St. Mary Magdalen Catholic Church



Dear Faithful & Friends,

Praised be Jesus Christ! Our Lord is the unifying center of our parish, and from His goodness flows every blessing. As a new member of this community, I am grateful for the care, generosity, and dedication I have already witnessed among our staff and parishioners. As you know, it takes many hands and hearts to support and sustain parish life. It is truly edifying to see so many generously share their time, talent, and treasure to make Saint Mary Magdalen a place where others can encounter Jesus Christ.

As Catholics, we recognize the importance of building our lives and our parish on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ, who tells us, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Our Lord spoke these words at the Last Supper as He prepared to embrace His Passion. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is essential to our life in Christ and to the foundation of our faith. In the Blessed Sacrament, we encounter the sacrificial love of Jesus which sustains us, transforms us, and draws us ever closer to Him. My hope and prayer is that each of you and your families will continue to deepen your knowledge of and love for Jesus Christ. The more we turn to Him, the more He transforms our hearts and our lives.

Thank you for the warm welcome you extended to me at my installation Mass on October 11, 2026, celebrated with the Most Reverend John J. McIntyre. I am especially grateful to our staff and clergy for coordinating the Mass and reception, and to all the parishioners who joined us for this special occasion. My family was deeply touched by your hospitality and grateful for the faith and generosity you shared with them.

Finally, thank you for your prayers, kindness, and patience throughout these past few months of transition. As we move further into the future at Saint Mary Magdalen, I look forward to getting to know you more and serving as your pastor. I am also grateful to Reverend Eric Banecker for his assistance in helping to ensure a smooth transition. It is both humbling and exciting to begin this new chapter of parish life together, and I am thankful that our Lord has brought us together in faith and service. Please be assured of my prayers for you and your families.

May our Lord bless you, and our Lady keep you!

Yours in Christ,
Father Cavara

News by Numbers

We are pleased to note there were twenty-three newlyweds who said "I do" at SMM from January through October.

Once again, we increased the total number of Baptisms over last year to 87, with the possibility of more added in December.

The school's student body rose 4% from 420 last year to 438. In addition, our PREP enrollment jumped 5.5% from 215 students to 227 this September.

Our weekend Mass attendance is holding steady, with a slight increase over last year's total of 1,038 to 1,045. Our 9:30 Mass on Sunday remains the most popular with an average of 253 faithful in attendance. It was closely followed by our 11:30, with an average of 245. Next was our 4:30 Anticipated Mass with an average of 231. Our Sunday's 7 PM Mass doubled its attendance from last year to an average of 176 each week.

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Journeys in Faith



Even if some individuals believe they are not on a spiritual path, each of us is on a journey of faith, whether we are aware or not. From the moment we enter this world, our faith journey begins with trust in our parents, and trust is essential to building relationships. Spiritual longing is part of our human nature, after all. St. Augustine may have summed it up most adequately when he wrote of God, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." As Catholics, we place our deepest faith in God, as revealed to us through his Son, Jesus Christ. For 'by faith, we are able to give our minds and hearts to God, to trust in his will, and to follow the direction he gives us' (CCC 37).

From late September through May, Deacon Bob Szipszky and his wife, Patty, arrive early most Monday evenings to finalize their preparations for OCIA class. Each session is designed for those seeking to discover or reconnect to the Catholic faith. The Order of Christian Initiation of Adults is offered each fall throughout the Catholic Church in Philadelphia. The Holy Spirit is vigorously at work, which has led to significant increases in Catholic conversions not seen since before the pandemic. Philadelphia is among the top ten cities in the United States with the highest percentage increase in conversions in 2026, experiencing a remarkable 60% rise from 2025. Fr. Dennis Gill, director of the Office for Divine Worship and rector of the Cathedral Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul, told NCR: "I have noticed over the last several years that there is a greater commitment to conversion and a greater commitment to the Church among those who arrive." Additionally, the dioceses of Harrisburg (77%) and Altoona-Johnstown (84%) also saw major increases.

Conversions and renewals to Catholicism moved St. Mary Magdalen in a similar trajectory, with eight entering the faith in 2025 and twelve in 2026. This fall, so far, the class has welcomed thirteen. David Simms was among those who became Catholic in 2025. He was raised a Buddhist but said he "always believed there was a greater being guiding me through coincidence or circumstances." Among a series of confluences drawing him toward the faith and assisted by the Holy Spirit, David reflected, "Not too long after my brother-in-law was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and passed a year later, I needed guidance through the pain and felt myself moving more toward God. It got to the point where I was overwhelmingly appreciative and decided these signs were God asking me to become a Christian." As an engineer, David said he had to research all Christian faiths before choosing a denomination. "I realized it wasn't my choice, since the calling had been around me my whole life. My friends and family were Catholic; this wasn't a coincidence."

David's OCIA classmate, Ali Stempler, said she was encouraged to become Catholic when her son, about five years old at the time, began to pray to Jesus without prompting. "Brayden brought me to Jesus about three years ago. When he began to talk about Jesus and ask me questions, I had to turn to friends for help, because I was Jewish." Some of her Catholic friends began sharing more about the faith. "My son and I became very interested and felt a very strong pull towards the Lord. I started reading and attending Mass." They started praying together at night. Ali added, "I signed up for OCIA and just fell in love with Jesus and Catholicism."

The road hasn't all been smooth because her family had a difficult time accepting her conversion. However, with hope and love, the strain has improved over the past year. Recently, because of her own experience, she was able to extend her support to another candidate who was experiencing a similar family dynamic.

Today, Ali said her spiritual life is wonderful. She is active in the community as a volunteer coach and participates in women's ministry groups, including SHE, which Patty facilitates. She also noted that she enjoyed using the Hallow app even before becoming a Catholic, and she found that 'Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist' and 'Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary' were truly helpful to her. Ali also shared her OCIA experience: "Patty and Deacon Bob are wonderful teachers. The camaraderie in my group was beautiful. Everyone brought something different to our discussions. I've never been more at peace than I was during that time in OCIA. I still feel that peace, but that's where it all started. The flexibility of the learning and the content were perfect for working parents. Being a part of this community has been a blessing for me and my children."

In April, Lisa Colterelli became Catholic, along with eleven others during the Easter season. She grew up without religion. Reflecting on her path to Catholicism, she said, "I can now see all the times God was calling me, even though I wasn't ready to hear Him. I believe I had a private revelation on the night of September 11, 2025. I was at St. Mary's Adoration Chapel, having been drawn there by forces unknown. There, I experienced the most peace I had ever felt in my entire life. I heard nothing—no intrusive thoughts, and I had no worries or cares. It was pure bliss. As I was driving home, I asked God if that was Him. When I arrived home, I went onto St. Mary Magdalen's website, and literally the first thing that appeared was an advertisement for OCIA. At that moment, I knew my path was clear. Looking back, I believe God had been calling me for a long time. I just wasn't ready to listen until that night."

Lisa added, "My OCIA experience taught me that faith is not about having all the answers; it is about being willing to keep seeking them. I came into the process with questions, doubts, and a lot to learn, and I found that the more I learned about the Catholic faith, the more I wanted to know. What has meant the most to me is discovering that Catholicism is not simply a set of rules or traditions. It is a relationship with Jesus Christ." She said the process helped her understand the Mass, the sacraments, scripture, prayer, and the Church's teachings. "It also gave me the desire to continue learning long after OCIA ended. I am still very much a new Catholic, and I know I have a lifetime of growing in faith ahead of me. That has actually become one of the things I love most about my journey."

Jessica Pelesh came to the Catholic faith from a culturally Jewish household and felt "the pull" to learn more about God. She and her husband had their children baptized in 2024. Jessica aid, "Going to Mass on Sundays, I felt the pull of the Holy Spirit to finally begin my journey of growing closer to God.

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It has allowed me to learn and read more of the Bible than I ever have and to begin to feel peace in giving my troubles to the Lord." The Pelesh family has also found community for their young ones who enjoy participating in the First Friday events, and they hope to enroll thier children in our school when they are of age.

It is easy to understand the dynamic energy that Deacon Bob and Patty feel as they witness the transformative effects God brings to those in their quest for Him, including some who are already Catholics, and signed up to be part of the 'Introduction to Catholicism' experience for a refresher. Deacon Bob conveyed, "We are so blessed to be in roles where we participate in the faith journey of others, thanks to God's invitation."

Maggie Barnette, a Catholic since 1960, saw the announcement in the bulletin, and it compelled her to attend. She said it "rejuvenated me to deepen my faith and relationship with God and the communion of saints." Maggie attends a weekly Bible study on Thursdays, is a member of our choir, and is currently exploring membership in the Dominicans' lay order. She said, "The experience has intrigued me and increased my interest in learning about the Bible, the Church, and my ability to communicate my faith, while also increasing my faith."

Christine Barker, another school parent, attended as a baptized Christian. She shared, "I not only built a stronger foundation in my Catholic faith, but I also had the opportunity to meet wonderful people from our St. Mary Magdalen community. It has brought me closer to my children as we now share an even deeper connection through our faith, and it has strengthened my family in ways I didn't expect." Fellow parent Rachael Mealey wrote, "We know how busy life can be, and adding one more commitment can feel overwhelming. However, she stated, "OCIA is a welcoming, supportive, and judgment-free experience. It's a place where you can ask questions, grow in your faith at your own pace, and connect with others who are on a similar journey. Deacon Bob and Patty do a wonderful job making the program flexible and understanding the realities of busy family schedules, so it's much more manageable than you might expect."

Lisa offered this to those considering becoming Catholic: "My biggest encouragement to someone considering OCIA would be: don't feel like you have to be ready or have everything figured out before you begin. Come with an open heart and allow God to lead you. You may be surprised where He takes you." Rachael added, "If it's been on your heart, even just a little. I encourage you to start the conversation. You don't have to have all the answers; you have to be open to taking the first step."

To learn more about OCIA, email Deacon Bob at deaconbob@stmarymagdalen.net.

Around the Campus

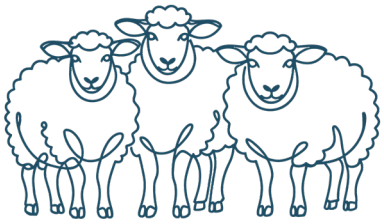





Left to right, top to bottom: Catechetical Sunday, Lector Gemma Heckler, Fr. Cavara greets families, Students enjoy the October wedding of teacher Mrs. Erica (Braunlinger) to Connor Thompson, Mrs. Cassidy, DRE, and daughters welcome PREP families, Student Living Rosary, Deacon Joe with PreK students for the annual blessing of the 'stuffed' animals, and Joe and Will Wood test the new playground slides.





An Envisioning Parish

Cultivate His Foundation. Connect His Community. Collect His Flock.

Over a year ago, the pastoral council asked us to share our insights on ways to enhance our connection to Jesus through worship, formation, and charity as his missionary disciples. Specifically, the council focused on priorities to enrich our parish's outreach and provide new opportunities for engagement and service to deepen our faith, individually and communally. It included a distinct call to reach members of our flock who have become disengaged from the Church for various reasons. Last year, we unveiled the Pastoral Envisioning Plan to the community.

Fr. Cavara and the council are pleased to share a few highlights on our efforts in these key areas: Cultivate His Foundation: We aim to provide parishioners with experiences that strengthen their faith and offer tools to deepen their relationships with Jesus, their families, and others. Connect His Community: We strive to find new ways to build up our community of faith across all age levels. Collect His Flock: Our goal is to expand our reach and engage those who have fallen away from the faith and parish life.

The action plan includes enhancing hospitality by expanding fellowship and worship through events like First Fridays. We are striving to create more intentional Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy opportunities and maximize our impact through outreach with our ministries. Plus, as a new FOCUS Parish with two missionaries, we are working to create more dynamic opportunities to help individuals grow in their personal relationship with Jesus.

HOSPITALITY

In our Christian faith, the roots of hospitality extend well beyond hosting friends in our homes; it is a spiritual calling that reflects how Jesus treated the poor, outsiders, and the marginalized. Hospitality spreads when Jesus flows through us in our words, deeds, and the way we welcome and serve one another. Last fall, we expanded opportunities to plant seeds through faith and hospitality by offering a fuller First Friday experience. In addition to morning Masses, the evening includes time for fellowship and features a buffet dinner, crafts for kids, games, or other casual activities from 5:30 to 7 PM. Confession is available during a Holy Hour from 5:45 to 6:45 PM, and we also offer a newly added 7 PM Mass. Last season, we welcomed an average of 75 members each evening, who enjoyed monthly faith offerings and made deeper connections with others in the community. So, if you haven't yet been able to attend, we hope you will join us this season. We are welcoming new volunteers to our Hospitality Team, and we have increased our team's visibility with new lanyards they can wear before and after Mass as they greet worshippers and are available to assist or answer questions. We invite you to help us in our mission to spread the joy of our parish and the message of Jesus to all of those who attend Mass or visit our campus.

SERVICE

In addition to our dedicated service ministries and spiritual groups, last spring, Mike Puchtler, our pastoral council president, coordinated with Christ in the City (CITC), whose purpose is to guide young missionaries in encountering Christ in every person, especially those who are underserved and living on the streets of Philadelphia. Through prayer, intellectual formation, community life, and hands-on service, CITC prepares its missionaries and supporters to deepen their faith, articulate it confidently, and lead with compassion and conviction. With over half a million Americans experiencing homelessness, their work is crucial and aligns with our parish's mission of building a community for Christ as missionary disciples. Our TMIY members served as the main sponors for CITC's March 'Lunch in the Park' event.

On Friday, March 13, they gathered in the cafeteria to prepare, package, and load large trays of baked ziti and meatballs. Many donated personal care items and basic essentials for 'Blessing Bags' to be provided to those at the lunch, and a handful of our students and families assembled about a hundred bags. On Saturday, March 14, our volunteers went to the Christ in the City missionary house for a brief orientation and training before heading to the park. They assisted the missionaries in packing the vans, serving meals, gave out bags, and spending time in fellowship with our homeless friends. On October 10, parishioners served the our second parish sponsored 'Lunch in the Park'.

FOCUS

Our FOCUS Missionaries, Tina Augustine and Jake Barajas, are so grateful for the warm welcome they have received since they arrived last September.

Throughout the past year, they have integrated themselves into the heart of our parish by becoming parishioners and participating in all our community has to offer. Last fall, they began introducing themselves and their families to others after Mass as they engaged in conversation and got to know many of our members. Tina and Jake also engaged and attended active group ministries including TMIY, SHE, the Pastoral Council, OCIA, First Fridays, and our newly minted Pre-Cana program.

Throughout Advent and Lent, they made a concerted effort to invite and lead new small-group Bible studies to help parishioners enter into a deeper relationship with Christ. Since then, their efforts have grown into six small groups with more than 30 participants. This year, they are excited to expand small-group involvement throughout the year.

As missionaries, they often hear from those of us who lament loved ones who have fallen away from the Church or are struggling in their faith journey. The opportunity for spiritual enrichment and renewal is everywhere. Some people love the Lord deeply, while others are searching for Him, have drifted away from Him, or have never truly encountered Him. The goal of FOCUS missionaries is not to simply organize programs, start a new ministry, or fill the calendar. Their mission is much simpler: to walk with people toward Christ, help them learn how to live as disciples, and equip them to become disciples to others. Jake noted, "Our greatest desire is to serve and walk with others in whatever stage of life they find themselves and in all the countless other ways God invites us to become saints in the ordinary circumstances of our lives."

Ultimately, they want to help them encounter Jesus and to grow in a lifelong relationship with Him. Tina added, "We are here so parishioners can begin to journey alongside their loved ones, neighbors, family members, and coworkers and show them the great love God has for all of us."

To learn more about our **2026-2028 Pastoral Plan**, or to get involved in any aspect of our hospitality, service, outreach, ministries, or small group opportunities, please visit the **Envision** and **FOCUS** pages on our website, or contact any staff member in our parish office.

Fr. Cavara's Installation Mass

October 11, 2026





Celebrant: Bishop John J. McIntyre; After Mass greetings







Fr. Mark Cavara (brother) and Fr. Eric Banecker with Fr. Kenneth Cavara on the altar during the 11:30 am Mass.

With Faith & Gratitude

Visit our website or see the bulletin for Mass times, spiritual events and ministry programs.

Contact our office for assistance, or to schedule an appointment.

To make a secure donation online, scan the QR code, return our envelope, or visit stmarymagdalen.net/giving.

Our Parish Financial Report for 2025-2026

The fiscal year runs from July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026.

Pastoral Revenue	
Sunday Collections	414,761
Mailed & EFT Donations	982,303
Holy Day and Directed Donations	350,272
Prep and Sacramental Income	92,998
Total Pastoral Revenue	**1,840,334**
Pastoral Expense	
Salaries and Benefits	752,929
Archdiocesan Assessment	226,000
Administrative and Sacramental Expense	498,624
Maintenance & Utilities	201,187
Total Pastoral Expense	**1,678,740**
Total Pastoral Operating Income	**161,594**
Non-Operating Items	
Investment Income	81,878
Net Charity to Others	(14,938)
Pastoral Capital Expense	(72,444)
Total Pastoral Non-Operating Items	**(5,504)**
Endowment Items	
Endowment Donations and Investment Income	691,257
Endowment Transfer to School	(165,000)
Endowment Change	**526,257**
Net Pastoral Income	**682,348**

School Revenue	
Tuition Income	2,804,723
CARES, Fees and other Income	148,659
Total School Revenue	**2,953,382**
School Expense	
Total Salaries & Benefits	2,753,014
Administrative and CARES Expense	316,817
Maintenance & Utilities	271,619
Total School Expense	**3,341,450**
School Operating Deficit excl Development	**(388,067)**
Development	
Gala Net Proceeds	326,373
School Donations, net of expenses	166,341
Net Development	**492,714**
Total School Operating Income	**104,647**
Non-Operating Items	
Investment Income	58,131
Endowment Transfer to School	165,000
School Capital Expense	(165,099)
Total School Non-Operating Items	**58,033**
Net School Income	**162,679**

This fiscal year brought significant accomplishments, growth, and meaningful investments in our community. Our church donations totaled $1.397 million, a modest 2% increase over the prior fiscal year. However, pastoral operating expenses rose 16% to $1.679 million, partly due to a challenging winter with increased snow removal, rising utility costs, along with our commitment to expand evangelization and ministry efforts. As a result, the pastoral operating income was $161,594, a decrease of $159,049, or approximately 49%, from the previous fiscal year. We remain committed to maintaining and improving our church, investing $72,444 in needed repairs to the HVAC system and gutters. Despite these financial pressures, our parish remains dedicated to serving our community, cultivating our faith, and providing opportunities for spiritual growth and fellowship.

Our school continues to thrive with the addition of a third PreK3 classroom and a 5.5% increase in enrollment over last year. The school tuition revenue reached $2.804 million, representing an impressive 21% increase over the prior fiscal year, primarily due to a larger number of students. A 14% rise in expenses resulted in an operating deficit excluding development of $388,067 underscoring the financial challenges faced by a growing school. In April, we gathered for a very memorable Derby-themed Gala to celebrate the school's 60th anniversary. We honored parishioners Patricia Miniszak, former principal, and Larry Donato, former School Board Chair, whose dedication and leadership have had a lasting impact on our school community. Thanks to the remarkable generosity of our supporters, the Gala netted over $326,000. These proceeds will help improve and enhance our school, ensuring that future generations of students benefit from an enriching educational environment rooted in faith and community.

The momentum continued over the summer of 2026, as our campus completed several exciting improvements in preparation for the new year. We added a new PreK4 classroom, enhanced the playground with new activity equipment, including a Gagaball pit, picnic tables, pavilion, fencing, and renovated the gym. These improvements create a safe, welcoming, and engaging environment for all to enjoy. As we look ahead, we remain focused on managing our resources responsibly, maintaining our facilities, supporting our growth, and continuing to fulfill our parish's mission.

These accomplishments would not be possible without the generosity, dedication, and faith of our parishioners, school families, and friends. Your continued support enables St. Mary Magdalen to grow, serve, form, and fulfill our mission in Christ. We remain most grateful for each of you!

EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT
TAX CREDIT PROGRAM

Through the PA Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) and Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) programs donors can receive up to a 90% tax credit against their personal PA state tax liability to schools of their choosing through BLOCS, The Catholic Foundation for Education, or Friends of Education.

Thanks to donors, the impact for SMM students and their families for the current school year were signifcant. EITC scholarships were awarded to 32 of our students across fifteen families. The total scholarship gifts to our school for the 2026-2027 was an amazing $203,730!

Learn more about how you, too, can make a big difference by redirecting your individual or business tax dollars to qualifying families in our parish.

Contact John Gill at jgill@stmarymagdalen.net, or call our parish or school offices for more details.

SMM THANKS OUR 2026 EITC DONORS

St. Mary Magdalen is most grateful to all of our EITC donors for their significant contributions:

Christine and Michael Barker
Michele and Charles Bramley
Andrew J. Carabello
Ryan and Brian Cassidy
Rosemary and Benjamin Cross
Jessica Czachor
Eileen and Jerry Francesco
Thomas Goldsmith
Lori and James Hahn
Alexis and Michael Henderson
Michael K. Hennessy, Jr.
Patricia and Gary Holloway
Matt and Kristy Jesson
Kristina and Seamus MacCrory
Kaitlin and Kurt Micelli
Elizabeth and Brendan Naughton
Madeline and Michael Puskar

YOUR GIFT CAN CHANGE A CATHOLIC CHILD'S LIFE FOR GOOD



Tax Calculation Example
An example of how the BLOCS credit works

See a sample calculation for LLC, Partnership, or S-Corporation with a 2-year commitment to EITC:

Cash to BLOCS/Your School	$10,000
PA Tax Credit Reduction (90% of contribution)	($9,000)
Net Federal Tax Reduction for contribution (37% tax rate)	($370)
Out of Pocket	$630