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ADVENT 2025

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# Connecting to the Word

A Xaverian Journey Through Advent



*Edward Rice*

**XAVERIAN BROTHERS**

*IN HARMONY SMALL THINGS GROW*

# INTRODUCTION

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*How silently, how silently,  
the wondrous gift is giv'n!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
the blessings of His heav'n.  
No ear may hear His coming,  
but in this world of sin,  
where meek souls will receive Him still,  
the dear Christ enters in.  
-Phillips Brooks*

This very familiar verse of a well-loved Christmas carol reminds us of the call of Advent. It is a time to enter the silence in which God speaks God's Eternal Word to us and in us. The daily reflections contained here are the fruit of the reflection, prayer and meditation by which these members of the Xaverian family have "entered in" and waited on the Word of the Advent Scriptures. Brother Theodore James Ryken spoke of his conversion as an experience of being "brought low," of "being put in my place." To know our true place is to become the meek soul of which this favorite carol speaks.

May we be together in meditation and prayer this Advent, that the "dear Christ" may "enter in" to our souls and through us to our sinful and suffering world.

Blessed Advent and Christmas to all.

*Brother John D Hamilton, CFX*

**Brother John D. Hamilton, C.F.X.**  
**General Superior**

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**XAVERIAN BROTHERS**  
IN HARMONY SMALL THINGS GROW

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# Week 1

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Nov. 30 - Dec. 6



“Giant in the Clearing”  
by Brother Edward Rice, C.F.X.

# November 30

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*"Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding; one will be taken, and one will be left." - Mt 24:37-44*

In this parable, Jesus invites us to see holiness in the everyday. A man digging, a woman grinding—ordinary people doing ordinary things. Such scenes, still familiar in rural communities across the world, remind us that God meets us in the midst of daily life.

Yet the mystery remains: one is taken, one is left. This suggests that salvation is not guaranteed by routine alone. Something deeper is required—a heart attuned to God, a life shaped by love.

The Xaverian Charism offers guidance. It calls us to live ordinary lives that bear witness to God's unconditional love. In humility and simplicity, we find grace. From this place, we turn toward God, fall in love with God, and offer ourselves in service as followers of Jesus Christ.

Advent is a season of reflection—a time to consider the gift of Jesus and our response to that gift. Have we loved God, ourselves, and our neighbors well? Do we allow Scripture to speak into our lives? Can we see the sacred in the soil, the grain, the faces around us? Are we cultivating peace within and beyond?

This is our mission: to be ready not through fear, but through love. To live lives of quiet faithfulness. To be found in the field, at the mill, in the classroom, the home, the hospital—wherever God has placed us—bearing witness to hope.

May we embrace the sacred ordinary, and in doing so, be ready to receive the gift of God's presence.

**Let us be people who are ready—not through fear, but through love. Ready to be taken into deeper communion with God. Ready to be found faithful in the ordinary. Ready to live lives that echo the hope of Advent: that God is with us, and our response matters.**

*Brother Michael Foley, C.F.X.*

# December 1

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*“Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them.” – Isaiah 11:6*

Isaiah paints a picture that is almost too good to be true: wolves and lambs, predators and prey, living side by side in harmony. However, this is the promise of Advent, that the Messiah will bring a peace so true that even the fiercest of enemies will be brought together.

As we enter this season of waiting, it's easy to feel that Isaiah's vision is an impossible one. Our world is filled with conflict, division, and fear. Even in our personal lives, we may experience challenging relationships and conflicts. Wolves and lambs do not naturally live in peace among one another; however, Advent calls us to believe that God is at work making what seems impossible, possible.

Advent invites us to soften our hearts, to begin by making peace in our homes, our classrooms, and our communities. When the wolf and the lamb come together, it is a sign that God is at work. This Advent, may we prepare not only for the birth of Christ, but that his peace be born again in us, so that the world might begin to look a little more like Isaiah's vision.

**Lord, teach us to welcome one another as wolves and lambs at the same table so that Your kingdom of harmony may take root in our hearts this Advent. Amen.**

*Lauren Hill*

# December 2

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*“Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I say to you, many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.” – Lk 10:23-24*

I am blessed to have two young children, ages 8 and 10. Each year as Advent begins, I find myself in awe of how they experience the season. Yes, they are excited for gifts under the tree, but their joy goes far deeper. To them, everything during Advent seems touched with meaning—lights, music, family traditions, even the anticipation itself. They see the season with eyes of wonder.

Earlier in the reading for today, Jesus reminds us that God reveals truth to the “childlike.” Watching my children, I understand this more fully. Their openness, trust, and joy allow them to glimpse the heart of Advent: love. Love of friends and family, and above all, the immeasurable love of God, who gives us His only Son on Christmas Day.

As adults, we can become distracted or burdened, missing what is right before us. However, Jesus invites us to see as children do—to let ourselves be surprised, to approach the manger with awe, and to recognize God’s love woven through the season.

This Advent, may we reclaim a bit of that childlike spirit. If we slow down, open our hearts, and see with wonder, perhaps we too will recognize what others have longed for: the beauty of God made visible in our midst.

**Lord, open our eyes and hearts to see this Advent season with the wonder of a child. Help us to recognize Your love in the simple joys around us and to welcome Your Son with awe and gratitude on Christmas Day.**

*Jason Ader*

# December 3

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## *Feast of St. Francis Xavier*

*Jesus summoned his disciples and said, "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd, for they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, for fear they may collapse on the way." - Mt 15:32*

In our lives, whether Christian or not, we always need compassion for ourselves through others, and for us to have compassion for others. This is why, especially during this time of Advent, Jesus invites us to be compassionate in the suffering of others. Compassion, according to the Bible, is a deep sensitivity to the suffering of others, a strong emotional connection that compels us to relieve and help, much like a parent does for their child. In this difficult time, the Catholic Church, our mother, invites us to prayer, contemplation, and acts of fraternity, such as serving others and helping others, in order to rekindle the desire for God and welcome the "coming" of the Savior.

Apart from that, today, December 3, the entire congregation celebrates the feast of the great Missionary Saint Francis Xavier, our patron saint of the congregation.

The missionary words of Saint Francis Xavier are characterized by a passionate call to evangelization, a deep concern for the spiritual well-being of unreached peoples, and an unwavering commitment to spreading the Christian faith, often expressed through direct appeals for more missionaries and detailed accounts of his efforts to teach basic Christian principles. He was always quick to say, "Woe to me if I don't preach the Gospel," emphasizing his deep conviction and sense of urgency.

**Eternal God, lead me on the right path so that, in contemplating You, I may always be ready to serve others while compassionating them for Your glory and Your Love following the example of Jesus our brother and our holy Patron Francis Xavier. You who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.**

*Brother Hubert Mulenga, C.F.X.*

# December 4

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*“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.” – Mt 7:24*

This academic year the St. John’s Prep community has been focusing on three aspects of simplicity: minimizing distractions that lead us to diminish others, building tables of welcome, and creating bridges of connection. These areas of focus are grounded in the words of Pope Leo XIV to leaders of diverse religious traditions who attended his Mass of Installation in May.

Advent is a time of reflection, a time to focus on where we are grounded and whether our grounding, in the words of today’s Gospel, is on a strong foundation of rock or on soft sands so easily worn down. In our world currently, it is easy to diminish, judge and tear down. We see this happening on almost a daily basis. However, such engagement is clearly built on a weak foundation of sand. Attacking, demeaning and diminishing does not allow others to flourish, nor does it create a culture, civic or ecclesiastical, in which all can grow and live as “unique expressions of God’s love in the world.”

Through my XBSS experiences, I know the more we foster connection, the more we engage with others and invite those who are on the margins to the table, the stronger our community becomes and the more effective we are at embracing all people as created in the image and likeness of God.

From readings and stories of the Brothers, I am convinced, now more than ever, that the “freedom and liberation” promised in the Fundamental Principles comes from embracing all people as created in the image and likeness of God, setting our foundation on rock and leading us to nurture strong communities committed to knowing, valuing and loving.

**Emmanuel, God with us, this Advent season empower us to build tables of welcome and bridges of connection grounded on the rock of your love.**

*Dr. Edward Hardiman*

# December 5

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*“And out of gloom and darkness, the eyes of the blind shall see.” - Is 29:18*

Today’s reading exemplifies why I love the book of the prophet Isaiah - orchards the size of forests, sight for the blind, tyranny eradicated, joy for the lowly, shame eliminated, and justice abounding. These verses, so typical of those from Isaiah during the season of Advent, provide a beautiful vision of a world made right, a world where the righteous need not be ashamed, a world where the deaf hear and the poor rejoice. It’s a hopeful vision of what the Messiah can do.

As much as I love the picture Isaiah paints, it’s easy to look around and see that the vision is not reality. The cost of living pushes more families into hardship, our political discourse grows ever more divisive, millions remain displaced from conflicts too easily forgotten, and the voices of those marginalized in our society still struggle to be heard. These facts make it hard to see Isaiah’s vision as remotely possible. It’s easy to feel hopeless and simply close our eyes to reality. It’s easy to wish for a messiah that can literally fix all of our problems.

Yet, that’s not how Jesus does things. He opens our eyes and in doing so opens our hearts. He walks with us fearlessly into the storm. He shows us that even in the midst of darkness there is love, light, and goodness. He promises that he will never leave us to face our fears alone.

This Advent, may we open our hearts to the promise of a true Messiah, one who changes things from the inside out. May we embrace a vision of hope, trusting fully in God’s promise of a world transformed by love.

**Jesus, God with us, open our hearts to your love. Walk with us through this season as we place our hope in you.**

*Stephen Murphy*

# December 6

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*Jesus sent out these Twelve after instructing them thus, "Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, make this proclamation: 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" - Mt 10:5-7*

This passage from the Gospel of Matthew for the first Saturday of Advent reminds us that the fundamental responsibilities Jesus saw in himself and his Disciples were those of both teacher and shepherd.

I have always felt that it is a privilege to work in a Xaverian school and to be part of the XBSS network. As a Xaverian graduate, the profound impact that my teachers and school leaders had on me as a teenage boy trying to find his place in the world was life changing. My parents and my broader Xaverian family, working through the legacy of the Brothers and Theodore James Ryken, helped me better understand and live my faith.

As educators, the awesome responsibility we have on the young people entrusted to us, not only in shaping their young minds, but helping them realize their places in the world, enlightens all God has in store for them. I often feel that Jesus calls us to play a similar role as the Disciples to help pronounce "the Kingdom of heaven is at hand". Through my daily encounters with students and faculty I encounter Jesus and the power of the spirit. The Brothers remind us that through trust, and imitation of Theodore James Ryken, we are joined together in our faith and efforts to build our community, comforted and inspired by the understanding that "in harmony, small things grow."

**Most Holy Spirit, grant me the courage to teach your truth with patience and wisdom, reflecting the love of Jesus in every lesson. Amen.**

*Daniel Sharib*

# Week 2

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Dec. 7 - 13



“Winter Dusk - Boston Common”  
by Brother Edward Rice, C.F.X.

# December 7

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*“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus” – Romans 15:5*

In Romans we see Christ-like unity, humility and compassion within the church, and as believers we are called to welcome and serve one another, mirroring how Christ himself welcomed all people, regardless of race, religion or socio-economic status.

As members of the Xaverian community we too mirror Christ’s actions as we strive to embody the principles of the Xaverian Charism which includes humility and compassion. From St. Francis Xavier himself to all the Brothers who have tirelessly lived the mission for decades, we were given role models of what humility and compassion look like on a daily basis. Thanks to their hard work and dedication, along with their attention to the gospel message, we have schools and institutions that stand as witness to faith in our world today. They know, live, and share their motto “in harmony small things grow.”

Sometimes as human beings we grow tired of doing God’s will, as did the early Christians described in Romans. Yet, “the God of endurance and encouragement” is always there to pick us up, dust us off and send us back out to be missionaries in the world. As a product of a Xaverian education, I am eternally grateful for the endurance and encouragement of my teachers and the Brothers; they have helped shape my understanding of the world, as well as my place in it, through their hard work and dedication.

**Loving Father, help us to encourage one another to live in harmony, accepting each other as brothers and sisters created by you. May we always be united in faith, strengthened and encouraged by Your divine providence, today and everyday.**

*Nicholas Cerreta*

# December 8

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## *Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

*Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. – Lk 1:38*

I find the Immaculate Conception a wonderful yet challenging day to be a theology teacher. It is difficult to explain how the feast doesn't actually refer to Jesus' conception. There is no biblical reference to Mary being conceived without original sin. The passage is about the Annunciation. Yet, in the midst of this confusion, is a particular beauty. The Lord shows respect, care, and love for the human condition. Mary is given the choice to be the mother of our Lord.

We all appreciate a chance to make our own decisions and to participate in God's plan. Mary learns of God's plan for her: "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus" (Luke 1:31). The angel gives Mary space to process this information and ask questions about how something so incomprehensible could be possible. Mary struggles; she doubts; not with the power of God, but with her ability to live up to such privilege. In the end, Mary trusts God's love for her by replying "May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). God knows we need a chance to wrestle with His will and allows us space to ask questions knowing we will put our trust in Him. We believe God wants what is best for us and that with a little bit of faith, we will see the wonders of his love.

**Lord, as we move into this second week of Advent, help us to be like Mary, to accept who we are and what God has called us to be. Teach us to listen to the angels in our lives, calling us to turn our doubts into curiosities, our fear into faith, as we await for your arrival among us this Christmas.**

*Lauren Connolly*

# December 9

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*“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them goes astray,  
will he not leave the ninety-nine in the hills  
and go in search of the stray?” - Mt 18:12*

God does not want a single one of his little ones to be lost.

In today’s Gospel, God’s concern is to save everyone, without exception. He is the Father who, in His infinite love as Creator, wants to grant salvation to each and every one of us, and especially to the little ones.

The little one is compared to a sheep that has gone astray. The shepherd does not hesitate to leave the other ninety-nine sheep on the mountain to search for the one gone astray. If he finds it, he rejoices for it more than the others who have not gone astray. This is the love of a Father who loves all his children; not all in the same way, but each one uniquely.

The little one still needs paternal support to grow in humanity and in his life of faith. He is the very symbol of our human fragility, which calls for God’s grace and intervention.

As children of the same Father, let us allow ourselves to be accompanied by God’s paternal and maternal love so that we may finally hope to live with him for all eternity.

**God, our Father, You love us so much that You come to seek us out even when we are lost. Have mercy on our wanderings and grant us the strength of faith to return to the pasture of Your divine mercy.**

*Brother Marc Kabwita Mufuka, C.F.X.*

# December 10

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*“Though young men faint and grow weary, and youths stagger and fall, they that hope in the LORD will renew their strength, they will soar as with eagles’ wings; They will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint.”*

*- Is 40:30-31*

To say that I have seen the young men in our schools “... faint and grow weary, ... stagger and fall...” is an understatement! As painful as it may be to watch a young person (or anyone for that matter) encounter hardship, each instance also provides an incredible opportunity. Such circumstances are opportunities for us to ponder the timeless question, “How will I support the person before me as they carry their burden?”

As Isaiah points out, a dedicated faith in God and his unwavering goodness certainly represents a worthy tool to navigate any hardship. Yet there is also a role for us, the bystander, to supplement God’s unending love and grace. By offering encouragement, love, and understanding to a person in need, we can provide a timely blessing for those under duress.

The Fundamental Principles also remind us that “As a disciple of Jesus Christ, you are called to ... minister God’s healing touch of love, through word and deed, to all whom you meet...” As we prepare to celebrate Christ’s birth, let us also seek to be a blessing for those who are weary—reminding them, through our presence and love, that God’s grace is always near.

**Lord, help me to be a blessing to those I encounter, especially those in need. May my words and actions reflect your love, so that others may experience your warmth and healing embrace. I ask this in Jesus’ name, Amen.**

*Dr. Jacob Conca*

# December 11

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*I am the LORD, your God, who grasp your right hand; It is I who say to you, "Fear not, I will help you."*

*-Is 41:13*

As Formation Director for XBSS, I support all 13 schools in our network as we build on the mission and charism Theodore James Ryken started. Visiting school communities, the foundational tenet of "enduring personal relationships" permeates my experience, from administrators to faculty and staff to students. While our world today is marked by divisions, violence, hatred, and ignorance, the Xaverian Brothers give us a charism that promotes love, acceptance, peace, integrity, and deep spiritual reflection.

Since I attended Mount Saint Joseph High School, this charism has become a centerpiece of my life. Not only has my Xaverian education provided me with a vocation, it also brought me my wife, a former teacher at MSJ. Before we married, I struggled to trust in the Lord's plan for me and for us, trying to make our long-distance relationship work, while fulfilling my ministerial role at Saint John's High School. That community lifted me through difficult times without me needing to ask for help. After marriage, Mary and I struggled to conceive, losing three babies in the process. Trusting in God's plan was at an all-time low, but through prayer, love, and support and yet another Xaverian community, Our Lady of Good Counsel High School, we weathered the storm.

We welcomed our daughter, Eliora Sol Abdo ("Sol," short for her being born on the summer solstice) on June 20, 2025. Everyday I am both thankful and humbled by this miraculous, beautiful gift we've been given. Despite my lack of trust and my fear of the unknown, God does have a plan. It may not be the easiest one, but often the difficult paths lead us back to God. Ryken and his Band of Brothers experienced this, as do our school communities, and the individuals who make them the most "unique expression of God's love."

**Come Lord Jesus.**

**Come into our waiting.**

**Come into our world.**

**Come into our hearts.**

*Kevin Abdo*

# December 12

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## *Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe*

*“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior.”– Lk 1:47*

*“The Word becomes flesh and dwells among us.”– Jn 1:14*

Today we celebrate Our Lady of Guadalupe’s feast by reflecting on St. Luke’s story of a pregnant Mary visiting a pregnant St. Elizabeth. Reflecting on this biblical story, and the many others of miraculous conceptions and births, I see a central conception and birth miracle: The story of our Infinitely Creative God and Divine Mystery coming to birth in us, which Advent prepares us to celebrate. The Christmas story symbolizes that Divine power, beauty, goodness, truth and love is becoming flesh in each of us. I pray that we Xaverians, Associates, students and alums foster the virtue of simplicity and perceive this deeper love story weaving through all of the sacred words in our Faith journeys, including Mary’s appearances to Juan Diego on today’s feast.

The word “incarnation [become flesh],” summarizes this simple story and is the heart of the Good News from Christ, The Messiah. It boggles our minds to conceive that we share the Divine Life, but this explosive message of Jesus spread like wildfire through the Roman Empire and set countless hearts on fire. Jesus and his followers proclaimed the Kingdom (power) of God within us in a divine community of life where every sparrow and hair on our head is bringing our loving God to birth. How could our own hearts not rejoice as we realize with Mary that we proclaim God’s greatness and are “words” in the Divine Word, Christ, bringing God to birth in our flesh and blood. We could never imagine a more spectacular love story.

**Dear Lady of Guadalupe, help us to fathom this profound love story of the Eternal Word, the greatness of God’s power, beauty, goodness and love, emerging in us, and awaken our minds this Christmas to who we are as Christ’s body and blood in our world.**

*Brother William Griffin, C.F.X.*

# December 13

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## *Memorial of St. Lucy, Virgin and Martyr*

*“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths: All flesh shall see the salvation of God.” - Lk 3:4, 6*

Today, as the Church celebrates the Memorial of St. Lucy, the patron Saint of the blind, it touches me that as I wait for the coming of our savior Jesus Christ, I am also blind and the birth of Christ will be a source of healing to me. I need to receive his light and be a source of hope.

Prophet Elijah is a symbol of hope and a source of light during Advent, which takes us into deep reflection as we prepare to celebrate Christ's birth. We should examine our hearts and our lives so that we may create room for Jesus, turning away from anything that separates us from God.

Advent is a period which gives us a moment of renewal both physical, mental and social, as we prepare to welcome the Lamp of God.

In my society, when a mother expects to give birth, there are four elements that people express to her; joy, love, peace and hope that the child will bring light, not only to their family but to the whole society. These are the same elements that the Catholic Church stresses as we wait for the coming of our savior Jesus Christ.

This period welcomes Christmas which everyone celebrates with joy for the coming of our Savior. For me, this is a time of reuniting and rebirth of our inner soul, spiritually and physically. It is a moment to appreciate the power of God through his Son Jesus Christ whom the whole world praises as we welcome him in our hearts.

**Loving God, in your goodness and love, give us faith like that of St. Lucy so that we may remain truthful to our mission and defend our faith in every moment. We ask this through Christ Our Lord, Amen.**

*Brother Felix Omanyo Oresia, C.F.X.*

# Week 3

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Dec. 14 - 20



“Amid the Bleakness”

by Brother Edward Rice, C.F.X.

# December 14

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*When John the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" — Mt 11:2-11*

What a very odd question for John to ask. John and Jesus were cousins, both well-known leaders and preachers. John even declared himself unworthy to untie Jesus' sandal. He was shocked when Jesus came to him to be baptized, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" So, why would John sound as if he were unsure about Jesus' identity? Maybe because he was arrested, confined, and likely to be put to death, and wanted his disciples to hear Christ's answer for themselves.

Perhaps each of us needs to hear more clearly Christ's answer in our lives as well. The blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.

Have I opened the eyes of someone struggling with difficulties? Have I walked with others of different faiths, lifestyle, race, or ethnicity? Consolated someone who has been ostracized? Listened to complaints with patience? Given new life to someone dying in grief? Warned a friend who has lost the way? Forgiven an unforgivable hurt? Honestly shared my faith with others?

We are all called to live ordinary lives that give witness to God's unconditional love. We fall in love with God, and we put ourselves in God's service. May your encounter with the Xaverian Way, with John the Baptist, with Jesus Himself, help you discover your own giftedness this Advent season.

**"Life's most persistent and urgent question is: what are you doing for others?" (Martin Luther King Jr.) Lord, let my prayer reflect my Advent commitments.**

*Michael Buckley & Jeannette Suflita*

# December 15

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*"By what authority are you doing these things?  
And who gave you this authority?" - Mt 21:23*

For us, Jesus' authority is that of God. But for his contemporaries, nothing was obvious. Today, in the political world, particularly in the DRC, the notion of moral authority is growing, embodied by the leader, the master thinker. For us, this should not be the case, because the only Authority of reference is Christ.

Our Fundamental Principles invite us to listen and show compassion towards our brothers and sisters:

"Listen to your brothers and sisters and sympathize with their difficulties; bear with them in their weaknesses, encourage them, and support them. Strengthen your brothers and sisters...for his service."

Proud power and the spirit of domination never accept the freedom that Jesus brings, in the face of all authority. How will we view our authority in the congregation, at all levels? Overwhelming? Protective?

Christ comes to illuminate our darkness, to establish the reign of God over our lives, our communities, our respective regions. Are we ready to let Jesus reign over us? Christmas is an inner invitation to recognize Jesus' kingship over us. Christmas is approaching, and in the wake of the 29th General Chapter, the call to conversion becomes urgent for our congregation. We cannot welcome Jesus with hearts filled with resentment, hatred, lies, indifference, or attachment to sin. It is time to let the Holy Spirit open our eyes and hearts, like Balaam's, to contemplate the greatness of God and to fully surrender to Him.

**Lord our God, we bless You for Your Son, Jesus Christ, who illuminates our lives. Help us open our hearts to Your kingdom. Grant us the power to live in conversion and become worthy dwellings of Your Son. Amen.**

*Brother Vital-André Mwenge, C.F.X.*

# December 16

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*Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people:*

*“What is your opinion?*

*A man had two sons.*

*He came to the first and said,*

*‘Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.’*

*The son said in reply, ‘I will not,’*

*but afterwards he changed his mind and went.*

*The man came to the other son and gave the same order.*

*He said in reply, ‘Yes, sir,’ but did not go.*

*Which of the two did his father’s will?” – Mt 21:28-32*

Jesus challenges the chief priests and elders to find God’s will in the actions, not the words of sons in His parable. This passage is one of many of Jesus’s teachings that demonstrate the dissonance we experience as we battle with what we know is right in our hearts, with our egos, pride and desires. For the chief priests, Jesus’s lesson must have been very shocking, because they likely felt that their actions were consistent with God’s will. However, God was literally in front of them, and they did not know Him. They were unable to discern Him or His will despite their virtuous acts.

God is in front of us, around us and with us at all times. His works of creation fill our days. Yet, He is challenging us, just like the chief priests, to recognize Him, to listen to Him and to discern His will.

**Most Gracious and Loving God, Help me see You clearly, as I rise in the radiance of Your morning, as I work in the bounty of Your Day, as I rest, under the cosmic vastness of a quiet night. Keep me from running from You, and guide me to seek You, my sweet Lord, my refuge, and my strength.**

*Wendy Kessler*

# December 17

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*“O Lord, I cannot understand your ways but I must adore them”*

*- Fundamental Principles of the Xaverian Brothers*

Today’s Gospel reading focuses on Luke’s description of the Annunciation. Many years ago, I had the privilege of visiting Florence and of viewing the many frescos by Fra Angelico in the Convent of San Marco, which became a Dominican monastery. Every monk’s cell had one of Fra Angelico’s frescoes on one of its walls. The most prominent of the frescoes at San Marco was that of the Annunciation which was painted at the top of a stairway in one of the common areas of the monastery.

The image is rendered with a great sense of simplicity - simplicity in the few shapes used as well as in the muted color scheme. That simplicity helps convey a sense of awe and reverence for a pivotal moment in the unfolding story of the Incarnation. The Angel Gabriel and Mary share the spotlight as Fra Angelico captures Mary’s reaction to Gabriel’s startling announcement that Mary is to give birth to Jesus, the Son of God.

Mary’s expression seems to be one of confusion and anxiety. Gabriel tries to anticipate Mary’s concern with the words, “Do not be afraid, you have found favor with God”. Mary’s expression could also convey a sense of calmness - as if she is willing to trust that God will be with her in this act of faith. “Here I am, the servant of the Lord. Let it be done according to your word”. Later, when Mary visits with her cousin Elizabeth, her cousin utters the words: “Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled”.

There have been countless times in our own personal lives in which we have experienced confusion and anxiety over a crisis situation that has us saying to ourselves: How did this situation come about? How will I get through it? How do I resolve it? I need time to think about my response and, above all, to pray about it. It is only after we explore all the possible resolutions while conversing about it with God can we then respond as best we can and most importantly to trust that God is with me in the process of resolving this situation.

“Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled”.

**Loving God, help me to always trust in your constant presence, not only at times of formal prayer but at any time throughout our day, and that it will guide me through my times of confusion and anxiety.**

*Brother Edward Rice, C.F.X.*

# December 18

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*“Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife and into your home.” – Mt 1:20*

I like to be prepared, plan carefully, and anticipate every possible challenge. In my years as a Catholic school administrator, I have worked hard to chart a well-defined path forward, striving to provide solutions to every need that arises. Yet, no matter how diligently one prepares, life reminds us that we cannot control everything. Inevitably, there come moments when our best-laid plans fall short, and we are invited instead to place our trust in God’s providence.

In this week’s Gospel, Joseph faces one of the most uncertain moments of his life. Learning that Mary is with child, he struggles with what to do. Yet, in a dream, the angel assures him: “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife and into your home.” Joseph’s quiet but decisive “yes” was a courageous act of trust. His willingness to follow God’s call in the face of doubt, models the kind of humility we are called to live.

Theodore James Ryken, the founder of the Xaverian Brothers, once prayed: “O Lord, I cannot understand your ways, but I must adore them.” His words echo Joseph’s yes. They remind us that discipleship does not mean having all the answers but entrusting ourselves to God. Like Joseph, Ryken’s surrender to God should inspire us to walk forward in faith and humility, even when certainty is beyond our reach.

In today’s uncertain world, where lives might be filled with challenges, we may long for clarity and control. Yet it is important to remember that Advent invites us to practice patience and put our trust in God.

**Lord, give us the courage of Joseph and the trust of Theodore Ryken, that even when we cannot understand your ways, we may adore them and find peace in knowing that You are with us.**

*Dr. Patrick Slattery*

# December 19

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*“And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.” - Mt 21:22*

Reflecting on this reading brings a lot to the surface for me because I too can relate to Elizabeth's experience. I recall going through emotional currents that came in waves of anger, frustration, defeat and sadness. Through prayer, I realized that I lost sight of all the good that was in my life and the things that God had already blessed me with. When I began to shift my focus to gratitude for what I did have in my life and silently surrendered to God's will, it confirmed for me that the Lord is always listening and paying attention to our prayers and our calls. God hears the loud cries, our muffled whimpers, the quiet whispers and the silent prayers that we utter wordlessly in our hearts. We must seek to be patient and faithful because what seems urgent to us may not fit the timeline that God has for us. We must Trust in Him without reservation or doubt. “Meanwhile the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along.”

**Lord, thank you for all that you have done, all that you do, and all that you will do in our lives as we continue to give you glory, honor and praise. During this Advent and Christmas season keep us focused on your love, your words and your promise. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”**

*Erga Pierrette*

# December 20

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*“May it be done to me according to your word.” Luke 1:38*

When God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery, Moses tried to get out of it. When God called Jonah to prophesy to Nineveh, he fled. And when God called Jeremiah to become a prophet, Jeremiah claimed he was too young.

But not Mary. When God called her to be the mother of Jesus, she said “May it be done to me.” How was she able to accept God’s call so freely, and how can we learn to do the same when God calls us?

The Fundamental Principles provide advice to help us to say yes when God calls: be prepared, be attentive, be patient.

First, we must prepare ourselves for the possibility that God will call. Mary, though clearly surprised by Gabriel’s announcement, did not need time to ponder whether she would accept this responsibility. She was ready for the moment, and so must we “stand ready to answer.”

Second, unlike Mary and Moses and the prophets, God’s call to us will probably not be so dramatic, so we must be attentive to all the little ways God calls us during the “ordinary, unspectacular” moments of our lives.

Finally, we must be “patient with ourselves and with God.” Ryken discovered that a continual conversion is needed. We must recognize that God’s call is always there, and we must respond to it each day, little by little.

Most of all, Mary trusted. She let go of fear and trusted God’s plan for her and the world. She made herself vulnerable to God’s call and accepted both the joys and the sufferings that being Jesus’ mother would bring. We are called to trust God in the same way.

**Dear God, grant us the ability to trust and to always be prepared to say “Yes” when we hear your call.**

*Kevin Browne*

# Week 4

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Dec. 21 - 25



"Snow Shadows"  
by Brother Edward Rice, C.F.X.

# December 21

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*“The LORD spoke to Ahaz: Ask for a sign from the LORD, your God....” - Is 7:10-11*

As I read my Bible daily, I am reminded of the wondrous miracles and signs from ancient days. The birth of Jesus to the Virgin Mary is one of God’s greatest miracles and a sign of His love for humankind. That same love is revealed to me in the life of our school community. I am blessed to witness God’s presence each day in our students—their laughter in the hallways, their compassion for one another, their determination in the classroom, and their generosity in service.

Advent calls us to wait with hope and to recognize that Christ is already present in our midst. When I see our students supporting one another, striving to grow, and seeking truth, I see the light of Christ breaking through. As a community, Advent challenges us to be more intentional about creating spaces where God’s love is seen and felt. In the way we welcome one another, share joy, and lift each other up, we have the opportunity to be living examples of Emmanuel, “God with us,” for all who walk through our doors. Together, we can make our schools a place where Christ’s presence is not only spoken of but experienced in real ways through acts of kindness, respect, and care.

**Lord, this Advent, help us to continue to be a living witness of God’s presence and a place where Christ is welcomed with joy. Amen.**

*Ron Kelley*

# December 22

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*"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior." – Luke 1:46-47*

This year, the Good Counsel community has chosen to focus on the value of simplicity. I find this ironic; in over a decade of teaching at this school (and well over 20 years of connection to the XBSS network), simplicity is not what immediately comes to mind when I think of my school and my own life. There is always something happening, something to do, somewhere to be. Simplicity so often seems out of reach and, well... complicated.

And yet.

The simple faith of the women in today's readings is not busy, complicated, or hard to grasp. It is clear and direct. Hannah dedicates her son, Samuel, to the Lord. Mary, in her abiding "yes" to God the Father, does the same in turn. Both actions flow through praise and thanksgiving.

I'm grateful for this Advent season's reminder that it really isn't that complicated. A trusting "yes" to God's plan. Praise. Thanksgiving.

**Lord God, strengthen our hearts that we may say "yes" to You in Your great wisdom. Strengthen our voices that we may lift them in praise to You. Strengthen us, Lord, that we may be ready for Your coming.**

*Maggie Bykowski Smith*

# December 23

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*“...his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God.” – Lk 1:64*

Advent is a season, not one day because our hearts do not open all at once. Preparation demands reflection, prayer and action. Today’s gospel turns our attention to John the Baptizer, whose ministry reminds us not simply to welcome the birth of Jesus, but to open our hearts to respond to the Lamb of God who comes for the forgiveness of our sins.

Throughout Advent we realize that our response to God must be our very life, freely offered to the world as a sign of God's love. Elizabeth trusted the Lord and that trust filled her with the courage to respond to God despite the noise of others. John too trusted the Lord and it filled him with both zeal and humility to prepare the way and act with God's will.

When I was 18 and graduating, Brother Bonaventure gifted each senior a copy of the “Good News New Testament.” It came with the message that the preparation we received was not simply for college and worldly success, but for us to respond to the call to live a life of love as disciples of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Secular society would have us believe we are formed by and for the things of this world. Advent reminds us that each of us is created by the God of love in God's image and according to God's likeness, to be a unique expression of that love. Let us praise and bless God with our words and deeds, our very being.

**Lord purify my heart and my intentions. Burn away the fears and pride that restrict me. Cleanse me of the attachments that chain me. I know you are with me. Help me to respond to your call and to be a faithful servant of Your will. Amen.**

*Kevin Shearer*

# December 24

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*“A House for the Lord, A Dawn for the World” — Pope Benedict XVI*

Today, we are invited to reflect on God’s promises; ancient, enduring, and now on the brink of fulfillment.

In the first reading, King David plans to build a house for the Lord, a permanent dwelling for the ark of the covenant. However, God redirects David’s ambition. God who will build for David—a kingdom that will endure forever. God is preparing a lineage through which the Savior will come. The house of David becomes the cradle of divine mercy.

The Gospel voices the prophetic song of Zechariah, father of John the Baptist. His tongue, once silenced, now bursts in praise saying the Lord has “come to his people and set them free.” The long night of waiting is ending, dawn approaches. The Messiah is nearby.

Zechariah’s canticle is rich with hope: “In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us.” This dawn is Jesus Christ, Son of David, the fulfillment of the covenant, the light that scatters darkness.

What kind of house are we building for the Lord? Is it a house of prayer, of mercy, of welcome? Advent is not only about waiting, it is about preparing. Like David, we may have grand plans, yet God’s vision is always greater. He desires not buildings of stone, but hearts of flesh.

We may have experienced silence, doubt, or fear, yet God’s mercy opens our lips to sing again. Dawn is coming. We must not miss it.

Let us welcome the Light and let Christ shine into every shadow of our lives. God’s covenant is unbreakable. His love endures. Prepare the Way: Be prophets of hope in a world that longs for peace.

**May our hearts become the house where Christ is born anew. Amen.**

*Brother Alex Brian Musoke, C.F.X.*

# December 25

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## *The Nativity of the Lord*

*“And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.”*

*-Lk 2:1-14*

The focus in today's reading is “the baby Jesus” which reminded me of the tradition in my parish church as a child of the Christmas procession. In the darkness of the church, singing “Silent Night, Holy Night” the angels, shepherds, and the Holy Family process in to present the newborn baby to the Pastor who placed it in the manger, where all our hopes, dreams, prayers, and petitions were placed before the newborn King. Even the hardest of hearts is open to the peace and tranquility that only a baby can bring to us. We experience the baby year after year and it never gets old.

This same baby becomes our Eucharistic Lord on the altar day after day. We, as Xaverian Brothers, Associates, and coworkers in our ministry, make the Eucharist the center of our lives. We become the bread that is broken and shared with each other and those whose lives we touch.

**This Christmas Day may we all meet in spirit at the manger and as we gaze at the baby in swaddling clothes, the baby who becomes the Eucharistic presence in our lives, may we remember each other in joy, peace, and love.**

*Brother William Ciganek, C.F.X.*

# About the Authors

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## **Kevin Abdo**

Kevin is the Formation Director for the XBSS network, and a graduate of Mount Saint Joseph '07. He lives in the Baltimore area with his wife, Mary, and daughter Eliora.

## **Jason Ader**

Jason is the Assistant Principal for Student Affairs and Programming at Mount Saint Joseph High School. He is also a 2003 graduate of the Mount, and has worked on the faculty for the past 18 years.

## **Kevin Browne**

Kevin is in his 21st year at Saint John's High School in Shrewsbury, MA where he has served as a Campus Minister, Administrator, and Religious Studies teacher. He is married with two teenage children.

## **Michael Buckley & Jeannette Suflita**

Mike and Jeannette are Xaverian Associates living in Ellicott City, MD. Mike taught at Holy Cross in Brooklyn and Our Lady of Good Counsel. He served as Adult Formation Director in various parishes in MD and as Sales Representative for several publishing firms. Jeannette was Director of Religious Education in parishes in Buffalo, NY and Associate Director of Religious Education for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. She also served as Organization Development Consultant at The Johns Hopkins Department of Nursing.

## **Maggie Bykowski Smith**

Maggie is a 2008 graduate of Our Lady of Good Counsel High School. After over a decade as a faculty member in the school's English Department, Maggie now leads the Campus Ministry team in the Office of Mission & Identity.

## **Nicholas Cerreta**

Nick has dedicated his professional life to his alma mater, Xavier High School. He has served in various educational and leadership roles at Xavier beginning in 2005. In January 2025, he was named President of Xavier High School, a role that underscores both his commitment to Catholic education and his deep belief in the transformative power of the Xavier experience.

## **Brother William Ciganek, C.F.X.**

Brother William is the Pastoral Associate at St. Stephen Church in Kingsville, MD and has served as a teacher at St. John's, Shrewsbury, MA, Mount St. Joseph High School, and as a teacher and headmaster at Xavier High School.

## **Dr. Jacob Conca**

Jacob '94, became Head of School at Xaverian Brothers High School in 2019. He has spent 22 years in the XBSS network, during which time he has held numerous leadership roles. In addition to his work at Xaverian, he serves on the Board of Trustees at Xavier High School in Connecticut, Notre Dame Academy in Hingham, MA, and Dana Hall School in Wellesley, MA. Together with his wife, he has three daughters.

## **Lauren Connolly**

Lauren is the Theology Department Chair and Campus Minister for Christian Service at Malden Catholic High School. She lives in Wakefield, Massachusetts with her husband, Liam, her 12 year old son, Asher, and her dog, Gilbert.

**Brother Michael Foley, C.F.X.**

Brother Michael spent many years in Kenya, Uganda and Sudan/South Sudan in a variety of ministries including teaching, administration, and work with refugees.

**Brother William Griffin, C.F.X.**

Brother Bill has served as a teacher, administrator, counselor, writer, missionary and analyst in Haiti, Africa, and in the USA for the Archdiocese of Washington, the Archdiocese of Baltimore, at Xaverian High School, NY, Mt. St. Joseph's College HS, The Center of Concern and The Center of Learning.

**Dr. Edward Hardiman**

Ed is husband to Kara, dad to Eddie, Matt, Julia and Owen and currently serves as the Head of School at St. John's Prep. Ed is a 1988 graduate of Xaverian Brothers High School and has been involved with Xaverian education and Sponsorship since 1993.

**Lauren Hill**

Lauren is the new principal at Saint John's High School in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts. She taught at SJHS from 2014-2020 as a High School English teacher, and spent the last five years as an Assistant Principal at Xaverian Brothers High School.

**Brother Marc Kabwita Mufuka, C.F.X.**

Brother Marc joined the Xaverian Brothers in 2007. He worked in formation at the novitiate from 2011-2013 and then in the postulancy from 2013-2017. He currently serves as the Director of the Sacred Heart Community in Likasi, Congo.

**Ron Kelley**

Ron is a Christian, a husband, a basketball coach and the Dean of Student Life at Nazareth Regional High School. He also manages extra-curricular activities like school trips and clubs. Ron is most proud of his work of 16 years as a mentor and coach of the girls basketball team.

**Wendy Kessler**

Wendy is the Campus Ministry Director for Lowell Catholic. In her spare time, she teaches Uechi Ryu Karate, a traditional martial art from Okinawa. Wendy is married, has two sons, and three rambunctious rescue dogs.

**Brother Hubert Mulenga, C.F.X.**

Brother Hubert is a member of the Regional Council and resides in the Lubumbashi community of the Xaverian Brothers.

**Stephen Murphy**

Stephen is the Coordinator of Campus Ministry at St. Xavier High School where he has also taught Theology for the last 19 years. He lives in Louisville, KY with his wife Faith and their three children.

**Brother Alex Brian Musoke, C.F.X.**

Brother Alex Brian is from Uganda and is part of the community of Xaverian Brothers in Kenya. He is a trained Psychologist and is currently working in the Diocese of Lodwar, Kenya.

**Brother Vital-André Mwenge, C.F.X.**

Brother Vital is an experienced teacher, administrator, and formator. He is currently the director of the new Rijken Educational Center, located in Kipushi. Brother Vital currently serves as Secretary of the Conference of Major Superiors for the eight dioceses of Katanga, the province in southeastern Congo where the Brothers' works are located.

**Brother Felix Omany Oresia, C.F.X.**

Brother Felix joined the Xaverian Brothers in 2018. He studied sociology at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Nairobi. He now serves the mission of the Xaverian Brothers at St. Patrick's Boys School in South Sudan.

**Erga Pierrette**

Erga is in an inaugural role, Dean of Community Culture and Equity at Malden Catholic. Erga has two sons who graduated from MC class of '21, '23 and has two daughters who currently attend MC; Jahlaina, is a sophomore and Giuliannah is a junior. Erga is a community organizer and is passionate about environmental justice.

**Brother Edward Rice, C.F.X.**

Brother Edward is a professional watercolorist who taught at St. John's High School in Shrewsbury MA, at St. John's Preparatory School in Danvers, MA and is currently an art instructor at the Melrose Senior Center. He resides in the Brothers Residence in Malden, MA.

**Daniel Sharib**

Daniel is the Principal and a Social Studies teacher at Xaverian in Brooklyn. He is a graduate from the Class of 1996. This is his 26th year working at Xaverian.

**Kevin Shearer**

Kevin has a lifelong connection with the Xaverian Brothers as friend, student, collaborator, and Associate. He cherishes the companionship of the entire Xaverian community.

**Dr. Patrick Slattery**

Patrick is the Executive Director of the Xaverian Brothers Sponsored Schools network. A graduate of Xavier High School in Middletown, CT, Patrick credits the Xaverian Brothers for igniting his interest in teaching and working in Catholic education.



# Project Contributors

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## **Gail Dennig**

Gail is a Xaverian Associate, and served as English teacher at St. John's Prep for 20 years, and Department Co-chair for six years.

## **Brother Edward Driscoll, C.F.X.**

Brother Edward has served the educational ministry of the Congregation both in the U.S. and Bolivia. After his term as General Superior, he dedicated himself to teaching immigrants English, to the ministry of spiritual direction and to the promotion of racial justice.

## **Brother John D. Hamilton, C.F.X.**

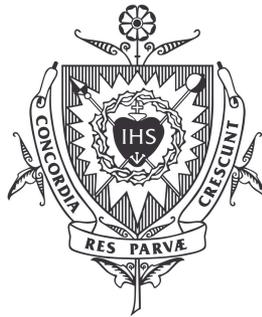
Brother John was elected to serve as General Superior in July 2025. He had served as Vicar 2013-2019 and on the General Council in previous years. Prior to his Congregational leadership roles, he was a teacher, retreat leader and religion department chair at Xavier High School, Middletown, CT.

## **Brother Lawrence Harvey, C.F.X.**

Brother Larry currently serves as the Vicar for the Congregation and is on the leadership team at the Generalate. He had served previously as General Superior and a member of the leadership council, as well as Director of Xaverian Brothers Sponsored Schools.

## **Stephanie Stricker**

Stephanie has served the mission of the Xaverian Brothers for 22 years in various advancement roles. She currently serves as the Executive Director of Advancement and Director of Planned Giving.



# Notes

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# Notes

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# About the Xaverian Brothers

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The Xaverian Brothers are a community of consecrated laymen who as religious Brothers participate in the Roman Catholic Church's mission of evangelization. Founded in Belgium by Theodore James Ryken in 1839 to be missionaries, the Brothers have been educators in the U.S. since 1854. The ministry in the U.S. includes 13 Xaverian Brothers Sponsored Schools, as well as many activities of the Brothers in direct service to refugees, prisoners, adult education, and the homeless. Xaverian Brothers have expanded their ministry work among the poor in Kenya, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Haiti, while continuing their historic connection with schools in Belgium and the U.K. The Xaverian mission touches the lives of the most vulnerable wherever the Brothers serve.



May your Advent  
journey give you hope,  
and help prepare you  
for the real meaning of  
Christmas, and may the  
coming of Jesus give  
you peace.



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