful lesson and is vigorously confronting evil in all its manifestations, an evil which never gives up, is everywhere, and relentlessly presents itself in deceptive, deceitful, despicable forms and faces. In my opinion, the best defense against this evil is to surrender ourselves completely to the power of the name of Jesus, and to consistently seek His hand to overlay our vulnerabilities, both as individuals and collectively as the people of God. The omnipotence of Jesus' protective name is what I cling to now. As St. Paul said in his parting instructions in *Romans 16*, *"I want you to be wise about what is good, but innocent in what is evil."*

I want to emphasize that the story of my return is a mere side note compared to the tortuous paths of countless sexual abuse survivors. They are the purest of all God's children. Most of them will probably never be able to comfortably return to the Catholic Church. Lambs in innocence, they are the ground zero victims of the sexual abuse crisis. Some feel traumatized beyond the possibility of hope. For them, their only recourse is that the Love of Jesus will someday make them whole again. Until then, Jesus has taken upon Himself and carries their unspeakable pains and sufferings. Jesus will never abandon them.

All praise and glory and honor be to Jesus Christ. Alleluia!



## Letter from Team Ministry by Fr. Joe Rossi

John, Chapter 14, begins with the following verse: *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me."* To some extent these words have always left me scratching my head. So many people in the world today are justifiably troubled for many reasons. The faith that we bring to bear on these circumstances is both a gift and a challenge. Being a person of faith is far from easy. That being said, faith is a virtue that lies at the heart of many of the miracles of Jesus in the New Testament. Without the gift of faith, one is truly lost.

When the sexual abuse crisis surfaced within the Archdiocese of Boston more than twenty years ago, my own personal faith was shaken to the core. Day-after-day stories in the newspaper and on television painted a harsh, sobering picture of the priesthood and the church—a picture that haunts me to this very day. One morning, in the midst of it all, I awoke and said to myself: "I'm not sure if I can do this anymore!" I was stationed at St. Pius V Parish in Lynn at the time and shared my inner turmoil from the pulpit on a Sunday morning. The response of the people was overwhelming. Their care and concern were most genuine. They were the ones who always checked in with me to ask how I was doing. To this day I am humbled and gratified by the genuine concern they extended to me. They validated my faith in God and the church, deeply broken as it was; they validated a vocational decision that I spent eight years discerning in the seminary. Was I about to throw it all away because of the blatant sins of a well-defined minority within the ranks? Where would I go? What else would I do?



For all that we have lived through together I can honestly say that I love being a priest; I believe in the value and beauty of who I am as one among many in the flock of Jesus Christ. It is an honor to journey with you as a person in faith, with all the questions, doubts, and troubles that come with this reality. On many occasions throughout the scriptures, Jesus confronts broken people who stand in need of healing and wholeness, and he says to them: *"Go in peace; your faith has saved you."*

I believe with all my heart that the Lord Jesus continues to confront us in that same way to this very day. Never underestimate the healing power of faith! The Lord has prepared many dwelling places for those who struggle to believe together.

### APRIL is Child Abuse Prevention

**Month.** The last Sunday in April is known as "Blue Sunday", when we are united with the world in praying for the victim survivors of child abuse. Pope Francis has called upon all people to reflect on synodality. We are being asked to journey together, to listen and learn from each other, to discern together what the will is of the Holy Spirit. During this Child Abuse Prevention Month, let us listen carefully to the words of the wounded. Let us walk together on this journey of healing and building trust. The Holy Spirit will light the way through the darkness of evil. But we must take the time to listen, to heed the guidance as we draw the map of our journey to wholeness.



## Mental Health Matters by Susan M. Hanly

*Jeremiah 29:11 - "For I know the plans I have for you" declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* This has been my favorite bible verse for a long time. The concept of hope is essential for our overall well-being.

For the past 19 years, educating others about mental illness has been an important part of my life. My family has been very open about our daughter Caroline's battle with diagnosed depression at the age of 14. Although 1 in 5 individuals will suffer from a mental illness, education is lacking and most people have no training in mental health literacy. 20% of the population will suffer from a mental illness but all of us need to take care of our overall health. For me, overall health includes physical, mental and spiritual health. Taking care of every aspect of our health makes all the difference.

The CEO of National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) shared a blog in August of 2022 entitled the intersection of faith and mental health and summed it up perfectly:

*"For too long, there has been a divide between faith and mental health—with mental illness being viewed as a moral or spiritual failing and spirituality being viewed as unscientific. We've spent too much time in silos where instead we could be finding strength and healing through partnership. Faith and mental health are not antithetical to each other; in fact, they are complementary."* (<https://www.nami.org/Blogs/From-the-CEO/August-2022/The-Intersection-of-Faith-and-Mental-Health>)

Daniel Gillison goes on to say in this blog that faith can help us make sense of our pain and suffering, can assist in ways that conventional treatments are unable to and can give us the

strength we need to get through the difficulties.

Faith alone cannot cure illnesses—physical or mental. Prayer is a powerful tool in the healing process but not the only tool. God helps those who help themselves. Individuals who shun treatment when their mental health is in jeopardy and trust completely in prayer are not helping themselves or their loved ones. As Gillison states, and I believe, faith and mental health are complimentary.

Many years ago, it was suggested to me to try exorcism for my daughter's depression. As a faith filled Catholic, I was saddened and horrified that this individual believed that a treatable illness was the work of the devil. There are many ways to care for our mental health and that includes getting enough sleep, eating right, exercise, connections with others, service and faith. An individual with a mental illness will benefit from all of this but may still need to take daily medications and go to counseling.

When Caroline was in high school and we were facing many uncertainties, my main outlets were prayer and exercise. I had run several marathons and those training sessions were good for my mind and my body. Unfortunately, a hip injury and three subsequent surgeries took away what I thought was my most important outlet. What I learned at that time was that what could not be taken away was my faith and trust in God. That was in fact my most important outlet and has been my constant through many of life's challenges. My daughter's faith is not as strong as mine and she has doubted at times whether God even cares about her. She takes her medications and goes to counseling for her major depressive

disorder but praying has not been a coping skill for her. Each morning, I start my day in prayer and continue to ask God for strength for the journey for me, Caroline and all of my family and friends who are going through pain and suffering. I pray for Caroline's unbelief and know that God is walking beside her and me every step of the way celebrating the good times with us and grieving with us when we are suffering.

*Philippians 4:6-7: Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*



## Landings Program

### for returning Catholics and those considering it

Are you someone who “used to be Catholic?” Blessed Trinity Parish offers a welcome to inactive Catholics.

**Landings, a reconciliation ministry of the Paulist Fathers, is a program that invites Catholic parishes and communities to reach out to Catholics who have been away from the Church or who struggle in their relationship with God and the Church.**

If you are a Catholic who has been away from the Church, know that Blessed Trinity Parish has been thinking about you and praying for you. We invite you to be an active part of your new Parish.

### WHAT CAN I EXPECT AS A RETURNING CATHOLIC?

We welcome you. We recognize you are considering a significant step on your spiritual journey, and it is a most sacred moment. It is our desire to honor that. Some see this as a journey back to their spiritual home; others are looking for reconciliation with God and the Church. Whatever your reason for being away, we have missed you and celebrate your desire to take another look. YOU are welcome here.

### WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM LANDINGS?

You can expect a safe harbor to explore your faith and your future within the Church. In a supportive and confidential setting, you can ask questions, discuss issues, and share past and present doubts and difficulties. You can expect an opportunity to be reintroduced to the love of Christ in a no-pressure, open and non-judgmental environment. During the program, a group of active Catholics, some “returnees” themselves, join with returning Catholics to share and explore our faith together.



### Our typical Meeting Agenda Includes:

- ✦ Opening prayer and check-in time to get to know each other
- ✦ Personal journey sharing and active listening
- ✦ Reflecting on Catholic themes and questions
- ✦ Closing Prayer

One returning Catholic said, *“The Landings Program was instrumental in my return to the faith. It gave me a place to talk through issues, build a faith community, and share my own story. It helped me to realize that we all have a different journey to the Catholic faith, but that God imparts grace upon us to return us to His church. Being in the church gives me a joy and peace that no material possession or worldly accomplishment ever could. Despite the issues in the world around us, I know that by maintaining a state of grace, and receiving the sacraments regularly, I can grow in holiness.”*

From another, *“Everyone experiences their journey to the Lord uniquely. I found my way to Blessed Trinity not for myself, but for my daughter. I thought after all the time I’d been away from the church I might not have a place here. I couldn’t have been more wrong. I’ve walked with God all my life, yet it was not until He guided me to Landings that I truly landed. The experience has been one of the biggest blessings in my life.”*

One companion offered, *“Walking with others is what we are called to do, not only a privilege, but a way I grow in my faith. Hearing others’ journeys demonstrates how much we are all alike. All of us are searching, seeking and in need of God’s grace and mercy. Our faith is a personal journey meant to be shared. Landings provides an opportunity for me to share my journey within a faith community.”*

Another shared, *“Meeting returnees, my heart has been moved and changed because of their openness, honesty, trust, and faith—simply wanting to know God and be part of a larger community of faith. Their stories of why they left and why they wanted to return produce a tear that turns to love thanking God for their YES to His invitation. How and why God puts people in our path we do not know, yet we offer the love and hope of Jesus Christ simply saying: you are welcome—please come in!”*

If you are interested and want more information, email [landings@blessedtrinitycatholic.org](mailto:landings@blessedtrinitycatholic.org) or contact Deacon Bill Dwyer.



**Landings** INTERNATIONAL  
Welcoming Returning Catholics  
A Paulist Ministry of Reconciliation

# VIRTUS - Protecting God's Children by Debbie Rhodes



As Christian adults, we have a moral responsibility and are entrusted by God with the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of minors and vulnerable adults as they participate in activities at Blessed Trinity Parish. At Blessed Trinity Parish, it is our responsibility and commitment to provide an environment which is safe and nurturing.

In the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, the Catholic bishops of the United States address their commitment to working with children and youth, parents, educators, civil authorities, and various organizations in the protection of children and youth. All the dioceses in the United States must adhere to the guidelines that have been implemented, and that, in turn, filters down to each and every parish.

In order to achieve the above, protocols are in place here that have been mandated by the Archdiocese of Boston. Every parish, school, and Diocesan agency in the Archdiocese are mandated to have these guidelines in place.

We conduct VIRTUS workshops (aka Protecting God's Children for Adults), annual background checks, and other procedures that are designed to reduce the risk of sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults. All volunteers at Blessed

Trinity Parish (over age 18) are required to meet these guidelines.

Over the years some volunteers have been reluctant to comply with these procedures, believing they were being singled out personally. But these protocols have never been about any single volunteer. It has always been about a parish wide team effort to create a safe environment for children.

Recently implemented, the Child Protection Policy for the Archdiocese now requires that all volunteers complete an application form. This is retroactive and even includes volunteers who have been involved for a long time. Additionally, volunteers who are new to the parish will need to provide a reference (two for those volunteers working directly with children). At the time of this writing, this new requirement was just mandated on February 1, 2023, and we are working to be in compliance.

This updated, more stringent screening process is not a reflection of whether the church trusts us. Rather, it is a commitment by the church to protect and honor children. When we are able to recognize this distinction, participation in the new screening processes becomes an opportunity for all caring adults to be a part of the solution.

At the beginning of 2023, Blessed Trinity Parish conducted an in-house audit of all volunteers. We were surprised to find that a large number of volunteers never completed the requirement for attending a VIRTUS workshop. To rectify that, those volunteers were informed that to continue their volunteer service here, they would need to fulfill that

requirement. Our VIRTUS Team conducted a number of workshops at our churches to accomplish this.

## WHAT IS VIRTUS?

VIRTUS is one of many best practices programs designed to help prevent wrongdoing and promote "rightdoing" within religious organizations. The VIRTUS program empowers organizations and people to better control risk and improve the lives of all those who interact with the Church. The Archdiocese of Boston chose this particular program to be used at all of its parishes.

## WHO FACILITATES VIRTUS AT BLESSED TRINITY PARISH?

We have a VIRTUS Team in place and all of the members have been trained to present Protecting God's Children for Adults (VIRTUS) workshops. George Clancy JD, one of the long-standing members of our VIRTUS Team said *"I joined VIRTUS at its inception in 2003 and became involved because we all have a responsibility to work for a safe environment for children. The church is not defined by the misdeeds of a few but the good deeds of all of us working together."* In recent months we have expanded the VIRTUS Team to include Tony Keaty PhD, Amy Patalano R.N., Dianne Walsh LICSW, and teacher Pam Willey. They received their facilitator training this past winter and have become valuable members of the Team.

In a 2018 message from Cardinal Sean O'Malley, he stated, *"Although 'zero tolerance' of sexual abuse has been declared and pursued and programs of advocacy and protection of children have been adopted in dioceses throughout the country, the memory, the record, the burden carried by survivors and every other fact of sexual abuse stay with the*



## Come Holy Spirit

fill the hearts  
of your faithful  
and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit  
and they shall be created.

And You shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit,  
did instruct the hearts of the faithful,

grant that by the same Holy Spirit

we may be truly wise

and ever enjoy His consolations,

Through Christ Our Lord,

Amen.



## Come Holy Spirit by Deacon Luc

When I first started going to Deaconate Formation classes, the twelve of us in our newly formed class were asked to choose a prayer to be said together as we opened each night of instruction—a prayer that would ‘put us into the proper spirit of learning.’ Quite naturally, we chose the “Come Holy Spirit” prayer.

I can honestly say that this prayer has accompanied me on this amazing journey; to strengthen me when I felt weak, to guide me when I felt lost, and to empower me when I felt helpless. Pentecost is often called the birthday of the Church. Why? Because it refers to the time when the first members of the Church received the Holy Spirit and were stirred to proclaim the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ, to others, including the 3000 newly baptized Christians.

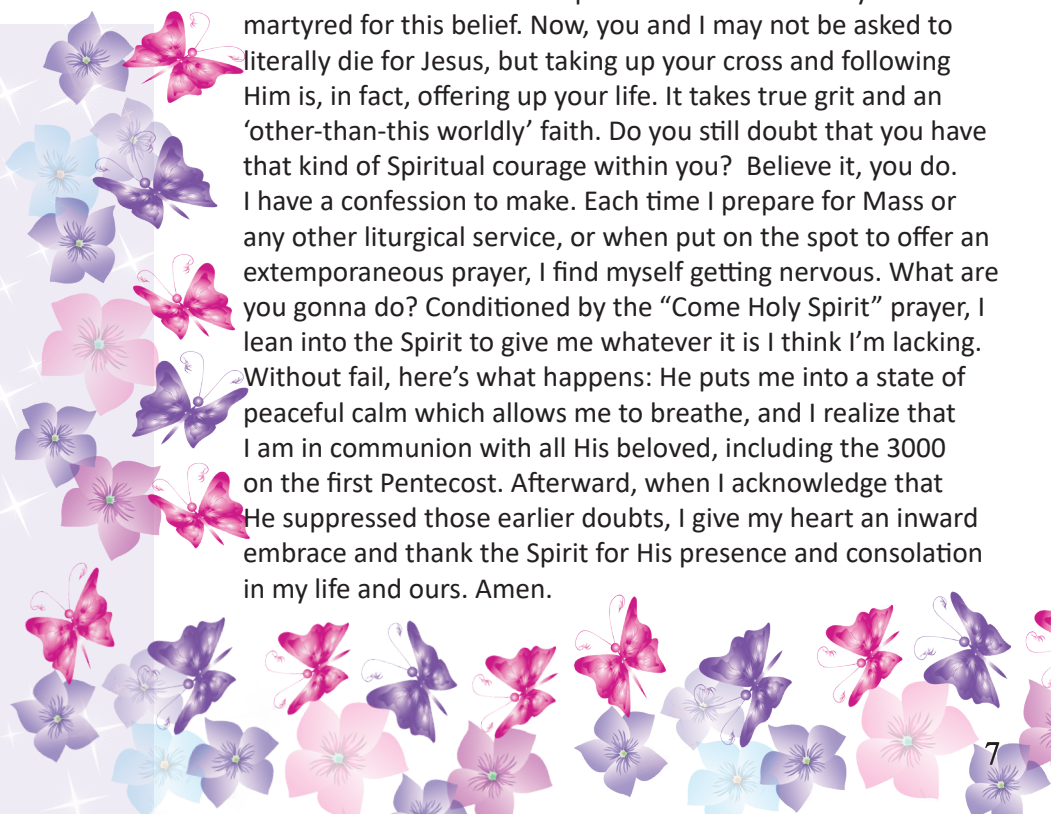
What a wonderful gift we have all been given! When you feel stirrings inside you that prompt you to do the will of God, that’s the Holy Spirit! Remember this, He is dwelling within you and me. Frequent prayer enhances our ability to experience this ‘indwelling’ of the Holy Spirit. So, when we find ourselves ‘inspired’ by His urgings, we should not ignore or suppress them, but joyfully embrace and follow them.

If we believe the Spirit dwells within us, through our own baptisms and by the very words of Jesus, we can rely heavily on the Spirit to strengthen, guide, and empower us to meet life’s challenges head-on. The first disciples so believed this that they lived ‘inspired’ lives, imitating Christ, and following His command to ‘make disciples of all nations’. Many were martyred for this belief. Now, you and I may not be asked to literally die for Jesus, but taking up your cross and following Him is, in fact, offering up your life. It takes true grit and an ‘other-than-this worldly’ faith. Do you still doubt that you have that kind of Spiritual courage within you? Believe it, you do. I have a confession to make. Each time I prepare for Mass or any other liturgical service, or when put on the spot to offer an extemporaneous prayer, I find myself getting nervous. What are you gonna do? Conditioned by the “Come Holy Spirit” prayer, I lean into the Spirit to give me whatever it is I think I’m lacking. Without fail, here’s what happens: He puts me into a state of peaceful calm which allows me to breathe, and I realize that I am in communion with all His beloved, including the 3000 on the first Pentecost. Afterward, when I acknowledge that He suppressed those earlier doubts, I give my heart an inward embrace and thank the Spirit for His presence and consolation in my life and ours. Amen.

VIRTUS | pg 6

*Church. We can never become complacent, this is a life-long ongoing work that demands the highest levels of our constant awareness and attention... While much has been accomplished in the protection of children with the participation of the laity, there remains much more to be done. We are committed to the fulfillment of this responsibility as a continuing priority for the work of the Church.”*

Here at Blessed Trinity Parish, we take this responsibility seriously and it is our joy to ensure implementation and continuation of these important safeguards. We are extremely grateful to our many volunteers and their understanding and cooperation in the effort to ensure the safety of our children, youth, elderly and disabled brothers and sisters.





**Blessed Trinity Parish**  
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**www.blessedtrinitycatholic.org**

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**Saint Anne Church**  
**75 King St.**  
**Littleton, MA 01460**

**Saint Catherine Church**  
**107 N. Main St.**  
**Westford, MA 01886**

## CURRENT MASS SCHEDULE:

### Weekend Schedule:

*Saturday 4:00 pm – St. Catherine Church (live streamed)*

*Sunday 8:30 am – St. Anne Church*

*Sunday 10:30 am – St. Catherine Church*

### Weekday Schedule:

*Mon & Tues 8:00 am – St. Anne Church*

*Thu & Fri 8:00 am – St. Catherine Church*

### Reconciliation:

*Saturday 3:00 pm or by appointment*

*St. Catherine Church*

*Fr. Peter Quinn 978-320-4201*

*Father Joe Rossi 978-320-4202*

Adult Volunteers needed! No experience necessary. If you love Jesus and love kids then contact us! Please email Bianca Rose at [biancadrose@yahoo.com](mailto:biancadrose@yahoo.com) or call her at **978-758-8136** for more information. You can also register online at: [www.wevbs.org](http://www.wevbs.org).



*Ecumenical VBS 2023*



Grades: entering K-4  
 When: July 10-14  
 Time: 9 am–Noon  
 Where: St. Catherine's  
[www.wevbs.org](http://www.wevbs.org)

Join us on a STELLAR out-of-this-world adventure that's light years of faith-building fun! Kids participate in Bible-learning activities, sing catchy songs, play teamwork-building games, devour yummy treats, and experience one-of-a-kind Bible adventures. They will have a blast embarking on a cosmic quest shining Jesus' light to the world.

*Hosted each Summer By: First Parish Church United, Blessed Trinity Parish, St. Mark's Episcopal Church, & The United Methodist Church of Westford.*

## 2023 Mission Trip Now Open

Grades: completing 8-12

When: July 24-29

Our Youth Mission trips create an environment where the *youth of our parish can enrich their relationship with God while developing a community of faith with their peers.* This is accomplished through service missions to some of the neediest areas of our country.

Last year, teens and chaperones enjoyed an exhilarating week of faith, fellowship, and service to the local community. Teams completed projects including washing cars, landscaping, visiting the elderly, painting, building beds for poor families, constructing outdoor bookcases for inner city kids, among other things. Every day we shared meals and the camaraderie that comes from shared faith and acts of service. There was also lots of music, dancing, and...beach balls? Yup!

**REGISTER NOW!**



*Note: based on feedback from last year we expect to reach capacity, so please register early.*

## Grade 5 & 6 Mission Camp

Leaders are needed to create a week of faith, service and Christian fellowship for our 5th and 6th graders.

[biancadrose@yahoo.com](mailto:biancadrose@yahoo.com)