There is a custom at Christmas that used to be more prevalent than it is today. It is the custom of placing lighted candles in one’s windows at Christmas. It is said that the Irish people brought this custom to America. During the English persecution religion was suppressed throughout Ireland and the people had no churches. The priests would often hide in forests and caves and secretly they would visit the farms and homes of the Irish people in order to offer the service of the Holy Eucharist in the night. It was the greatest hope of the Irish families at that time to have a priest come into their home and celebrate Mass on Christmas night. The persecuted people of Ireland would pray and hope throughout the year for this most precious grace.

When it was Christmas, families would leave their doors unlocked and place burning candles in the windows so that any priest who happened by would know that they were welcome. The light was placed in the window to guide them through the dark night to a place of sanctuary. The priest would silently enter through the unlocked door and be received by the faithful inhabitants who would express great gratitude and prayers of thanksgiving, even tears of happiness because their home became a church for Christmas.

The Irish people explained this custom to the English soldiers by saying they would keep candles burning in their windows and their doors unlocked so Mary and Joseph, looking for a place to stay, would find their way to their home and be welcomed with open hearts. The English authorities, finding this Irish superstition harmless, did not bother to suppress it. For generations the candles in the windows have always remained a cherished practice of the Irish, even though many have long since forgotten the earlier meaning.

(Source – Stories for All Seasons – Gerard Fuller)

In this edition of the Spirit of Wyoming the Rev. Chris Galligan in her writing invites us to open our doors, our hearts, our lives, ourselves to the presence of Christ, particularly in the vulnerable that live among us. You will also read about how visitors from Wyoming were received by our Link Dioceses of Kiteto and Leicester. My hope during this time of the year is that we will light metaphoric candles and make room for fresh expressions of faith, welcoming Mary and Joseph and the Christ child, sharing God’s light in a world that often may feel covered with darkness.

May each of you be warmed and blessed this Christmas season with the knowledge and experience of the life-giving grace and light that is always coming into the world through our relationship with the living God, found particularly in human form, in a manger, in a stable and in an open heart.

+John