

**NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY**  
**September 8, 2019**

*The following is the homily and announcement given by Father Michael Zacharias, Pastor, on the weekend of September 7 and 8, 2019:*

Good morning/afternoon/evening!

Today we celebrate the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary! What a beautiful Feast Day in the life of our Church! From the dawn of time, God our Father predestined the birth of Mary, who would become the Mother of His Son. And so it happened! Mary was born – and she was full of grace!

And then, in the fullness of time, the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to announce that she would become the Mother of the long-awaited Messiah! And Mary said YES to that most sacred of announcements!!! And from that moment on she gave her whole life to Jesus. She bore Him in her womb for 9 months, gave birth to Him, raised Him, and watched Him grow in wisdom and understanding. She watched Him in the workshop of Nazareth – working side-by-side with St. Joseph. And she watched Him leave home as He began His public ministry at the age of 30. Eventually, she would stand by and watch Him carry His cross – die on that same cross – and hold Him tenderly in her arms after His crucifixion. Today, she continues to be at His side in heaven where she intercedes for us and points us to Jesus. From the time of the announcement of the angel Gabriel, until now, everything Mary does, she does out of love for Jesus.

Today, on this Feast Day of the Birth of Mary, it is my honor to make an announcement to all of you! Allow me to take a moment to read this letter from Bishop Thomas to all the faithful of the Diocese of Toledo: *(Read Letter from Bishop Thomas)*

Yes, you heard correctly, the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist out of Ann Arbor Michigan will be making a home here at St. Michael's next school year! For decades we have seen a decline in Religious Sisters in our Catholic Schools in the United States. The mission of the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, is to honor Mary, as Mother of Jesus – as Mother of the Eucharist – and to serve Jesus and His Church by placing good and holy Sisters back in Catholic Schools. I don't know about you, but I find the prospect of having Sisters in our School to be absolutely incredible!

While most religious communities of Sisters in the United States struggle with the number of new vocations they have – the biggest struggle for the Ann Arbor Dominicans is their overflowing Motherhouse! Since their founding in 1997 they already have over

150 Sisters in their community! And the average age of the Sisters is 32 years old! They love Jesus, they love Mary, they love the Eucharist, and they love our One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church! And the joy they have in living out their vocation is infectious! The Sisters currently have over 400 requests to come and teach in Catholic Schools. We are one of a handful of parishes in the nation that they will be sending their Sisters to next year to begin a new mission. How exciting is that!

So what does this mean for our parish? It is an opportunity that comes along only once every few generations! It has probably been 50 years or more since a new community of Religious Sisters has set down roots at one of the parishes in our diocese. How blessed are we to be the parish that welcomes a community of Religious Sisters to make a new home here in our diocese! At the beginning of the 2020-21 academic year we are looking to welcome up to 4 Sisters here at St. Michael's to do just that! As in past generations, the ministry and mission the Sisters will begin here next year will be the beginning of something that, we pray, will last for generations to come. The Sisters will work side-by-side with our lay teachers – helping one another to grow in holiness as they form our students in the Faith. We will make room for the Sisters in our School without pushing out any of our current teachers – as we value all of our teachers. As attrition of teachers occurs we will place the Sisters in grade level positions appropriate to their individual gifts, talents and education.

Growing up, I was honored to attend Catholic Schools from Kindergarten through twelfth grade. And while we all know the stories of Sisters with rulers – I had a much different experience. During my formative years in my Catholic Elementary School, we were incredibly blessed to have a number of Sisters of St. Joseph on hand. And our principal, Sr. Genevieve, was by far my favorite. I remember in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade asking Sr. Genevieve if she would write a letter of recommendation for me for a Knights of Ohio Scholarship in order to help me with tuition to attend Elyria Catholic High School. She readily agreed. I will never forget the day when she handed me the letter she wrote on my behalf. We stood in the hallway outside of her office and she handed it to me and asked me to read it. I did. As I read it I couldn't believe what she wrote. In her letter she wrote, "Michael will be a good priest someday." As I read those words I just froze – I then looked at her and asked why she would say such a thing. Her response was matter-of-fact, "Because you will be, Michael." In my 8<sup>th</sup> grade mind I thought to myself, "Yeah, right, there's no way that's ever going to happen!" And out of my polite 8<sup>th</sup> grade mouth came the words, "Thank you, Sister." I could have never imagined what the words she spoke to me back then would mean to me later in life. It is my fervent hope that generations of students in our school will also have the experience of Religious Sisters – living witnesses of faith, hope and love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I am humbled as I think about the goodness and holiness of the Sisters who gave their lives in service to God as Catholic School teachers – not just in the Catholic schools I attended – but all around our country. Perhaps you, too, were blessed to have had Sisters who taught you in school – and who made a difference in your life or the life of your children. I truly believe I would not be standing here today without the witness of those holy women who helped to form me in the Faith. They were living witnesses of the gospel – living witnesses of what it means to live out our baptismal call – living witnesses of Religious Sisters who generously gave their lives in service to God and neighbor.

So where will the Sisters live? As you know, in the next month or two we will be demolishing our 3 rental houses on the southwest part of our Main Campus property facing Sutton Place. It is our hope to build a convent for them on this site. Things are going to have to move fairly quickly in order for this to happen and to welcome them to St. Michael's next summer. In the weeks to come you will be hearing much more about the plans for the Sisters' convent – and how you will be able to be involved in welcoming the Sisters to our parish and school.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Bishop Thomas for the tireless work, persistence and prayers he has put into making possible this opportunity for our parish and school. Without Bishop Thomas, this would not be happening. I would also like to thank Mother Assumpta, the Superior (and one of the four foundresses) of the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist in Ann Arbor, for entrusting her Sisters to us. Bishop Thomas and Mother Assumpta have absolute faith in our parish and school. And so do I!

Join me, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, in offering prayers of thanksgiving to Almighty God in heaven for this wonderful – and generational - opportunity for our parish and school. Like Mary, who said YES to the announcement of the Angel Gabriel, I pray that we, as a parish, make her YES our own. May our YES to the announcement I have made here today, like hers, always point the way to her Son Jesus – both now – and for generations to come.

Thank you!