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## THE GIFT OF GRACE

By Karen Agnello

Nativity's book club discussed Bill Huebsch's book titled *Grace: God's Greatest Gift*. Our gathering of a dozen people was extraordinary as the group members recognized and shared the grace-filled moments in our lives. In our four weeks together we were empowered and encouraged to live our lives in new ways as we recognized grace in the daily experiences of life. It is quite easy to write an article with my heart so filled with these experiences, expressions, and the recognition of grace. As I sit down at my blank blue computer screen, I ponder how to address God's amazing gift of grace in mere words. Grace is so much bigger than words can convey.

Karl Rahner, a contemporary influential theologian, emphasizes grace as "God's very self," the "self communication of God." Rahner also insists that Grace is the essence of being human and therefore is inseparable from human nature. This understanding of grace is very different from past interpretations claiming that grace was earned through participation

in the sacraments and good deeds and lost through sinful actions. This new theological understanding unites God with all humanity and recognizes grace as God's free gift to all people. It is not earned; rather it is a free gift. Recognizing this gift is transforming, it helps us to be more reliant on God's empowering help and like St. Paul proclaims makes us a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17) here and now.

Last night, I went to the movies to see "The Karate Kid" and I observed a unique parallel between grace and the understanding of Kung Fu taught to the young karate kid by the wise Kung Fu master, Mr. Han (played by Jackie Chan). Mr. Han begins instructing Dre after he gets beat up badly by several boys in his new school.

Dre's training takes place in the courtyard of Mr. Han's house with the bizarre directive, "jacket off..., drop it..., hanging it up..., and jacket on." Dre goes through this routine of putting his coat on and off, dropping it on the ground and hanging it on the peg over and over again for days. **(Continued on page 2)**



## Grace

By Deacon Walt Skinner

When I was asked to contribute an article on "grace" for this newsletter, I was intrigued because grace has many facets. I asked one of our parish staff members to give me their take on grace and we discussed how she has been blessed with God's grace throughout her life. Furthermore, we discussed what a special place Nativity is and how God has graced this parish as we prepare to celebrate our 50th Golden Jubilee!

So, you might ask, "What exactly

is grace?" For the purposes of this article, God's grace is something that is given freely as a gift. As such, it can be freely accepted or rejected. God's grace is what gives each of us the courage and initiative to do the will of God. In the early days of our Church (and even in some places of our world to this day) grace is what gave the martyrs the courage to face death rather than deny Jesus as the Christ. Grace enables us to be disciples of Christ and as such call others to discipleship and thereby become part of the Body of Christ – the Church. **(Continued on page 2)**

## THE GIFT OF GRACE continued.

In frustration and exasperation, Dre finally concedes to a new understanding that he must respect his mother who had been repeatedly asking him not to throw his coat on the floor. Mr. Han acknowledges Dre's new understanding, but continues his training as usual. "Jacket on... jacket off..., drop it..., hang it up..." Dre continues again, tolerating a seemingly useless task before deciding this old guy really doesn't know how to teach. With great disappointment and sadness (he's sure he will be beat up over and over again by the bullies), Dre grabs his coat and tells Mr. Han that he's had enough, he's done with this worthless training. Mr. Han stares deeply into the boys eyes, assesses the truth that the young boy is worn down in spirit and ready to see the wisdom of the ancient art of Kung Fu. Mr. Han then proceeds to ask him one more time "jacket on, jacket off" and as Dre goes through the motions Mr. Han begins an offensive attack. Dre counters the onslaught by mimicking the derobing motion he has been practicing. Then Mr. Han imparts his wisdom that Kung Fu is part of every action and movement a person does. As I heard this I thought of Grace. The gift of God self that God gives to every person regardless of their religious preference or non-preference, regardless of our sinfulness or holiness. A gift we are generally unaware of until we get so broken in battles of our lives' and are ready to recognize that by ourselves we are quite powerless and it is God's Grace, God's very self that is there to strengthen us through mystery.

In the gospel of Matthew, chapter 13, the disciples ask Jesus why he talks in parables and he responds, "Because knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven has been granted to you, but to them it has not been granted. To anyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; from anyone who has not, even what he has will be taken away." Grace is very much like a parable. Once we recognize grace, its presence in the ordinary is everywhere but the secret lies in having eyes to see and ears to hear and in valuing things of the kingdom above things of the earth.

This past week, I watched a golf tournament in Charlotte, NC that my daughter, Nicole, participated in. It was an important tournament in the golf world, one that had a great

deal of public recognition. In terms of "earthly things", the tournament was a bust. My daughter played rather poorly; she certainly didn't achieve her potential. Not to mention we had to change hotel rooms during our stay, got caught in a traffic jam, and argued once or twice about something or another. However in terms of the kingdom of heaven, I recognized God's grace in abundance in those five days. It was in the actions of a young ten year old girl who walked the golf course with her dad during the first practice round and asked my daughter to be the first player to autograph her commemorative tournament flag and take a picture together. (At the end of the round my daughter ran into this little girl again and she was beaming with excitement as she talked about her day and showed off her flag filled with signatures.) Grace was in joyful opportunity to walk the golf course with my parents, to share the joy of a great shot out of the thick rough and the agony of a missed putt. This was the first time in ten years my parents traveled to watch their granddaughter play in a tournament. Grace flourished in the laughter and teasing during our card game in the hotel room, and again as we dined outside at the tournament barbeque talking and sharing stories with several other players and their families. I saw grace in the opportunity that my husband, Jim, (who is currently out of work) had time available to caddy for our daughter for the first time (confrontation free). And after my daughter was eliminated from the tournament, grace gave her the strength to put aside her own disappointment and support a collegiate teammate during match play the following day.

God's Grace is an amazing gift. It brings the love of others into focus in new ways and showers life with hope and goodness in hard times, ordinary times, as well as good times. Grace is elusive because it is mystery. Recognizing it means opening our heart to God in new ways. Like Mr. Han tried to convey to Dre in "The Karate Kid", it is personal experience that brings real meaning to grace. I encourage you to explore your daily experiences and share them with your friends, spouse, and children in order to recognize the fullness of God's grace in your life.



## Grace continued.

Grace isn't necessarily something that you can see, taste, smell, hear or feel. But we do have moments in our spiritual development which Christ instituted to give grace. We call these special times of grace "sacraments" - Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony and Holy Orders. In these Catholic rites, we utilize physical, tangible symbols, such as water used in Baptism and oils when anointing, to help us see the invisible reality of the

supernatural grace given.

Grace isn't just something we receive; it is a call to action. It is what calls us to continual conversion. Each of us is called to continue to grow in our faith. Being Christian calls us to do more than just attend Mass on Sunday. We are called to live Christian lives in the world outside the "Exit" signs of our church. We are called to bring Christ into the community. You might be thinking, "How can I do this? I am not worthy to bring Christ to others." My

friends, God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies those called! Grace is what qualifies you and gives you the strength and courage to be Christ's ambassador to the world at large.

My prayer is that each of us will open our hearts and minds to the grace of God in our lives. It is a gift that is given to us freely. But remember, once received, it must be put into action by those who receive it! How will you use the grace of God to touch those around you?



# OCTOBER RESPECT LIFE MONTH

Every human being, at every stage and condition, is willed and loved by God. For this reason, every human life is sacred. To deprive someone of life is a grave wrong and a grave dishonor to God. Because we are created in the image of God, who is Love, our identity and our vocation is to love. Pope Benedict has called this "the key to our entire existence."

Nowadays, in America as elsewhere in the world, a model of society appears to be emerging in which the

powerful predominate, setting aside and even eliminating the powerless: I am thinking here of unborn children, helpless victims of abortion; the elderly and incurably ill, subjected at times to euthanasia; and the many other people relegated to the margins of society by consumerism and materialism. Nor can I fail to mention the unnecessary recourse to the death penalty when other "bloodless means are sufficient to defend human lives against an aggressor and to protect public order and the safety of persons.

Ecclesia in America, Pope John Paul II, 1999



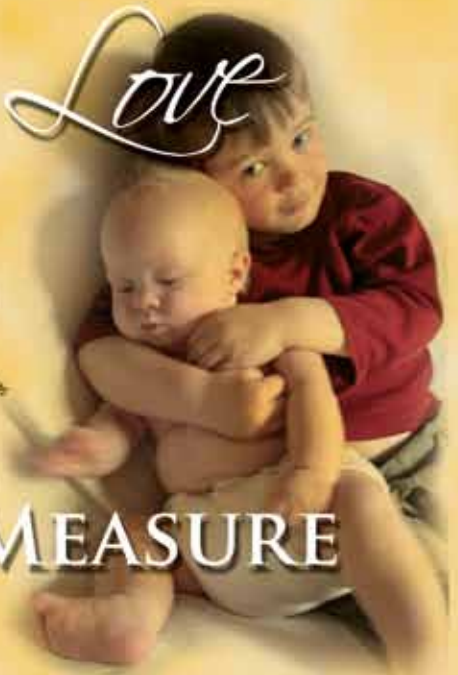
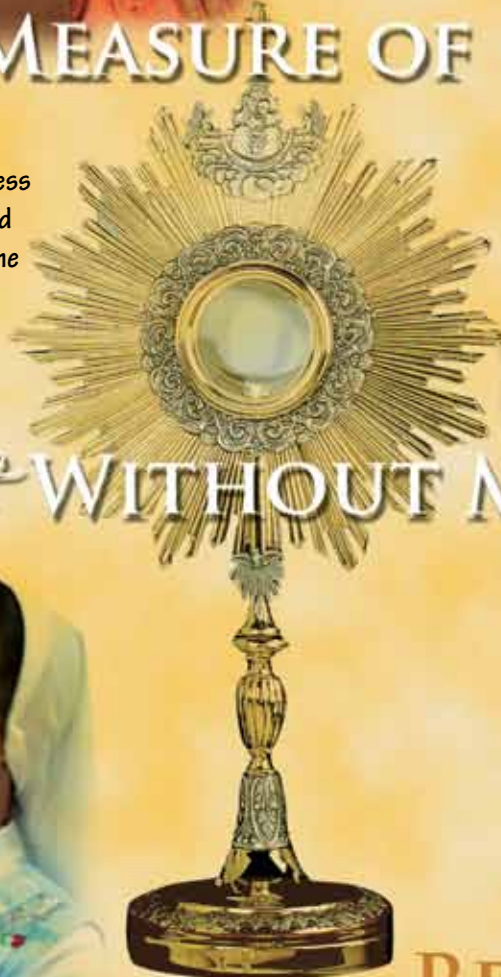
*"God's love does not distinguish between the infant in the mother's womb or the child or the youth or the adult or the older person. In each one God sees His image and likeness. Human life is a manifestation of God and His glory."*

Pope Benedict XVI

## THE MEASURE OF *Love*

*"Give us the grace - When the sacredness of life before birth is attacked, to stand up and proclaim that no one ever has the authority to destroy unborn life."*

Pope John Paul II



## IS *Love* WITHOUT MEASURE



## RESPECT LIFE

*Contributed by Mary Nielsen*

# “GRACE” Through the Eyes of our Parish Youth

One of the greatest parts of our high school summer mission trip each year is seeing how the youths’ eyes are opened to see God’s presence in new ways in their everyday life. The following are some reflections from our Nativity youth on how they experienced God during their week in Virginia this summer:

“This week has shown me how much four days of work can touch a person so deeply. I have grown in my faith in ways I didn’t think I would and I have met so many people that I will not forget. This mission trip will probably be one of the most memorable for me. On this mission trip, I became closer to God and the people from our church.”

“God will always take care of you. He decides when to take you to the Kingdom of Heaven and He knows when your purpose on earth is fulfilled.”

“I came on this trip to have fun and help others. Even though it was a Catholic camp, I didn’t expect to get any closer to God. The best part of [Wednesday] night was probably reconciliation. I’ve had some worries about things, so when the priest told me all “past or future sins unmentioned” were wiped away, I felt like a huge weight was lifted. I never thought that I could feel completely new, but that was an amazing experience.”

“Because of the last four years, I have gone from a man of little faith to God’s servant.”

**The Church defines grace as “the free and undeserved gift of God’s loving and active presence in the Universe and in our life.” Without being given the definition, some of our parish youth were asked to reflect on what grace means to them and how they have experienced God’s grace in their lives.**

“They say that if you find a penny, it means God is with you. I didn’t need to find a penny to know that God was with us. I could feel His presence rising from our joined hands.”

“God’s grace is the ability for anyone, no matter what lies in their past, to have a new beginning in life. Unlike us on earth, He has the heart to forgive things that we truly couldn’t.”

“God shows his love for me in that He blessed me with an incredible family and incredible friends. I experience God’s presence through the people he has brought into my life. They each play a different, yet vital role in my life, as I believe I do in theirs. The relationships I have both at home, and at school, are something I truly cherish and owe to Him.”

“I feel God’s presence in school. When I get distracted, He keeps me focused on my work.”

“God’s grace is that I am healthy and alive.”

“God’s love for me shows through the love my friends and family express for me.”

“Whenever I think my life sucks, or that I have it rough, I see an example of the less fortunate and realize how great it is that I am able-bodied to walk freely in this great country. It is such a privilege, all because God placed me in this specific position.”



## ||||| St. Ignatius Loyola’s “Daily Examen” |||||

As fall begins and schools resume classes, time seems to disappear as schedules intensify. St. Ignatius of Loyola developed a simple method of meditation known as the Daily Examen. This form of prayer encourages us to review each day and to recognize God as active in our daily lives. Follow these steps:

**Set aside 10 minutes.**

\* Quiet yourself and recall God’s presence, thanking God for His love and asking the Holy Spirit for guidance.

\* Review your day, thanking God for the ways He blessed you this day.

\* Review your day again, thinking about the opportunities you had to use the gifts God has given to you, identifying the times you either did or didn’t.

\* Thank God for the ways you grew closer to Him and ask forgiveness for the opportunities you missed or rejected.

\* Resolve to cooperate with God’s grace in the days to come.

\* Conclude with the Lord’s Prayer

# What Saint is This?

By Marge LaCour

She was born in Lombardy, Italy in 1850, one of thirteen children. At 18, she applied to become a Sister, but was refused because she was not well and was small. She returned to the family farm and worked with her brothers and sisters until she was asked to teach in a girl's school at age 24. Finally, she was able to become a nun. She wanted very much to become a missionary to China.

She was asked by her Bishop to found the Institute of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, where she and other young women began to care for the poor children in need of education and medical care. All the while, she kept praying for a chance to go to China.

In the late 1800's many thousands of Italians came to North America and settled in the cities and towns of the United States and Canada. They had a difficult time, because they didn't know the language, Catholicism was discriminated against and they had trouble finding work.

Instead of asking our Saint to go to China and bring the Word of God to the people there, Pope Leo XIII asked her to go to the United States and work among the Italian immigrants.

Out of obedience to the Holy Father, she came to New York City. In the years that followed, she founded schools, hospitals and orphanages in the new land. With a great trust in God, she overcame every obstacle in her path, and managed to achieve things that everyone else said couldn't be done. At all times, even when she was running hospitals and in charge of hundreds of nuns, she never forgot to care for the poor, lost, homeless and jobless immigrants that she was sent to serve. She thanked God everyday for the opportunity to serve Him, and for His plan that sent her West, instead of East.

Our Saint entered Heaven on December 22, 1917. In 1946, she was canonized by Pope Pius XII, the first American citizen to become a saint.

Answer on the bottom of page 8



## Kids Explain Angels

I only know the names of two angels, Hark and Harold. ---Gregory, 5 years old

Angels work for God and watch over kids when God has to go do something else. --- Mitchell, 7

My guardian angel helps me with math, but he's not much good for science.---Henry, 8

Angels don't eat, but they drink milk from holy cows. --- Jack, 6

Angels talk all the way while they're flying you up to heaven. The main subject is where you went wrong before you got dead. ---Daniel, 9

When an angel gets mad, he takes a deep breath and counts to 10. And when he lets out his breath, somewhere there's a tornado. ---Reagan, 10

Angels live in cloud houses made by God and His Son, who's a very good carpenter. ---Jared, 8

My angel is my grandma, who died last year. She got a big head start on helping me while she was still down on earth. ---Katelynn, 9

It's not easy to become an angel! First you die. Then you go to heaven, and then there's still flight training to go through. And then you got to agree to wear those angel clothes. ---Matthew, 9



### The Good Samaritan

Find the hidden words.

P Q B V U F J T Y S R M E  
 T A W R B G E E R E E E O  
 H O R C E T S L O H H L G  
 N M I A A W U L T T C A O  
 S J T I B M S I S O A S H  
 H E T L Y L M N S L E U Z  
 Q H E D U S E G A C T R X  
 D U N X D Y Y D R O L E N  
 H W L I V U B H W J H J P  
 N M P T K V Y T Z V Z H K

PARABLE  
 ANSWER  
 JESUS  
 TELLING  
 TEACHER

STORY  
 WRITTEN  
 JERUSALEM  
 CLOTHES  
 LORD

# Nativity: In the Beginning —

## Trials & Tribulations

by Adrienne “Sam” Scarfo

**In the beginning** you might say, “It was the best of worlds and the worst of worlds.” It was exciting to have a new Catholic church in the area. However, when the Church of the Nativity was in its infancy, it was decided that families would be members of this congregation by geography. Until our existence, people attended either St. Mary Magdalen or All Souls Churches. The Bishop actually told people they would become members of this church depending on where they lived. Some folks were not very happy about this.

They had formed attachments to the churches where they were already worshipping, not to mention they had their friends there.

On July 29, 1962, the first Mass was celebrated in our new church. Although Catholics attended, it did not mean they were a “congregation.” Father Trainor understood the need for fellowship and found a unique way for people to get to know one another by introducing the concept of neighborhood “women’s circles.” The ladies, many of whom were Navy wives, not only bonded, but helped each other as well. Each “circle” had its own name and met weekly in someone’s home. Once a month, all the “circles” met at the church. Not only was there camaraderie, but competition among the groups made for some fun and entertaining times!

Meanwhile, the men were also busy. A barbecue pit had been built on church grounds. Monthly, the men barbecued, the ladies provided covered dishes, and the people came, not only just parishioners, but from the surrounding area.

**Original Nativity building built in 1962.**



**Groundbreaking: Man holding shovel unknown, then L to R. Fr. Carroll, Fr. Trainor, Fr. Lyons**

The cost for the barbecued dinner was \$3.00 per person and helped fund the men’s projects for the church.

The congregation was growing, both in numbers and in fellowship. Then, a major setback happened. The naval air base in Sanford was closed in 1968 and about 100 parishioners left the area to be reassigned elsewhere. Not long after it was decided another church would be built in Casselberry. Again parishioners were assigned to worship at that church according to where they lived. The Church of the Nativity was floundering.

**(Continued on page 7)**

### *Also happening in 1962...*

- President Kennedy set the goal of landing a man on the moon
- The Beatles released “Love Me Do”
- “The Beverly Hillbillies” was the new tv hit
- Gas was 28 cents a gallon
- Tuition at Harvard University was \$1,520
- John Steinbeck won the Nobel Prize for literature
- Wilt Chamberlain scored 100 points in a game

**Nativity In the Beginning  
(continued from page 6)**



**Nativity Women's Club; Front row, L to R: Mrs. Robert Mooney, Mrs. John Fitzpatrick, and Mrs. Sam Day; back row, L to R; Mrs. Edward Schweickert, Mrs. B.G. Caruthers, Mrs. Lewis Schweickert**

**As the saying goes,** “when you have lemons, make lemonade.” With Fr. Neidert’s guidance, this is precisely what happened. Shortly after his arrival, a rectory/office was constructed. (It is now our Parish office.) There were 150 children attending CCD classes, and there was no space. With Fr. Neidert’s skills and a work detail of parishioners, a carport was turned into six classrooms.

Still, there wasn’t a lot of money to support the parish, let alone the Priest. So, Fr. Neidert decided to plant a vegetable garden. This supplemented food for both the Pastor as well as some parishioners. Times were indeed tough financially.

In 1970, Fr. Neidert procured about 2 dozen cedar seedlings from a local conservation office. For 5-years he lovingly cared

for these little trees. In 1975, it was decided that the one that was the largest would become the official Christmas tree for the church. The tree was prepared by digging up the root ball and readied to be planted and brought into the church. Imagine Fr. Neidert’s surprise and disappointment when he went outside the morning of December 8th to find that this special tree had been stolen! Fr. Neidert asked the parishioners to pray for the thief, the local newspaper carried the story, and someone kindly donated a 15 foot tree. Christmas was celebrated, and most importantly, it drew people even closer together.

Fr. Neidert saw our congregation through the worst of times. He finally retired as Pastor in 1976, but stayed in residence here until he fully retired in 1984. It may have been a difficult first 15 years for the Church of the Nativity, but with Fr. Neidert’s “can do” attitude and parishioners willing to help the “little church in the woods” was no longer floundering. It is proof that God listens and provides for his children!

**Brunhilde Nakutis, Toi Fitzpatrick**



## Book Review - “Grace”

What we learned about GRACE from a book written by Bill Huebsch

Grace is all around us, a free gift from a loving God given to everyone. He is communicating God’s own self to us – present in the very ordinary experiences of life. Grace is mysterious and empowers us. We recognize Grace in a holy pause, feel for God’s presence while praying. Grace is an energy, not a mere theology—a divine energy rolling into our lives like waves of never-ending tides toward the shores of human need.

### *Grace is God’s Greatest Gift*

The power is within you.  
Don’t go looking here and there,  
don’t think you can find it outside of yourself.

What you seek is within  
and when you find it,  
will be like finding a precious gem.  
You would trade nothing for it.  
Use it well – don’t abuse it or lose it.  
It is yourself!  
The power is yourself!  
Take responsibility for yourself!

### *Grace is the full Context of Life*

We will not find God by escaping the earth. Rather than looking outside of ourselves, or our world, we need to look within to find what we want. The heart of the Lord can only be discovered through our own hearts. In prayer, in our heart is where God dwells. “The kingdom is not here or there: No, the kingdom is within you.”

*GRACE by Bill Huebsch is a beautiful explanation of the Grace of God in our Hearts!*  
*Book reviewed with Karen Agnello*  
*Written by Ann McDeed*

## *Grace Under Fire* by Adrienne "Sam" Scarfo

I call it "grace under fire," a difficult lesson for this "hot blooded Italian." Of course, I had to learn it the hard way. Thankfully, I was still in my 20's.

When I was working for the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, a vendor didn't send me an order I needed for an upcoming fundraising event. Only a few days were left and I needed this order to be delivered "like yesterday." Frankly, my blood was "boiling." I phoned the owner of the company. When he answered, I proceeded to "read him the riot act." I was angry and didn't wind down my complaining long enough for him to give me an explanation.

Finally, when I did take a breath, he quietly said to me, "kids with Cystic Fibrosis die don't they?" Of course, I was taken totally off guard. I stopped short, gulped and asked him why he wanted to know. He replied that his niece was just diagnosed with CF. His entire extended family was in shock and didn't know anything about the disease. I ended up talking with him for over an hour. With encouraging words, I described the disease, treatment and successes in extending life.

Believe me, that day I was beside myself for having been a less than stellar representative of the foundation. This episode turned out to be a true "life lesson" for me. I learned about picking battles and to think before I let my temper fly! "Grace under fire" has not been an easy thing for me, but it has become my personal mantra each time I feel my "temperature rising."

By the way, the order came in time, the special event was a success, and this gentleman became a wonderful volunteer on behalf of the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation. Most importantly, the last time I spoke with him, his niece was doing just fine!!!

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### **What Saint is This?**

Answer: Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini

Feast Days - November 13 & December 22

## **SPIRITUAL SOJOURNING**

by Kim Fratrik

Pope John Paul II once said "How many people have gone to a shrine out of curiosity, as visitors, and have returned transformed!" We are fortunate that living in central Florida puts us within driving distance of many shrines and holy places. One such place is the Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine. St. Augustine was founded in 1565 by Don Pedro Menendez de Aviles who, upon landing, celebrated the first mass. In 1870 the Diocese of St. Augustine was created and the current parish church was raised to be the Cathedral. This Cathedral is "America's First Parish" and serves not only the many families who call the Cathedral Parish their spiritual home, but also the thousands of visitors who come to "America's Oldest City". The Cathedral is located at 35 Treasury Street, just a short stroll from the St. George Street shopping area. For more information, visit their website at [www.thefirstparish.org](http://www.thefirstparish.org).

While you're in the St. Augustine area, you might also want to pay a visit to the Mission of Nombre de Dios and Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche. This site is where Don Pedro Menendez de Aviles actually landed and proclaimed the area for Spain and the Church. The early Spanish settlers also established the first shrine in the United States to be dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Thousands of visitors and pilgrims visit this shrine every year, many asking for the blessings of motherhood and the intercession of Our Lady of La Leche. The Mission and Shrine are located at 27 Ocean Ave., St. Augustine. The website is [www.missionandshrine.org](http://www.missionandshrine.org).

