

# Gatherings

# Reflections

Dear DREs and Youth Ministers:

December 10, 2009

## From the Religious Education Office

**Bryan Reising**  
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Adult Faith Formation*  
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### Merry Christmas from Bryan Reising

We Americans use the phrase "Happy" as a greeting for many celebrations like "Happy Birthday," "Happy New Year," "Happy Easter," and "Happy Mother's Day!" But why is the greeting, "Merry Christmas" the greeting of choice during Christmastime? In 1565, in *The Hereford Municipal Manuscript*, it reads: "And thus I comytt you to god, who send you a mery Christmas." In an informal letter written by an English admiral in 1699, he wrote: "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year." In 1843, the same phrase appeared in the popular secular English carol "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" and the first Christmas card, produced in England.

During that same year, Charles Dickens wrote and published *A Christmas Carol*. In English society, the word "merry" was then beginning to take on a new meaning of "jovial, cheerful, and outgoing" instead of the original meaning of "pleasant or agreeable." "Merry Christmas" as a greeting is found in Dicken's novel, *A Christmas Carol*. The popularity of this book and this greeting has led some historians to credit Dickens with popularizing the greeting, "Merry Christmas."

With the popularity of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* in the United States, that phrase became more common here.

The American poet, Clement Moore, wrote *A Visit from St. Nicholas* (Twas the night before Christmas...) in 1823. At the end of this poem, it read originally, "Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night." With

the popularity of "Merry Christmas," later editions changed the last line to, "Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night." This reinforced the popularity of "Merry Christmas" in the United States.

And what about the word Christmas? Its English roots come from the Greek, *Christos* and the Latin, *missa* forming a meaning of Christ's Mass. In 1038, the Old English language recorded the earliest expression of this: *Cristes mæsse*. The Middle English phrase was *Christemasse*. And today we have the current word, Christmas. Christmas refers to both Christmas Day, when we

celebrate and commemorate the nativity of Jesus Christ, and the Christmas season that extends to the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord in January.

Now that we know its development, let us mean what we say! You can say to your parishioners, "Merry Christmas! See you at Christ's Mass on the Solemnity of the Nativity of Our Lord!" And "Merry Christmas" from the Offices of Religious Education and Adult Faith Formation!



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## Teachable Christmas Moments for Parents

by Bryan Reising

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Christmas is a time where we gather as families and friends. We celebrate with meals and parties. What are some teachable moments that parents can do with their children?

### *Advent and Christmas Calendar*

The United States Catholic Bishops have an Advent and Christmas Calendar filled with family activities. It is a great resource for prayer and activities for families: [http://www.usccb.org/advent/family\\_calendar.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/advent/family_calendar.pdf)

### *Christmas Blessings*

Gather your family together around the Christmas tree and then the nativity scene. Have a special blessing and prayer for these. For further information about blessing the Christmas tree, go to <http://www.usccb.org/advent/prayers.shtml>. For further information about blessing the nativity scene, go to <http://www.usccb.org/advent/prayers.shtml>

### *Christmas Mass*

Some parishes have a Christmas Eve Mass or a Christmas Day Mass geared toward children and families. Let your families know that it is a holy day of obligation, and we need to participate in Mass at Christmas, as we need to participate every Sunday. I have teenagers – so we take them to the Christmas Eve Mass or Midnight Mass. Take the time to discuss the Christmas story with your children/youth before or after Mass. A question: Jesus said, “Whatever you do to the least of these, you do for me.” What will you do for Jesus this Christmas as a gift to him?

### *Christmas Meal*

Say a Christmas blessing for your Christmas meal. The US Bishops put together a meal prayer that can be read throughout the Christmas season. See the following link to see this prayer: <http://www.salfordliturgy.org/Table%20Prayer%20Card%20Christmas.pdf>. This comes from the Diocese of Salford in England (United Kingdom).

### *Acts of Charity*

Our family has traditionally helped deliver meals on Christmas Day or during the Christmas season to those persons in need. This teaches your children the true meaning of Christmas: It is more about giving love to others and bringing the Good News of Christ as well. Find out about opportunities to give of your time in your community.

### *Acts of Justice*

Families at a parish can organize around a cause like raising funds for Catholic Relief Services

(<http://crs.org/act/advent/>) or places in need of water (<http://www.adventconspiracy.org/>). They can organize events in preparation for the March for Life the following month, January 22, 2010 (<http://www.marchforlife.org/>). They can organize and be a voice for immigration reform in preparation for Immigration Sunday on January 3, 2010 (<http://www.usccb.org/mrs/webparishactivities.shtml> and <http://mncc.org/resources/immigration-sunday/>).

### *Celebrating Epiphany*

Traditionally, Epiphany has been a time to bless the home. Have your family bless the home, perhaps have a small exchange of gifts, and have a special meal. To find out more about the blessing of your home, go to: <http://www.usccb.org/advent/prayers.shtml>.

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## Mohr Catechist Scholarship Fund

*A Gift for You, Catechists, Youth Team Members,  
Teachers of Religion*

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A new scholarship fund is a great gift for your catechists, teachers, youth ministry team, and many of you! You can receive scholarships for Faith Formation Day and other catechist formation opportunities, NCEA Convention, MCEA Convention, online courses through the University of Dayton’s VLCFF (Virtual Learning Community of Faith Formation), and even some college courses on faith formation. To apply, contact Cindy Blickem at 507-359-2966. An application will be on our website soon!

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## VIRTUS Trainings

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- December 12, 2009 at 9:30 a.m. Olivia
- January 5, 2010 at 6:30 p.m. Morgan
- February 11, 2010 at 6:30 p.m. Marshall [Church]
- March 20, 2010 at 9:30 a.m. Arlington

### **All Catechists are required to:**

1. Have a background check before beginning to volunteer;
2. Sign Forms A & B of the diocesan sexual misconduct policy;
3. Attend VIRTUS training within 90 days of beginning to volunteer;
4. Do the on-line training as assigned.

Volunteers and catechists who are under the age of 16 are not to attend the adult VIRTUS training. The VIRTUS training is for youth and adults ages 16 or higher.

If you have a question about VIRTUS, please contact Margy Manderfeld at **507-233-5305**. Please do not contact VIRTUS directly unless you need a password.

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## Touching Safety - VIRTUS Website - Educator Tab

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If you have not done Lessons Five and Six of the Touching Safety Program, please do so as soon as possible. They were to be turned in by November 30, 2009. If you have questions, please contact Bryan or Margy. Thank you!

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## University of Dayton's VLCCF

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Cycle 1: Jan 10 - Feb 13

(Registration: Opens Oct 20, 2009; Closes Jan 6, 2010)

- [Catholic Beliefs](#)
- [Church and Communication](#)
- [Church History 1](#)
- [Conscience](#)
- [Ecclesiology: The Beginnings of the Church](#)
- [Ecumenism](#)
- [Faith and Human Development](#)
- [Foundations and Visions for Adult Learning and Faith Formation](#)
- [Images of Jesus](#)
- [Introduction to Catechesis](#)
- [Introduction to Liturgy](#)
- [Introduction to Media Literacy Education](#)
- [Introduction to Practical Morality](#)
- [Introduction to Prayer](#)
- [Letters of Paul](#)
- [Marianist Studies: Community](#)
- [Marianist Studies: Education](#)
- [Marianist Studies: Prayer](#)
- [On Bended Knee \(Seminar\)](#)
- [Our Hearts Were Burning \(Seminar\)](#)
- [Overview of the GDC & NDC \(Seminar\)](#)
- [Pastoral Planning for Lifelong Faith Formation](#)
- [Poverty in the U.S. and Around the World](#)
- [Sacraments](#)
- [Scripture: Introduction](#)
- [Scripture: New Testament](#)
- [Scripture: Old Testament](#)
- [Spirituality and Inclusive Faith Communities](#)
- [Survey of Catholic Doctrine](#)
- [Vocation, Spirituality and Discipleship of Catechists](#)

For further information, contact Bryan Reising at 507-233-5324 and check out VLCCF's website:  
<http://vlc.udayton.edu/>.

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### Upcoming Gather for January for Parish Catechetical Leaders (PCLs or DREs) and Youth Ministers

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We begin with a social, a prayer, then enrichment with a guest speaker, lunch, meeting/networking, and closing prayer. If you have conflicts like work or other commitments, let me know. We can perhaps work on a conference call during the evening sometime or even a visit.

Our Gather in January will be **Monday, January 4, 2009** from 10:00 am-3:00 pm at the Center of Youth Ministry. The Gather will feature Matthew Brounstein, Deb Lindahl, and Laurie Mueller of the Church of St. Paul in Ham Lake, MN. They will talk about ideas to involve

parents. They will also showcase the Family Formation model. Please RSVP Cindy Blickem at 507-233-5325 or [cblickem@dnu.org](mailto:cblickem@dnu.org).

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### Christmas Resources from the Diocesan Media Library

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- For Middle School Grades: **Celebrating the Church Year – Christmas** by Paulist Press
- For High School Grades and Adults: **The Christian Year** (Section Three – Christmas) by Cathedral Films and Video
- For Families: **It's A Wonderful Life** by Videos with Values
- For Families: **Jacob's Gift** by Tommy Nelson, Inc.
- For Families: **The Legend of the Three Trees** by Tommy Nelson, Inc.
- For Families (Middle School and up): **The Fourth Wise Man** by Paulist Productions

These and many other resources (DVDs, videos, and audio) can be used by member parishes, schools, and individuals. Check out the Media library catalogue at <http://dnu.kdsi.net/search/search.php>.

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### RCIA Seminar: Concerning the Baptized

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Save these dates! August 6-7, 2010 at the Church of St. Catherine in Redwood Falls, MN. Featured speakers are Rev. Michael Clay and Sr. Gael Gensler, OSF. Fr. Michael Clay is from the Diocese of Raleigh, North Carolina, and he is an author an expert on the catechumenate in rural parishes. Sr. Gael Gensler is a practitioner of the RCIA at a parish in Illinois.

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### National Conference for Catechetical Leadership (NCCL) Membership

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Right now, they are doing a membership drive for potential members of NCCL. **The cost of an individual membership to NCCL is only \$60.00. This is only \$5.00 a month.** For further information, check out the website:  
<http://www.nccl.org/>

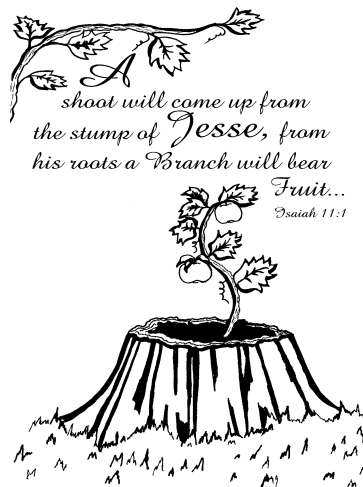
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### Parish Catechesis Question

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What is your family's background?

Have your families research their family roots and begin a Christmas faith tradition this year?



## From the Youth Ministry Office:

**Sr. Margaret McHugh, DSMP**

Director of Youth Ministry & Vocation Awareness

[mmchugh@dnu.org](mailto:mmchugh@dnu.org)

### House Cleaning and Soul Keeping



This Advent, I've made a commitment to do some spiritual house cleaning. By eliminating some of the clutter in my life, I'm better able to focus on the preparation for Christmas. Every year, I'm amazed at the amount of "stuff" I hold onto. Some of it is baggage from the past, and other items are things I've kept because they "might come in handy" someday. When I procrastinate and don't get rid of junk in a timely manner, I'm either overly focused on the past or excessively prepared for the future. In the meantime, I don't have enough room to maneuver in the PRESENT and do what I need to do NOW.

It occurred to me this Advent how important Jesus' coming is *in my present moment*. Emmanuel (God-with-us) is present in the here-and-now cleanliness and messiness of the moment.

A few years ago at a Senior High Rally in Dassel-Cokato, our keynote, Sal Solo, made a great analogy between "housecleaning" and "soul keeping." He asked us to imagine what our house would look like if we decided not to take out the garbage for a day. Then, we were invited to imagine what were to happen if we let trash accumulate for a week or more. By the end of his reflection, we were squirming at the thought of a year or more of accumulated garbage inside our house. The idea of so much filth and stench in our homes made us extremely uncomfortable.



Then Sal delivered the punch line and asked us, "When was the last time you went to confession?" His whole talk had been a preparation for the cleansing and purifying effect of the sacrament. Step by step, he led us to invite Jesus into our homes and give him all our sinful garbage and accumulated bad habits. Little by little, we began to experience relief and freedom from the effects of "hoarding" sin in our hearts. By the time, Sal was done, everyone was ready for confession!

It might have been a while since you've been to confession. Maybe you've been putting it off. Perhaps you have a few areas in your life that are ready for housecleaning. Seize the moment and take it to Sacrament of Reconciliation. Jesus is waiting for you!

This is the best house cleaning we could possible do for Christmas.

### Rally Follow-Up

A few DREs and Youth Ministers commented on three points brought out by our keynote, Fr. Burke Masters. The three most frequently asked questions posed by his friends were:

1. Why do Catholics worship Mary?
2. How can you believe the bread becomes Jesus at your church services?
3. Why do you confess your sins to a priest? Can't you just go directly to God?

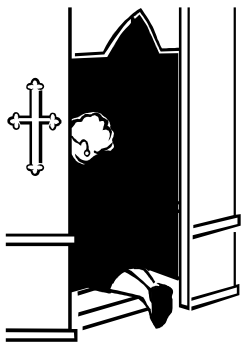
Because of the interest expressed by the DREs, Youth Ministers, and adult chaperones, as well as the youth themselves, I've put together a resource or "belief sheet" that I've enclosed in this mailing. This month's edition will be addressing the FAQ, "Why confess your sins to a priest?" and next month we will discuss the last question. I hope this will be helpful and presented in a youth-friendly, readable style.

Feel free to make copies and share this with your youth.

**Junior High Festival - April 25, 2010  
in Montevideo**

### Rel Ed / Youth Ministry Calendar

2010			
Mon, Jan 4	Gather for DREs & Youth Ministers	10:00-3:00	Center for Youth Ministry
Mon, Feb 1	Gather for DREs & Youth Ministers	10:00-3:00	Center for Youth Ministry
Mon, Mar 8	Gather for DREs & Youth Ministers	10:00-3:00	Center for Youth Ministry
Apr 6-8	NCEA Convention		Minneapolis
Mon, Apr 12	Gather for DREs & Youth Ministers - Curriculum Day	10:00-3:00	Catholic Pastoral Center, New Ulm
Sun, Apr 25	Jr High Festival	11:00-5:00	Montevideo
Mon, May 24	DRE/YM Spring Fling	Noon-4:00	TBA
Thurs-Fri Jun 17-18	Young Women's Discipleship Camp	Thu 9:30 am-Fri 5:00 pm	Center for Youth Ministry
Thurs-Fri Jun 24-25	Young Men's Discipleship Camp	Thu 9:30 am-Fri 5:00 pm	Center for Youth Ministry



## Why Confess Your Sins to a Priest?

This is such a frequently asked question. It deserves a good answer. And the answer is very Biblical and rooted in Judeo-Christian tradition. Get out your Bible and open it to the Gospel of John, Chapter 20 and read verses 19-23. We'll look at verses 21 here:

[Jesus] said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."  
And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.  
Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them and whose sins you retain are retained."

There. Next question?

Let's back-track and look at Hebrew tradition. In Hebrew and Christian tradition, confession of sin was never just a private matter between God and me (or me and God). Hebrew and Christian tradition are deeply rooted in community. Both the good we do and the sin we commit has a "ripple effect." The good we do builds up the community. When we sin, our sin affects everyone in the community. Every sin breaks relationships and causes harm to the community and the individual.

In order to take care of the "sin problem" certain people have been delegated for service. From the beginning of God's relationship with his Chosen People, particular individuals have always been set apart from among the community to be mediators of forgiveness between the community and God (and vice versa).

For ancient Hebrews, this was a much more messy and complicated project than it is for us. People made sin offerings in the form of animal sacrifices. In ancient times, this required the ministry and service of a priest and the altar. The priest would raise a knife to cut, rip, and separate the parts of the sacrifice as he sang songs of penance and praise. The priest's service involved handling all the prescribed parts related to the altar. When the Chosen People under the Old Covenant went to God for the forgiveness of sin, God said, "Bring your sin offering to the priest" (Hebrews 4:1 and Malachi 2:7).

The New Covenant never abolished but rather fulfills the Old and now Jesus is our High Priest (Hebrews 7:1-10, 15-17; Colossians 1:19-20). Jesus completely transformed the Hebrew sacrificial system. He is now our sin offering, once and for all, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Jesus entrusted this service of reconciliation to the Twelve Apostles, and their successors, the bishops and priests, down through history. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church it says,

In imparting to his apostles his own power to forgive sins the Lord also gives them the authority to reconcile sinners with the Church... Since Christ entrusted to his apostles the ministry of reconciliation, bishops who are their successors, and priests, the bishop's collaborators, continue to exercise this ministry. Indeed bishops and priests, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, have the power to forgive all sins "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." -CCC 1444, 1461

Since this is such a noble ministry, priests are sworn to absolute secrecy. No government or church leader can demand knowledge of a sacramental confession. The priest cannot use the knowledge he hears in the confessional. The Alfred Hitchcock thriller *I Confess* bases its plot and suspense on this prohibition.

In a nutshell, Catholics confess to God, who alone can forgive sin. The priest acts as the servant and minister to visibly extend Christ's priestly ministry. When we confess to a priest, we are confessing to Christ, our one High Priest who carries out his ministry through the ordained priesthood.

For more resources, visit Catholic Answers or NCRRegister.com. Click on "Resources."

I recommend the following resources as well:

- Chapter 14 in *Church* by Amy Welborn published by Our Sunday Visitor in 2001
- Page 115 in *Why do Catholics Genuflect?* By Al Kresta published by Servant Books in 2001
- Page 72 and 73 in *The One Minute Apologist: Essential Catholic Replies to Over Sixty Common Protestant Claims* published by Sophia Institute Press in 2007
- Number 25, on pages 64 and 65 in *What Catholics Really Believe* published by Ignatius Press in 1992

Pope Benedict XVI said, "The renewal of the Church in America and throughout the world depends on the renewal of the sacrament of penance."

