



REFLECTIONS

WINTER 2018

...recognizing our gifts of time, talent and treasure



CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
growing & thriving
by Misty Poe, Superintendent

With Thanksgiving behind us and the season of Advent upon us, let us pause and give thanks for the blessings and sacrifice Jesus bestowed upon us. Our Catholic Schools are very thankful for the families, students, faculty, staff, benefactors and friends for their tremendous dedication to make our schools great. Without your support we would not witness the transformation that happens within the lives of our students on a daily basis. I have witnessed those moments, such as when a student who feels insecure about their reading ability stands up in front of their peers to lector at Mass. Or when a middle school student reads to a lower school student and

recognizes his or her leadership skills and capacity for service. Or when a student with a learning disability, who feels they do not belong, is welcomed by classmates and accepted for who they are – a child of God. Those are moments where confidence is instilled and students realize that nothing is impossible with God.

Without the faculty and staff, who answer the call to guide and form our youth, the guardians, who provide the family environment and sacrifice so their children will grow in faith, and the benefactors and friends, who make this dream a

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2019
Upcoming
**DIOCESAN
EVENTS**

JANUARY 19
**"Saints & Scholars"
Celebrating Catholic
Schools Event**
Austin

JANUARY 26
Texas Catholic Pro-Life Day
Austin

FEBRUARY 1-3
**Diocesan Catholic Youth
Conference (DCYC)**
Waco

FEBRUARY 23
Annual Men's Conference
St. William Parish
Round Rock

For event information, visit www.austindiocese.org

possibility, we would not have Catholic schools. These amazing disciples of Christ are our "Messengers of Hope." "Messengers of Hope" is the theme for this year's Catholic Schools. Our Catholic schools in the Diocese of Austin are growing. While the national average of student growth in Catholic schools is declining, the student population in the Diocese of Austin increased by more than 160 students over the past three years.



Over the last few years, the Office of Catholic Schools (OCS) hired a consultant to review the demographics of the diocese and meet with focus groups to determine needs and interests. As a result, the OCS is implementing changes to work towards meeting identified needs and interests. These changes include new programming, financial accessibility and fostering the needs of students with learning differences.

In 2017, St. Louis Catholic School in Austin began offering a Montessori program. The demand has been so great they opened a second Montessori class this year. Cathedral School of St. Mary and St. Mary's Catholic School in Taylor are revising their educational curriculum to offer a full Classical program. The OCS seeks to understand and respond to the needs of our community, while keeping focused on the excellence in teaching, faith formation and student experience.

While each of our schools have programs in place to meet the needs of students with learning differences, providing the necessary personnel and resources to meet this demand causes a financial challenge. Nine of our 21 schools have hired a Learning Specialist and/or Certified Language Therapist to meet the needs of all students but it is our goal to have learning specialists at every school.

Catholic education must be accessible to all children. Our schools provide more than \$5.4 million in tuition assistance but the need continues to grow. The OCS is grateful that the *Encountering Christ Campaign* will include a \$5 million endowment for tuition assistance. This gift will provide more opportunities for children and families to continue to grow in their faith and become "Messengers of Hope" in our community.

Prayer is always at the center of the Catholic School message, as it is the means by which God sustains our hope. Please join us in our mission by praying for the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Austin and the work of our faculty/staff, parents, children and benefactors. In the words of Pope Francis, "Hope opens new horizons making us capable of dreaming what is not even imaginable."

For information on Catholic schools in the Diocese of Austin, visit csdatx.org.

REFLECTIONS

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THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF AUSTIN



Beginning the Church's liturgical year, Advent (from, "ad-venire" in Latin or "to come to") is the season encompassing the four Sundays (and weekdays) leading up to the celebration of Christmas.

The Advent season is a time of preparation that directs our hearts and minds to Christ's second coming at the end of time and also to the anniversary of the Lord's birth on Christmas. The final days of Advent, from December 17-24, focus particularly on our preparation for the celebrations of the Nativity of our Lord (Christmas).

Advent devotions including the Advent wreath, remind us of the meaning of the season. Traditionally, Advent wreaths are constructed of a circle of evergreen branches into which four candles are inserted, representing the four weeks of Advent. Ideally, three candles are purple and one is rose, but white candles can also be used.

The purple candles in particular symbolize the prayer, penance, and preparatory sacrifices and good works undertaken at this time. The rose candle is lit on the third Sunday, Gaudete Sunday, when the priest also wears rose vestments at Mass; Gaudete Sunday is the Sunday of rejoicing, because the faithful have arrived at the midpoint of Advent, when their preparation is now half over and they are close to Christmas.

The progressive lighting of the candles symbolizes the expectation and hope surrounding our Lord's first coming into the world and the anticipation of his second coming to judge the living and the dead. While the days leading up to Christmas may seem busy, Advent is a season in which we are called to wait with joyful expectation!

For more resources to help you enter in to the season with daily activity and prayer suggestions to prepare you spiritually for the birth of Jesus Christ go to www.austindiocese.org/advent.

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What it means "to be" Church

by Scott Whitaker



I grew up in a small town called Bowie, just northwest of Fort Worth. Bowie has about 4,000 people and one Catholic church with one priest who also serves three other parishes.

As I reflected on my time at St. Jerome in Bowie, I realized my experience helped me cultivate and understand the core foundations of Christian stewardship. It took every family in our small, rural parish to keep the parish running and to make sure parishioners' needs were met since a priest was not around every day.

All of us share the vocation of being a disciple of Jesus. Stewardship comes alive through our discipleship. You may have heard that stewardship is the gift of time, talent and treasure. In reality, stewardship is an outgrowth of a true conversion to Christ. Growing up in a small town taught me what it means "to be" Church.

The recent news in the Catholic Church is disturbing. What was once far away is closer to home. I share in your concern and disgust for all the terrible actions of a few people in Church leadership. I ask you to join me in praying for the victims that they may know they are loved by God.

I have been asked if gifts given to the diocese are protected from lawsuits. I can assure you that gifts given to the Catholic Services Appeal and the Encountering Christ Capital Campaign are used only for the items outlined in campaign case for support found in the brochures. I would encourage you to visit the diocesan website (www.austindiocese.org/year-of-reparation) as well as the campaign website (www.encounteringchristcampaign.org/faq) to learn more about what we are doing to protect your generosity.

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For more information about how to include the Catholic Church in your will or estate plan, contact Scott Whitaker at (512) 949-2441 or scott-whitaker@austindiocese.org

Additionally, many people have let me know they plan to make their gifts to other charities instead of the diocese. Giving is a personal decision between you and God. I invite you to take your personal stewardship to prayer and discern how your generosity can be used to serve the Church.

Just like that small church in Bowie, it takes many people to make sure the mission of the church continues. I hope and pray that your discernment leads you to understanding the programs and ministries supported by the Diocese of Austin are worthy of your support.

Have a blessed Advent as we prepare for the birth of our Savior.

For further assistance or to ask any questions, contact Scott Whitaker at scott-whitaker@austindiocese.org or (512) 949-2441.



messengers of hope

OUR DOMINICAN SISTERS

by Robert Whitworth



The Catholic schools in the Diocese of Austin are blessed to be able to count 10 Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist among its teachers. These joyful women are wonderful Messengers of Hope in our Catholic schools, as they seek to demonstrate the ways in which the Gospel can be lived out. In a skeptical society it is often difficult to win hearts and minds for Christ. Yet, that is at the heart of what our Catholic schools seek to do and it can only be done when the students encounter authentic witnesses.

The Holy See's teaching on Catholic schools says it is primarily the teacher who serves the role of witness to Christ. So, as our students look around their schools for "Messengers of Hope" they are blessed to see the witness of these religious women living out their vocation in their midst. The sisters engage students in the classroom, play with them on the playground, encourage them to excel in extracurricular activities, and model the ways in which a life devoted to Jesus becomes a great adventure.

At St. Helen Catholic School in Georgetown, you will find Sister Irenaeus Schluttenhofer reviewing yesterday's science experiment in which the students were tasked with discerning what liquids Sister had given them. As Sister led them through a series of lab exercises including testing the pH and other properties of the liquids, the students were to identify which liquid was water and which was hydrogen peroxide. The students were truly engaged and challenged by the task. The task awakened a sense of curiosity in the students and required them to use critical thinking skills. The wonderful thing about this arrangement is that Sister Irenaeus is also the students' religion teacher. In one class, Sister Irenaeus is able to teach the students how God constantly reveals Himself through creation and in the next class she shares how he has revealed His great love for them through Scripture and Tradition.



The witness of these "Messengers of Hope" in our Catholic schools cannot be underestimated. They demonstrate the beauty of a life of virtue and how that life can be lived out in the circumstances students encounter each day. The sisters do this, first and foremost, through their joyful witness, but also through their dedication to the apostolate of education.



Many of our schools in the Diocese of Austin have adopted a program designed and written by the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist entitled *Disciple of Christ: Education in Virtue*. This program gives teachers in our Catholic schools the tools to talk about, explain and practice the virtues with our students. This program has been a great blessing to the schools as it empowers teachers to assist students in understanding the gifts they have been given and the lives of sacrificial love to which they have been called to live.



STEWARDSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Diocese of Austin

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Celebrating Saints



JOHN, APOSTLE & EVANGELIST

DECEMBER 27 (FEAST)

John, the beloved disciple, son of Zebedee and brother of James, was one of the first apostles called by Jesus. Modern Scripture scholars disagree about whether or not he was also the writer of the Book of Revelation and the Gospel and epistles that bear his name, but that controversy is less important than the lesson that can be learned from his life and those writings. Jesus called him and loved him and used him to spread the Gospel of love. Privileged to be present at the transfiguration, asked to watch and pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, and give the responsibility to protect and provide for his Mother at the foot of the Cross, St. John said "Yes!" to Jesus, and then spent the rest of his life faithfully following him and helping others to know and love him, too. "We have come to know and believe in the love God has for us," he writes. "God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him" (1 John that's the condensed version of St. John's life and writings and a sure recipe for good stewardship of our vocations and the gifts entrusted to us!

*Adapted from Sharon Hueckel, **Steward Saints for Every Day**, Copyright © 1999, the National Catholic Stewardship Council, Inc., Washington, D.C. All rights reserved.*

