

The Mustang Connection

Alumni and Friends Newsletter

St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School
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Winter 2011

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Our Roman Holiday

By Sue Waldecker, Teacher

We were barely able to contain our excitement as we approached Rome, Italy after a 13-hour journey! Our arrival was the fruition of nearly two years of fundraising, rehearsing, and planning, all under the tireless leadership of St. Francis Middle-school Choir Director Linda Opaleski. Her 7th and 8th graders had been invited to perform at the 36th International Congress of Pueri Cantores; and now 121 choir and family members were about to descend upon the streets of Rome!



Although we were only there from December 27 – January 2, we certainly made the most of our one-week stay. Music Celebrations International, our tour company, took us on trips to many of the Roman icons: the Forum, the Colosseum, the Pantheon, Trevi Fountain, and the Spanish Steps. Seeing Roman ruins interspersed throughout this bustling, cosmopolitan city was breathtaking! Walking around the beautiful Piazza Navona, eating at local restaurants and cafés, and shopping in the market places were definite highlights of our trip.

Perhaps what affected us most deeply, however, were the spiritual aspects of our trip. Visiting Vatican City was an incredibly moving experience. There are no words to adequately describe the majesty of St. Peter's Basilica and the Sistine Chapel! We were also able to visit the Basilica di San Giovanni in Laterno (the mother of all churches in Rome and in the world) and the Basilica di San Paolo fuori le Mura (built over the burial place of St. Paul). As we traveled, our St. Francis students truly enjoyed meeting children from other countries, as well as performing with them. We attended several rehearsals and concerts with people from all over the world! The priests and nuns at Betania Mariana, the convent where we stayed, were extremely kind and welcoming. In thanksgiving for their hospitality, our students performed an impromptu concert for Padre Leone and the staff on our last night there.

I think the pinnacle of our trip were the opportunities we had to be near our Pope. During the middle of the week, all of the Pueri Cantores singers and their families had a private audience with Pope Benedict. In many ways, it was like attending a rock concert! People, young and old alike, were so excited to get even a glimpse of him in person. Attending the Pontifical Mass on New Year's Day while our children sang in the choir was a glorious experience. And finally, before leaving St. Peter's Square that afternoon, we received a Papal blessing. Several of us were moved to tears at each of these events!



**A+ For America
Catholic Schools**

Philosophy and Mission Statement

St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School is a family-oriented mission of the St. Francis of Assisi Parish community where each student is valued, respected and nurtured as a unique creation of God. We challenge our students spiritually, academically and physically to learn, care and lead as they work to discover the plan that God intends for them. As followers of Christ, we strive always to instill in our students the words of St. Francis of Assisi... "Preach the Gospel always, and when necessary, use words."

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The Pastor's Perspective



With the arrival of a New Year, many of us reflect on changes we want or need to make in our lives. We resolve to lose weight, or exercise more, or quit smoking or drinking. While important to our physical health, these goals avoid spiritual growth, as well as a deepened relationship with God.

Today, I challenge you to tie your faith into your New Year's resolutions and goals. Why wait? Testify to God that in 2011 you will strive to follow Jesus' example more. Allow Him to lead you in your dedication to God, in your family and social relationships, in your business transactions and in the stressful times in your life.

As I look back on the past year, I see the great abundance it provided. For the many gifts you shared with St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School, I offer you my deepest gratitude. We continue to remain strong with your support and prayer.

I wish you a happy and faith-filled New Year. May God bless us all in 2011 and may we be a blessing to all we meet.

Please join me in "**Unmasking Possibilities**" for St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School during the 10th annual Educational Trust Fund Benefit on **Saturday, March 5** at the Four Points Sheraton in Ann Arbor. Let's celebrate Catholic education and have Mardi Gras fun together.

Most Sincerely,

Fr. Jim McDougall
Pastor



From the Principal's Pen



Dear Friends,

St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School celebrated Catholic Schools Week beginning January 30. During that special time, our school and others throughout the nation were recognized and celebrated for contributing to Catholic education. This year, the theme for Catholic School's week was -

A+ For America Catholic Schools

There are ten strong reasons why Catholic schools are considered **A+ for America**. They are as follows:

1. Catholic tradition and academic excellence in a community grounded in faith.
2. Balanced curriculum that includes Spanish, music, band, Art, Physical Education, library and technology classes.
3. Emphasis on moral development, service to others, and leadership skills.
4. A graduation rate of 99% from high school.
5. Strong preparation for further education.
6. Safe and disciplined environment.
7. Exceptional faculty who help students reach their highest potential.
8. Individual attention in a caring community.
9. Commitment to technology use to enhance education.
10. Good stewardship of resources.

If you have a friend or family member interested in learning more about St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School, I am available to give tours at the convenience of the family. All one needs to do is call the school office at (734) 821-2200 and Mrs. Stefl or Mrs. Van Oirschot will be able to schedule a tour.

Thank you for sharing the good news of Catholic education!

As many of you already know, tuition does not fully cover the cost of educating a student at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School. There is a gap of about \$2,000 per student that must be made up through Development efforts. With that in mind, our school is in the midst of our Annual School Appeal, focusing on raising funds for teacher salaries and Outdoor Education. Catholic schools play a pivotal role in developing young men and women to be strong, faith-filled citizens of our world who are dedicated to making a difference. If you can help continue this important legacy of Catholic schools, your gift will be used by our students as a way to serve our Lord.

In the Peace of Christ,

Ms. Sara Collins
Principal

Fiesta Fun Car Raffle

By Glenn Gottfried, School Parent

Fifteen years ago, St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School partnered with Gene Butman Ford to introduce the Car Raffle to support the operation of the school. Ken Butman generously offered to donate the Grand Prize in the form of a new Ford vehicle, and the school committed to making the fundraiser a worthwhile endeavor.

This year, a cumulative total of over \$1,000,000 will have been raised by the succession of annual Car Raffles. The Butman family has kindly continued to supply our Grand Prize - this year, a lease on a 2011 Ford Fiesta or \$6,000 - and the school has benefited immensely.

The Car Raffle will be “new and improved” in 2011 in several ways: first, it will include a fun “Fiesta” theme. In addition, the prizes have been expanded with an additional drawing. First prize will be \$1,000, second will be \$750, third will be \$500, and fourth will be \$250. A single ticket will cost \$5, and a book of five tickets will be sold for \$20.

The window of opportunity to purchase tickets is a little narrower this year, as they will only be available for about six weeks, starting in mid April. The drawing will again be at the Ice Cream Social on Friday, June 3 - and it’ll be a better “party” than ever before!

The goal for this year’s raffle is just over \$70,000, with the proceeds directed to new textbooks for the science curriculum as well as renovations to the fourth- and fifth-grade hallway bathrooms.

For tickets, please talk with a St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School student or family, or call the Development Office at (734) 821-2208. Buy your tickets as soon as they’re available to be a part of the fun and help our school!

Planned Giving

By Patti Dobbs, Educational Trust Fund Trustee

Improving the financial strength of the Educational Trust Fund (ETF) at St. Francis of Assisi is of utmost importance. The ETF was established in 1987, and over the past ten years, our faithful community has hosted a benefit for the ETF that draws together parishioners, school families and friends of Catholic education.



As part of our ongoing effort to ensure the long-term health of our school, we are introducing a planned giving program. The ETF Trustees ask parishioners and friends of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School to prayerfully consider leaving a specific bequest in their estate plan to the Fund. Increasing the corpus of the ETF will help ensure the longevity of our Catholic school. As the principal of the ETF grows, so does the annual award given to our school by the ETF. In the 2010-2011, St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School received \$52,000 from the ETF to help support school operations.

A sub-committee of the ETF Board of Trustees recently developed a Planned Giving Case Statement, and prepared information for potential donors. The Case Statement addresses the question, “Why St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School?”

Please consider including the Educational Trust Fund in your estate plan. We welcome the opportunity to talk with you about how you can help, and answer the question “Why St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School?” In addition to staff members, committed volunteers will discuss this type of charitable giving with you. Please call Colleen Pierce, Director of Stewardship and Development at (734) 821-2208 or email her at cpierce@stfrancis2.org if you are interested in learning more. God bless you for your consideration.

Math Curriculum Changes Add Up

St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School adopted two new math programs at the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year for all grades. The McGraw-Hill textbooks include an online version of the text, classroom materials and myriad online resources like quizzes, chapter reviews, study aids, online tutorials, voiced text and lesson/homework help.

The Renaissance Math program for grades 4-8 consists of two components, Accelerated Math (AM), which is math practice, and the diagnostic StarMath program. Accelerated Math generates unique worksheets for each student, which they score electronically for instant feedback. If the student needs more practice on an objective, AM will automatically print more problems.

StarMath helps track student and class progress and compares the progress to national norms. Students take a StarMath test at the beginning of the year and at the end of each quarter. The test uses computer adaptive technology to customize the level of difficulty of the test to match the student’s current level of achievement. Data collected over the course of the year help teachers assess the efficacy of the student’s current effort and instruction.

The response to both of these new programs has been very positive. Students appreciate receiving instant feedback and having their instruction tailored to their needs. Data collected after the first year of implementation indicate St. Francis students’ annual growth in math proficiency exceeds the national norm. As the use of these programs is expanded, the increases in math performance should be even greater.



Pop Quiz

- $\frac{1}{2} \cdot \frac{7}{8} = \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$.
A. 3/8 B. 7/16 C. 8/10 D. 8/14
- Simplify 13/91.**
A. 1/7 B. 1/8 C. 7 D. 13
- Divide 1.44 ÷ 0.4.**
A. 36 B. 0.36 C. 3.6 D. 36
- Find the greatest common factor for the set 26, 52, 65.**
A. 2 B. 4 C. 7 D. 13

Find answers on Page 4

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Our Roman Holiday *(continued from Page 1)*

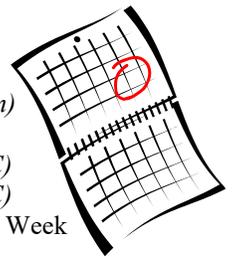


To say that this trip was a pilgrimage would be an understatement. I truly believe that my daughter, her classmates, and all of us adult family members who traveled with them have been changed somehow because of this trip. Experiencing what we did as a small community would be hard to duplicate. In reflection as we travelled home, I remembered all the support and kindness of so many at our school and parish, St. Francis of Assisi, to allow this to be an affordable experience.

Without so many generous efforts, this trip would not have been possible. I know I am not alone in my gratitude to Linda Opaleski for having the vision to make this a trip of a lifetime for our children!

Upcoming Events

- March 5:** ETF Benefit
(Four Points Sheraton)
- March 9:** Ash Wednesday
Lenten Fish Fry (PAC)
- March 11:** Lenten Fish Fry (PAC)
- March 21:** Teacher Appreciation Week
- March 24:** Tri-Arts Program
- March 25:** Lenten Fish Fry (PAC)
- April 1:** Lenten Fish Fry (PAC)
- April 4-8:** No School
- April 8:** Lenten Fish Fry (PAC)
- April 12:** Car Raffle Kick-Off
- April 15:** Lenten Fish Fry (PAC)
- April 21:** Holy Thursday
- April 22:** Good Friday
- April 24:** Easter Sunday



¡Hola! to you from our new Spanish-language teacher Señora Lara. She joined us this fall teaching Spanish language to all of our students in preschool through eighth grade. As a native of Colombia, Señora Lara has become a part of our family, guiding the students in lessons using stories and songs to excite and inspire the children to learn another language! We are blessed to have Señora Lara as a member of our faculty.