

# SAINT AUGUSTINE SAINTS NEWS

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• WINTER 2024

SINCE 1858

Welcome to the  
Home of the Saints

For Parents, Alumni, Parishioners and Friends of St. Augustine School in Washington D.C.

## A God of New Beginnings

Dear Parents, Faculty, Alumni, Parishioners and Friends,

In the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, we read: *"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."* (43:18-19).

When God says, *"...do not dwell on the past,"* the point is not that our history is unimportant or irrelevant. No, God is really telling us not to get **stuck** in the past, as if the best days are behind us! Jesus himself put it this way: *"No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God"* (Luke 9:62). In other words, remembering and celebrating the great things God has done for us in the past must always serve as the key motivation to **expect** equal and greater things from God in the future! *"See, I am doing a new thing!"*

Speaking of new things: Two notable things that have occurred in the past month and a half are the renaming of our street from "V" Street to **"St. Augustine School Way,"** and second,

### From the Pastor



the securing of a new Principal for the 2024-2025 academic year.

The new Principal for next year is Dr. Anika Logan, and she officially begins on **July 1, 2024**. In case you don't recall, Sr. Emmanuella Ladipo, HHCJ, President of the school, stepped in as Interim Principal at my request in

October of 2022. At the conclusion of this academic year, she will return to focusing on her duties as President.

Dr. Logan comes highly recommended and with eight years of experience leading two Catholic schools as principal. A holder of a Master's Degree in Education since 2015 and a Doctor of Education since 2021 (both from Seton Hall University), Dr. Logan has been described as "exceptional" with curriculum development, educational leadership and operations management. References also cited her work in policy development and strategic planning as well as having a gracious personality and a passion for Catholic schools!

In addition to the professional references she provided, here are some of the comments shared with me by our own Principal Search Committee, made up of current school parents, teachers, alumni, a retired principal and long-time Saint Augustine parishioners: *"Clearly experienced and dedicated to working with students in Pre-K-8th grades;" "She is pleasant and passionate"*

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# Preparing for Lent



## From the President's Desk

**Academics:** The winter Measures of Academic Process Test is ongoing; it will end on Thursday February 15.

**Awards:** We congratulate all the students who made Principal and Honor Roll. This year we introduced the Character Award, a monthly award. We recognized students who are working on themselves, to be at the best that God made each one to be. We are highlighting students who consistently try to be their best, cooperating with all who are taking care of them.

**Lent 2024:** Each day during the 40 days of Lent, we're encouraging student to think about picking a different thing to give up or an activity to take on. It will make Lent interesting and **plant the seeds of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving in their little hearts**. For some, this could mean giving up electronic devices for a day or letting go of a toy they love but have outgrown. For others, giving up soda or a sugary drink might be a good sacrifice.

**More on Sacrifices & Fasting (Denying Yourself).** Some could avoid asking for toys when going to the store with mom or dad, while for others,

giving up watching the TV or videos for a entire day could be a sacrifice. From a positive perspective, one could tackle a kid-friendly chore. Being positive and not complaining can be a sacrifice for some of us. Those over 14 and older who are Catholic give up meat during Fridays in Lent.

As children grow, so the seeds of faith grow in them. Perhaps a child could give up a few things for brief periods of time during Lent. As the child grows older, then he or she could be old enough to grasp Lent and the concept of giving up, and at that point, they could choose to sacrifice one thing for 40 days, as most adults do.

As always, we are working on following school and class rules consistently, showing respect for everyone, and doing our class and homework.

Let us keep in step with the spirit, who leads us step by step. May God and His blessed mother continue to bless our effort.

Have a blessed Lent and a Glorious Easter.

Sincerely,

**Sister Emmanuella Ladipo, HHCH**  
Interim Principal/President.

Dear Saint Augustine Family,

Let us keep in step with the spirit (Galatians 5: 25).

It is the winter time, God has showered us with blessings of snow, so far we are lucky, not to have too much. We have many blessings to count! We thank God and all our Saint Augustine Community, Parish and the neighborhood and the DC Government for the honor of naming 14th and V Street: Saint Augustine School way!

All teachers are in place, we welcome our newest faculty members: Mr. Louis Wallen, Social Studies and 7th grade home room, and Ms. Anya Higman, Science teacher. You can read more about them in this issue.

*Continued from page 1*

## From the Pastor

*and clearly wants to serve 'our' students!" "Has a clear understanding of Catholic practices and teaching;" "appreciates the critical importance of marketing and enrollment;" and finally "A great fit for Saint Augustine school".*

Dr. Logan, who is serving as Principal at Cardinal Shehan School in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, is very excited about beginning this new venture at the helm of a great Catholic school with an extraordinary history,

remarkable longevity and a promising future. God is doing something new indeed!

Thank you for your part in cooperating with God by continuing to invest in our school and pray for our children, parents, faculty and staff.

Sincerely in Christ,

**Rev. Patrick A. Smith**  
Pastor

## Career Day

Are you passionate about what you do for a living? Would you like to share that passion with our PK-8th grade students?

Please join us for our annual Career Day

**Thursday, March 14**  
**9 a.m. – 12 Noon**

Please contact Bill Murray, development director, at [bmurray@saintaugustine-dc.org](mailto:bmurray@saintaugustine-dc.org) to RSVP by March 7.

# St. Augustine School Way street sign dedicated

Amidst all the changes of Ward 1 in Washington, D.C., including restaurants opening and closing and the redevelopment of large properties such as the Reeves Center, not to mention gentrification, St. Augustine Parish has been a steady presence in the Meridian Hill neighborhood.

On Jan. 26, the parish's largest ministry received an official form of recognition from the District of Columbia government, with the dedication of St. Augustine School Way, block-long section of V Street between 15th and 16th Streets, N.W., during a brief ceremony on an unseasonably warm day.

"What is the way of St. Augustine?" Fr. Patrick Smith, pastor of St. Augustine, asked during introductory remarks in front of the parish school entrance, speaking before a group of several dozen staff, students, parishioners, and friends of the parish.

"It's a way of serving. It's a mission," Fr. Smith said. "It was a way out of the indignity of slavery," since Saint Augustine Catholic School was founded in 1858, before slavery was eliminated in the U.S. "It's a way out of poverty," he said, since Catholic schools have been a ticket that many African-Americans have punched on their way to a middle class life.

"It's a way out of ignorance," Fr. Smith said. "It's a way into a loving community that cares about them," he said of Saint Augustine students. A District of Columbia native, Fr. Smith has served as pastor of St. Augustine, since 2004.

During her introductory comments, Sister Emmanuella Ladipo, president and interim principal of St. Augustine School, told the gathered crowd about St. Augustine's history, which began in 1858 when emancipated African-Americans, forced by segregation to



worship separately at St. Matthew's Church, began a chapel and school under the patronage of Blessed Martin de Porres on 15th Street. After the school was closed during the Civil War, it reopened on 15th Street, above L Street.

St. Augustine Catholic School was closed from 1885 until 1908, when the Oblate Sisters of Providence from Baltimore agreed to work there, a ministry they continued for 90 years. The parish school has been located at its current location, at 15th and V Streets, N.W., since 1971, after the Archdiocese of Washington merged St. Paul Catholic Church with St. Augustine.

In 2007, while a member of the 12-school Center City Consortium, the parish school as scheduled to be closed, among seven other K-8 schools in the city that the Archdiocese of Washington had decided to shutter, but under Fr. Smith's leadership, parishioners came up with a five-year Strategic Plan to take on daily

management and financing of the parish school, which then-Archbishop Donald Wuerl of Washington accepted. The prelate soon became impressed by the strong religious identity of St. Augustine, and since 2010, more than 70 children from the parish school have been received into full communion with the Catholic Church.

Ward 1 council member Brianne Nadeau (D.), who sponsored legislation to name the one-block area St. Augustine School Way, arrived toward the end of the ceremony, and spoke to the gathered crowd gathered near the Reeves Center, amidst the din of 15th Street traffic, about St. Augustine's role in the community. "I wish you many, many good years," she said to the crowd.

Avery Clark, a church volunteer and cantor, said in an interview that it took two years for St. Augustine School Way to become a reality. A lawyer who clearly knows how to stay on task, she learned that she had to work through the city council to sponsor the legislation for the street block dedication, after initially inquiring through the DC government and consulting with officials from the DC Department of Transportation.

Apparently, navigating the bureaucratic red tape was all worth it in the end.

"It's absolutely wonderful. I think it's overdue," said lifelong parishioner Marsha Lyons, an alumna of the parish school who is a leader in Team HOPE, a 14-year parish ministry to support individuals experiencing homelessness. "I couldn't be happier."

"This is something I wanted to be a part of," said Angie Young, a parishioner of 35 years, the widow of Johnny Young, one of the first Black American ambassadors at the State Department.

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# Teaching Math with Mrs. Hanton

On a December afternoon in her second story classroom, Mrs. Cheryl Hanton stood before 16 fifth graders.

A teacher for more than 40 years at Saint Augustine Catholic School, she was explaining to them the difference between proper and improper fractions in Math class. An improper fraction, such as  $\frac{9}{8}$ , is one where the numerator (top number) is greater than the denominator (bottom number). A proper fraction, meanwhile, is one where the numerator is less than the value of the denominator.

"Yes!" a student explained after answering a question correctly.

She called on one student in the second row, a boy who made the sign of the cross before heading to front of the class, where he showed how to make an improper fraction,  $\frac{5}{2}$ , into a mixed number,  $2\frac{1}{2}$ . Mrs. Hanton, who began teaching at St. Augustine when Oblate Sisters of Providence ran the parish school, then explained that any



number presented as a fraction over itself equals 1.

Any visitor to the classroom could sense how Mrs. Hanton had earned the Golden Apple Award in 2022 for excellence in teaching in the Archdiocese of Washington. She knows the material she teaches and presents it in an appealing way that engages her

students, clad in their blue and white uniforms.

In recent years, St. Augustine graduates have earned admissions offers at top area high schools, including Bishop McNamara, Bullis, DeMatha, Georgetown Day School, Georgetown Visitation, Gonzaga, Maret, St. Anselm's, and St. John's. One can see that the preparation for high school is launched, in part, in Mrs. Hanton's classroom.

During her tenure, she has seen her son and daughter enroll and eventually graduate from St. Augustine. This year, her second granddaughter is an eighth grader, so a second generation of Hantons has experienced a St. Augustine education.

"Ms. Hanton!" An excited boy in the back row called out, hoping to answer another question. But the veteran teacher had numerous options, students who had raised their hands to answer her next question.

## Alumni Notes • Alumni Notes • Alumni Notes

Kellie Benefield Everett '87 began her own bakery business in 2010, CakeNuts Cakes L.L.C., serving the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area with weekend cake pickups, and Kellie serving as a specialty cake designer.

Business is so brisk that she generally takes orders four to six weeks in advance, whether her customers are celebrating a birthday, anniversary, some other special occasion, or are just looking for a special dessert.

Kellie's father is Steve Benefield, who served for many years as CYO basketball coach at St. Augustine, while her sister is Nicole Benefield '95. They grew up in St. Augustine Parish, and they remember their father sometimes helping pick up and drop



off older parishioners on the way to Sunday Mass. Kellie and her husband Chris Everett have been married for 20 years.

One can find more information at [www.cakenuts.com](http://www.cakenuts.com), and one can email Kellie at [kelliejamel@gmail.com](mailto:kelliejamel@gmail.com).

*Do you have any news to report about St. Augustine School alumni? Please contact Bill Murray at [bmurray@saintaugustine-dc.org](mailto:bmurray@saintaugustine-dc.org).*

# New teachers join staff

Two teachers joined the Saint Augustine Catholic School in January. The well-educated duo have three Master's degrees between them.



**Mr. Andrew Wallen** (*Middle School Social Studies/7th Grade Religion/7th Grade Homeroom*) was born in Oxford in

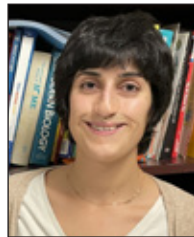
England and came to the United States during his seventh-grade year. He holds a bachelor's degree in History from Pomona College, as well as a master's degree from University College in London, as well as a second master's degree from Columbia University, an Ivy League university in New York.

He has studied Counter-Enlightenment history and the history of political philosophy and is interested in how the concept of liberty has

developed in countries like England and the United States through their respective histories.

He and his wife recently moved to the Washington area from Durham, N.C., and he wanted to get a job teaching in a Catholic school because he has good memories of attending a joint Catholic/Anglican school in England.

"I always wanted to teach," he said.



**Ms. Anya Higman** (*Middle School Science*) is a

District of Columbia native who attended St. John's College High School before graduating from Wilson High School. She holds a bachelor's degree and master's degree in Global Health from the University of Central Florida in Tampa, Fla. During her undergraduate

years, she minored in Anthropology. She comes to St. Augustine after serving as a children's education specialist at a Tampa museum.

"I want to get them excited about science," she said of her goals. In her initial days on the job, students have asked her about when they can start working in laboratory experiments. She is looking forward to studying cells with the students, as well as fire, as a physics exercise. She is also thinking about out-of-classroom activities she could schedule.

She has noticed how her middle school students are diligent about completing their homework assignments and has noted their excitement about learning about science.

"The kids are a blast. They have lots of personality," she said.

## Sheku Kabia '08

Sheku Kabia '08 died in his sleep on Jan. 28, survived by his mother, Hawa Sheriff, and his sister, Fanta Kabia '10.

A native of Sierra Leone and District of Columbia resident, Ms. Sheriff found Saint Augustine Catholic School after researching local Catholic schools. Although she came from a Muslim family, Ms. Sheriff understood the value of Catholic education for her children and was able to enroll her children into Catholic schools through the Opportunity Scholarship Program, with their initial years at St. Gabriel School, N.W., which after the 2007-2008 school year was closed, with a public charter school opened in its place.

Sheku attended St. Augustine Catholic School for middle school, from grades sixth through eighth, while his sister attended in seventh and eighth



grades. They were also involved in the Petworth Youth Program, run by Mr. Ronald Riley, Math Department chair at St. Augustine, as well as the Youth Leadership Foundation (YLF), which operates afterschool mentoring and academic enrichment programs for boys (Tenley Achievement Program)

and girls (PALS).

Following his graduation from Archbishop Carroll High School, where he played varsity soccer, and University of Maryland, where he majored in Sociology, Sheku developed a career in data analysis. He self-published three science fiction fantasy books, according to his sister, and he loved the arts, drawing, and gaming. Sheku served as a Tenley Achievement Program volunteer, and he earned a Johnny & Mary Claire Holliday scholarship through YLF that helped him attend the University of Maryland.

"He was very kind and intelligent," Fanta said. "There were no challenges he wouldn't face. He had a silent strength to him. He was very focused. He will be dearly missed. I wish to embody the spirit of Shek," she said, using his nickname.



# Catching up with Steve Benefield

Four years into his retirement, Steve Benefield is doing well.

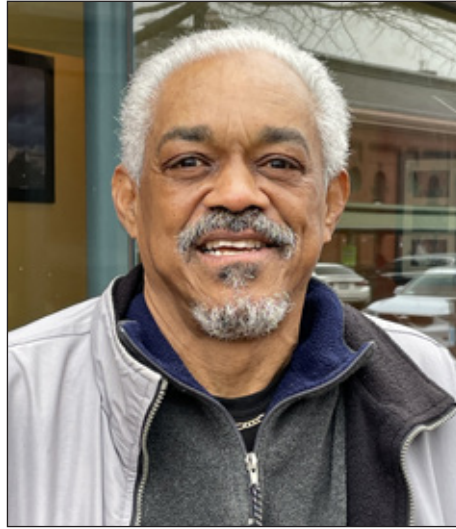
A smile easily comes across his face, seated in a coffeeshop across from Eastern Market. His childhood straddled Alexandria, Va., and the District of Columbia, but it is clear that the nation's capital is his home.

He doesn't get up before 12 Noon most days if he doesn't have to. Such a relaxed lifestyle was not always possible. While working in the District of Columbia's Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, he could get calls at any time for issues that seemed like emergencies (remember Y2K?), in addition to true all-hands-on-deck episodes.

He doesn't play basketball any longer, since he would want to play all out if he was on the court, and his body does not respond like it used to. He enjoys playing ping pong – some call it table tennis – at Benefield's home in Southeast Washington with his cousin.

He clearly has a love for the game of basketball. As CYO basketball coach at St. Augustine (roughly 1981 to 1996), it wasn't unusual for him to have to shepherd a group of 13- and 14-year old boys, giving them a ride from Northwest DC all the way to Darnestown, Md., for example, to play a Saturday morning basketball game with a 7:00 a.m. tipoff. He felt there was somehow a CYO conspiracy to put St. Augustine at a competitive disadvantage with the time and location of games, but Benefield would not allow such obstacles to deter his players.

The score for such CYO games would usually be tight in the first half, but then the St. Augustine Saints – who were composed primarily of school students, with two or three neighborhood boys joining – would inevitably pull away in the second half



and win by 20 or 30 points.

"The second-string players wouldn't let up," Benefield recalled, anxious to prove themselves on the gridiron. In other words, the opposition was in trouble.

These days, being a family driver takes up much of his time, driving his grandchildren to activities after school and on the weekends. His two daughters, *Kellie Benefield Everette '87* and *Nicole Benefield '95* have given him grandchildren to dote over.

After a brief time at St. Augustine School when it was located at Bishops Gate on R Street, N.W., Benefield was educated at St. Francis de Sales School, N.E. It was not unusual for him to have to spend time in detention due to some rule-breaking during the school day. The benefit of such experiences, as he recalls them, is that he saw another side to the religious sisters, the Sisters of St. Francis, who worked at the school: a less stern side that was more fun-loving and informal.

He feels that his experiences with the Sisters of St. Joseph at St. Francis de Sales, as well as the Oblate Sisters of Providence at St. Augustine, have formed him in a unique way as a Catholic.

He attended Mackin Catholic High School, playing basketball and winning a city championship with Austin Carr, who later became a legendary Notre Dame basketball player before launching a 10-year NBA career, before Benefield graduated in 1968. Benefield's basketball skills and academic interests led him to a scholarship in Kansas, but Benefield returned to the District, eventually attending Prince Georges Community College and George Mason University, where he played basketball, before dropping out.

He became a St. Augustine School parent in 1983, upon his older daughter Kellie's enrollment. He remembers how Fr. Raymond Kemp, pastor, as active at the school, which was known as the Saints Paul and Augustine School, after the merger of St. Augustine Catholic Church and St. Paul Catholic Church.

During Benefield's more active time in the parish, he showed himself to be more of a "doer" than a just one who joined parish or community activities. While he might not have joined the Holy Name Society, for example, the oldest parish organization for men, he helped manage the St. Augustine Room, which would host everything from punk rock concerts to wedding receptions, as a form of community outreach and parish fundraising. One year, Fr. John Mudd, then the pastor of St. Augustine, told Benefield that the St. Augustine Room had earned \$60,000 in revenue for the parish.

He helped run Wednesday night bingo in the St. Augustine School cafeteria, located in the basement of the building. The event grew over time to be a social gathering that its regular attendees, many of whom lived in the neighborhood, looked forward to every week. The activity went by the wayside

*Continued on next page*

# Emory Verstraete '13

One could say that *Emory Verstraete '13* has entered the family business.

During her senior year at the University of Pittsburgh, where she earned a bachelor's degree in Psychology in 2020, and for many months following, she and her family were very transfixed by the bike injury that her brother *Robert Verstraete '10* had suffered in 2019. While riding his bike to work one morning, he had a traumatic head injury on the streets of Washington, DC.

As fate would have it, Robert's mother, *Andrea (Stallworth) Verstraete '71* and father *Richard Verstraete* are nurses, and his mother was particularly



focused on ensuring Robert had the best care, after Robert had suffered a brain bleed while he was unconscious from his fall.

In the process of learning more about Robert's care, Emory decided to apply to Drexel University in 2022, where she graduated after completing an 11-month bachelor's in science in nursing program.

For eight months, she has been working as a nurse at a hospital in New York City, having previously worked at

Washington Hospital Center, where both her parents had worked before. While working in a neuro surgical unit, she has come to appreciate more the care that her brother Robert received during his convalescence. "Now I know how bad his injury was," she added.

"I'm learning a lot," she said. "Obviously, it's a very different city than D.C. I'm getting used to doing things on my own." She is considering becoming a flight nurse, which would entail caring for patients in need of helicopter transportation to a critical care facility.

She appreciates the academic, moral, and spiritual formation she received at St. Augustine School. Her academic preparation helped her succeed in high school at Georgetown Visitation.

Robert Verstraete has made a complete recovery from his accident, and he is preparing to be married at St. Augustine Catholic Church in May.

*Continued from page 3*

## St. Augustine School Way street sign...

She and her husband hosted a school donor reception at their Kensington house about 10 years ago, capitalizing on their large circle of Foggy Bottom professional and personal associates, during a time when the parish school was working hard to build support.

Shelore Williams, an attorney and longtime parishioner who converted to the Catholic faith as an adult, came back to the school where she served as principal from 1995 to 2002. "My favorite years of working were as principal of St. Augustine School," she said, speaking effusively about the staff she worked with. "We pray together, we laugh together, we discipline together, we teach together," she said of working at St. Augustine Catholic School and the strong community she fostered.

Photo caption: Sister Emmanuella and a group of school children look on, as Fr. Patrick Smith unveils the St. Augustine School Way sign. Photo courtesy Catholic Standard, Mihoko Owada.

## School Video

Please check out our new school video, which you can find on our website landing page at [www.staug-dc.org](http://www.staug-dc.org) or through our YouTube channel (search "St. Augustine School Washington, DC"). If you know a family who might be looking for a Catholic education for their child, please consider forwarding the video to them.

## Correction

In the Summer 2023 St. Augustine School Saints newsletter, we stated that Ms. Helene Cropper was serving as the middle school Social Studies teacher at the school and no longer serving as vice principal. We apologize for this inaccuracy, since Ms. Cropper is continuing to serve as both vice principal and Middle School Social Studies teacher.

## In Memoriam

*Sheku Kebia-Sheriff '08*

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

*Continued from page 6*

## Catching up with...

after the DC City Council tightened its control and passed legislation that required games of chance to purchase their products through the city.

He would drive a 13-passenger parish van to and from Sunday Mass to give older ladies who were members of the Sodality rides to Sunday Mass. Over the years, these parishioners would pass away, leaving the passenger van with fewer occupants. "We started off with 13 of us, but by the end, there were just three," he recalled.



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Story ideas for the newsletter? Please contact **Bill Murray** at [bmurray@saintaugustine-dc.org](mailto: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](http://www.staug-dc.org/alumni.html).

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