

**Important Dates**

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REGISTRATION ENDS  
FEBRUARY 3



SCHOOL MASS  
FEBRUARY 8



END OF THIRD  
INTERIM  
FEBRUARY 10

# FAMILY BULLETIN



## ***THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL FAMILY***

### ***A LETTER FROM MR. DOWNEY ON THE HEART OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL***

I am the oldest of nine kids; a good Irish Catholic family! Mom and Dad met at Bishop Watterson High School in Columbus, Ohio. They shared a common teacher and mentor in Monsignor Paul Enke, who would end up officiating at their marriage. Monsignor Enke went on to baptize me and half of my siblings and officiated at all of our weddings. He has also buried both my grandparents. In short, if you are a Columbus Downey, your odds are quite high that Monsignor Enke will either baptize, marry, or bury you!

During the rehearsal dinner for one of the weddings, I was present as he was talking to Mom. Now my mom is a saint - as all good Catholic mothers are - and she has always shown unconditional love to me and all my siblings. So Monsignor made my mother very uncomfortable when he asked her which of her children she loved the most. My mom blushed and said she does not have a favorite. He said that he knows that she loves all of us without condition and she would never admit to having a favorite. But come on... who is it... really?

So my mom sat back and thought about it for a minute. Then finally, she looked at him and said, “*The one I love the most is the one that needs me the most.*”

I am sharing this story with you, because it is Catholic Schools Week, and the Church clearly teaches that the Catholic school is to be modeled off of the Catholic home. Mom did not say she loves the easiest one. She didn’t even name one of us specifically. The reality is that at any given moment, any of her children could have the most need for her, and therefore is the one that she is called to love the most.

The Catholic school should be the same. Sadly, Catholic schools far too rarely are. Most Catholic schools today do not seek to serve and support - *to love* - all Catholic children and their families. In my experience, they prefer to support the easy ones. The child who comes from a stable household. The child who is naturally well behaved. The child who scores in the 70th percentile or higher. The child of middle and upper class parents. The child who has no learning or developmental delays or disabilities.

For years, we in Catholic education have cowered behind an excuse, saying, “We do not have the resources for it! Therefore, it would be unfair to that child and all the other children in the class for us to serve them!”

Now that is a true statement. But what we do not hear is the crucial question that goes to the heart of the Catholic identity of our schools: “So how do we make this happen?”

In our families if a child comes down with a serious illness, we do not say, “Oh well... we don’t have the money.” Instead, we say, “We will do what it takes.” And when our friends, neighbors, and fellow parishioners find out, they come to the same conclusion: “We will do what it takes.” And while there are never any guarantees, we either find the resources, or exhaust ourselves finding them. That’s a *family*. That’s a *Catholic* family.

In the five years since I arrived at St. Benilde School, I have seen the school transform itself into an authentic Catholic school modeled on the Catholic family. And while we are far from perfect and have a long way to go to truly meet our aspirations, we no longer look at the hard to teach kid and say, “Oh well!” We love without condition every single one of our kids.

And the ones who need us the most, we love the most.

## Upcoming Calendar

February 3: Last Day for Returning Families to Guarantee Their Child’s Seats

February 4: New Family Registration Begins

February 6: Book Club, 3:15 PM, Grades 2 & 3

February 8: School Mass, 8:15 AM, Church

February 9: Cats Rehearsal, 3:30 - 4:30 PM, Teen Center

February 9: Jazzy Jumpers, 3:30 PM

February 10: End of Third Interim

February 11: Cats Rehearsal, 9 AM - Noon, Cafeteria

February 13: Mission Club Meeting, 3:15 - 3:50 PM

February 14: Student Council Meeting, 3:15 - 3:45 PM

February 15: School Mass, 8:15 AM, Church

February 15: Book Club, Grades 6 & 7, 3:15 - 4:00 PM

So how does this look in the daily life of school:

- We regularly track each child's growth through nationally normed tests at least five times a year. Last year, we also started using a similar test to measure their knowledge of Church teachings and values.
- Our teachers review each child's data *obsessively*, and they look for kids who are growing, kids who are stagnating, and kids who are declining... and they *adapt* instruction accordingly.
- We overhauled our discipline system so that it focuses on *rewarding* good behavior and strong values, instead of punishing bad behavior and unwittingly reinforcing poor values.
- We *found* the resources to hire a literacy specialist to work in small groups with kids that are not seeing the academic growth they should be seeing.
- We *found* the resources to hire an enrichment specialist to work with high performing kids to challenge them to think deeper and critically and creatively, as they have the same "right to growth" as their lower performing peers.
- We *found* the resources to start up an entirely new program for Exceptional Learners that is allowing kids who have never before been able to receive the gift of a Catholic education to receive one.

And what have been the results:

- Enrollment is up... from 283 to 337... or 17%... in five years. We have waiting lists in six classrooms. We are the fastest growing Catholic school in East Jefferson.
- Test scores are up. In the 2012-2013 school year, the average Percentile Rank in first grade for reading improved from the 36th to 37th percentile. In just half a year this year, the first grade class average has improved from the 63rd percentile to the 80th percentile!
- Individually, some of the stories are phenomenal. One child - currently in Fifth Grade - started in First Grade so afraid to read he would not even try to read quietly to his mom in his own room. Today, he is above grade level and regularly volunteers to read at school masses. Another child had to be retained in First Grade, was stuck in the 10th percentile for nearly two years, and was ultimately identified as having dyslexia, dysgraphia, *and* ADD. This would get the child kicked out of most Catholic schools. Today, after spending time in the Literacy Lab and working for a semester in the Exceptional Learners Lab, the child scores in the 79th percentile.
- And giving to the school has gone from \$7,000 in 2011 to \$159,000 last year, allowing for us to improve our facilities by taking care of a significant amount of deferred maintenance that has been accumulating over the years.

In other words, we decided we will do what it takes.

And just like with the seven loaves and fishes 2,000 years ago, God made sure the resources were there.

I want to close by saying thank you to all of you. The reason we have had this success is that you all have allowed God to work this miracle through you. You pray. You volunteer. You give in ways that

literally nobody else in New Orleans thought was possible for “little St. Benilde.” I am surrounded by an amazing faculty and staff. I have fellow administrators who are genuine servant leaders. I have faculty who “get it,” who love our children in both words and actions, and who work *tirelessly*. I have staff who take joy in working behind the scenes to make sure that the day runs as smooth and painlessly as is ever possible in a school. I have parents that understand what a partnership means.

Love is the most powerful force in the universe. All of you prove it. Thank you.

Happy Catholic Schools Week!

## Returning Family Registration Ends Feb. 3

Time is running out to secure your child’s spot for the 2017-2018 school year. Here is what you need to know.

- ❖ Registration now occurs online through a link that has been **emailed directly to families**. The online registration process will greatly reduce the amount of paperwork families need to complete as part of Back to School Days next August. If you have not received the link, please contact the school office to ensure we have your correct email.
- ❖ Returning families have until February 3 to register their children and guarantee their spot for the 2017-2018 school year.
- ❖ New Family Registration will begin on February 4, 2017. At this point, spots are filled on a first come/first served basis. We currently have nine students on the waiting list. Please register by February 3 to guarantee your child’s spot!

## Athletics Corner

- ❖ Congratulations to our Junior Boys Basketball Team for their winning season (5-2)! Their first playoff game will be Tuesday, February 7. The time and place are TBA.

## Bi-Annual Mandated Disclosure

St. Benilde School owns and operates a master meter natural gas distribution system on the school campus. The gas systems consist of underground networks of pipelines. The purpose of the gas systems is to provide a reliable and safe economical source of energy for heating purposes to the buildings adjacent to the underground gas pipelines. The pipeline systems have the capacity to reliably deliver natural gas to the customers.

The hazards of natural gas are it is odorless, colorless, tasteless, lighter than air and can ignite and/or explode with tremendous force when mixed with the right amount of air.

Prevention measures taken include:

- adding odorant to the gas to give it that distinctive smell, similar to rotten eggs, to warn us of its presence,
- testing the odorant level each calendar quarter,
- performing annual gas leakage surveys, and

- conducting periodic pipeline patrols.

The following are signs that may indicate a gas leak:

- A hissing or roaring sound (caused by escaping gas),
- A patch of dead or discolored vegetation in an otherwise green setting along a pipeline route,
- Blowing dirt, grass or leaves near a pipeline,
- Continuous bubbling in wet, flooded areas,
- A “gas smell”.

Anyone who may smell this odor or notice any unusual conditions on or near gas mains, vents, service lines, meter sets, or especially inside of a building should call the St. Benilde School office immediately. If you smell a strong gas odor inside a building, notify everyone in the building to leave. Do not operate any switches or use the phone. Go a safe distance away upwind of the gas smell and call the St. Benilde School office. With any gas leak protect life first then property, then notify St. Benilde School.

State and federal laws require excavators to notify LA One-Call 2 days before digging. If any excavation is planned you must notify LA One-Call which will notify St. Benilde School to locate the gas lines. St. Benilde School maintains membership in the LA One-Call program.

To obtain additional information or report a gas related issue call St. Benilde School. The St. Benilde School phone number is (504) 833-9894. The LA One-Call Center phone number is 811.



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