

# SPIRIT AND LIFE

## SAINT GREGORY THE GREAT PARISH

Autumn 2020

### *St. Greg's Students Return to School*

St. Gregory the Great School reopened on September 9, after being closed since the middle of March. The opening was gradual, with selected grades coming on specified days. This allowed students to become familiar with new guidelines and procedures. The full student body was back on campus after two weeks for in-person, five days a week.

Some students shared their impressions with Spirit and Life. "Being back is a whole new experience", according to Alessandra Basile. "There are so many new rules, new procedures, new precautions. We have to make the best of a hard situation." Her classmate Kari Mroziak said, "I was excited to go back to school." During the six month hiatus, she said, "I wasn't lonely, but I missed interacting with other kids my age."

"When we went back, I thought it would be super difficult," Jonathan Kramer noted, "with masks, social distancing, and all that. But they made it easy for us. I am glad to be back, I was getting a little bored at home."

"The reopening has been going great," according to principal Julie Gajewski. "Smaller groups of students returned gradually, rather than all at once. This has been quite effective, allowing time to test new protocols and procedures, and enabling the children time to reconnect and rebuild relationships."

"This will be a unique year for us all as we wear face coverings and physical-distance within the school. Yet, the blessing of being together five days a week has given the faculty and staff great joy. The sound of children in the halls of St. Gregory the Great School after nearly six months has brought much hope and positivity!"



Early Kindergarten students learn to stay physically distant from each other.



Max Gilbert models the latest rage in facial enhancement.



Seventh Graders keeping their distance at recess.

## ***Seminarian Joe Tokasz***

***Joe Tokasz is a seminarian studying for priesthood in our diocese. He was at our parish from September 2019 to August 2020. He spoke with Spirit and Life about his life and his experiences at St. Gregory's.***

### ***Where did you grow up?***

I am a native of Elma. My home parish is St. Vincent de Paul in Springbrook. I am public-school educated, graduating from Iroquois High School in 2003. My father Bill is a technology teacher, and my mother Marie is an orchestral music teacher. I have a younger sister who works for the Erie County 4-H, and a younger brother who is a student at Allegany College in Meadville, Pennsylvania!

### ***What did you do before you entered the seminary?***

After high school I enrolled at the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam with a double major in Music Education and Music Business. I became involved with the local parish, St. Mary's, when I joined the choir and helped prepare young people for Confirmation. I was also active in the Newman Club at school. I began to think about the priesthood. I enjoyed my time at Potsdam studying to become certified as a music teacher and was planning a career in music. But then I decided it was time for me to at least see what the seminary would be like.

### ***What has your path through the seminary been like?***

In August 2015 I was accepted as a seminarian for the Diocese of Buffalo. I was assigned to St. Mark's College Seminary in Erie, Pennsylvania for formation and philosophy studies at nearby Gannon University. Two years later I was awarded a B.A. in Philosophy and went on to the Christ the King Seminary in East Aurora. This year at St. Greg's is called a "pastoral year". It is meant to give the seminarian a "hands on" experience of working in a typical parish. Since our local seminary is closing, I will continue at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore. There I will spend my final two years of preparation, anticipating my ordination to priesthood in June 2022.

I have had some very fulfilling summer assignments. In 2016, I worked as a counselor at Camp Turner. The following year, Sacred Heart Parish in Bowmansville was my place of ministry, and in 2018, St. John's Parish in Olean (linked with St. Mary of the Angels Basilica and St. Philomena in Franklinville). In 2019 I lived with the Jesuits at Canisius College while pursuing Clinical Pastoral Education at Sisters' Hospital and Mt. St. Mary's Hospital in Lewiston.

### ***What have you been doing here at St. Greg's?***

I have enjoyed my time at this Parish. There is lots to do and lots to learn. I have been involved in Youth and Young Adult Ministry, including Edge, Life Teen, and Amped and have been able to use my musical talent to play with Ascent 101 for the 4:30 Mass on Sundays. In the school, I took part in some classroom celebrations and helped with grade level retreat days. I taught a ninth grade Religion class for Family Faith Formation, and attended countless meetings, ranging from School Board to Finance Council. My latest project was updating our records with the 2020 parish census data. I have learned a lot in this short year.



## Great Dinner Auction Event Update

Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus, we have been closely monitoring its progression. With the well-being and best interests of the St. Greg's community in mind we have decided to take a year hiatus from the in-person Great Dinner Auction. This decision was heartbreaking and not easy to make as we know how much many of you like to attend our grand event.

We are planning community events for our school and parishioners this fall, including some virtual auction events and cash raffle if possible. We hope to host smaller family events, perhaps some outdoors where we can practice safe social distancing. As we plan these upcoming events we will keep you all updated.

With that in mind, we are hosting our 1st Virtual No-Go Gala and St. Gregory's Funniest Home Videos Awards. Save the date and check our Bulletin and social media for more information.



We will miss the energy and people that come with the planning of the in-person Great Dinner Auction, all the gift gatherings and planning meetings, etc. We will miss being a part of the experience, and yes, we will miss the craziness of Auction weekend and all that it brings. But we made this decision to ensure that we all remain healthy and able to enjoy all these wonderful experiences at Great Dinner Auction.

We are grateful to our past sponsors, supporters, donors, community partners, vendors and volunteers whose partnerships we value deeply.

We look forward to celebrating with you all once we have moved past this global crisis and making many happy memories together again.



## ***Father Leon Reflects Upon his Six Years as Pastor***

### ***The Diocese recently conducted a review of your first six-year term as pastor. What were the results?***

There were several steps in the review process. First, twenty parishioners were asked to complete a questionnaire provided by the Diocese. I do not know who they were. They mailed the questionnaires directly to the Priests Personnel Board, where they were tabulated. Two members of the Board met with me to discuss this ten page report.

I was generally pleased and humbled by many beautiful comments from our parishioners. A fair critique mentioned a sense of my not being available to them, or not responding promptly to emails. I would point out that this is a parish of 6200 families, of fifteen thousand members, and that two full-time and one part-time priests are assisting me. I do not personally perform all the priestly ministry here (nor could anyone) but I do ensure that when someone needs to see a priest, they do see one of the four of us promptly. As the pastor, generally all inquiries, comments, and concerns are sent to me and I ask other staff members to help respond.

### ***When you reflect on your term, what are you most happy about?***

I am very pleased that we have an outstanding ministerial staff. This has enabled us to offer the best Youth Ministry program in the Diocese (and maybe the country!) with two full-time youth ministers. We now offer a seven day per week ministry to our young people. This is substantially greater than the Sunday night Life Teen program of six years ago.

I am proud of our School, which has state-of-the-art facilities for distance learning. This was a godsend in

the weeks of confinement at home, as well as planning and preparing for our new school year. Our principal, Mrs. Gajewski, did a wonderful job leading our faculty with distance learning. Many school parents have told me how pleased they were with the work of our school when we were shut down. I have even heard that our offerings online surpassed what some public schools offered.

Although last year was a difficult one, I am grateful that we have generally had a balanced budget, and that in 2019 we completed a major renovation of our Church interior. This \$991,000 project was financed mostly from our Parish share of Upon This Rock contributions.

### ***Have contributions declined because of the Corona virus?***

They have in our Parish, and in all Parishes. This is because people are not physically attending Church, and also probably because, for many, money is tight. We are not doing too badly, considering the state of affairs. Many are contributing by dropping their envelopes into the safe deposit chute in the Parish Office vestibule, which is open 24/7. Our online streaming of Church services continues to be heard throughout the country, and we have had contributions from as far away as Colorado. I am confident that the Lord will provide the funds we need to carry on His work.

### ***Will you be re-appointed for another six year term?***

I hope so. The Personnel Board is recommending it. But the official appointment won't take place until we have a new Bishop.

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## ***Stay Connected to Your Parish!***

Receive spiritual quotes, learn about upcoming events, closings, cancellations and updates within the Parish, School, Family Faith Formation and Youth Ministry.

◇ Download the St. Gregory the Great Parish Mobile App.

Iphone Users Text: *ParishApp1* to 555888, Andriod Users Text: *ParishApp2* to 555888, follow prompts.

◇ Follow us on Social Media: @StGregsBuffalo, @stgregsthegreat, @stgregsyouth, @stgregsyounadults

◇ Subscribe to our YouTube Channel: @stgregswilliamsville

## Family Faith Formation Gets Creative!

Close to one hundred pupils took part in the summer Disciple Camp from their homes. Students entering grades five through eight had 35 hours of religious education in accord with the curriculum guidelines of the Diocese of Buffalo.

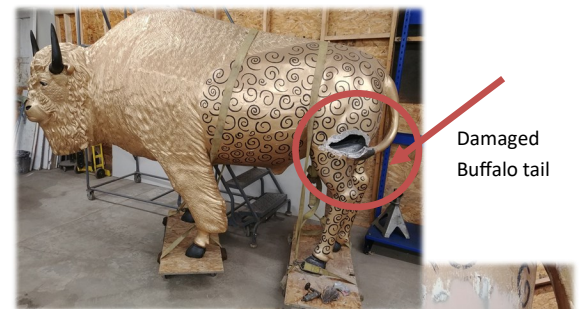
A group of girls (Elizabeth Beaton, Rory Kingsley, Hanna Meetze and Lucy White) got creative when they got together and enlisted their families to be part of the Disciple Camp experience. Each girl and her family took responsibility for presenting a different lesson. They combined the lesson with lunch or dinner and some other activities.

Having classes online, rather than in person, put a damper on the annual Food Drive that benefits the St. Vincent de Paul food pantry. Some students got creative and found a fun way to raise money and collect canned goods. Pictured here are Garrett Durnford, Owen Goral and Cameron Durnford, at their lemonade stand. They not only collected over forty cans of food, but also raised \$110. Neighbors and passers-by were happy to patronize the stand. For a glass of lemonade, you could either pay one dollar or donate two cans of food.



## Buffalo returns to the Ministry Center

As many of you may recall, a few years ago we received a decorated Buffalo from the 2011 Great Dinner Auction. The Buffalo was accidentally damaged over a year ago. Before Covid happened, Lee Zack, Parish Nurse - Health Ministry, worked with Mike Uzarowski to pick up the Buffalo and restore it. The Buffalo recently returned. It has been fixed, given a weather-resistant top coat, and has been placed back in the MC Foyer. Ultimately we hope to find a home outside on our beautiful campus to secure it permanently. Thank you to Lee for her diligent follow-up and organization and Mike for his talent. We are grateful that both individuals took the time to take care of something outside their normal job scope. We are truly blessed to have wonderful, kind and thoughtful individuals in our Parish Community.



In progress Buffalo



Final Buffalo

## **Parishioners Share Coronavirus Confinement Stories**

### ***Siblings become friends***

“We have four children in grammar school. They were devastated when they realized they could not hang out with their friends. Gradually they came to see that their siblings could be their friends too. The confinement has brought the children closer to each other. My wife and I feel our family is more united now, and stronger. God works in strange ways!” - *Anonymous*

### ***God is calling us to slow down and enjoy the beauty***

“It was tough not being able to hug my parents, sisters, and the preschool children I teach. We have two children graduating from grammar and high school and it was hard to see them miss out on the end-of-year festivities. I am grateful, though, that I am at home with all five of my boys. As two live out of town, I never thought I would have this time with all of them. It has been great having meals together, laughing, playing cards, doing puzzles, etc. They also lifted the spirits of my St Greg’s Eighth Grader and Canisius High School senior. I believe God is calling us to slow down and enjoy the beauty in our lives. It is not easy to do but very important.”

- *Kelly Hillery*

### ***Loves being able to take part in Eucharistic Adoration***

“The greatest silver lining in this cloud has been the great privilege of attending Adoration every day, thanks to our pastor. I can’t imagine these days without it. Thank you Jesus for the special time spent with family. This has been a bad time, but mostly a good time, in our lives.” - *Margo Doughty*

### ***Praise and thanksgiving***

“Here in Taiwan we have been full of praise and thanksgiving, in particular because we have been able to continue to receive the Eucharist each week. Receiving Jesus in the Eucharist has sustained us in so many ways during our transition here. We are praying for our St. Greg’s family and hope that soon we will be able to share in that gift together again.”

-*The Doktor Family (Chiayi City, Taiwan)*

### ***Gratitude dispels fear***

“We are a family of eight. Initially there was a lot of tension and fear. After working through the newness of being home and needing to share space more, we were able to enjoy some family game nights, family Rosary, lots of baking and trying new recipes, daily Mass (for some), more frequent Adoration (for me). I’m praying for the grace to continue some of these activities after things are opened up. I have learned that when I feel afraid, I turn to focusing on gratitude. Thinking of things I am grateful for diffuses fear, changes my focus, and my mind and heart are more uplifted.”

-*Anonymous*

**“I believe God is calling us to slow down and enjoy the beauty in our lives.”**

### ***A time to reassess priorities***

“This time has afforded our family more opportunities to spend quality time together, playing board games, watching television, taking walks outside, completing projects, and reassessing priorities. I found it hard not to be able to attend Mass and carry out my ministry of bringing Holy Communion to the homebound.”

-*Anonymous*

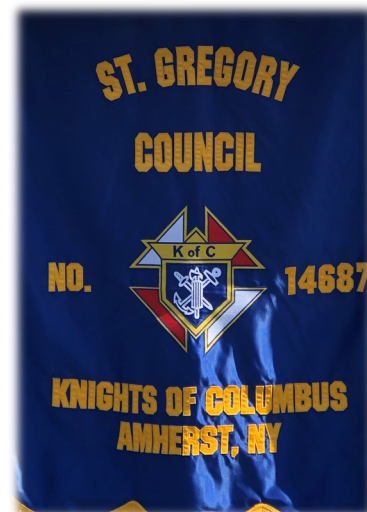
### ***Spending time learning Faith***

“I am spending more time learning about my Catholic Faith through the Bible studies and reflections of Formed.org. I am grateful for St. Greg’s livestreamed Masses. FIAT has been a gift with its program of scripture readings, testimonies, Adoration, and worship music. Although it is different viewing Adoration on line, it is no less beautiful. Jesus is with us always and in all ways.”

- *Marcia Carrano*

## Why be a Knight? *By Tom Ahearn*

Almost nine years ago, my wife Janet and I joined St. Gregory the Great Parish Faith community. Our cousin is a member of this parish and welcomed us with open arms. He also asked me if I was interested in joining the Knights of Columbus. At the time, I wanted to get my bearings and ‘just be a parishioner.’ Oh, how wrong I was for waiting. The Knights of Columbus is a wonderful international organization of over two million Catholic men whose principal work involves helping others. So, after waiting four years, I joined. What a wonderful group of men we have here in our Council. When you look around and see certain things being done in our parish—pancake breakfasts, mulch sales, coats for kids, chicken barbecues, grounds being cleaned, new umbrellas for the Café patio, setting up student desks for the new school year— the men behind these things are the St. Gregory Knights of Columbus. In all the works I mentioned above, our wives are involved also; so ladies, when we join, you join. We volunteer to help at St. Lukes Mission, Gerard Place, and spend an hour in our Adoration Chapel. We do not go around waving a red flag and yell, “Look at what we’ve done!”, we just do it! We are also the right arm of our local parish priests. We are there to assist our pastor, our vicars, and our deacons. Fr. Leon, Fr. Paul , Fr. Thomas and Fr. Moses and Deacon Michael, are all Knights of Columbus and we are so happy that they are.



The good works, conduct and ethics of the Knights are formed by these core principals: Charity, Fraternity, Unity and Patriotism. We live by these four basics, as any good Catholic man does. We ask that you consider joining our Council and become a Knight; become someone who cares about their fellow parishioners and is willing to pitch in when needed. The Knighting process has been streamlined and does not take much time. Your involvement and commitment are minimal; there is no requirement to attend each and every meeting; no one will force you to attend. We only ask that you pitch in to help at certain events once or twice a year. If you are interested, please contact me, Tom Ahearn, tandj1978@gmail.com. You can also contact the Parish Office and they will be in touch with me. I am now the Grand Knight and am humbled and honored to lead our Council, worship in our Parish, and most of all, love the Lord with all my heart.

### Share-a-prayer

Do you have a favorite prayer that you would like to share with *Spirit and Life* readers? Send it to [tfm210@hotmail.com](mailto:tfm210@hotmail.com) or mail it to the Parish Office at 200 St. Gregory Court (14221). If you prefer you can send it anonymously. If you give your name, we will include it. This prayer dates from 1833. It was written by a young John Henry Newman, in a time of great uncertainty. He is asking for God’s light to show him the way, one step at a time. That light eventually led him to the Catholic Church, and to a cardinal’s hat.



### Lead Kindly Light

Lead, Kindly Light, amidst the encircling gloom. Lead Thou me on! The night is dark, and I am far from home.

Lead Thou me on! Keep Thou my feet. I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step is enough for me. I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou should lead me on. I loved to choose and see my path, but now lead Thou me on! I loved the garish day, and, spite of fear, pride ruled my will. Remember not past years! So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still will lead me on. O’er moor and fen, o’er crag and torrent, til the night is gone, and with the morn those angel faces smile, which I have loved long since, and last awhile!

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Page 8

Spirit & Life

Autumn 2020

## ***St. Vincent de Paul Society Furniture and Appliance Collection***

We only pick up furniture items in St. Gregory's geographic area, and all furniture and appliances must be located in a garage or covered porch. Refer to what we can accept on this list. Appliances must work, and furniture must be in good condition.

**Furniture:** Couches, Chairs, Kitchen Table and Chairs, Dressers, Coffee and End Tables, Bed Frames: We cannot accept mattresses and box springs or baby cribs.

**Appliances:** Gas Stoves (must work and be disconnected), Refrigerators (must be plugged in and cool at pickup), Microwaves. We cannot accept electric stoves or cooktops, or older CRT type TV sets.

Call our answering service at 688-5678, ext. 423 and leave a message. We will respond to your call within 72 hours.

## **CHRISTMAS MASS REQUIREMENT**

### ***Forgetting to sign up for weekend Masses?***

This process will continue for the foreseeable future. Please start doing this and get your family into the habit of doing so. Sign up online at [www.stgregs.org](http://www.stgregs.org) or call the Parish Office before 4:00 pm on Friday.

**NEW:** For Christmas Masses this year, you will be **required to sign up and receive tickets**. If you do not sign up and receive a ticket, you will not be allowed to enter the worship site.

In the coming weeks, we will provide more information on how you can sign up and receive your tickets.



**St. Gregory the Great**  
ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH