



THE VISITATION

THE PUBLICATION OF THE NATIVITY HOUSE

DECEMBER 2018

VOLUME 9 ISSUE 1

I am your mother

by Nicole Antonelli

We know that Mary is our mother, because this is what we've been told. Maybe this is what our parents told us from a young age. Maybe we heard it a few times at Mass or during some form of religious education. Or maybe Mary came down from heaven just to tell us this simple fact! She didn't tell me this personally, but I recently heard the story of someone who did receive this very direct and powerful message straight from the source. Fr. Leon Pereira is a hilarious and adorable Dominican priest who while on pilgrimage had a vision of the Blessed Mother and later received a message from her. I recently saw him speak at the Christ Our Life Conference in Des Moines,

Iowa and he shared the message that Mary gave to him. She told him, "I am your mother, and I want you to tell everyone you meet that I am their mother and that I love them."

When I heard him speak these words I got goosebumps and amazed, thought, "Wow, she really is my mother." And then I thought... "Wait, I already knew that. Couldn't she have shared some practical advice or at least something a bit more substantial?" But the more time I've had to digest these words, the more impactful they have become to me.

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Imago Dei

by Erik Olson

Sexual abuse in society-at-large, and within the church, seems to be crying out to heaven for vengeance with feverish pitch. Skeletons are being ripped out of closets and cast into the light of day with full public disclosure. But these horrifying accounts of abuse of power for sexual means are symptoms of a much deeper and underlying disease. The symptoms of social disease are finally being condemned, publicly, and named in ways that for the first time do not bring shame or blame to the victim.

Even as such progress is being made, however, our ability to clearly articulate the disease is

slipping away. Without the Catholic understanding that the human being is, Imago Dei, the very grounds on which we condemn the objectification of women, or anyone, threatens to vanish like wisps of smoke through desperate fingers. The divine foundation of Imago Dei is exactly the foundation that upholds the human person as subjects rather than objects.

In our pursuit of justice, we must remember that objectification does not *begin* with assault. Increasingly, the only time our culture condemns sexual behavior is when it is non-consensual and illegal. Objectification and

exploitation is the disease but it is only illegal in its terminal stage. This is why Christ says, "The man who looks at a woman with lust, has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

The idea that we can neglect the heart while demanding purity in action has become increasingly prevalent. We insist that we can visit restaurants, whose very names objectify female anatomy, watch crass T.V., listen to objectifying music *and* build a culture in which men and women respect each other. Trying to imbibe in both is practically begging one of Willy Wonka's Oompa Loompas to appear,

sound a flute, and sing us a lesson.

The person who walks into a strip club, listens to exploitative music, or looks at pornography "only on occasion" and the person who buys a nine year old girl for sex are not guilty of the same exact sin but they share the same foundation. Namely, one that relies on seeing others as means and not ends or objects and not subjects. I am not saying that listening to explicit music *causes* sex trafficking of minors. However, both are contingent on a culture that allows an individual

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Letter from the Directors

Dear Friends of Nativity House,

Advent is upon us. We are waiting. As Church we await the birth of Jesus, a baby-king, eager to enter our hearts making us capable of love beyond our wildest imaginings. It's a time of silence, darkness, and seeking the light in the darkness.

With a glance out the kitchen window you see a snow covered goat pasture with a red barn appropriately adorned with icicles. The garden is asleep under layers of snow, mulch, and straw. The Nativity House Apiary has been dormant for a few months now offering us a beautiful fall harvest of honey.

Our community is also in a season of waiting. We are happy to accept a new intern maybe two with the New Year and a guest mom shortly after that. We are also expecting our first goat kids to be born shortly after the new year. Our community is expanding in new and old ways!

The life of Nativity House runs deep with abundance, blessing and friendship. We are entering our 9th year of publishing this very newspaper, three and a half years of intentional community and hospitality to guest moms and a lifetime of memories, loves, joys, tears, laughter.

Over these years we have met and come in contact with so many amazing beautiful friends - some long term, some just passing through. We carry all of you with us. You are our community.

Thank you for allowing us to be part of your lives.

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year,

Venus & Justin Wozniak

About The Visitation

This newspaper, *The Visitation*, is a publication on topics of social justice, spirituality, and theology. It is published four times a year by Nativity House. Submissions are accepted from readers everywhere.

To contact us, email us at:

newspaper@nativity-house.org

Past issues are online at:

<http://www.nativity-house.org>

About Nativity House

Nativity House serves as a house of hospitality for first-time mothers in need of residence in the southwest Chicago suburbs. Nativity House operates an on-site community supported farm (CSA) that provides nourishment for the Nativity House and the greater community. Overall, we envision a healing environment focused on the dignity of each person, the dignity of work, and stewardship of the earth.

Nativity House is administered by a board of directors and an advisory committee of individuals with a broad range of experience. Nativity House has formed positive relationships with relevant local organizations that are extremely helpful in carrying out the mission of the house. Nativity House was recognized as a public charity in August, 2011.

To connect with us, please email Venus Wozniak at:

venusad@nativity-house.org

Postal mail should be addressed to:

Nativity House
17141 W. 143rd St.
Lockport, IL 60441

We extend the sincerest thanks to all.

Catholic Social Teaching, Nativity House, and becoming agents of change

by Sr. Emily Brabham, OSF

Each year Lewis University students spend a day working and sharing a meal at the Nativity House. This is part of their preparation to lead a retreat in downtown Chicago focused on Catholic Social Teaching. This is one of three experiences to demonstrate how people live out Catholic Social Teaching radically in their daily lives. We are so grateful to be able to learn and grow through this experience. Our leaders spent time in reflection

and how that day impacted them.

One of the ways that I witness the Nativity House living out the Catholic Worker Movement and Catholic Social Teaching is through their preferential option for the poor and vulnerable. Young women with unexpected pregnancies are the epitome of vulnerable. The radical hospitality of these expectant mothers truly embodies this need for a preferential option. If we, as a

society, do not care for the stranger at our door, what are the values we are professing? This is a small piece of what we can each do. I am inspired by the example of support of the vulnerable through hospitality and the commitment to care of creation through the community garden.

How can each of us be inspired to promote justice and dismantle systemic injustice and oppression wherever we encounter it?

The following essays illustrate some of the ways that Lewis University students have been transformed by their experience with Nativity House.



Sr. Emily Brabham, OSF is the Coordinator of Social Justice Formation at Lewis University and a sister of St. Francis, Clinton, Iowa.

Interns Wanted at Nativity House



Past Interns: Annemarie and Sarah

Are you passionately Pro-life? Seeking a Year of Service? Eco-friendly?

Nativity House, a non-profit Catholic Worker House in Lockport serving expectant mothers, is seeking 2 full time interns

Join us in:

- serving expectant mothers in need in our community
- living in intentional, prayerful community
- caring for our home and small farm

"Nativity House has been such a blessing to me, it has given me a chance to use my gifts and talents to serve others, but most of all it has taught me to love and be loved."
-Annemarie

job description:

- One Year Commitment
- Living at Nativity House in Intentional Community
- Monthly stipend plus free room and board

Our Community includes:

Venus and Justin Wozniak (Directors) their 10 yr old daughter, Gracie, 2 interns and 1-2 guest moms
We pray Morning and Evening prayer together as a community.

Tasks include:

- Caring for the specific needs of 1-2 guest moms (expectant mothers in need)
- Household tasks: cleaning, each community member cooks for the community once a week, composting, laundry, answering phone
- Farm tasks: feeding chickens, goats, we also have 1 dog and 2 outdoor cats, Saturday morning and Thursday evening Garden (planting and harvesting fruits and vegetables in our backyard)
- Formatting, writing for, and delivering the Nativity House newspaper, *The Visitation*
- Helping plan and run 2 Fundraisers
- Being open and flexible to the Holy Spirit and whatever may be needed!

Interested? e-mail Venus Wozniak at venusad@nativity-house.org



Advent is a time of waiting of expectation, of silence. Waiting for our Lord to be born...

In solitude Christ speaks to the heart as a modest lover who embraces not His beloved before all the world. In silence we hear so much that is beautiful... To love with understanding and without understanding. To love blindly, and to folly. To see only what is lovable. To think only on these things. To see the best in everyone around, their virtues rather than their faults. To see Christ in them...

Enlarge my heart, Lord, that Thou may enter in.

from On Pilgrimage 1946 Dorothy Day

97 Miles

by Jan O'Hara

When you sit down to think about it, it is incredible how a place like the Nativity House of Lockport, IL and the Eco-Justice Center of Racine, WI share so many things in common despite the fact that they are run by completely different groups of people, 97 miles apart from each other. I have had the absolute privilege of visiting both sites this year and each site allowed me to really see God's work in action and to see how we are called to serve and care for our planet.

When I went to Racine this past May (it was actually my second time going there), I got to take in the facility once more, and really see the great things they had going on there; From the areas they had dedicated to farming and gardening, to the wide variety of animals they were caring for, I had the chance to see how the Dominican Sisters of Racine truly do their part in promoting environmental awareness and care for creation.

Likewise, I was able to witness a lot of the same ideas at the Nativity House in Lockport when I went this past September. When you compare the two sites, the bigger similarities are easy to see: there is land dedicated to growing a wide variety of crops, there are plenty of animals such as chickens and goats that are being nurtured, and both sites even have a dog and a couple of cats roaming around the place.

However, the Nativity House and Eco-Justice Center share something much bigger. That something is the reason why each location shows such reverence for our Mother Earth. You see, what allows these two relatively distant places to be similar is how each location strongly subscribes to the Catholic social teaching principal of caring for God's creation. I was able to garden at both the ECJ and Nativity House, and by doing so I was able to demonstrate reverence for the greatest gift that God has given all of us: our planet Earth.

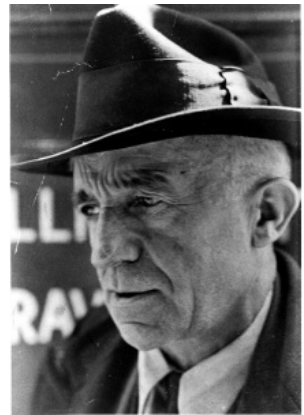
As Catholics, we are expected to care for this ultimate gift we call home. We are called, as God's people, to protect our people and planet, while living in a caring relationship with all of God's creation. This is a concept that both the Dominican Sisters of Racine and workers at the Nativity House fully understand and embrace. During my visits to both locations, I was able to strongly grasp that concept as well, and all the lessons of environmental awareness stick with me to this day. Ultimately, it was very inspiring to see how the Nativity House dedicates itself to caring for God's creation, and it graciously reminded me of the great work that is being done 97 miles up north.

Jan O'Hara is a junior at Lewis University studying Computer Science and is the current president of Lewis' CRS Student Ambassadors.

Easy Essays:

Reconstructing the Social Order

by Peter Maurin
(1877-1949)



Chesterton says

“The Christian ideal

has not been tried

and found wanting.

It has been found difficult

and left untried.”

Christianity has not been tried

because people thought

it was impractical.

And men have tried everything

except Christianity.

And everything

that men have tried

has failed.



Growing up

Growing up I was never really part of a close community outside of my family and school life. My family and school friends filled up my life with much community. I had groups that I belonged to, but at the end of the day, I didn't live in community. When I started my freshman year at Lewis University, I had to make the choice if I would dorm on campus or commute 35-40 minutes one way. On the one hand driving would be cheaper than renting a room, but I didn't want to spend tons of time driving every day; I'd rather use that time for something with more purpose like working or studying.

My first real experience living in community was about three and a half years ago when I made that choice to live in community. My freshman moved onto campus on a Wednesday, but classes did not start until that following Monday. We had five whole days to make friends and meet others who would be in on our community for the next four years. I didn't have a roommate, so I started off at college alone. I went to a barbeque Wednesday night with the girl who lived next to me then I stayed in my room all weekend until classes started Monday.

I was freaking out. I thought my whole college experience would be me sitting alone in my room eating hummus and pita chips for

dinner because I didn't know how to order food. I started my classes and began to be invited to events on campus. Sometimes I would hang out with friends if it was convenient or I would go to dinner with people if they asked or I would participate in an event if they really needed someone to go. Before I could realize it, I felt deeply alone, and I wanted to change.

It took a radical change of my thinking to open up to not only to saying yes to things but to creating a place of community for the people around me. I need to participate in my community even if it isn't convenient, it isn't easy or it isn't benefiting my immediate needs. We all live in solidarity with one another. Our mission is not only to eat a meal with those in need, but to ask them how they are feeling and what they need from me and from God, right now. Without community participation in all aspects of life, we forget that we are all brothers and sisters; we strip people of their dignity and their worth because we don't see that they matter.



Sydney Phillips is a senior Radio/TV Broadcasting major at Lewis University and the director of Catalyst, a social justice retreat at Lewis University Ministry.

The Nativity House and hospitality

by Jasmin Ramirez

The Nativity house in Lockport, IL. serves as a house of hospitality for first time mothers in need of a home. A house of hospitality provides shelter, and often food and clothing, to those who need it. Venus and her family opened their home to help mothers by living in community with them, and to volunteers who help with their farm.

We live in a society that discourages openness and hospitality towards strangers and living in a house of hospitality requires you to be open to strangers, and to greet them with open arms and unlocked doors. Dorothy Day, who wrote for communist periodicals before converting to Catholicism, and Peter Maurin, a Christian Brother created the Catholic Worker newspaper and then opened up houses of hospitality and farms. People across the country were very inspired by their activism that they started their own Catholic Worker communities.

A house of hospitality builds a society based on human dignity and compassion. Catholic social teaching believes that human beings, are created in the image and likeness of God. This means that God is present in every person, regardless of his or her race, sex, origin, orientation, culture, or economic standing.

Regardless of any factors or reasons we can think of, individuals have an inherent and immeasurable worth and dignity and therefore each human life is considered sacred.

Catholic Social Teaching asserts that all human beings must see within every person both a reflection of God and a mirror of themselves and must honor and respect this dignity as a divine gift. Human dignity is about our radical equality before God that leads us to think no less of somebody because they are from a different place or culture, because they believe something different to you, or because of their work or employment situation.

In our current society, it can be very easy to lose sight of human dignity, and a house of hospitality like the Nativity house helps us see that we are all equal and we all deserved to be loved. It was very inspiring to visit the Nativity House, and during our time there it taught me that we must continue to love one another and to treat everyone with the dignity and respect they deserve.



Jasmin Ramirez is a junior majoring in International Business at Lewis University and a passionate Social Justice Advocate.

Mary

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I've only been a mother for a short 3 1/2 years, but it's been a busy 3 1/2 years as my husband and I are a few months away from having our fourth little one! I have learned a lot about what it means to be a mother in these past years and how incredible and unique a mother's love for her children really is. I remember when I had my first child I kept thinking, "My mom did all of these things for me!?" (And my other eight siblings!) I should really be doing more to thank her!" I never understood how much my mom loves me until I loved my own children. And I'm sure there are a lot of dimensions of this motherly love that I have yet to experience! Although my mother and I are not perfect, I feel like this is as close as you can get to unconditional love between two flawed human beings. So how much more perfect must be the love of our pure heavenly mother? She can look past our weaknesses and our ugliness and see the light of Christ shining within us. We can strive to do this with our fellow human beings, but our own failings will always keep us from loving perfectly.

It's hard to imagine Mary loving us as her child because she has SO MANY KIDS! And people tell me my hands are full with number four on the way! Ha! I can't do justice to this description in paraphrasing, so I'm including an excerpt from a published lecture of Fr. Pereira's, speaking of his encounter:

When she said, "I am their mother," she made me understand that as though she had given birth physically to each one of you. It was as if she said, "This one is

mine, this one is mine, this one is mine..." very much a strong claim. And when she said, "And that I love them, she crushed me with this love to show me how – it was like a banana slipping out of its skin. It was like being outside myself in joy, literally being ecstatic. It was the same powerful love, very, very powerful. She loves every single one of you like you are her only child, and there is no one else, and she is looking just at you. I don't know how she does it, it is very overwhelming. I was in tears, seeing her and listening to her.

I have always known that I am loved by my mother and that I could turn to her for anything and everything. It breaks my heart to think of one of my own children not knowing how much I love them and not knowing that I will always be there for them! Mary wants us to know that we are hers and that she loves us. How it must break her heart to see us suffer, thinking that we are alone! She wants us to feel her love and she wants us to turn to her - and not just for the huge things! My mom is pretty limited on time, so I don't call her every day when every stressful thing happens. But I know my heavenly mother can handle my constant pleading!

When I'm having stressful moments with my little ones and I feel like I need some relief, my usual sources of relief are texting my husband, calling my mom, putting on a show for the older two, or making myself another coffee. Lately I've been trying to make my first cry for help to my heavenly mother. My sister-in-law shared a popular prayer with me which is to pray "Mary, Mother of God, please be a mother to me now" in times of need. I feel like that prayer should have an

exclamation mark at the end, because I always feel so desperate when crying out this prayer!

I have been battling a very long cold and was really hoping for the coveted nap-overlap yesterday afternoon. It is very rare that I can get all three kids to sleep at the same time, so with only an ounce of hope I called out to Mary: "Please let them sleep today so I can get some rest! I understand that this is not a big deal, I'd just really appreciate it if you could help me out this once!" As it turns out, it was God's will that all three children slept at the same time for a solid two hours. Praise Jesus! Thank you, Mary!

Jesus gave us a great gift when He shared His mother with us. He

didn't have to come into the world as a baby, in a mother's arms. But God must know the value of a mother, so He gave Jesus a mother and Jesus gave Her to us! We will only begin to understand the immeasurable gift we have in our heavenly mother if we reach out to her and accept her love.



Nicole is wife to Jamie, and mom to Madeleine, Vincent, Augustine, and "Baby Bojo" due in February. She is trying to grow in holiness and to grow as many children as fast as she can! In between cooking meals and changing diapers, she is a part-time church musician.

the call to Family, Community and Participation

The person is not only SACRED but also SOCIAL. How we organize our society - in economics and politics, in law and policy - directly affects HUMAN DIGNITY and the capacity of individuals to grow in community.

MARRIAGE and FAMILY are the central social institutions that must be SUPPORTED and STRENGTHENED, not undermined.

We believe people have a RIGHT and DUTY to PARTICIPATE in society, seeking together the COMMON GOOD and WELL-BEING of all, especially the poor and vulnerable.

FROM CRS-CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING 101

Image of God

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to see another as “object” and not “subject.”

The problem, according to Christ, begins in the heart. There is a reason Christians in the past referred to each other as “brother” and “sister” and it was not just to sound holy. Using those phrases immediately causes the speaker to humanize the other and implicitly recognizes the Imago Dei or “image of God” in the other.

I am not suggesting that our values are drifting away from a non-existent perfect past. I do fear, rather, that we are beginning to believe that brothels, strip clubs, abortion, contraception and a hookup culture can exist side by side with a sexual ethic that is rooted in consent, love, and personhood.

The Church does not believe there is any room for middle ground here. Humans are either always subjects or they are only objects. As we condemn sexual assault in more direct and public ways, we must also till the soil from which we seek to reap good fruit. In *Abolition of Man*, C. S. Lewis observed that “We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst.” I would like to further this and say that we scorn the prude and are scandalized by licentiousness.

Yes, we want young men (and women) to “respect women (and men).” However, we must ask ourselves by which social mechanism do we expect that moral formation to take place? We want the virtue, but are we willing to accept the cure? I believe, as Christians, we must really begin to examine our own participation in a culture of objectification,

which is the disease that causes sexual exploitation. This includes examining our participation in social media, how we entertain ourselves, what we laugh at, what music we allow ourselves to listen to, and every interaction we have with another human being.

When confronted with products or social events that seek to conform the human person into means instead of ends let us not participate. Let us risk the sideways glance and snide remarks as we decline entertainment or call out the sexualization of entertainment and advertizing as appalling. All these things threaten the Imago Dei.

The cure for sexual exploitation, really, is Christian idealism. The #metoo movement gets the problem, at least partially, right and properly exposes it. Men (or women) ought not treat each other as objects to be exploited. Except, as the “Imago Dei” slips through our fingers we lose the foundation on which the “ought” rests. The fear is that we resort to believing that all we need to do is change the law to better prosecute abuse. However, Christ, through St. Paul, teaches us that the law cannot save us. This is not because the law is bad but rather because the law is merely a description of actions that should flow from a properly converted heart. Hence, he says “these people worship me with their lips but their hearts are far from me.”

I am not suggesting Christians seek to outlaw anything. Rather, with converted hearts, and at all times, let us greet each other as made “Imago Dei”, especially when the “other” isn’t acting like it or is unaware of their own dignity.

Erik Olson teaches high school English and is a member of the Nativity House CSA. He also volunteers his time and skill as the Nativity House Beekeeper.

Because We Are Yours

LOVING FATHER,

I did not know you
But I was yours.

AND THEY DO NOT KNOW ME
AND I DO NOT KNOW THEM
But they are mine
and I am theirs.

LET NO CHASM, NO RIVER,
NO DROUGHT OR STORM,
NO WAR, NO EXODUS, NO BORDER,
natural or constructed,
NO DEVICE OF MAN NOR DEVIL
COME BETWEEN US
OR halt the LOVE that burns
within me,
The grace that flows from you.

LET ME THINK ON NO MAN
unless I think joyful thoughts
of brotherhood,
LET ME THINK ON NO WOMAN
unless I think tender thoughts
of sisterhood,

FRIEND and STRANGER,
ALLY and ENEMY,
BROTHERS,
SISTERS.

They are mine and I am theirs,
Because we are yours.





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Nativity House
17141 W. 143rd St.
Lockport, IL 60441



Reflections on St. Therese of Lisieux

Feast: October 1. Patroness of missionaries

by Lydia Finney

It's hard to admit that I struggle with how to embrace the saints. But it's true. I don't always know how to relate to them. These rare, shining gems of lives well lived – do I try to make my life like theirs? Do I pick one, and try to live like that one person? Do I look at all of them, and try to find some common thread to imitate? I'm reminded of the way I felt one day back in high school. I was at my friend's house, in their kitchen. Her mother asked me my test scores and then to my chagrin, turned to my friend and said "See, why can't you do that?!" I wanted to run away! As a child, I felt like this about the saints – like a sibling or friend that I'm being held up to in comparison. Some of these same old feelings were stirred up recently when I re-read 'The Story of a Soul' by St Thérèse of Lisieux.

I had read this autobiography of St Thérèse before. My maternal grandmother was French-Canadian and both a book and a portrait of St. Thérèse were handed down to me as a girl. I loved reading it. Her life sounds

so beautiful and perfect. She was born in 1873 in Alençon, France. She entered the Carmelite convent in Lisieux at the young age of 15. In the short time she lived there until her death at 24, she recorded the story of her childhood, and her 'Little Way' of doing the ordinary, small deeds of everyday life with extraordinary love. The contrast between her life and mine - her lofty thoughts and my mundane ones, her visions and encounters with Jesus and my practical, gritty reality - left me feeling a little bit daunted. If God wants me to be like her, I felt, it's hopeless!

Now, as I re-read her story – actually, listened to the audiobook - all the memories flooded back. She had a mother who wanted to be a nun, and a father who wanted to be a monk. Her childhood was centered on faith and filled with idyllic stories. She had visions of Jesus and experienced miraculous cures. But, still, I listened on, and pushed myself further. I thought about the context of history – placing her

story in 19th century France. I considered her age and I imagined myself listening to a young girl in her early 20's at that time and place in history. Do you think she would have written about anything hard, any complaint? The most striking part of her story, to me, and it must have been even more so in that context, was the idea that God had helped her to learn and grow spiritually without the aid of great instruction at a university, or from a renowned spiritual director. Maybe that is what we should really learn from her? Perhaps I can learn from her that we are ready to do what God is asking us to do. God gives us all that we need.

I'll admit, it is still a little bit of a struggle for me. There are times, as I

listened to her story again, that I felt this huge chasm of difference between her life and mine. But, if I fully appreciated our communion with the saints, could I be ready to live side-by-side with them, and let them help me grow in my own context, with my own story? Could it be that God wants to brighten heaven with millions of different shining souls? St. Thérèse called herself the 'Little Flower' and wrote about God wanting a garden full of different flowers. I might need to read her story again.

*Sing with all the saints in glory,
sing the resurrection song!
Death and sorrow, earth's dark
story, to the former days belong.*



Lydia is the mom of two boys and a member of St. Dennis parish.

