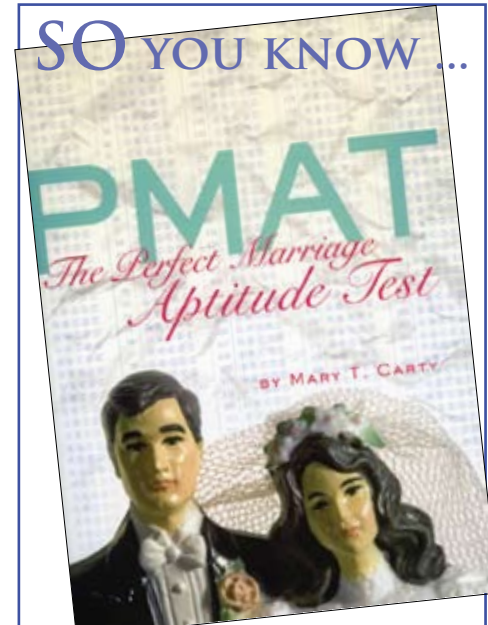


# SEASONED OBSERVER



"PMAT: The Perfect Marriage Aptitude Test" by Mary T. Carty. Glitterati Incorporated (New York, 2009). 144 pp., \$18.95.

Feeling a need to reconnect? Try a quick quiz

Mary Carty's book, "PMAT: The Perfect Marriage Aptitude Test," should not be read alone and placed on the bookshelf to collect dust. Instead, it should be shared with a loved one and kept readily available for later reference.

Within each chapter is a short opening and a list of multiple-choice questions related to real-life scenarios: Think standardized test, but without the timer and the calculator. Carty actually encourages readers to take their time to read and answer the questions. And although there is an answer sheet (No. 2 pencils optional), answer D is open for the readers to fill in their own responses.

The scenarios are not only fun and enjoyable to read, they also can spark meaningful conversations between a couple. Perhaps a particular circumstance — such as a partner mowing over a prized iris bed — never happens in the readers' lives, but the situation might encourage a discussion that is realistic.

Reading the book together also can be a good way to connect with a spouse. It is a joint activity that forces a couple to take a moment and focus just on themselves and their relationship. Carty's book is unique in that it is an activity book for two people. It does not preach but it does encourage conversation and offer suggestions.

Although the book does not offer groundbreaking advice or solutions, it does have a lot of "duh, we should have tried this" moments. Carty's book is fun, important and a solid read.

—Reviewed by Regina Linksey, CNS

## Surgeon to the Saints

BY AMANDA HUDSON  
Observer News Editor

Her very first job was a decapitation.

The Mother of God statue had fallen hard enough to crack off her head, Gloria Visell says as she recalls just how she got started many years ago in her work of repairing religious statues. Parishioners at old St. Mary Church in Rockford had put the statue back together the best they could, using ribbons to try to hide the scar. But it just didn't look right.

Visell, of Winnebago, had studied art and painting before she began raising her family. With most of her children in school at that point, she volunteered her artistic services. St. Mary pastor, Augustinian Father Edward Kersten, accepted her offer immediately.

His confidence in her abilities gave her the needed boost to attempt the repairs, she says. Her then-two-year-old youngest son enjoyed accompanying her, especially when one of the priests would invite them to the rectory so Edward could help himself to a dresser drawer that was always filled with candy.

That first statue turned out well, and Visell continued volunteering to restore the many other statues in the church. Some of the church candles were emitting styrene, she says, which was coating the statues, making them dull and gray.

The Infant of Prague was her second patient. He and most of the others at St. Mary's just needed a good cleaning and a few paint touch ups, she says.

Word of her work on the statues began to spread. "People started bringing me little statues," she says, "and then some began bringing outdoor statues, which need outdoor paints and finishes."

Visell appreciated that "people brought things that meant a lot to them." She discovered that "I could kind of pray, in a way, with my paintbrush. It was hard work (at times), but different from housework. It was meditative."

The needs of each statue have ranged from a complete overhaul to touch ups, she says, and some of the repair efforts have been "trial and error." Her tools include toothbrushes, Q-tips and dental instruments for hard-to-reach places.

"Some statues are really old and very fragile, and others come to me in (sturdy) condition," she notes. Some statues have been made of plaster; others were concrete, stone or marble. Most of her work has been with religious statues for parishes and individuals, along with an occasional bust or outdoor



Gloria Visell brushes off a statue of Our Lady of Fatima, whose smashed face, Visell will repair. (Photos provided)

rooster statue.

She notes that the images of Mary have changed through the decades, with the older statues filled with many delicate details. At the request of one customer, Visell contacted an antique dealer about a statue, which was able to be traced back to Germany and was likely part of a Stations of the Cross scene.

Visell now charges a "small amount" for her work, and considers many of her hours of work as "part of my time and talent," she says.

"I like images," she says. "They help me focus

(my prayer), and statues can trigger a lot of thoughts and meditation."

Her next big project is at St. Anthony of Padua Church. She and a parish staff member will be working on the backdrop at the parish's shrine. Although Visell sees her endeavors as a "solitary work," she thinks having a co-worker for the project will be fun.

As it has over these past 20-some years, her labor of love for the saints and for people continues to evolve.

## Illinois widow leaves \$2 million to parish

Before her death in October 2008, Alyce Christopher was a familiar face at St. Mary Nativity Parish in Joliet.

Father Chris Groh, the pastor, said she was always around to lend a helping hand at women's club bake sales or senior citizens' events. In her younger years, he said, she was very involved in the parish's school.

But no one suspected that her helping hand would be so generous.

On June 11, the parish announced that Christopher had left \$2 million to St. Mary Nativity.

Parishioners often bequeath money to the church in their wills, Father Groh said, but Christopher's gift dwarfs the next largest donation in his memory, which was \$240,000.

Christopher was a lifelong member of the parish. She was baptized, confirmed, and

married there, and graduated from the parish school's eighth grade in 1934.

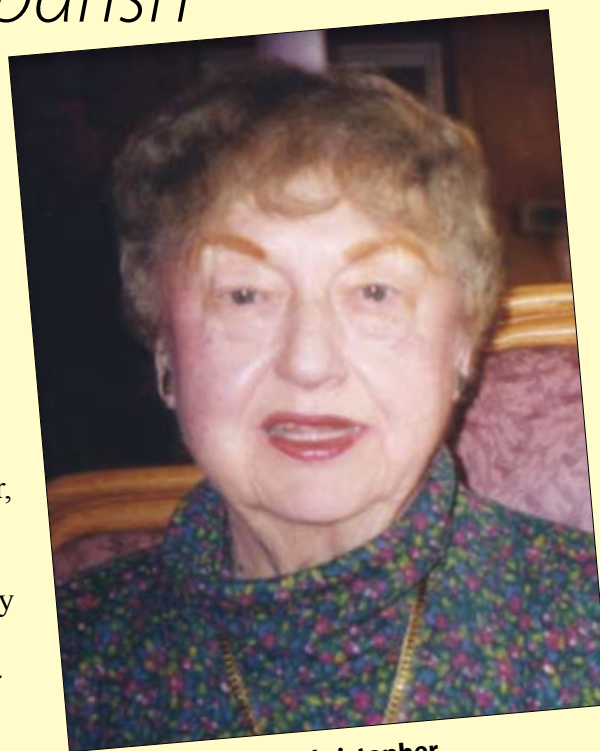
Although, technically, Christopher left her estate to the parish in general, Father Groh said that "her intent verbally was to benefit the school."

He recalls one incident more than 10 years ago when she mentioned a dream she had about giving a million dollars to the school.

"She kind of smiled and said, 'Father, if you had a million dollars, what would you do with it?'"

The priest told her that kind of money could provide St. Mary Nativity's students with new insights and opportunities they otherwise wouldn't have had.

—CNS



Alyce Christopher

## Foundation reports U.S. charitable giving down, but boost in church gifts

Though Giving USA Foundation reported U.S. charitable giving was down overall last year, the organization's data showed an increase in church offerings.

With charitable donations reaching an estimated \$307.65 billion in 2008, the Giving USA 2009 report — released June 10 — confirmed a 2 percent drop from 2007 giving, which totaled a record \$314.07 billion. It was the first decline in charitable giving the group has reported since 1987 and only the second since Giving USA began publishing annual reports in 1956.

"With the United States mired

in a recession throughout 2008, there was no doubt in anyone's mind that charitable giving would be down," said Del Martin, chairwoman of Giving USA Foundation, a research organization backed by the fundraising industry.

Charitable foundations saw the biggest decrease in giving, with a whopping 19.2 percent decline, but religious congregations and other religious organizations received an estimated \$106.89 billion in 2008, a 5.5 percent increase over the previous year.

—CNS

## DESTINATION



(Photo: www.shrineofstbernadette.com)

## Basilica of St. Francis Xavier

**Destination:** The Basilica of St. Francis Xavier is in downtown Dyersville, Iowa. If you plan to chase grounders at the "Field of Dreams" in Dyersville, make sure to drive downtown to see the church under the spires. Dyersville is about 26 miles west of Dubuque on U.S. Route 20.

Masses at the parish are 4 p.m., Saturday; 7, 8:30, 10:30 a.m. in English and noon in Latin on Sunday; 6:30 a.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday; 5:15 p.m., Wednesday, and 8:30 a.m., Friday.

There are weddings at 1:30 p.m. every Saturday in July, so you might plan your visit around them.

**Why to go:** Built in 1888, the basilica is a stunning example of Gothic architecture, which was repainted and refreshed in 2000-2001. New 24 carat gold and silver leaf was applied, giving the church its like-new gleam and shine.

In the back are two confessionals, carved of butternut wood. They were built by the Dubuque Altar Company and installed in 1897.

At the sides of the main altar are two of the basilica's 64 stained glass windows. They depict the adoration of the magi and the resurrection.



In the cross at the end of the restored center aisle are five marble pieces — symbols of the five wounds of Christ — and made from marble that was on the floor of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Under the center piece is also a chip from the Grotto at Lourdes, France.

Before you go, check out the basilica Web site for an electronic brochure to guide you on your self-tour.

**Access:** The front steps could be a bit of an obstacle for some, but once inside the church has a wide center aisle to allow fairly easy movement for anyone.

**(Grand) Kid friendly:** As with any parish, children are welcome.

**Info:** Address: Basilica of St. Francis Xavier, 104 Third St. SW, Dyersville, IA 52040. Phone: (rectory office) 563/875-7325. Web: www.xavierbasilica.com.

—By Sharon Boehlefeld

We welcome your suggestions for 'Destinations.' If you have a photo, or just an idea, send it to "S.O. Destinations" at The Observer, 555 Colman Center Dr., P.O. Box, 7044, Rockford, IL 61125, or to [observer@rockforddiocese.org](mailto:observer@rockforddiocese.org).