



REFLECTIONS

WINTER 2022

Recognizing our gifts of time, talent and treasure

Catholic Schools Further the *Mission*

Our Catholic schools are called to further the mission of the church in all that they do. This mission includes supporting both children and adults in their relationship with Jesus Christ. Pope Francis' call for a Eucharistic Revival provides a beautiful opportunity for all of us to experience the love and mercy of Jesus' sacrifice. Middle school students in our Catholic schools participated in one of these opportunities on Nov. 8 at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Austin.



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The Middle School Eucharistic Rally was a daylong event that featured local speaker Paul J. Kim, Mass with Bishop Vásquez, Eucharistic Adoration, and fellowship among eight Catholic middle schools in the Diocese of Austin. This rally was an inspired idea from Holy Family Catholic School's middle school religion teacher, Sister Teresa Benedicta Block, OP. As we continue to recover from the disruption caused by the pandemic, the spiritual and emotional needs of our adolescents are just as

important as their academic needs. This rally provided our middle school students with a day to encounter Jesus one-on-one and to remember, as one of the participants shared, "... God loves us and just wants us to open our hearts to Him."

As we continue to partner with parents to support our children, we want to recognize the incredible level of parental support the Eucharistic Rally enjoyed. Parents built balloon arches, provided snacks, drinks, and spent

the day ministering to and praying with students and teachers as a true witness to Christ's presence in our central Texas community. By the end of the day, many students, teachers, and parents were calling for another Eucharistic Rally next year, and so the planning begins!

Another important way our Catholic schools support the mission of the church is to provide a place where adults can share their gift of teaching and their gift of faith throughout their workday. Nurturing these teachers is important to the work they do, so the Office of Catholic Schools created the Classroom Learning Lab (CLL) as a way for teachers to share and explore their teaching craft as a vocation. The first CLL cohort consisted of six teachers from three Catholic schools. These teachers span

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the grade levels from kindergarten to high school physics, and yet, they share a joy and craft that has more commonalities than differences. Each teacher created a goal in an area of teaching they wanted to explore whether it was reframing questions or encouraging critical thinking skills. After each teacher finished a lesson in their classroom, we would meet as a group to discuss the strategies we saw that would help us in our own craft of teaching. Teaching can become an isolating profession, so it is important to give teachers the time to have professional conversations in an environment that supports exploration. The importance of this lab experience can be summed up in the prayer of one of the teachers at the beginning of her physics class: *Lord, please help these students discover the beauty of your universe in the concepts we discuss today and help me be your instrument in that discovery.* It is a prayer she shares at the beginning of each class. Amen!

Our schools are places of *faith* AND *excellence*

Catholic schools across the nation have seen an increase in enrollment, and for the Diocese of Austin, that statement rings true. While this may come as a surprise since we continue to maneuver a new post-pandemic season, we are proud to report that



The faculty and staff in our 20 Catholic schools in the Diocese of Austin are truly unsung heroes as they not only help students grow in wisdom, but also in holiness, and even at the peak of the pandemic, they did not miss a beat.

Catholic schools have not only survived, but thrived, as shown by the latest National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), or better known as the Nation's Report Card.

The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) is a biennial report of the U.S. Department of Education that provides information about student achievement and learning experiences in various subjects. The latest report, released this past October, showed that Catholic school students across the nation performed at or near the top in reading and math compared to non-Catholic schools after the pandemic.

Lincoln Snyder, the president of NCEA (National Catholic Education Association), when asked about the results of the latest Nation's report, responded: "one of the reasons Catholic schools performed so well is that our teachers showed up for the kids," he said. "In every state, we were among the first to transition to distance learning, and after that brief time, also among the first to return students to a safe in-person environment. That's why I call our educators heroes!"



The faculty and staff in our 20 Catholic schools in the Diocese of Austin are truly unsung heroes as they not only help students grow in wisdom, but also in holiness, and even at the peak of the pandemic, they did not miss a beat. These men and women do everything in their power to endure the success of the students who have been entrusted to them. Our schools are truly places of excellence and faith because of our great teachers.

Several highlights of this past school year assessment data for the Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Austin:

- Despite national norms that show depressed math scores, 7th and 8th grade math students overall met or exceeded the expected growth in this subject area.
- First grade students overall throughout the Diocese of Austin scored in the top 15% nationally in reading.
- Overall, students in each grade between 3rd and 8th grades scored in the top 10% nationally in science.

These, along with a recollection of the best moments of 2021-2022, can be found in our latest impact report at <https://csdatx.org/parent-resources>.

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Endowed funds provide *support* for the future

Endowed funds, like the ones in the Catholic Foundation – Diocese of Austin, are truly “gifts that keep on giving.”

“What makes an endowment unique is that its annual income is distributed for whatever purpose that fund was set up for, but its principal remains intact,” said Scott Whitaker, executive director of the foundation. “This means that an endowment can then keep generating more income to be distributed for years to come.”

The Catholic Foundation – Diocese of Austin was established in 2007, and since then more than 50 endowments have been created. Some were set up



with gifts to the *Our Faith ~ Our Legacy* and *Encountering Christ* campaigns and benefit specific ministries of the diocese, including:

- Seminarian education
- Campus ministry
- Catholic Charities
- Catholic schools
- Permanent diaconate
- Retired priests
- Religious education and faith formation
- Youth ministry

But a number of endowments have also been set up by parishes, schools, agencies and organizations in the diocese. These types of endowments are similar to the ones the diocese has established, in that they provide a stable source of income for operations or special ministries. But Scott notes that they also give parishioners, alumni and supporters a way to leave a legacy to the communities and organizations they value as part of their estate plans.

The opportunity is available to all parishes, schools, agencies and organizations in the diocese with an initial gift of at least \$10,000. Distributions from these endowments can begin once their value reaches \$25,000.

“They can then take advantage of the diocese’s larger investment pool and professional fund management,” Scott said. “By allowing for the creation

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For information on how to contribute, or to set up a named endowment fund through the Catholic Foundation – Diocese of Austin (www.catholicfdn.org), please contact Scott Whitaker at scott-whitaker@austindiocese.org or Dan Wierzbowski at dan-wierzbowski@austindiocese.org.



Top 10 Ways to *Give Smarter* at the End of 2022

As you consider your end of year giving, here are some tips for you to give smarter at the end of 2022 according to Russell James, J.D., Ph.D., CFP, professor of Charitable Financial Planning at Texas Tech University.

- 1. Take advantage of inflation by donating appreciated assets instead of cash.**
- 2. Make a charitable swap of appreciated investments.**
Donate shares of stock and immediately buy new shares in the same company. Your portfolio doesn't change, and the capital gain is removed. The asset must have been owned for a year or more. The "wash sale" rule does not apply because this is gain, not loss property.
- 3. Take advantage of higher interest rates with a Charitable Gift Annuity (CGA),** which pays you income for life.
- 4. Make IRA gifts at age 72+ to satisfy some or all your required minimum distribution (RMD).** Giving directly from your IRA to a nonprofit, known as a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD), does not count as income and reduces your RMD.
- 5. Make IRA gifts at age 70½+ with a QCD directly to nonprofits, up to \$100,000 annually, without paying federal income tax.**
- 6. Move your 401k/403b into an IRA rollover now to prepare for future IRA gifts before the year you turn 72 to avoid taxes on the conversion.**
- 7. Leave part of an IRA, 401(k), or 403(b) account to a nonprofit instead of in your will.** Heirs (except spouses) must take out all the funds (and pay the taxes) within 10 years of inheriting. Any part left to a nonprofit avoids these taxes.
- 8. Donate inheritance rights to farmland or a home using a special deed instead of in your will to create an immediate income tax deduction.**
- 9. "Bunch" gifts with a donor advised fund (DAF).**
- 10. Combine a Roth conversion with a charitable donation.** An income spike caused by a Roth conversion can be offset charitable planning. This can include strategies like CGAs, DAFs, charitable remainder trusts, retained life estate deeds, or paying a multi-year pledge early.

These are just a few ideas to discuss with your tax advisor. They may not apply in your situation. To learn more about how your gifts can make a lasting impact to the Diocese of Austin, your parish, a Catholic school, or another one of the diocese's Catholic organizations, contact Dan Wierzbowski at (512) 949-2496 or dan-wierzbowski@austindiocese.org. We are here to help!



Diocese of Austin

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Join the ACP... *inspire, challenge, gather*

The Assembly of Catholic Professionals (ACP) provides an opportunity for business women and men to come together to network, share common values and engage with the leaders of the Church in the Diocese of Austin.

The Assembly meets quarterly, over lunch, in a relaxed setting in Austin between 11:30 AM and 1:30 PM. Speakers are chosen to inspire us with their unique story and how they relate their work and spiritual life experience to the context of living in our challenging, modern world.

Assembly of
Catholic Professionals
An opportunity to grow in your faith

2023 LUNCHEON DATES

February 8

May 17

September 20

December 6

HOW TO JOIN?

You can join the Assembly of Catholic Professional by going to www.austindiocese.org/acp



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