



Branches on the Vine

FEBRUARY 14 - 20, 2026



Parishioners from Sacred Heart Parish in Suffield participate in the mask-making activities during last year's Mardi Gras celebration to kick off the Lenten season.
SUBMITTED PHOTO

As winter lingers and Lent approaches, Sacred Heart Parish in Suffield is once again inviting parishioners to gather for a joyful celebration that brings the community together before the reflective season begins. On Feb. 15, following the 10:30 a.m. Mass, parishioners are encouraged to head to the church hall for the second annual Mardi Gras celebration—a lively afternoon of food, music and fellowship.

Mardi Gras celebrations, especially those rooted in New Orleans tradition, are an institution in themselves, culminating with Fat Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday on Feb. 18. At Sacred Heart, the spirit of Mardi Gras is embraced not simply as a party, but as a meaningful pause before the Church enters Lent—a season centered on prayer, fasting and almsgiving in preparation for Easter.

Last year's inaugural event drew between 80 and 100 people, ranging from senior citizens to young families with children, and organizers say the response was overwhelmingly positive.

"I work with a gal who goes to a church in Hartford and one Lent the priest had a Mass on Mardi Gras night and asked people to bring what they were giving up for Lent," Jeanne Forschino, who heads the Sacred Heart Social Committee, explains. "I thought that was a great idea and just think of how this would impact children at the Mass, to visibly see their parents presenting

something and themselves bringing something as well."

Forshino adds attendance is strongest when activities are held immediately after weekend Mass and paired with food, which led the committee to plan a lunch following the final Sunday Mass. After limited participation in a written Lenten intentions book last year, the group will instead invite parishioners to place name tags with Lenten promises into a basket for the altar. This year's celebration will feature a catered meal (tickets are \$15 per adult and \$5 per child) to help cover costs. Tables will include information about Lenten devotions, offering attendees a transition from celebration to reflection.

Forschino notes barbecue food will be served, including pulled pork, smoked chicken, macaroni and cheese (a gluten free option will be available), green beans with almonds, rice and beans, and chicken tenders.

Music will fill the hall thanks to Paul Kulas, a beloved parishioner in his mid-90s who plays saxophone and clarinet, adding warmth and nostalgia to the afternoon. Children will also enjoy activities such as

making Mardi Gras masks and coloring beads to take home.

The event follows a tradition Sacred Heart has been building in recent years: creating opportunities for parishioners to gather beyond Sunday Mass. From barn dances hosted by

parish families to themed dinners for Valentine's Day and St. Patrick's Day, these events have helped strengthen parish life. Mardi Gras, however, has captured something special.

For Father Joseph Keough, pastor of Sacred Heart Parish, the event will be a "fun-raiser" and he credits Forschino's dedication and perseverance.

"Jeanne is a very determined person and she's done a fantastic job with it," he adds. As Lent begins just three days later, Sacred Heart's Mardi Gras celebration serves as a notable commencement to the 40 days that recall Jesus' time in the wilderness. For more information or to attend, parishioners may contact Forschino at 860.254.5421.

- Story by Jim Tierney



Upcoming Events

02/25 WEDNESDAY 6:30PM - 8PM

ALPHA | READY TO EXPLORE LIFE'S BIG QUESTIONS?

Our Lady of Sorrows Church,
79 New Park Ave, Hartford

Alpha is a series of conversations that explore life, faith, and meaning. Each session includes a free community meal, a short video, and an open discussion where no question is off limits. It's a safe and welcoming space. No pressure, no judgment, and no cost. Everyone is welcome regardless of background or belief.

Starting Wednesdays, February 25,
6:30PM - 8:00PM

Register now!

Questions? Call (860) 233-4424

or email Rosa at

rmarcano@olsparish.comcastbiz.net

02/22 SUNDAY 3PM - 8:15PM

LENTEN RETREAT FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Holy Family Passionist Retreat Center,
303 Tunxis Rd, West Hartford

Join other young adults for an afternoon and evening of prayer, community, and reflection to deepen your Lenten journey. In this retreat, we will ask: how can my Lenten practices become more contemplative? And how, in turn, can my way of living become more contemplative, overall? We will explore the rich tradition of Christian contemplation—from the Desert Fathers and Mothers to the mystics through the ages—to gain insights into the contemplative dimensions of Lent and entirety of the Christian life. The retreat program will include time for personal reflection, small group sharing, community building, a delicious dinner, and Sunday Mass with our regular 7:00 p.m. worshipping community.

Offering: \$50, includes dinner (\$75 more if you can, \$25 less if you can't)

To learn more or register visit:

www.holyfamilyretreat.org/calendar/len-ten-young-adults

SACRED SOUNDS CONCERT SERIES
presents
At the Foot of the Cross
a Lenten Choral Meditation
conducted by Dr. Gabriel Löfvall
featuring Soli Deo Gloria Chamber Ensemble

First Friday of Lent
February 20, 2026
7 o'clock in the evening
Cathedral of St. Joseph
140 Farmington Avenue
Hartford, CT 06105
Free admission

The Cathedral of Saint Joseph Sacred Sounds Concert Series and the Cathedral Schola Cantorum present: *At the Foot of the Cross*, the first in a series of annual Lenten choral meditations. Through sacred music of the Renaissance, Baroque, and Romantic eras, featuring Allegri's *Miserere*, Rheinberger's *Stabat Mater* and *Abendlied*, and music by Purcell, Palestrina, Byrd, and Duruflé, these contemplative choral selections trace the Lenten journey from penitence to quiet hope. The program is conducted by Dr. Gabriel Löfvall, with the Soli Deo Gloria Chamber Ensemble, Cathedral Organist Jacob Dowgiewicz, and soloists from the Schola Cantorum. We invite listeners not simply to hear a concert, but to enter into a shared moment of reflection as the somber Lenten season begins.

For information, go to: hartfordcathedral.org/concert



23rd Annual 3-21-26

5 Mile Race

2 Mile Race

2 Mile Fitness Walk

Kids Fun Run

Registration and Info:

www.ctshamrockrun.com