



# Saint Mary's Catholic School

## Summer 2015

EDUCATING CHILDREN SPIRITUALLY, ACADEMICALLY AND PERSONALLY

IN THIS ISSUE

## Preparing for the New School Year

by T. Dertinger

This summer has been a very busy time for Saint Mary's school! Walls are being painted, cabinets are being installed, floors are being refinished, schedules are being prepared, admissions and enrollments are being finalized, transcripts are being processed, new technology is being installed and tested, landscaping is being done, rooms are being cleaned, systems are being upgraded including new messaging, better student tracking and website improvements, faculty are being hired, teachers are attending professional development workshops, the PTO is planning fundraising and social activities, and there is even some time for vacations. This newsletter is an attempt to provide information to the community in general with the goal of being as up to date as possible in this blur of summer time.

### Communications

Saint Mary's has been working hard to improve the availability of information to parents and the community in general. This summer, the Diocese of Richmond's Office of Catholic Schools mandated a standard student / school information system known as RenWeb. Saint Mary's is currently in the process of converting from our old system to

this new system with the intent of being operational as the new school year commences. This will involve transitioning our email and text messaging systems to yet another platform with the expectation that the new systems will be easier to manage and provide for clear and consistent information. There will be some initial set up that will involve parent input –stay tuned for those requests. Please note that we will abandon the use of previous systems, so there is no need to update your information or supply previously requested information until the RenWeb system is implemented.

### Staffing

The summer continues to be a time of change for a number of staff members. An update of staff changes can be found in this newsletter with more changes expected. When a faculty member requests a transfer to a new position, our first responsibility is to insure that the faculty member will be eligible for a State license. This determination often takes 6 or more weeks, so an announcement is often delayed while the paperwork is reviewed and processed.



### PTO News

The PTO Executive Board met and be assured that this is going to be an amazing year at Saint Mary's Catholic School!

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### From the Principal

What's coming for the 2015-2016 school year? New procedures, new staff assignments, and many important dates.

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## PTO

The Board of the Parent – Teacher Organization (PTO) has been planning for the 2015-2016 and has made great progress in designing an exciting and productive agenda for the 2015-2016 school year. Saint Mary's is so very fortunate to have active and talented families so willing to give of their time and resources to insure that our students have exceptional opportunities to learn and grow in a warm and loving environment. Throughout this issue, please note the many opportunities to become involved as a family in the family of Saint Mary's!

### Popsicle Party

**Sunday, August 16, 2015 at 2:00 PM on the Playground**

Join us for a late summer get-together. Especially for new families, this is an opportunity to meet new friends, chat about the upcoming school year, and begin the new school year with a gentle introduction. In the event of inclement weather, we will gather in the gym. Hope to see you there!

### Summer reading book drop

**Meet the Teacher Day, Thursday, August 20, 2015**

Families can drop off their summer reading books, which will be stored and made available to rising students as school ends for the summer next year. A great way to recycle books. Drop off books in the gym during your meet the teacher day visit.

### Kick off Cook Out

**Friday, August 28, 2015 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM in the Gym**

Join us for our annual gathering to kick off the new school year! Great food, great fun. Families with last name A to P bring a side to share, Q to Z bring a dessert to share (Think 10-12 people). BBQ provided! The Knights of Columbus will have their beer truck available for cash.

### Parent Work Day

**Saturday, August 29, 2015 9:00 AM at the Playground**

Help spread mulch to keep our playground safe. Many hands are needed to spread over 110 yards of mulch. Want to help in other ways? There will be a sign up later in the month for spruce up jobs that need to be done around the school. All talents and interests are needed to help us make our facilities look great and serve as a great learning environment.

### Go Forth 5k

**Saturday, September 26, 2015 8:00 AM in Deep Run Park**

Join us for our fall fund raiser. Run, walk, race, or just stroll in our 1 mile fun run and you will be supporting the PTO's efforts to bring resources to Saint Mary's school. Sign up on our website – look for the 5K link on the home page.

### Marketplace

**Saturday, September 26, 2015 All afternoon at the Parish Picnic**

Many vendors, unusual items for sale, and the comradery of fellow shoppers make for a great time. Come enjoy the parish picnic with the family, and be sure to stop in the gym for this annual opportunity to help Saint Mary's school by purchasing from local vendors and artists.

## Happy Summer all!!!

The PTO Executive Board met and be assured that this is going to be an amazing year at Saint Mary's Catholic School! However, in order to make it amazing we are still in need of your time and talents! YES, we want YOU and we need YOU!

The following events still need CHAIR PERSONS:

- Welcoming Committee ( a team of 2 would be great)- popsicle party is Aug. 16-- it can't happen without YOU
- Spirit Nights (2nd chair to assist Laura Earle)
- Gala (a team of 2 would be great!)
- Nominating (spring 2016)

These committees are not starting from scratch and you will get the "playbook" and help from the former chair. We would like to start having a main chair and a 2nd chair that shadows to take over the position the following year.

If you would like to help with any of these or anything else please feel free to contact Kim via FB or [kim.ethangraham@gmail.com](mailto:kim.ethangraham@gmail.com)

See the Volunteer Guide (on the website) for descriptions and dates!

## From the PTO President

Have you been to Target, Walmart or Kroger? Can you believe that the school supplies are out? Yes, it's still July but the first day of school will be upon us before we know it. If you're like me and are not ready for "back to school", go ahead and continue to enjoy a few more weeks of the slower, relaxed pace of summer fun in the sun, I know I will! However, although my family and I have been enjoying summer, the PTO Board and many committee chairs have been actively preparing for the coming school year PTO events. We are excited to continue cultivating a sense of community through our Stewardship Program. The PTO believes getting people involved, working towards the common goal of a strong Catholic education, and spending quality time as a community of parents and teachers will help to shape the lives of the students of Saint Mary's Catholic School.

I am looking forward to serving you this year as PTO President and am positive that it will be a spectacular year of learning and success!

*Kim Graham*



## Stewardship

Our children will grow up to be givers, if we show them how to give. They will grow up to be helpers, if we show them how to help. Our goal, with the SMCS Stewardship Program, launched last year by the PTO, is to show our children that helping can be fun, rewarding, and beneficial to the whole Saint Mary's Family!

We appreciate your willingness to give 10 hours of your time throughout the year or pay \$25 per unfulfilled hour, a maximum of \$250 for the year. Please stop in the gym during Meet-the-Teacher Day to get all the details about our volunteer opportunities! We plan to have signups available for all events and committees, so you can mark your calendar immediately. There are plenty of in-school activities, but also service that can be provided after school hours. Ask a PTO representative for more information

Additional information can be found in the summer return to school "packet" found on the website. You are asked to complete the Stewardship Program Agreement form and submit it on Meet the Teacher day.

## Principal

As we said farewell to our 2015 graduates who are off to exciting and challenging high school programs well prepared for the rigors of advanced learning, I listened to students, teachers and parents share wonderful experiences, as well as suggestions for improvements. Based on those many comments, plans have been made for 1) changes and improvements in our communication efforts, 2) attention to skills that will better prepare our students for school and life in general, and 3) continued emphasis on learning to love one another as Christ has commanded us. Changes will be both subtle and dramatic as faculty, staff and school administration address these three areas. Please read below the introduction to some of these changes, as well as note the many upcoming activities and events as we kick off the 2015-2016 school year.

## Summer Packets

In the old days, packets were left in the lower commons of the church for pick up. Each packet contained the forms, instructions, and information vital to the start of school. These days the "packets" are online – but just as important. Please visit the website, click on the PARENTS tab, and look for the Return to School (Summer Packets) choice. Be sure to read the instructions carefully and complete each item.

Online

### ECDC Orientation Days Wednesday, August 19, 2015 Pre-K at 6:30 PM; K at 7:00 PM

Parents are invited to meet with the teachers to share information and get ready for the first day of school. Pre-School (2 and 3 year olds) date and time will be announced shortly.

### Meet the Teacher Day (K – 8) Thursday, August 20, 2016 3:00 PM – 5:45 PM

Students: Time to bring your supplies to school, meet the teacher, and visit your classroom while parents visit the gym to drop off paperwork and payments. Parents: be sure to check in with the PTO and Development tables to learn more about our programs and opportunities for parents.

### First Full Day of School Monday, August 24, 2014

All school programs start on Monday, August 24<sup>th</sup>. Classes meeting on other days of the week begin this week as well. Pre-School, Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten begin this day. Pre-School Preparation classes (2 year olds) begin Tuesday, August 25<sup>th</sup>.

### Parent Back-to-School Night (Grades 1-5) Tuesday, August 25, 2015 7:00 PM – 9:00 PM

A general orientation to the programs and procedures used throughout the year. Parents will gather in the church for an initial group meeting, followed by classroom visits with teachers.

### Parent Back-to-School Night (Grades 6 – 8) Wednesday, August 26, 2015 7:00 PM -9:00 PM

Learn about the IB program, expectations for students and parents, and specific subject programs of instruction. Parents will gather in the church for an initial group meeting, followed by classroom visits with teachers.

### Labor Day Holiday Monday, September 7, 2015

No school – enjoy the Labor Day weekend!

## Focus on Uniforms

Teachers: We waste far too much time dealing with uniform violations. Parents should check their students for proper uniforms, and we shouldn't have to be checking all of the time. It is important that our class time is focused on instruction, not insuring that students are groomed and dressed appropriately.

Parents: We spend a lot of time and money making sure our children are in uniform. But, we see other students who are not following the rules. It is annoying that we comply with the rules, and others don't. I am fine with making my child adhere to the uniform policy, as long as it applies to all.

Students: When we see another student getting away with not being in uniform, we know that nothing is being done about it. We all know who is not in uniform, and it does bother us that our parents make us wear the uniform when others don't. We talk about it a lot when we see others getting away with it.

Wearing uniforms is a time honored tradition of Catholic Education that is both envied and emulated in the public sector. From a classroom perspective, uniforms help to reduce distractions and promote focus on what is being taught. When listening to teachers, parents and students, the comments most often heard are highlighted above. While the vast majority of our students have learned to comply with the uniform regulations, it is time to ensure that the distractions, the "fairness" and the consistency of wearing uniforms

are addressed. An emphasis for the 2015-2016 school year will be on teaching students proper grooming, teaching students to comply with rules, and being consistent in the enforcement of compliance. Grades K – 3 will focus on learning, and uniform compliance violations will be addressed with parents by the homeroom teachers. Parents are asked to assist in teaching the students to pay attention to their appearance and conformity to uniform standards. Grades 4 – 8 will focus on preventing distractions due to non-compliance. Students will not be permitted to attend class unless in uniform compliance. Parents will be called to remedy any non-compliance issue, and students will be permitted to return to class once they are in compliance. Perhaps a bit harsh, but the expectation is that students will quickly learn to adhere to uniform policies without teachers spending a lot of time dealing with non-compliant students. It will also reinforce the message that instruction in the classroom is very important, and should not be distracted from. Parents should be aware that students will be removed from classes if non-compliant, and may only return wearing the proper uniform and attending to appropriate grooming.

Parents, teachers and staff will work together to help instill a sense of responsibility and importance by following the above.

## Focus on Being Prepared for Class

"It is a sin to waste time!" I heard that often from my mother. I didn't hear the usual "It is a sin to waste food" because my older brother would eat everything in sight, but wasting time was simply not tolerated. I haven't found a theologian who supports my mother's categorization of wasting time as a break in my relationship with God, but I did learn many habits of time efficiency in fear of offending God and my mother!

Teachers tell me that the first five to ten minutes of every class is devoted to "I don't have a pencil" and "Can I borrow a piece of paper?" Ten to twenty-five percent of instructional time in each middle school class is lost to students not prepared to learn. While those who are prepared to learn waste their time waiting for those not prepared, precious minutes of learning are lost. What was once a simple, short disruption now seems to be somewhat prevalent at Saint Mary's – just ask any student.

Teachers in grades K – 4 will be working with students are developing organizational skills that insure time is not wasted. Expectations will include sitting down to learn prepared with pen or pencil, paper and other needs as the lesson requires. Students will practice being prepared from the start with all that is needed. The pencil pouch will be essential to success, as well as notebooks and other supplies.

Students in grades 5-8 will be expected to have mastered the simple necessity of coming to class prepared to begin learning without disruption. Teachers can expect that students will have their notebooks with paper to write on, will have either a pen or pencil as required by the teacher, and will have all supplies ready at hand. Students not prepared to learn will not be allowed to disrupt the classroom but will be asked to leave the class for supervision by the office staff. Instructional time is simply too valuable to waste – mom was right again!

## Peacemakers - Saint Mary's Anti-Bullying Program

Love one another. A simple commandment. One that is central to all that we do at Saint Mary's. But as simple as the commandment is, we often fail and need to be reminded. As students grow and learn, they too need to be reminded that respect for others and care for each other is not optional – it is a core value of our school. The scripturally based Peacemakers Program is a yearlong set of lessons and activities used by teachers to provide students with the skills and understanding to prevent bullying.

Parents are encouraged to learn more about the program and reinforce the lessons, information is available on the website. Beginning in September, a monthly theme is highlighted, scriptural passages are suggested, and instructional materials are made available to the teachers. Parents can access the themes and citations for scripture on the school's website calendar. Students are rewarded for demonstrating their compassion and respect for others, and classes share information on how best to be true Disciples of Christ. In conjunction with weekly homilies, daily Religion instruction and modeling of appropriate behaviors by adults, the Peacemaker program is an opportunity to address teasing, name calling, gossiping, rudeness and bullying and help our students to grow into respectful, confident and loving adolescents.