



06.2012

Saint Paul

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

St. Paul Catholic School Concludes Another Successful Year

As we turn the calendar to June, it is hard to believe another school year is in the books.

For the staff and students at St. Paul Catholic School, it was another wonderful year filled with many fine achievements.

“It was a very good year here,” says Principal Lorelei Darga. “Of course there are always going to be bumps along the way, but we’re always working hard to make things even better.”

This year’s Catholic Schools Week theme of “Faith. Academics. Service.” was on display throughout the school year, as these ideals truly served as the three pillars of day-to-day life at St. Paul Catholic School.

Founded on a firm dedication to the Catholic Faith, the school offered a variety of spiritual outlets for the students throughout the year, such as middle school retreats with school chaplain Fr. Michael Nixon, in the fall and spring, weekly Mass, the Living Rosary, Advent prayers, the Live Nativity, the Stations of the Cross, and the May Crowning. This year, the school also started a new tradition of having each class plan and lead one First Friday Mass during the year.

“The classes chose a theme, wrote the petitions and led the singing,” Ms. Darga says. “They all did a really, really good job and had a lot of fun with it.”

Service, an outpouring of the love that comes from faith, was also a central theme throughout the year.



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Another Successful Year *continued from front cover*

In November, the Student Council collected food and made baskets for 10 families in the area, and during Lent, it held a canned food drive. For Catholic Schools Week, the students brought bag lunches to take to the Waterfront Rescue Mission and collected over \$3,000 in a Penny War to give to five local charities. Monthly dress-down days were held throughout the year to raise money for charity, as well. With two of our school's students suffering from juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, their peers rallied in support, raising \$10,000 for the Arthritis Foundation through car washes, button and ice cream sales, and the Arthritis Walk.

The academics at St. Paul continued to be a strong point again this year, thanks to the dedication of a great group of teachers.

"All of our teachers have done a wonderful job," Ms. Darga says. "They care so much about these kids. I truly feel blessed to be able to work with them. I've never worked with such a dedicated group of teachers before. They love these kids and do this job because they're committed to Catholic education."

Given the great work done by our teachers, it comes as no surprise that our students excelled in competitions in key subjects like math, science, history, and art.

Recognizing the need for early exposure to foreign languages, the school began a new Spanish program this year



for students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

"Maria Harbour, our new Spanish teacher, is doing a great job," Ms. Darga says. "The kids really enjoy it. She brings a lot of the cultural side into it and the kids have a great time."

The school also expanded the middle school science program under new teacher Andrea Riley. This year, Mrs. Riley led the students through a number of exciting experiments, including a variety of dissections and the first annual Physics Olympics during the spring.

In May, the school year finished with a flurry of activities, including the graduation dance on May 11 and the eighth-grade awards ceremony and Mass on May 18. The final day for grades one through seven was on May 25, the same day the school hosted its 17th Annual Spartan Scramble Golf Tournament and Dinner Auction in Gulf Breeze at the Tiger Point East Golf Course.

The high point of the spring, though, came on May 19, when the school conferred diplomas to its 18 eighth-graders at the graduation Mass and luncheon.

"I'm so proud of this eighth-grade class and how they've come together as a group," Ms. Darga says. "Their leadership, their sense of camaraderie, their closeness, their willingness to help — they have amazed me with everything they've accomplished. We're going to miss them!"

A Letter from Our Pastor

Take Vacations from Work or School, Not from God

Dear Parishioners,

Regardless of whether we have school-aged children at home or not, most Americans mentally operate on a school-year calendar. As the calendar turns to June, school is out, and the spirit of summertime fun takes over. The pools are open, hammocks are hung in shady backyards, and family vacations have many of us teeming with excitement.

The arrival of summer means life slows down a bit and gives most of us a time to relax. But even as we unwind during our vacation time, we need to remember that summer is no time to take a vacation from God. In fact, summer can serve as the perfect opportunity to grow in our respective relationships with God, especially since most of us have considerably more free time.

Whether or not we're involved with schools — as students, teachers, or parents — we find that the school year calendar impacts our lives at work, at church, and in our leisure time. Many of our groups have fewer meetings during the summer, or none at all. And although some people are on vacation at any time of year, summer retains its place in our minds as the vacation season.

Vacations, no matter when we take them, provide us with an opportunity to refresh our lives by following a totally different daily pattern. Whether it's a trip to the beach or to the mountains, an excursion to a big city or to a dude ranch, a visit to relatives, or a cruise, a vacation offers a break from our daily routines. We get to spend our time the way we choose, not the way someone tells us to.

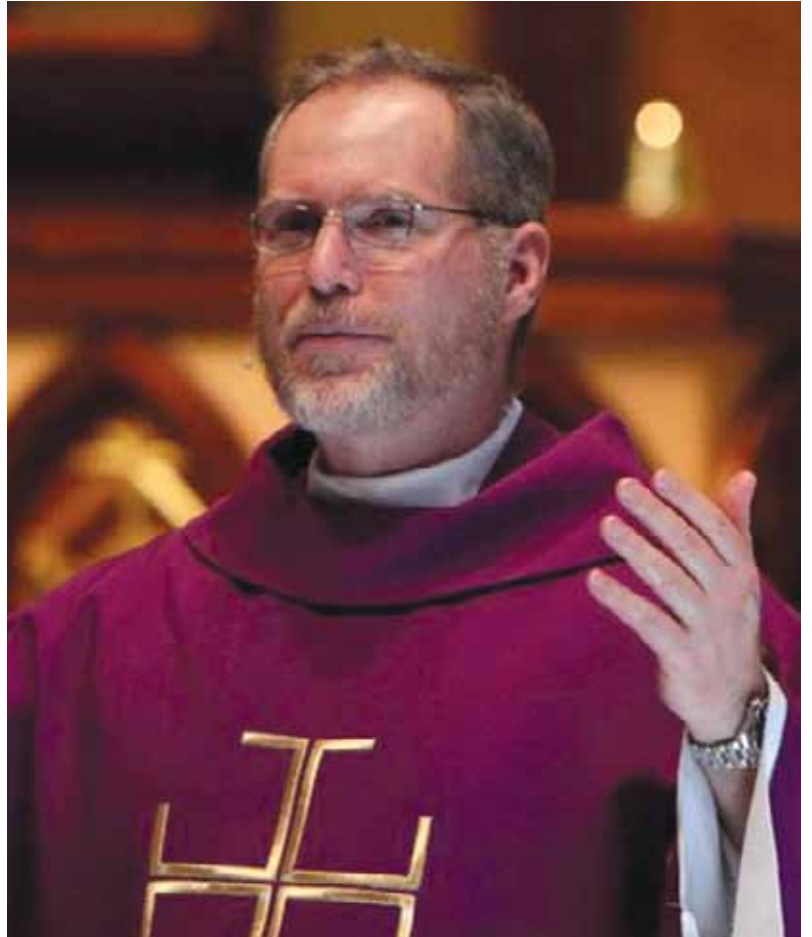
A vacation also provides a good opportunity for us to make some permanent changes in our use of time. When we're free from the demands of everyday life, this is a perfect opportunity to try something that is not part of our regular routine, such as spending a few minutes a day in prayer or meditation. "Try it; you'll like it!" as the old commercial said. It may have some lasting results in a stronger spiritual life.

Remember — we may take a vacation from work, but we don't have a vacation from God. Be sure to worship at Mass wherever you are each Sunday. You'll come back from vacation refreshed both emotionally and spiritually.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Fr. Doug Halsema
Pastor



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each Sunday. You'll come back from vacation
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First Communion

Beginning a Lifelong

“The First Communion you have received is the beginning of a lifelong friendship with Jesus, the beginning of a journey of faith.”



On April 22, nearly 50 children from our parish deepened their union with God in an inexpressibly powerful way. Their eternal savior and best friend humbled Himself and came to meet them for their First Holy Communion, and their lives will never be the same. Now they can enjoy the bountiful blessings of the Eucharist, and take refuge in His presence therein, forever.

“The day was really beautiful,” says Berdina Clarke, Director of Religious Education. “All of the First Communicants looked so angelic. Right before Communion, a little boy named Joey Harbour came up to me and told me he was so excited to receive Jesus for the first time. It was so special!”

Fr. Doug Halsema was the celebrant, and Fr. Michael Nixon concelebrated and offered the homily. After processing into the church in pairs behind Fr. Doug and Fr. Michael, the 46 First Communicants received the Holy Eucharist before everyone else, one at a time. After Mass, a reception was held in the Parish Hall, at which the First Communicants were given certificates.

Since August, our CCD students and our parish school students have been preparing for this most memorable day, as well as for their First Reconciliation, which they made in November. Public school students prepared their hearts and souls by attending weekly CCD classes instructed by Celine Hansford, while our parish school students were taught by Lisa Struck. Overall, the classes focused on our need for redemption, the love of God, the Scriptures, the parts of the Mass and other prominent aspects of our Catholic Faith. Before receiving the sacraments, the children were asked to memorize the “Our Father,” “Hail Mary,” and “Glory Be” prayers.



“We encouraged the children to understand that this is the start of a lifelong experience of God’s love found in Him. That is why First Communion is a joy for even the bride and groom.”

— Fr. Michael

Communion

Friendship with Jesus

... will be the beginning of a lifelong journey together..” — Pope Benedict XVI

“We encouraged the children to understand that First Communion is not just a day, but it is the start of a lifelong experience of God’s love,” Fr. Michael says. “We are God’s children, and our identity is found in Him. That is why First Communicants dress similar to those being baptized, or even the bride and groom at a wedding.”

Furthermore, in order to prepare for their First Reconciliation, the students made a special retreat, accompanied by their parents, during which they talked about what Reconciliation is. They also created and laminated place mats with the steps of Reconciliation pictured on them, along with the Act of Contrition. In preparation for First Communion, the children and their parents went on a retreat which included a tour of the church as well as a talk by parish seminarian Matthew Busch about the true focus of the Mass – the Body and Blood of Christ. In addition, they made banners, which featured things like the chalice and the cross, and displayed them in the Parish Hall.

Overall, the children gained an understanding of the significance of the Most Precious Body and Blood of Our Lord, and how it is truly at the heart of our belief system as Catholics.

“As the Church teaches, the Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith,” Fr. Michael says. “It is such a beautiful testament of our faith that children can participate in the Eucharist just as completely as adults who have maturity and deep theological knowledge. They can have the same level of communion with God as those who are grown. All that is necessary to receive the Lord is childlike trust. It is a great insight into what our faith is all about.”

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Fr. Michael Nixon



The Christian Steward

Each day, we strive to live stewardship in our lives, recognizing our roles as “God’s co-workers” in His creative, redemptive, and sanctifying work. But in our quest to live as disciples of Christ, many obstacles often arise.

One of the most prevalent roadblocks in living stewardship is understanding the traits that make up a good Christian steward. Surely, it would be much more convenient if we had some sort of “stewardship profiler” who could lay out the necessary steps to becoming a good steward, like on one of those television crime dramas. Unfortunately, it more often feels like living stewardship is a lifelong journey that we will never fully comprehend.

Fortunately, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ pastoral letter on stewardship, *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*, gives some insight into the characteristics that make up a good Christian steward. It may not have the powers of a stewardship “profiler” or “mentalist,” but it certainly gives us some tangible things to think about.

The Christian steward should display some of the following traits:

Insight – Before the disciples could live what we know as the stewardship way of life, they needed a flash of insight, or a certain way of viewing the world and their relationship to it in a fresh light. This “divine grandeur,” more than anything else, is often what sets people on the path to Christian stewardship (*Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*, 39).

Conscientiousness – Stewards are fully conscious of their accountability in sharing of their time, talent and treasure. As caretakers of the gifts that God has given them, they have the opportunity and responsibility to use them to their fullest potential to spread God’s kingdom on Earth (40).

Generosity – Christian stewards are generous out of love as well as duty. They should display a desire to share with and care for others based on the sacramental graces they have received. And they are also cognizant of the many warnings that the New Testament presents to those who fail in charity and authentic love (40).

Indeed, living as a Christian steward is a lifelong journey with many ups and downs along the way. But if we strive to consciously incorporate each of these characteristics into our giving of time, talent and treasure, we will find that the profile of a good Christian steward will become much clearer with each experience of service.



Joy – Christian stewards are often presented with difficult obstacles, but they should remain joyful in the face of challenges to their lives of stewardship. Like Paul, the good steward is able to say, “I am filled with encouragement, I am overflowing with joy all the more because of all our affliction” (2 Cor 7:4). Only by serving with a joyful spirit will stewards fully reap the rewards of their service, both in this life and the next.

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Meet the Hodges Family

Although Mike and Grace Hodges met in a non-traditional manner (a sparring ring at a martial arts studio), they both have very traditional ideas about faith, family, and their Catholic identity, all of which they learned from their own parents. Growing up, Mike says both his parents emphasized regular church attendance and taught him to make informed decisions between right and wrong. Grace's parents had distinct roles and, to this day, they live their faith by example.

"Mom was the 'rules' – she taught us our prayers, quizzed us on parts of the Mass, was the disciplinarian in the pew, and could always come up with the patron saint for any ailment or calamity," Grace says. "Dad was the 'action' – when he gave his word he meant it, and would follow through. There was nothing too menial to do for someone else; you were just expected to help and support family, a friend, or a stranger."

It is no surprise that Mike and Grace wanted to build on their parents' example of faith and family. In fact, Mike says

that once they were married, they knew that if they were blessed with children, they wanted to be near grandparents. This was so important to them that they purposely chose to find work in an area that would take them nearer to family.

"I grew up in a multi-generational home with my parents, my brother, my sister, as well as my grandmother and aunts," Grace explains. "It's so easy to lose sight that things change, but living together like this – being around parents and grandparents and aunts – it helps keep things in perspective, and can offer a lot to children."

Parish involvement is very important to the Hodges, and they participate in various ministries both individually and as a family. Together, they have worked with CSA and St. Vincent de Paul, and have volunteered throughout the years at St. Paul Catholic School. Grace has served as chair of the School Advisory Council and as a Rounder for the parish, while Mike is currently active in ACTS and the Men of St. Joseph ministry.

Not only are they involved with various ministries, but both Mike and Grace believe that it is equally important to nurture their own spirituality. For this reason, Grace says that they appreciate the Catholic education available for their children, Timothy, who is 10, and Caitlyn, who is 7, and that the school has been a means for the entire family to grow in faith. In addition, Mike says the various adult education programs offered by the parish have helped him rediscover the beauty and depth of the Catholic Church.



Mike and Grace Hodges with children Timothy and Caitlyn

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Address Service Requested

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“I didn’t go to Catholic school, and for a number of years I had even drifted away from the Church,” Mike explains. “But through wonderful programs such as the *Catholicism* series by Fr. Barron, I have come to appreciate the richness and texture of our faith.”

Between their full-time jobs, volunteering, and participating in various ministries, there is no doubt that the Hodges stay busy, and yet they have found concrete ways to give of their time, talent and treasure. And what motivates them to incorporate stewardship into their day-to-day life?

“Honestly, in a word – parenthood!” Mike says. “We try to be an example to our children. It’s not just financially supporting the Church; it is volunteering our time in efforts that we enjoy and that can help others. We hope our actions with each other, with our family, at work, and in our community demonstrate a Christian way of life. And we believe it is so important that this starts in the home.”

Liturgy Schedule

Saturday Vigil: 4:30 p.m. | **Sunday:** 7:00, 9:00, 11:00 a.m., 6:00 p.m. | **Daily Mass:** Monday-Saturday, 8:30 a.m.
Confessions: Saturdays, 9:00 a.m., 3:30 p.m. - 4:15 p.m., 1st Wednesdays, 6:30 p.m., and by appointment
Eucharistic Adoration: Thursday 9:00 a.m. until Friday 7:30 a.m.