



Branches on the Vine

AUGUST 16 - 22, 2025

CATHOLIC PARISH TAKES FLIGHT AT ANNUAL BALLOON FESTIVAL



For the second year in a row, Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Plainville will have a booth for evangelization during the upcoming Plainville Fire Company Hot Air Balloon Festival.
PHOTO BY KAREN AVITABILE

Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Plainville is inviting people who have questions about the Catholic Church to ask them during the town's upcoming balloon festival.

For the second year, newcomers and returning Catholics will be welcomed to the parish booth during the 38th annual Plainville Fire Company Hot Air Balloon Festival, which runs Aug. 22 and 23 at Norton Park.

"Some people have wandered away because of schedule, work or it slipped off the radar during the coronavirus," pastor M. David Dawson says. "We want everybody to come home or welcome those who have never been to church to come."

Father Dawson learned about the balloon festival, one of Plainville's signature events, soon after his appointment as pastor in 2023. He suggested last year that the parish set up a booth to reach out to the community and evangelize at the same time.

"Our faith should not stay within the four walls of the church," he says. "Everyone needs Christ."

Similar to last year, a committee will work in shifts at the parish booth to greet people, engage in friendly conversation and pray with anyone who wishes to do so. Volunteers will also hand out religious medals, prayer cards, rosaries, trinkets for children, and flyers with information about the church, Mass times and confession schedule.

"We want to have a real presence and an impact on people in our town," Father Dawson says. "This is a chance to make our presence felt among our community. We are part of Plainville, and we want people to come home."

During the balloon festival, Father Dawson, donned in a cassock, spends most of his time walking around the park "to give people a little nudge," he says, "to remind them that the Catholic Church is here for them."

Homebound parishioners who are unable to participate in the balloon festival are asked to pray for the volunteers and the people they will encounter. "Pray that the Lord will work through the volunteers and his words and attitude will come through their mouths and actions," Father Dawson says.

"Pray that people who have never been Mass-goers start coming, and pray that those who have wandered will allow the Lord to open their hearts to his spirit."

All festival-goers are encouraged to stop by the booth for Our Lady of Mercy Parish. Weather permitting, the balloon festival runs 3 to 10 p.m. on Aug. 22, and 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. on Aug. 23 at Norton Park on South Washington Street. Crafters, vendors, food trucks, carnival rides and entertainment will be offered on both days.

At dusk on Friday, a balloon glow – when tethered balloons are illuminated from within the park at the same time – and a fireworks display will light up the sky.

On Saturday, balloons are scheduled to take flight from the park at 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. The balloons are a spectacle that captivate several neighboring communities too.

Also on the second day of the festival, a classic and muscle car exhibit will be underway. To mark the 140th anniversary of the Plainville Fire Company, a professional drone show in the evening is expected to draw a large crowd.

Father Dawson says he is hoping the parish booth will "plant a seed" with those who are unfamiliar with the faith. "Pray that our efforts will bear eternal fruit," he adds. "Pray that those who have wandered will allow the Lord to open their hearts to his spirit."

- Story by Karen A. Avitabile



Upcoming Events



09/9 TUESDAY 10AM - 3PM
ART AND SPIRITUALITY RETREAT
Sacred Heart on the Lake
Retreat Center, 194 Candlewood Hill
Rd, Higganum

Well-known local artist, Ed Rosado will team with Sr. Lany Jo to teach and demonstrate how art can be a segue into prayerful meditation and contemplation. Both of these Art/Retreats are for those that already have some background in art and in the medium they most often use to create art, especially landscapes, which will be the focus at the scenic lake and grounds of the SHOTL Retreat Center.

Mr. Rosado will offer artistic critiques and pointers and Sr. Lany Jo will offer guidance at prayerfully focusing on our Creator God dwelling within us, allowing us to create with Him. Please bring your lunch and art supplies. Coffee, tea and other hot and cold drinks will be provided.

A donation of \$20 is asked for this Retreat Day. Space will be limited, so register ASAP on our website sacredheartonthelake.org or call Sr. Lany Jo at 203-606-9102.



invites you to celebrate the

Canonization

of our patron,

Saint Pier Giorgio Frassati!



Sunday, September 7

11:00am - Mass at St. Mary Church
5 Hillhouse Avenue | New Haven

1:00pm - Hike at East Rock Park
Park at St. Joseph's Church
129 Edwards Street | New Haven



The **New England Catholic Biblical School** is currently enrolling adult students for the certificate program in Advanced Biblical Studies. Classes begin September 6, 2025 and meet at multiple locations, at various times, for both on-line and in-person class options. Spanish language classes are available. Those interested should go to the NECBS website at: www.catholicedaohct.org.

La Escuela Bíblica Católica de Nueva Inglaterra (NECBS) está inscribiendo a estudiantes adultos para el programa de certificado en Estudios Bíblicos Avanzados. Las clases comienzan el 6 de septiembre de 2025 y se imparten en diferentes sedes y horarios, tanto en línea como presenciales. Se ofrecen clases de español. Los interesados deben visitar el sitio web de NECBS: www.catholicedaohct.org.



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