Branches on the Vine

NEWS FROM THE ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD OCTOBER 31 - NOVEMBER 6, 2026

Parish Challenges Congregation to *800 Acts of Kindness*

- Story by Shelley Wolf

Doreen Blondin, Paulann Marianella and Roseann Williams, members of the Jubilee Year of St. Francis Committee, are overseeing the "800 Acts of Kindness" campaign to celebrate the Jubilee Year of St. Francis for St. Junípero Serra Parish in South Windsor. PHOTO BY SHELLEY WOLF

It seems as if there is no end to the many thoughtful, personal acts of kindness being performed by the parishioners of St. Junípero Serra Parish in South Windsor. Two tiny Christmas trees located inside St. Francis of Assisi Church and St. Margaret Mary Church are a testament to their kindness.

Each tree is coated with paper tags that contain handwritten notes, detailing individual good deeds manifested by local Catholics. And most of the tag-writers are choosing to remain anonymous.

"Every week, I take the tags off the trees," says Roseann Williams, a member of the parish's Committee for the Jubilee Year of St. Francis, which organized the challenge. It's Williams' job to collect the tags from both churches to keep count. "We're hoping it becomes a way of life."

From acts of old-fashioned courtesy to prayer for others to charitable contributions, these virtuous actions are part of the "800 Acts of Kindness," a campaign for kindness kicked off by the parish in early 2026 as part of the Jubilee Year of St. Francis.

Back in 2025, the parish formed the committee to come up with ways to celebrate the Jubilee Year of St. Francis, which runs from Jan.10, 2026, to Jan. 10, 2027. Declared by the Vatican, the Jubilee Year is being observed by Catholics all over the world.

"We asked what activities we could do and how we could work as a pilgrim parish," says Paulann Marianella, another committee member. "We wanted to get people engaged and involved."

Joe Coray, a parishioner and teacher, proposed the "800 Acts of Kindness." Tags are made available to parishioners in baskets in the sanctuary, where a small poster offers some helpful hints to get people started: hold a door, prepare a meal, pick up litter.

After an act is performed, it can then be recorded on a tag and affixed to a tree by individual parishioners.

A closer look at the completed tags on the trees reveals moments of uncommon generosity. One handwritten tag reads, "Gave donation for those affected by the earthquake in Colombia." Another reads, "Helped a woman pay for her groceries when she didn't have enough money."

Still other tags mention bringing good cheer and actively assisting others: "Visited a sick friend," and "Helped person in a wheelchair get out of a jammed situation."

Additional tags tell of providing roadside assistance to a stranger and watering the flowers on the altar for all to enjoy.

By the end of the summer, parishioners had already surpassed their collective goal of 800 acts. Organizers predicted even more acts of kindness will be performed throughout the fall as students returned to faith formation classes. They say the final count won't be known and released until Jan. 10, 2027, at the conclusion of the Jubilee Year.

Why the focus on kindness? "Kindness – there's not enough of it," says Doreen Blondin, another committee member. "You can't change your world, but you can change your little circle."

Referring to the inspiring quotes about kindness printed on the front side of the tags, Marianella says, "That's what the quotes on the front side of the cards speak to. Even if it's just a smile to brighten other people's day. We're modeling on St. Francis and all his good works and teachings."

Williams insists, "Kindness is the backbone of Christianity. We're being Christlike. The way I look at it, kindness leads to love."

Upcoming Events

NOVEMBER 1 @ 3:30PM **$60**
CAROLYN'S PLACE 34TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER
La Bella Vista, Waterbury

You are invited to celebrate 34 years of life-affirming care with Carolyn's Place Pregnancy Care Center! Enjoy a 5-course meal, an exciting silent auction, an impact presentation, and an awards ceremony honoring Virginia Baudinet, Charles and Shirley Tooth, and Fr. Jeffrey Romans. Tickets are $60 per person. Reservations are required. To reserve your seat, visit www.carolynsplace.org or call **203-597-9080**.

NOVEMBER 1 @ 3PM
FROM BROADWAY TO THE MET: A BENEFIT CONCERT FOR HAITI
St. James Church, Rocky Hill

You are warmly invited to an uplifting afternoon of music. Admission is free, and donations will be gratefully accepted to support our sister parish, St. Anne in Saintard, Haiti. Our program spans Broadway favorites, Classical masterpieces, and Sacred music.

Approximately 50 singers from various parishes across our diocese, as well as professional soloists Rochelle Bard and Daniel Juarez, will present beloved classics including The Prayer, Bring Him Home from Les Misérables, For Good from Wicked, Nessun Dorma, and much more. Bring your family and friends to experience this musical celebration for a wonderful cause!

NOVEMBER 1 @ 6PM
SACRED SOUNDS: SZYMANOWSKI & TRACZ
Cathedral of Saint Joseph, Hartford

The Cathedral's Sacred Sounds concert series continues with an evening of soaring melodies, choral splendor, and a world premiere. Under the direction of Adrian Sylveen, the Connecticut Virtuosi Chamber Orchestra, joined by guest choirs and soloists, presents Karol Szymanowski's Violin Concerto No. 2 and Stabat Mater, alongside the world premiere of Sandra Tracz's In Via, a meditation on John Paul II. Presented as part of the 2026 Polish Heritage Festival, this program brings together two distinctive Polish musical voices in the Cathedral's magnificent setting.

For more information, visit **www.thevirtuosi.org**.

NOVEMBER 2 @ 10AM
ALL SOULS' DAY CELEBRATED BY THE MOST REVEREND CHRISTOPHER J. COYNE
All Saints Cemetery Mausoleum, North Haven

Immediately following Mass, Archbishop Coyne will preside over a special Rite of Committal, during which unclaimed cremated remains will be reverently placed in a permanent resting place within the mausoleum. All are welcome to join us for this sacred occasion of remembrance and prayer.

NOVEMBER 7 @ 1PM - 4:30PM **$45**
STARRY NIGHT SILK SCARF PAINTING
Holy Family Passionist Retreat Center, West Hartford

What is the perfect accessory for your Advent prayer table, backdrop for your nativity set, or item to wear or give as a gift? A silk scarf in blues and purples, highlighted in gold! Painting on silk is enjoyable for all ages. Everything will be provided. All you need is to wear old clothes and bring a spirit of adventure. Children under 12 should be accompanied by an adult.

This retreat is sponsored by The Monastery Gallery of Art.

Offering: $45, includes supplies.
Register using the QR code.

NOVEMBER 14 @ 10AM - 3PM
GINGERBREAD FAIR
St. Patrick Church, Collinsville

Come celebrate the season at our annual Holiday Gingerbread Fair! Try your luck at our popular teacup auction and browse an incredible selection of beautifully curated gift baskets—perfect for holiday gifting. After shopping, step into our café to enjoy delicious food and refreshments, featuring our famous homemade gingerbread topped with fresh whipped cream. Bring your family, friends, and holiday spirit! Admission is free!

JANUARY 15 - 17
RETROUVAILLE MARRIAGE RETREAT WEEKEND
Windsor

If your marriage has become distant, troubled, unloving or uncaring; if you are divorced or separated but want to try again, Retrouvaille can help. Retrouvaille provides tools to communicate better, resolve conflicts fairly, and re-discover why you fell in love in the first place.

Our next Marriage Workshop Weekend is January 15-17, 2027 in Windsor, CT. Contact us today for information or to register: **helpourmarriage.org** or **(860) 837-0447**.

2026 ARCHBISHOP'S ANNUAL APPEAL

As of today, 16.83% of all Archdiocesan parishioners raised $10 million for our Archdiocesan ministries.
Imagine the difference if one in four parishioners joined in.
Help us reach 26% participation in 2026!!

WE ARE ONE

www.archdioceseofhartford.org/appeal