

New Jersey church reflects people of God at their finest

Isabella R. Moyer | Nov. 27, 2012 NCR Today

My friends Joanne and Ray live half a continent away from me in New Jersey. Each Sunday, they travel 45 minutes each way to attend Sunday Mass at [Sacred Heart Church](#) [1] in Camden. Sacred Heart is a world away from my quiet, prairie parish. Ask Joanne and Ray to describe why they are part of the Sacred Heart community, and they will regale you with a passionate account of a church whose soul is nourished with heavenly hope. This hope becomes incarnate, moving hands and feet to fight the hell of violence and poverty.

For the families of Sacred Heart, Sunday Mass is no mere obligation. The Eucharist is cherished and embraced, for it provides the much-needed food for the work ahead. And work they do. Each parish member is expected to be involved in at least one of the numerous [social ministries in the parish](#) [2]. Hospitality and welcome is a responsibility of all.

November is the month when we remember our dead. Each year, on Christ the King Sunday, a special remembrance takes place at Sacred Heart. A Mass is offered for the murdered in Camden. Here are Joanne's words:

On Sunday, we remembered 63 souls who were murdered since this time last year -- the highest number since records began and a number eight times higher than any country in Europe. The youngest was a two year old baby, decapitated by her mother who was crazed on drugs.

All the families of victims are invited, regardless of their faith. This year, twenty came. After the Gospel was proclaimed, Fr. Michael Doyle slowly [read each name](#) [3] and their manner of death. If a family member was present they came forward and received a sign with their loved ones name, date of birth and death. They also received a candle lit from the Easter candle of hope. If no one was there to represent that person, a member of the Sacred Heart community took their place.

This year the church was almost totally ringed with candles, an overwhelmingly sad sign. The families that attended were grateful and stayed for the entire 2 1/2 hour Mass. To balance life and death, next Sunday, the first Sunday in Advent, we will bless all expectant mothers and each delivery will be heralded as an echo from Advent.

The act of remembrance becomes the impetus to continue the community's mission "to stand on the side of life with all the struggling people of Camden and the world." It is a firm belief that "God bends to heal the bloody wounds of the world, to restore what was damaged, to renew what was destroyed."

Dedicated to works of justice and peace, firmly grounded in prayer and Gospel mission, the community of Sacred Heart truly reflects the church as the people of God at her finest.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.sacredheartcamden.org/>

[2] <http://www.sacredheartcamden.org/Social%20Main.php>

[3] <http://www.sacredheartcamden.org/BulletinCurrent/Bulletin.pdf>