

St. Mary School News

St. Mary School nurtures the development of the whole child: spiritually, academically, emotionally, and socially. St. Mary School provides a strong, accessible, and rigorous Catholic education to the students of greater Grays Harbor and their families.



A Publication for Alumni, Families, and Friends of St. Mary School

Staff, Families Step Up To Distance Learning

At the beginning of March, the staff, students, and families at St. Mary School were looking forward to a spring trimester filled with activities, fundraisers, and end of the school year celebrations. By the middle of the month, the school building was closed, staff was working to transition to “distance learning”, and families were scrambling to figure out things like childcare, their own employment status, and keeping family members safe. With a combination of hard work, adaptability, and trust in God, the St. Mary School community came together and not only survived but found silver linings among the coronavirus clouds.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the St. Mary School building closed along with all other schools in the



state effective March 17th. With less than a week’s notice to prepare for the closure, SMS teachers and staff worked long hours prioritizing subject matter, discussing the

St. Mary School first grade teacher Susan Batcheller joined other staff in sending positive thoughts to students during the school closure.



The St. Mary School Lion mascot with mask in place, greets the Pettit family during the end-of-school family parade.

best way to implement distance learning, and coming up with lesson plans and materials for students to take home.

Some of the initial challenges that staff were worried about included varying levels of family access to technology and the Internet, language barriers, and balancing school work with other family demands.

“Like all new situations there were trials and errors,” recalled first grade teacher Susan Batcheller. “I’m thankful for our school community because we were each other’s cheerleaders as we navigated the process.” A few examples of the problem solving were school families cooperating to figure out childcare for those with working parents; older siblings helping younger students

Continued on page 2.

Distance Learning (continued from page 1)

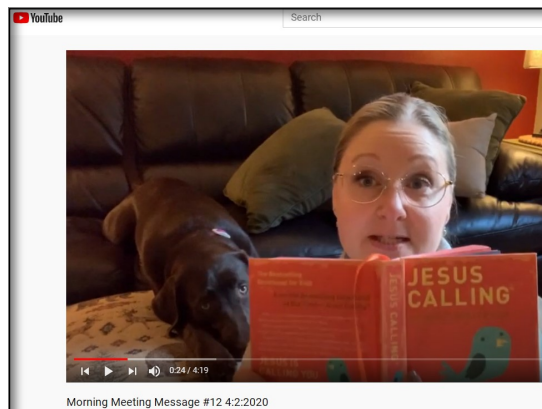
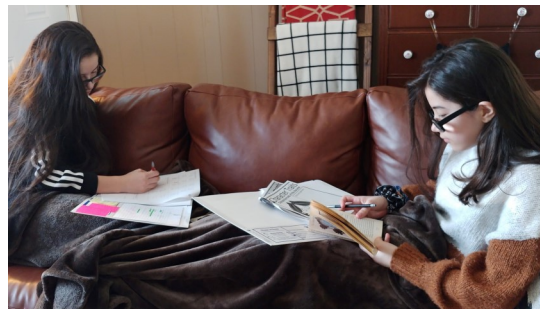
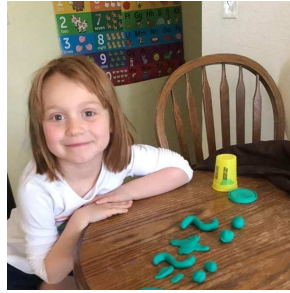
with technology and homework; and teachers accommodating students who were better able to submit work on paper than electronically. Another adaptation was the transformation of the “Morning Meeting” in the school auditorium to a “Morning Message” video sent out by Principal Carrie Marlow each school day (56 in all), with a devotional reading, prayer, and words of encouragement.

“The daily Morning Message video was my way of reminding myself *and* the school community to keep Jesus at the center of our lives and to trust in God’s plan,” shared Mrs. Marlow. “By divine intervention, I am sure, many of the daily devotionals or ‘Messages from Jesus’ were just what members of our school community or I needed to hear that day.”

Once families had gotten through the first couple weeks and began to settle into the distance learning plan, SMS teachers started enhancing the curriculum with classes taught via “Zoom” video conference and assignments monitored through apps such as “Seesaw” and “Google Classroom.”

“It was very hard not being in the classroom,” says middle school teacher Jolie Carroll, “but I was thankful for the ability to connect and see their faces on Zoom.” There were also paper-based materials and assignments, and these were exchanged on “Pickup/Dropoff Tuesdays” with designated boxes in the covered play area for students to leave completed work and take new assignments.

School staff also worked to add a little fun into the process and try to keep some of the social connections. In early May, the school held a “Virtual Spirit Week” with daily dress-up themes, a trivia contest, and Zoom lunch gatherings that included surprise pizza deliveries to students from the St. Mary Lion mascot. Then in mid-June, a “drive-by parade” celebrated the end of the school year. With staff spread out a safe distance from each other in front of the



Top photos: St. Mary School students found a variety of ways to study and learn during the three-month distance learning period.

Bottom photo: Principal Carrie Marlow shared a daily video devotional message and words of encouragement.

school, students and family members were able to drive by and honk, wave, and shout to their teachers.

Even with all of the effort to keep learning going and families connected, there were a lot of experiences that distance learning was not able to replace. Middle school science camps, the drama club production, and numerous end of the year activities had to be cancelled. The 8th grade graduation ceremony was postponed until August. And several fundraisers, including the Fun Run, Cinco de Mayo, and an East Indian dinner to support teachers were all postponed or cancelled.

Keeping the budget balanced during the closure also required a lot of hard work and faith. The Archdiocese decided that all staff would be kept on the payroll at

their regular salary, so expenses continued at a near normal level. Through the efforts of Pastoral Assistant for Administration Theresa Wright, the school was able to partner with St. Mary Parish and receive a “Payroll Protection Program” (PPP) forgivable loan, which covered payroll for the first two months of the shutdown. In addition, the school received an emergency scholarship grant from the Frost and Margaret Snyder Foundation based in Tacoma, as well as some private donations. And with most school families continuing their tuition payments as they were able, the school made it to the end of the school year in good shape financially.

“The last three months have been some of the most challenging for our little school, our families and staff, and for me,” concluded Carrie Marlow. “But, together, we made it and came out on the other side stronger and wiser and more faith-filled than we were before. St. Mary School is not just a building. We are a community that trusts in God and endures together. St. Mary School is moving forward in faith!”

Fall Reopening Plan Offers Hope, Challenges

Just having completed one of the most unique school years ever (see distance learning story), St. Mary School staff and families were heartened to hear that schools will be allowed to reopen in the fall if the COVID-19 infection rates remain under control and if schools are able to comply with a list of safety requirements. Among these are daily health screenings for students and staff before entering the building, the wearing of cloth face coverings by staff and students, social distancing within classrooms, and frequent cleaning of the entire building.

School leaders have already organized a preliminary plan to meet all of the requirements and have communicated the plan outline to school families so they have plenty of time to prepare.

“From the very beginning, our number one goal has been to bring all students back into the building every day as safely as possible,” said Principal Carrie Marlow. “Planning for the reopening is like trying to complete a giant 1000-piece puzzle whose pieces keep changing or fall on the floor!”

In order to be ready for the new guidelines, SMS has partnered with schools statewide to place a bulk order for things like face masks, infrared thermometers, and gallons and gallons of hand sanitizer. Meanwhile, teachers have been busy mapping out desk locations and finding creative ways to schedule the school day to maximize learning while minimizing contact between students. On top of all this preparation, staff are working on a backup plan for distance learning in case it is necessary.

At a time when momentum for new enrollments seemed to be growing, the social distancing requirement made it



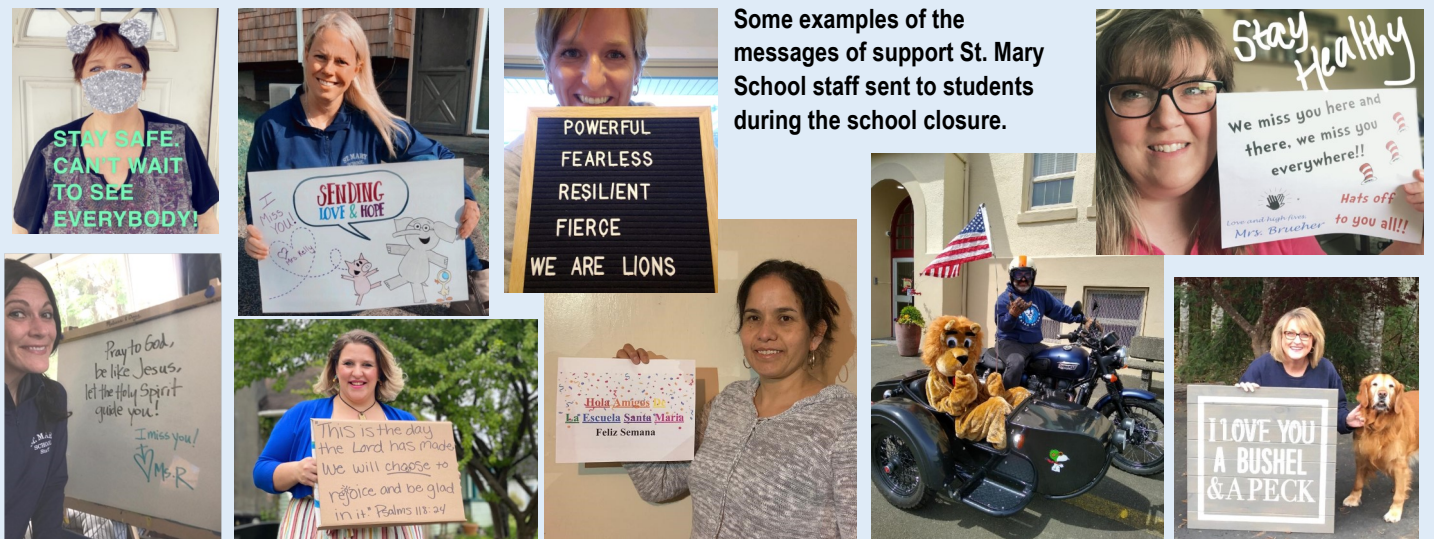
St. Mary School staff stood together briefly following the end-of-school family parade.

necessary to limit the number of students per class to 15 or fewer. This has resulted in waiting lists for some classes as well as a rush for returning families to submit all of their paperwork in order to secure their students’ places. The health guidelines also create a financial double-whammy: fewer students means less tuition revenue at the same time there is the need to add staff and increase hours of existing staff in order to handle the additional screening, supervision and cleaning.

Despite all these challenges, staff and families seem willing to adapt their routines in order to be together again as a school. When the initial plan was explained during the June School Commission meeting, parents had questions about some of the specific steps but were in full support of the effort to bring students back in person.

“We have faith that it will all come together by fall, said Carrie Marlow, “And we can’t wait to have our students’ laughter ringing throughout the hallways again!”

School Snapshots



Some examples of the messages of support St. Mary School staff sent to students during the school closure.

Alumni Facebook Group Supports Teacher Fund

With nearly one hundred years educating students, St. Mary School has a rich history and a long list of alumni. For those who move away from Grays Harbor however, it hasn't always been easy to keep up to date on school activities. With an idea toward changing this, alumnus Robert Harpster (class of 1980) organized a SMS Alumni Facebook group.

"I originally reached out to some SMS friends on Facebook about a reunion of sorts," Rob recalled. "One of them suggested starting a St. Mary Alumni Facebook page. So on January 18th, 2020 the group was formed. I was surprised how quickly it grew with new members inviting SMS classmates and parents to join. I'm really proud of the contributions from the members in terms of pictures, stories, and memories shared. We have members of all age groups and while the experiences and memories vary, the love and appreciation for St. Mary School is the same."

Although the interaction of group members was great to see, Rob had bigger plans for the group. In conjunction with Catholic Schools Week at the end of January, he started a

fundraiser for the school through Facebook. With lots of encouragement, matching challenges, and even an auction of the famous St. Mary School brownie recipe, the group raised approximately \$8,000 from 40 members in only one week. The money was directed to the recently created Teacher Fund to help close the 37% gap in SMS teacher's pay relative to local public school teachers.

"I had the thought to launch a fundraiser as the group's first official activity," Rob said. "I think the original goal was \$2,000 but we ended up doing much more and actually had a lot of fun doing it!



SMS alums Cheri (Harpster) Zeller, Rob Harpster, and Richard Snyder at the Catholic Schools Week Open House.

Asked about future plans, Rob was optimistic: "I feel there is a lot the group can offer the school in terms of support, not only financially but also spiritually and resourcefully. I am looking at various ways to work with school leaders in terms of expanding community reach, ensuring the school's sustainability, and being involved with the students and staff on a more personal level."

Anyone wanting to join the alumni Facebook group can search for "St. Mary's Catholic School Alumni - Aberdeen, WA."



Class of 2020 Makes Most of Unique Situation

No class at St. Mary School had to give up more experiences during the three-month school closure than the 8th-grade graduating students. Among the events they sacrificed were several "Sea Lions" maritime outings, their graduating class trip, an orientation visit to Aberdeen High School, and the chance to say goodbye to teachers, staff, and fellow students.

Wanting to give the 8th-graders some type of recognition, the school had a banner made for each student and hung them on the fence outside the school. In addition, the middle

school teachers drove to each student's home with a yard sign and a message of congratulations.

The students and their families were given the choice of a virtual graduation ceremony in June or waiting to have an in-person ceremony in August and they unanimously agreed that they wanted to wait for the in-person graduation.

Although they may not appreciate it now, hopefully the St. Mary School Class of 2020 will someday look back on this period as a time of building character and faith.





Staff Feature

Theresa Brumley Managed School Office with Faith and Hugs

Office Manager Theresa Brumley retired this year after 15 years supporting staff, students, and families at St. Mary School. We asked Mrs. Brumley to share some

of her memories of her time at SMS.

Tell us about yourself—your background and family life.

I grew up in Hoquiam, the oldest of 7 children. Our family was very involved in Our Lady of Good Help Parish. (Knights of Columbus, guilds, brothers altar serving, etc.) We went to school at OLGH School, where my grandfather was the janitor. My family has a history of Catholic and public school teachers. My husband and I have been married for 46 years, and have three amazing girls.

How did you happen to come to St. Mary School?

My girls received a wonderful education at St. Mary School. I volunteered as a parent to the point of Sr. Angela hiring me for Office Assistant. I worked as the lunchroom/playground helper, substitute teacher, librarian and finally as Office Manager. My heart has always been for this "Jewel on the Harbor"

What aspect of managing the office have you enjoyed the most and why?

I have enjoyed working with and helping the teachers and especially the children who would come into the office with very small to large injuries. To give a bandage or ice pack, a hug and send them on their way back to class or to call parents when needed.

Each principal I have had the privilege to worked under has brought a gift of

Office Manager Theresa Brumley during one of her "normal" days balancing student needs, staff requests, phone calls and much more.

themselves to the school. Sr. Angela, Joanne, Deona, Maureen, Katie, Joe, Nicole, Carrie. And the school continues to prosper.

Do you have a favorite memory of your time at St. Mary School?

At times St. Mary School would be falling behind financially. I would open the mail and with tears go to the principal with a large contribution from a member of the parish or the Grays Harbor community that would cover the cost of what was prayed upon. Throughout many seemingly great odds and large disasters, God truly has his hand on St. Mary School.

What are your plans for the future?

My plans after retiring are to spend time with my family, my very best friends and do a little traveling when possible.

Thank you Mrs. Brumley, you will be missed!



School Closure Creates Opportunities for Assistance

One of the mementos from the COVID-19 school closure is a large box of invitations that were never sent. Approximately 1,000 brightly colored invitations for an East Indian dinner cooked by the priests of the Western Grays Harbor parishes were ready to be mailed just as the school closure was announced. School leaders had hoped to raise \$40,000 from the dinner to support the St. Mary School Teacher Fund, which aims to help close the large pay gap between our teachers and their local public school counterparts.

This is just one example of “revenue challenges” created by the coronavirus pandemic. Here are several others:

- Other spring 2020 fundraisers that were canceled, including Cinco de Mayo, the Fun Run, and Trinkets & Treasures rummage sale. Estimated revenue lost: \$10,000.
- Because of social distancing requirements, school enrollment for the upcoming school year is capped at approximately 150 students. This is around 15 students fewer than the average enrollment in recent years. Estimated revenue lost: \$30,000.
- The school endowment fund, which provides yearly income to the school from investment earnings, lost a large amount when the stock market fell in March. While the fund has regained much of its value, there are currently no earnings to support the coming school year. Potential revenue lost: up to \$150,000.
- Fundraisers for the 2020-21 school year may have to be canceled or re-worked to avoid large gatherings. Potential revenue lost: ???

What We’re doing

School leaders are already working on ideas for alternate fundraising events for the upcoming school year. Also, the Fulcrum Foundation, which supports Catholic schools in western Washington, has created a special fund to help schools with COVID-19 related financial challenges. St. Mary School will apply for a grant from Fulcrum, as well as other foundations that are potential funding sources.

What You Can Do

We are grateful for the continued support of our alumni, parishioners, community members and friends who have blessed the school with your generosity over the years. We ask for your prayers that St. Mary School will continue to be a source of faith-based education for families in Grays Harbor. For those that are willing and able to make a financial contribution, we have identified three areas of need: student scholarships, the Teacher Fund, and fall 2020 reopening costs. You may choose to support one or more of these needs by completing the form below. If you have questions, please contact Advancement Director Pete Scroggs via email: advancement@saintmaryschool.org or phone: 360-580-7714.

I / We will support St. Mary School with a gift as follows:

Student Scholarships \$ _____ Teacher Fund \$ _____ 2020 Reopening Fund \$ _____

Name(s) _____

Mailing Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

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Enclosed is a check payable to **St. Mary School**

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