

Baltimore priests share favorite Christmas memories

By Catholic Review Staff

Four priests serving in the Archdiocese of Baltimore took time from their busy holiday-season schedule to share their meaningful memories of Christmas.

"Although my family went to Christmas Mass while I was growing up, it was a mere obligation to me. But after I had a conversion at the age of 21, Christmas was completely different. I went to sing carols at a nursing home with a group of young adults, and for the first time, the words of the carols had meaning, deep meaning. I was moved by the fact of the incarnation."

-Father Albert Scharbach, pastoral associate to Baltimore Auxiliary Bishop Denis J. Madden

"As a child in Pittsburgh, my family would walk to midnight Mass. The church would be decorated so beautifully. During the Mass the choir would sing the verses of "Silent Night" in Polish, German, English and Latin; so beautiful. We would go home to a house with nothing decorated. We woke the next morning to find the whole house decorated and we celebrated the whole day. God bless my parents."

"Here at St. Ambrose, we always celebrate Christmas Eve with the half-hour of carols before the Mass. The last carol is "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." Then the church is cast into darkness and Mary and Joseph enter asking if there is room. After that, I process in with the infant Jesus in my arms as the community sings, "What Child Is This?" We process to the manger and place him in the manger and then it's blessed. It is always so moving and beautiful."

-Capuchin Franciscan Father Paul Zaborowski, pastor of St. Ambrose, Park Heights

"If I go back to growing up, Christmas was centered around family and midnight Mass. From the time my brother and I were old enough for my parents to take us, we would go to midnight Mass, we would come home, we would have dessert and then we would exchange gifts. It was a wonderful family time."

"I've always enjoyed Christmas as a priest and I still love, as a pastor, leading the midnight Mass. It's very special."

-Monsignor G. Michael Schleupner, pastor of St. Margaret, Bel Air

Father Samuel Young, pastor of Our Lady of Grace in Parkton, said his fondest Christmas memory dates to his second year as pastor of St. Joan of Arc in Aberdeen. That's when he began a tradition of placing a live 20-foot Christmas tree in the church's gathering space. Throughout his tenure, the practice continued, with a

parish family donating a huge tree from their farm. After their trees began getting too big to handle, Father Young and a family from the parish spent time searching for trees elsewhere, cutting one down each year, bringing it to the church and setting it up with the help of more parishioners.

"People were amazed year to year wondering how we go it in and how we were able to get it up in place," Father Young said.

Parishioners were invited to bring in ornaments inscribed with their family name and the year.

"We saved each ornament from year to year," he said, calling the decorations the "best" part of the trees. "Some ornaments were bought and others were creatively homemade. But the most meaningful ornaments for me were ones from parishioners who had moved or passed away. It was a simple way for our parish to remember them at Christmas."

-Father Samuel V. Young, pastor of Our Lady of Grace in Parkton

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