

Dear Friends,

*Saint Damien Is Coming To Our Parish!* On Friday, February 12 at 8:00 p.m., Chicago celebrity, Wayne Messmer will be performing the award winning play *Damien*, by Aldyth Morris in our worship space at our parish.

The play is an extraordinary and inspirational story about the Belgium-born priest, Father Damien (born Jozef De Veuster), who as a young priest of 24 traveled to the Hawaiian island of Molokai to begin his remarkable life as a missionary. Upon arriving, Father Damien soon volunteered to be the first full-time priest in service to the over 800 people with leprosy (Hansen's Disease) who were abandoned in a leper colony. The leper colony on Molokai was described as a 'hell in paradise' and is where Father Damien, transformed, chose his life of service for the thousands of 'his lepers', as he called them.

At the age of 49, after bringing the message of hope and grace and ministering to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of his flock, Father Damien himself contracted the disease and died in the colony and with the people he loved. On, October 11, 2009, Father Damien was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI and will forever be known as Saint Damien, the Leper Priest of Molokai.

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#### **About the Actor**

Often simply referred to as, "the guy who sings the Anthem," Wayne Messmer has become the voice most associated with the National Anthem in Chicago.

Since his early childhood, Wayne Messmer has been drawn to the powerful real life story of Father Damien and his compassionate work with the forgotten lepers of Molokai. As an actor, Messmer has played dozens of leading characters of the American musical theatre, but none as significant as Damien.

In 2008, Wayne made a personal pilgrimage to the Hawaiian Island of Molokai where he walked the actual steps where Father Damien lived and served his beloved flock. "Standing in the churches that Damien built with his own hands, I knew that I had to tell everyone about his unconquerable commitment to his faith. Being in the very place where his saintly work occurred was breathtaking. I knew right then that the Damien story must be shared," Messmer said.

**On a personal note**, I had the opportunity to help produce this play when I was in the seminary. We performed the play in four parishes to raise money for an AIDS Hospice. It is an amazingly powerful play for such a simple one-man production. Its power comes from the story of the selfless dedication of one young man to care for the people of God. It was truly an inspiration for me in how I try to live out my priesthood and I believe it can be an inspiration for each of you in living out your individual vocation as well. So please join us for what we know will be a memorable, inspiring and enjoyable evening as we welcome Saint Damien to our parish!

Proceeds from the performance will benefit our parish as well as two other charities. The *Glycogen Storage Disease Program Team* at the University of Florida, at Messmers' request, on behalf of their granddaughter and Stauros U. S. A., a locally based, national non-profit organization committed to helping people find meaning, hope and peace in the midst of suffering. The parish portion of the proceeds will go to a Scholarship Fund for School and Religious Education Tuition Assistance and Connect Youth Ministry Mission and Retreat Fees Assistance.

Events like this at our parish — at any parish — are rare. I hope you can join us for this evening of inspiration and historic drama.

In Christ,  
Fr. Jerry