SAINT AUGUSTINE SAINTS
NEWS
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Renewable energy, advocated by Elementary School Students

Nine Saint Augustine elementary students sat down with their pastor and a longtime parishioner on June 11, as the school year was ending. They were not demanding changes in the school hot lunch program or doubling the amount of recess time each school day.

No, renewable energy was the subject of their discussion. Having learned about water rockets, bridge building, and ball and marble momentum in other projects, it was time for the Saint Augustine Pre-Engineering Club to complete an 18-month project: studying renewable energy and deploying solar panels on 35,000 square feet of space on their school's roof.

Reginald Berry, a chemical engineer, has been a St. Augustine parishioner since 1995 and launched the Pre-Engineering Club after Fr. Patrick A. Smith's persistent recruitment. As many practicing Catholics can attest, it is hard to say "no" to a priest. With the blessing of Ms. Helene Cropper, vice principal of Saint Augustine and aftercare director, Berry gathered a group of 20-some third through fifth grade students for an hour each week, and during their solar panel project, the students learned about electrical currents, the average number or sunny versus cloudy days in the city, and how much panels and their installation cost, among other subjects.

Students considered options with roof-based solar panels

Nine students authored the resulting Powerpoint slides, and they recommended St. Augustine install solar panels, with an estimation that the project would pay for itself in five years through electrical bill savings.

"I'm knocked out by the kids," said Berry, a native of New York, who has taken the Pre-Engineering Club on field trips to the National Air and Space Museum, Howard University, and NASA. "They didn't just stick with (the project); they were enthusiastic." Berry is encouraged that four female students participated in producing the solar panel Design Specification, and that the Pre-Engineering Club appeals to both boys and girls. In addition to the nine Design Specification authors, a number of other students participated in the project over 18 months.

Based on Internet research and renewable energy company estimates, Pre-Engineering Club members think that solar panels would cost about $70,000, and that installation would cost the school $18,000, with an additional $5,000 spend on a converter to help convert Direct Current to Alternate Current energy, so it could power the 90-year old school building.

"I am really proud of these kids," Berry said. "This (Design Specification) is what you would pay an engineering group for, since it is what trained, professional engineers do." He told his club members that many adults have a fear of public speaking and giving presentations, and he was impressed by their presentation.

"It's gotta be fun, and you have

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Our Catholic Identity

From the Principal's Desk

Sister Gloria Agumagu, HHCJ, principal (seated), with Sister Juliana Asuzo, HHCJ, PreK assistant (left), and Sister Bibiana Okoro, HHCJ, director of religious education (right)

Dear Alumni, Parents & Friends,

I've been thinking a lot about our Catholic identity. What does it mean to be a Catholic in this day and age, in our secular country?

About half of our students are Catholic, and we have students from many different Christian churches, in addition to Muslim students. We are open to all. Our staff is split roughly evenly between Catholic and non-Catholics.

Attending the McKinley Tech Senior High School graduation on June 15 helped me to understand better our Catholic identity and what attending our school can mean for a family. I attended the graduation with Mr. Patrick Respers, our Math teacher. *Amen Khan '15*, who grew up across the street from our school on V Street, was graduating as Salutatorian from McKinley Tech, located south of Rhode Island Avenue in Northeast DC. I enjoy attending graduation ceremonies for our alumni.

Amen's sister *Abia Khan '11* graduated with honors from School Without Walls before matriculating to George Washington University.

Amen told us that attending Saint Augustine gave her the formation she needed to successful complete high school. She gave a lot of credit to me and Mr. Respers, and it was gratifying to hear how our education has helped her. Amen is from a Muslim family, and her mother told us that Amen still recites prayers she learned at Saint Augustine.

Like those who are Muslim, we believe in one God, and we pray five times a day at Saint Augustine, including the Memorarae and the Act of Contrition. We bless our meals before we eat. We go to weekly school Mass. Our students learn to pray, regardless of whether they are Catholic. While we do not seek to convert students, we do teach our students about the Catholic faith.

On another note, I enjoyed the June 2 visit of our archdiocese's new shepherd, Archbishop Wilton Gregory, to Saint Augustine Catholic Church at the 12:30 p.m. Mass, just weeks after he was installed. Being able to bring up Science textbook as a Sunday Mass offering to the altar meant a great deal to me. If you are Catholic or attend Mass, it is good to pray about what gifts you can bring to the altar from your life. Members of the Oblate Sisters of Providence who had taught at our school previously joined us from Baltimore, and we welcomed their visit.

Please pray for Archbishop Gregory, our students and our school. Have a safe and happy summer!

Sister Gloria Agumagu, HHCJ

We continue to live our Catholic traditions, including May Crowning, when we venerate the Blessed Virgin Mary, with students who have received their First Holy Communion dressing in white, as they did earlier in the month at the First Communion Mass. Here, Fr. Patrick A. Smith, pastor, is with Sister Gloria Agumagu, HHCJ, principal, and SIster Bibiana Okoro, HHCJ, director of religious education (right), as posed with our students.

2019-2020 School Year theme:
"If we live in the spirit, let us also follow the spirit." (Galatians 5:25)

Longtime second grade teacher Katie McDonnell departs

Fifteen years ago, Mrs. Katie McDonnell came to teach at Saint Augustine Catholic School. She liked the church and since she lived with her husband two-and-half blocks away, one could not beat the commute.

She had begun the journey to teaching two years before, discerning that her job at a consulting firm where she was doing website and production development work was not ultimately fulfilling her desire to contribute to society. With her employer's support, she enrolled in the Master of Arts in Teaching program at Trinity University Washington, using her lunch breaks and other time to study for classes.

With one semester to go in the program, it was time for student teaching, and she was hired as the Librarian and Media Specialist at Saint Augustine by Mrs. Donna Edwards, then principal. She later taught in the third grade at Saint Augustine, followed by three years as a first grade teacher, and then 11 years as a second grade teacher.

"Academics have improved," she said of her time at Saint Augustine. Part of the proof of this transformation is the improved high school placement record for recent eighth grade graduating classes.

She and her husband Mike had such confidence in Saint Augustine that they enrolled their son Miles for PreK-3 and PreK-4 during the last two school years. "I saw things from a parent perspective," particularly understanding how working parents view their children's education, she said of Myles' time at Saint Augustine.

Mrs. Katie McDonnell with her husband Mike and their son Miles

"She was always there to help the administration and other teachers, oftentimes behind the scenes," said Sister Gloria Agumagu, HCCJ, principal of Saint Augustine, of Mrs. McDonnell.

Since Saint Augustine's funding through the Archdiocese of Washington ended following the 2007-2008 school year, this challenge forced the parish to work closer with the school and for staff members to get in the trenches and work as though the school's survival hung in the balance.

"We had to forge a very strong bond," she recalled of the staff.

"It's bittersweet," Mrs. McDonnell said of leaving Saint Augustine. She looks forward to new challenges but will miss Saint Augustine. While interviewed for this story, she and her husband were staging their District home for sale.

Her family has moved to Durham, N.C., where she is preparing to continue her work teaching in a Catholic school, and her husband has found a job with a marketing company. "It's a great place. I'll miss it."

Alumna earns full scholarship to GWU

Kidan Tesfamichael'15 had a welcome surprise during her March 19 English class at Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School in Georgetown.

George Washington University President Thomas LeBlanc and Dean of Admissions Costas Solomou entered the classroom with the Foggy Bottom school's mascot, George, to announce to the cheers of her classmates that Kidan would receive a Stephen Joel Trachtenberg Scholarship to cover full years of tuition, room, board, books, and fees. This was no ordinary Tuesday morning. Kidan's hard work at Saint Augustine and Visitation was being rewarded, as she was one of ten District of Columbia students selected for a Trachtenberg Scholarship.

Photo courtesy of GW Today.

Saint Augustine congratulates Kidan and all her of her Saint Augustine classmates on their graduation from high school.

Having survived Minnesota winters, Verstraete back home in capital city

Robert Verstraete '10 has met his fair share of challenges in his life.

Coming from a close-knit, three-generation Saint Augustine Parish family, Robert graduated valedictorian in his Saint Augustine School class – the sixth of seven members of his family who attended Saint Augustine - and matriculated to one of the top academic high schools in the country, St. Anselm's Abbey, N.E., choosing it over Gonzaga College High School and St. John's College High School.

At St. Anselm's, Robert took Latin for three years and felt well prepared for the school's academic rigors, with the exception of the intense language study, which also included Spanish. "I enjoyed it," he said of Latin. "It's more useful than I thought," despite being a dead language, he added. At St. Anselm's, heended seven years of flute and dancing lessons and took up cross country and track.

But between his changing colleges during his first year to his brother Berkeley passing away in November 2015 to fracturing his skull during a May 2019 bicycle accident that gave him a concussion, Robert has been knocked down and gotten up in each case.

Robert graduated from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities with a bachelors degree in Environmental Science in December 2018. His path to a college degree was not a straight one, since he withdrew from the first college he attended because of a sharp tuition increase and his feeling that he did not fit in well there. He came back home and earned an Associates degree from Montgomery College, graduating

with honors. While Robert was home, his step brother Berkeley Wright passed away in November 2015, and Robert took a week off from classes to be with his family.

Initially living with his uncle, *W. David Stallworth '72*, and attracted in part by a scholarship, Robert entered University of Minnesota as a junior and was determined to finish college strong. Earning a 3.7 grade point average his final semester and nearly graduating with honors, Robert appears to have met his goal. Nonetheless, he does not recommend Minnesota winters to anyone and said that the city is harder to navigate without a car. "Let's put it this way: no one wanted to visit," he said of Minnesota.

He will enter the University of Maryland Baltimore County master's program in Geographic Information Systems this fall, taking classes at the Universities at Shady Grove campus, learning about complex information and data and how to put it into mapping formats. But as he was applying to UMBC and preparing to graduate from University of Minnesota, Robert was searching for a full-time job. Out of 45 job applications, he received three inquiries. Booz Allen Hamilton hired Robert to work in regulatory compliance, hazard waste remediation and oil spill prevention, and he began working in January 2019.

"The company's great," Robert said. "I love my co-workers."

One seemingly normal Wednesday morning, however, Robert found himself near Capitol Hill being attended to emergency medical technicians, after he had fallen from his bicycle during his commute to Booz Allen Hamilton. Robert had fractured his skull and was knocked unconscious by his fall to the pavement. During his stay at Medstar Washington Hospital Center, his mother, *Andrea Verstraete'71* spent two nights by his bedside.

She portrayed the situation in a "good news" and "bad news" scenario. The good news was that God clearly has a special plan for Robert, since his bicycle accident could have been the perfect time to bring his earthly life to a conclusion. The "bad news" for Robert, according to his mother, is that now the young man had to find out what God expects of him. His mother has told him that his guardian angel likely protected him, and although Robert was alone when the EMTs came to tend to him, he remembers someone telling him to "stay down" when he wanted to get up from the street. Robert has no memory of the accident. A good Samaritan also took care of his bicycle by locking it up after his accident.

True to the family he was raised in, Robert feels badly that his family and his "super supportive" Booz Allen colleagues, in particular, were worried about his welfare after his accident. While his mother does not want him to ever climb aboard a bike again, Robert has not ruled out a return to cycling.

2019 Graduation Highlights – Baccalaureate Mass – June 10

All the paths we took and all the decisions we made have helped us to realize who we were and who we wanted to be. We learned not to follow in footsteps but to create our own. Middle school was a chance for us to shine once more, it was a time to discover how to stand up for our own beliefs. We didn't let our fears of belonging prevent us from showing our true selves.

Bamlak Yilma '19 Valedictorian
Georgetown Visitation '23

My time at St. Augustine has allowed me to define myself as a pioneer and carry the personality of a leader. My teachers gifted me with the lens to respect different cultures and pursue knowledge from different perspectives while having a deeper desire to help others change the course of their lives. Going forward, I plan to fully immerse myself across various disciplines to develop the cross-cultural knowledge to succeed in our changing world.

Debora Abera '19 Co-Salutatorian
Georgetown Visitation '23

I learned so much from my classmates. They were kind, supportive, creative, unique, and interesting. They were very intelligent and talented. I also decided to appreciate my teachers. Before, I despised being disciplined by teachers such as Mr. Respers, Mrs. Lee, and Mrs. Hanton. I learned that every punishment they gave had a purpose. They were trying to make me the very best that I could be.

Noah Dooley '19 Co-Salutatorian
Georgetown Prep '23

There are three teachers who always pushed me to be the best that I can be, and they are Ms. Ross, Ms. Foersch-Connolly and Mr. Respers. I remember when I was having some challenges in Math, and Mr. Respers took time to break the information down to me so that I could understand it. I remember when I was having difficulty understanding a topic in class and Ms. Ross helped me with it after school I remember when we learned about the Bill of Rights in Ms. Foersch-Connoly's class and now I am more aware of the freedoms we have in society.

Obe Aaron '19
Holy Name Society Scholarship Winner
Eighth Grade Graduation Prayer Breakfast – May 19, 2019
Don Bosco Cristo Rey '23

Elexia Alleyne '11, also raised in Saint Augustine Parish, graduated from Old Dominion University in Norfolk this month with a bachelors degree in Speech Pathology and a minor in Special Education. She has earned a $25,000 scholarship at American University's School of Education, where she will pursue a Master's degree in Special Education Learning Disabilities Program. Through this program she will work as a fellow at the Lab School in Palisades and attend classes in the evenings. Upon graduating from the Special Education program, Elexia plans to pursue a Master's degree in Speech Pathology. AU is the alma mater of her proud mother, Alexandra Balbuena Alleyne. At ODU, Elexia participated in the LeADERS program, which helps prepare students for success upon graduation through compiling an electronic portfolio and participating in academic internships, leadership opportunities, service learning, entrepreneurship projects, and study abroad opportunities. She earned a LeADERS medal at a ceremony two days before ODU's May 11 graduation.

Alumni! We would like to hear from you and your families! Please contact Sister Gloria or Bill Murray, development director, at bmurray@saintaugustine-dc.org, with your news.

Seventh grader wins Prudential Spirit of Community Award

Actress Viola Davis congratulates St. Augustine's Feven Tadele (right) and a senior at Ballou Senior High School, Skylar Thomas, on winning their respective awards at the May 5 Prudential Spirit of Community Award ceremony at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History

Feven Tadele, a seventh grade student at Saint Augustine Catholic School, won an award through the United States' largest youth recognition program based solely on volunteer community service.

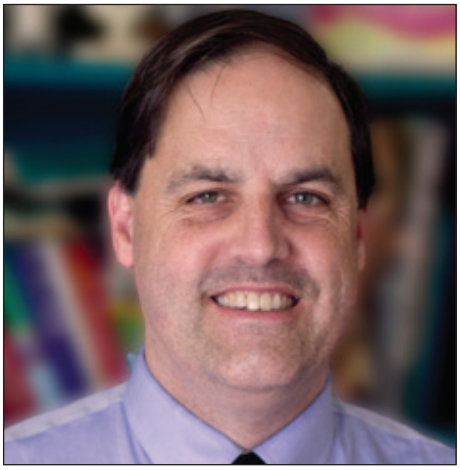
Actress Viola Davis presented the Prudential Spirit of Community Award to Feven at a May 5 ceremony at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History. Feven earned her award among middle school students in the District of Columbia, and it came with a $1,000.00 prize.

During five of the last eight years, a Saint Augustine student has won the Spirit of Community Award, which honors middle school and high school students, in part due to the advocacy of parishioner Donna Gaskins Pasteur '64, a retired educator who has assisted the school through the years. Each year, she holds an information session for middle school students at Saint Augustine to inform them about the applications process Prudential Spirit of Community Award.

Feven has helped pack food for people in need and taught Sunday school at her church. She also travelled to Ethiopia last summer to teach English to people living in poverty. Feven's volunteerism back at the age of 7 with chocolate sales to benefit Saint Augustine Catholic School, followed by helping her teachers clean up their classrooms and assisting classmates with their homework assignments. She has also distributed Christmas and holiday card at a senior citizens home.

DEVELOPMENT CORNER

William Murray



One cannot undervalue the role that our families have had in shaping their young people for success.

In some cases, our families have had to flee life-threatening environments. After Hurricane Maria slammed into the Caribbean nation of Dominica in September 2017, the family of *Obe Aaron '19* left the island and came to the United States, eventually finding Saint Augustine. Obe's strong academic performance earned him a Holy Name Society scholarship in May to assist with high school.

Another family, also Catholic like Obe's, came to us after the mother had to flee gender-based violence in their home country. Thankfully, the children's immigration status is secure, since they were born in the U.S., while the mother is pursuing refugee status. Remembering that St. Joseph had to flee with the Holy Family soon after Jesus' birth to Egypt to escape King Herod's slaughter of the innocents, we have welcomed the family into the St. Augustine Family.

Sister Gloria Agumagu, HHCJ, our principal, readily took up the family's cause, telling me that it was a matter of social justice that we ensured her children receive a Catholic education. It was hard not to consider the concept of solidarity in connection to this family's plight, and we are glad to play some role in their finding a better way than what was presented to them before.

"Is a journey about what you are escaping from or what you are moving towards?" asks Gail Dooley, mother of *Noah Dooley '19*. Her family's journey has been much shorter.

She and husband Twain moved from Baltimore to Silver Spring in part to be closer to his family, which is Jamaican. "We didn't want to raise him in in Baltimore," she said of Noah, given the "much broader opportunities" available in the Washington, D.C., area. She also thinks that stereotypes on young black boys are harder to escape in Baltimore.

So while the Dooley's journey was only an hour-long car ride, it has made all the difference for Noah and his 10-year old brother, Nolan. Gail Dooley called the move not only "powerful" but "intentional." As a mother who quizzed her son on thousands of vocabulary words in preparation for city-wide and national spelling bees, Mrs. Dooley should probably be taken at her word.

Noah graduated co-salutatorian in the eighth grade Class of 2019, which allowed him to give a speech to hundreds of congregants at Saint Augustine at the baccalaureate Mass in June, when he reflected on leaving his friends behind in Baltimore and making new ones at Saint Augustine. He is the first Saint Augustine graduate in recent memory to enroll at Georgetown Prep, the Jesuit boys school on Rockville Pike that has produced the last two Supreme Court justices.

Mr. & Mrs. Twain and Gail Dooley with their son, Noah Dooley

"He wanted it," Mrs. Dooley said of Georgetown Prep. Despite the school's sky high tuition, which is higher than a mortgage payment for some families, "I couldn't say 'no.'"

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Renewable energy, advocated by...

to use Math," Berry said of the two rules for the Pre-Engineering Club. He readily admits that he is not an educator and is surprised by how much he has enjoyed working with the students. Berry also serves on the Parish Finance Council, and he and his wife Kathlyn have given presentations to engaged couples in the Pre-Cana Program about family finances.

Although Fr. Smith liked the students' presentation, the solar panel project has run into archdiocesan bureaucratic obstacles. Money is not necessarily a deal breaker, since St. Augustine could partner with a solar energy company that could install and own solar panels and pay St. Augustine for use of the roof, and the school could also participate in a grant program to help make renewable energy a reality at 1421 V Street.

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In Memoriam

McVay Washington '56

May the souls of the faithfully departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

www.staug-dc.org

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Annual Giving Update

As we entered the school year, there were disturbing revelations about clergy sex abuse in the Catholic Church. Beyond the obvious need that the news from Pennsylvania and our own archdiocese pointed out to protect children and ensure accountability, many of us had concerns that support for Catholic organizations would decrease. The adage is that people vote not only with their feet but with their wallets.

Twelve months later, with the school year complete, we are doing well at Saint Augustine in fundraising. We received more than $355,000 from individuals and foundations, with an average gift size of nearly $1,000, during the 2019 school year ending June 30. Our school enjoys a good mix of support from people who have given for years and those who are first-time donors. Many of our donors attended Catholic schools when they were younger, and we have strong participation by alumni, parishioners, and other friends of our school. Thank you to our donors!

Story ideas for the newsletter? Please contact **Bill Murray** at bmurray@saintaugustine-dc.org.

Would you like to update your address for our records?
Please complete an alumni contact form at www.staug-dc.org/alumni.html.

We welcome inquiries from alumni, former students and anyone interested in our school.