

# Local Priest Carries on Family Tradition With Dedication to Bright Christmas

by John Alexander

FOREST HILLS — Father Francis Passenant credits his parents for his dedication to the Bright Christmas Fund.

"They would send something to the Bright Christmas Fund every year, and I remember that The Tablet would list all the names of those who gave to Bright Christmas in the form of a nativity scene, Father Passenant recalled. "You might have needed a magnifying glass to see it, but every donor's name was listed."

Through his parents' generosity and decades of participation in Bright Christmas, he said he also realized the fund's impact.

"Many times, I feel that there are children who have nothing for Christmas," he said, "and whatever little gift the kids get through Bright Christmas might just make a difference and make them feel that they are special."

Last year, Father Passenant discovered a unique way to carry on his family's legacy. He invited his parishioners at Our Lady Queen of Martyrs — where he has served for the last 21 years — to participate by contributing to a second collection at Mass while vowing to personally match whatever contributions they gave.

"I said, 'I'm throwing the gauntlet out to you, so instead of throwing a dollar, throw in a 20. Instead of a five, throw in a 10,' and it ended up being \$995," Father Passenant said.

He rounded it up to \$1,000 and then added \$1,001 of his own money, bringing the total to \$2,001. When asked about the significance of his adding the dollar, Father Passenant laughed and said he remembered the days they would print the amounts each parish gave and how adding the extra dollar would put his parish in the higher bracket.

Father Passenant credits his staff and parishioners' dedication to helping those in need through various initiatives and fundraisers. Our Lady Queen of Martyrs was first in last year's annual Catholic appeal. The church also has a giving tree with donations earmarked for Catholic Charities, filled two trucks with food for Thanksgiving, and donated coats for migrants.

"My parishioners truly understand generosity and always step up when asked," he said.



The Bright Christmas Fund was started in the 1960s by Don Zirkel, then editor of The Tablet, who saw the financial struggles many families faced during the holiday season. In the early 1980s, The Tablet's Editor Emeritus Ed Wilkinson took the reins and helped the fund continue to grow.

Father Passenant said this year he would add the second collection for Bright Christmas during the parish's three Masses on Monday, Dec. 9 — the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. He said he hopes the parish raises at least the same amount as last year.

"It's a great parish with wonderful and very generous parishioners who always come through when called upon," Father Passenant said. "When you give, you get it back tenfold, if not more."

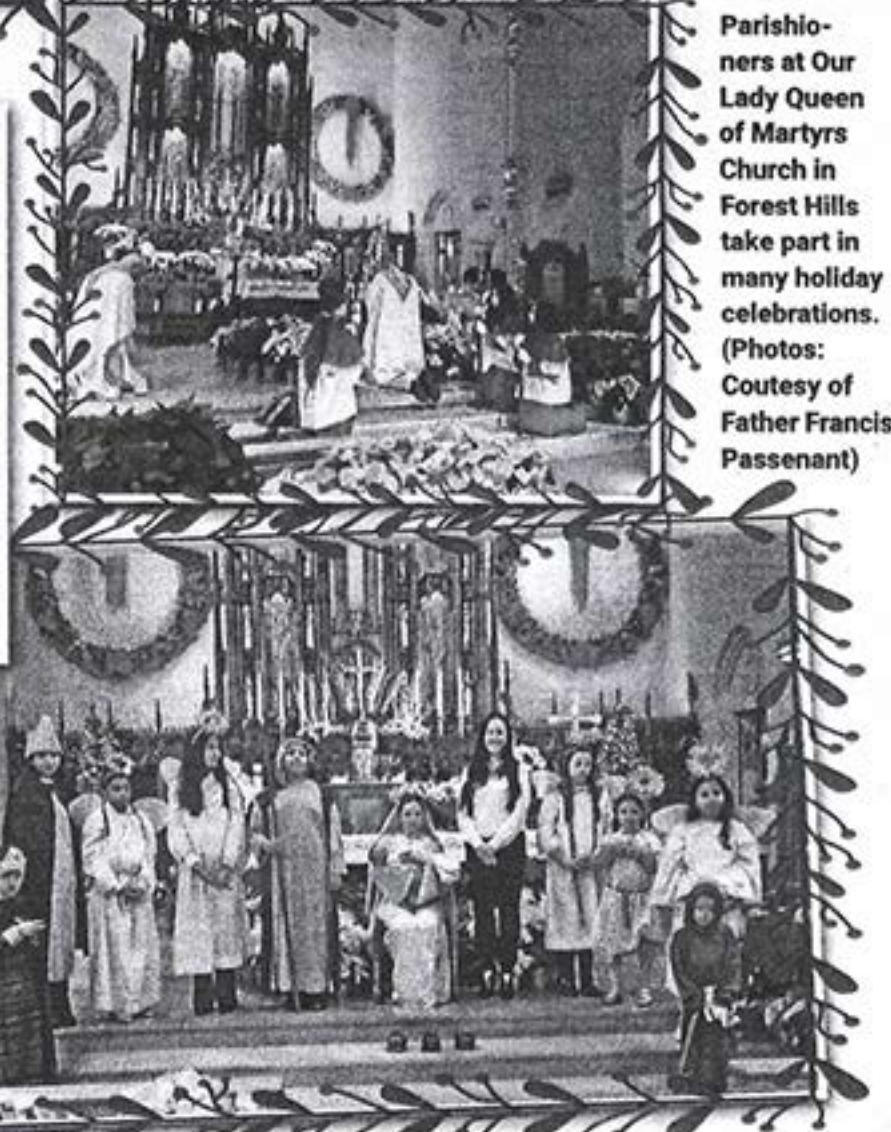
"It's all about the parish who took the challenge and made the difference."

## How to help

If you'd like to donate, visit [thetablet.org/brightchristmas](http://thetablet.org/brightchristmas).

Or, write a check made out to "The Tablet's Bright Christmas" and mail it to:

**The Tablet Bright Christmas Fund**  
856 Pacific Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11238



Parishioners at Our Lady Queen of Martyrs Church in Forest Hills take part in many holiday celebrations. (Photos: Courtesy of Father Francis Passenant)