

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

Archbishop and School Superintendent visit SMS

It's not every day (or even year) that the archbishop or superintendent of Catholic schools visits Grays Harbor, so to have a visit from both leaders on the same day was a highlight for St. Mary School staff and students. On March 15, Archbishop Etienne and Superintendent Nicholas Ford traveled to SMS as part of an outreach that both are making to visit schools throughout the archdiocese. The duo toured St. Mary School, stopping in each classroom to interact with students and teachers.

"It was an honor for us to host both the archbishop and the superintendent here at St. Mary School," said Principal Carrie Marlow. "It was the first time that both men had been to our school and both made numerous positive comments about the preservation and updating of the



Archbishop Etienne and Superintendent of Catholic Schools Nicholas Ford visit the fourth grade class during a tour of SMS.

school building itself as well as being very complimentary about our staff and students as they interacted with many throughout our tour."

During the visit, school and parish leadership also had the opportunity to have a sit-down in-depth conversation with Archbishop Etienne and Superintendent Ford about the great things happening at SMS, including the strong Catholic identity, supportive alumni and donor base, hard working parents and students, dedicated staff, and strong school traditions. In addition, the group discussed the various financial challenges school leaders are working on, such as balancing fair teacher salaries and increased operational costs with an increased need for tuition assistance, as well as new ventures such as expanding early childhood education and increasing Hispanic community outreach.

"It was a rich and supportive conversation and the archbishop and superintendent listened intently and contributed many wise and thoughtful responses," Mrs. Marlow said. "It really meant a great deal to our community for both men to take the time to come to Grays Harbor and get to know us better."



(Left to Right) Regional Pastoral Coordinator Theresa Wright, Fr. Marcos Villanueva, Fr. Navy Kumar Thomas, Archbishop Etienne, Fr. Jaya Kumar Embeti, Superintendent Nicholas Ford, Principal Carrie Marlow

Fulcrum Grant Enables New Vice Principal Position

Around the halls of St. Mary School, staff members often use the analogy of “wearing many hats” to describe the need to cover many duties with a limited number of people. Thanks to a grant from the Fulcrum Foundation, SMS recently added a new “hat” to its collection in the form of a part-time vice principal position.

During the 2021-22 school year, the Office for Catholic Schools identified a handful of “mission essential” (mostly smaller and more rural) schools and the Fulcrum Foundation, which supports Catholic schools in the archdiocese, pledged various forms of financial assistance for these schools. In the Spring of 2022, St. Mary School was awarded a “Building Leadership Capacity” grant to add a part-time vice principal position for the 2022-23 school year.

With the funding in place, Principal Carrie Marlow tapped veteran teacher Lisa Villar to take on the new vice principal position.

“The addition of the part-time vice principal position has been a true Godsend,” Mrs. Marlow said. “There are so many important facets to the principal position in Catholic schools and the need for additional administrative support is high. Lisa Villar has successfully brought her many years of teaching and leadership experience to the position and provided me and our students and staff with much needed support, time, coaching, and collaboration.”

Lisa Villar summarized the new position as that of a “helper,” not only for the principal but for teachers,

support staff, and students. Some of the specific tasks that she took on during the past year included teacher observations, lunch and recess supervision, student behavior incentives, and discipline.

“My learning curve has been high and my mindset has had to shift to the big picture (entire school) instead of just my little world (the classroom),” Mrs. Villar said. “When I came to St. Mary School six years ago, Carrie was my mentor teacher. I think God was preparing me for the future of being mentored by her once again in an administrative role. There is no one I would rather come alongside and help to continue the mission of St. Mary School in the years ahead.”

The Fulcrum Foundation grant was recently renewed for the 2023-24 school year which will allow for continuity and possibly more roles for the vice principal position. Mrs. Villar said that although the job requires a lot of extra time and energy, she has held to the words of Philippians 4:13 – “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”



Vice Principal Lisa Villar with the “Kindness Coupons” she awarded to reinforce positive behavior.

MCT and Community Foundation Bring Drama Back to SMS

For many years, St. Mary School has had a strong drama program, often producing plays and musicals involving months of rehearsals, set building, and costume design. That tradition was interrupted during the past several years of pandemic-related restrictions. With help from the Grays Harbor Community Foundation, singing and dancing returned to the SMS stage this year via the Missoula Childrens Theater (MCT).

In mid-February, two directors from the MCT travelled to the school and spent a full week leading students through the process of try-outs, rehearsals, memorizing lines, and all the elements required to stage a musical performance. Twenty-four students took on roles in the production of “The Emperor’s New Clothes” with four students working as part of the production crew. In addition, the directors held workshops throughout the week with all students in kindergarten through eighth grade to give everyone an introduction to the concepts involved with theater. At the end of the week, a full house of students, parents, and other supporters assembled in the school



SMS students perform “The Emperor’s New Clothes”

auditorium to watch the show. As the curtain rose, a group of student performers who had started the week unsure and somewhat timid were now in full costume speaking, singing, and smiling with confidence.

Continued on page 3

Honors Choir Turns Hard Work into Beautiful Music

Anyone entering the St. Mary School building on a Thursday after school this year was treated to the sound of young voices harmonizing combined with occasional bursts of laughter and upbeat chatter coming from the SMS music room. Under the leadership of Angel Damasiewicz (“Miss Angel” to the students), the school implemented an honors choir to give students the chance to work on their vocal skills. Open to 3rd through 8th grade students, the honors choir attracted 15 students who met weekly to practice songs and singing techniques.

Angel, who just completed her fourth year as music instructor at SMS, teaches weekly music lessons for all students Pre-K through 6th grade in addition to the honors choir. After leading students in a Christmas concert in 2019, Angel and the students were not able to stage a live performance until May of this year due to public health restrictions, and had to make do with recorded performances that parents and family members could watch at home. When the chance to perform live again finally came, the students were ready to make the most of it.

Parents and family members were also ready for an in-person performance and the SMS auditorium was standing room only on the night of the concert in May. Many students showed up in costume for their class songs which featured characters such as kings, lions, and pirates.

“For a lot of them, that was their first concert and you could see the smiles on their faces, Angel said. “They learn a lot from being on stage, even if they don’t want to be up there.”

With extra practice time to prepare for the concert, Angel allowed the honors choir to choose from several songs with varying degrees of difficulty and the group selected “The Greatest Show” from the musical “The Greatest Showman”



Music teacher Angel Damasiewicz leads students in a rehearsal before the Spring Concert.

“They chose the hardest one,” Angel said, “but because it was theirs, they worked really hard on it.”

The honors choir teamed up with the fourth through sixth grade classes to perform the number. The song features a strong background rhythm so Angel recruited some of the older students who were not interested in singing to play percussion or help with lighting. The song is fairly lengthy and featured a number of student solos which explains the difficulty level. However, the students leaned into the challenge and gave a performance that brought rousing applause from the audience.

For the final song, all the students joined together and sang “The Goodness of God” which was a fitting way to remind everyone of the blessing of being able to gather again for a live performance. Angel said she also uses this theme to remind students about why it’s important to give their best effort.

“Whatever we do, we get to give it back to God,” she summarized. “It’s all about His grace.”

Bringing Drama Program Back continued from page 2

“It was truly an amazing experience to watch our students develop their stage presence and self-confidence throughout the week,” said Principal Carrie Marlow. “The MCT directors were fabulous and the students worked so very hard and it showed during the performance! Theater is such a wonderful hands-on way for students to develop so many important skills and discover their unique gifts. What a blessing!”

SMS was able to bring the Missoula Childrens Theater to the school thanks to a grant from the Grays Harbor Community Foundation, which covered the entire cost for the week. The foundation offers the grant to any school in Grays Harbor that wants to stage an MCT

production, and SMS leaders were so impressed with the impact of the MCT program that they immediately scheduled a return visit for the 2023-24 school year.

“We are very thankful to the Grays Harbor Community Foundation and the MCT grant they provided our school,” Mrs. Marlow said. “The foundation is so important to our community and the grants they provide our schools are invaluable to keeping the arts alive and well for our students. St. Mary School staff and students can’t wait to have the MCT theater program back again in January 2024! We may have more students in the next play than our small stage can hold, but what a great problem to have!”

New Cross Installation Highlights Teamwork and Generosity

On a bright January morning, a crane and a manlift straddled the front of St. Mary School like surgeons preparing to operate on a patient. In this case, the “surgeons” were a team from Quigg Bros. Inc. and their task was to “transplant” a shiny new cross on the top of the 97-year-old school building. The operation took several hours to finish but was a complete success and the school now has a crowning symbol that should last well into its second century of life.

Several years ago, SMS alum (class of 1956) and longtime school supporter Gordy Scure reached out and offered to replace the aging concrete cross on top of the school. Gordy’s friend and expert craftsman Chuck Laier welded a new steel cross in the same dimensions as the original and had it powder-coated in a copper color to withstand the Grays Harbor elements.

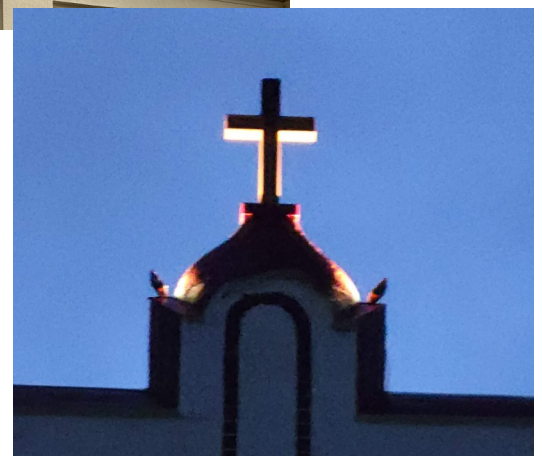
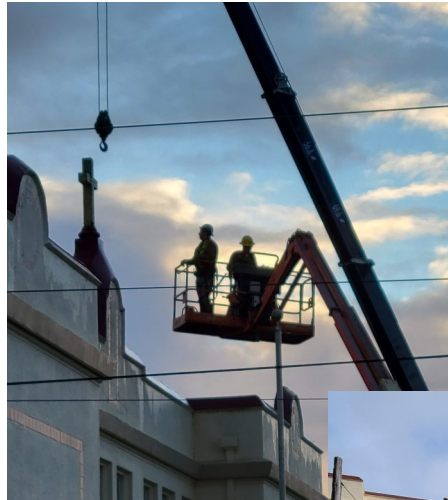
The installation of the new cross was dependent on the convergence of a couple of things: a day when school was not in session so the work could be done safely without people around the building and second, the availability of equipment and crew from Quigg Bros. who donated the cost of installation.

While the old cross looked its age with flaking paint and weather-worn edges, the removal team soon discovered that it was structurally as sound as the rest of the building. Crew members spent nearly two hours with a concrete saw, drill, and “persuasion” from the crane before they finally detached the cross from the building and gently lowered it to the ground. By contrast, the new steel cross was lifted and bolted securely into place in just a matter of minutes.

Besides replacing the cross, Gordy wanted to make sure that it would be visible at night as well as during the day. So shortly after the installation, Maneman Electric mounted dusk to dawn spotlights that shine up on the cross and give a warm glow every night.

The original school cross still had one more gift to give. Without a safe and secure place to put the 300-pound cross on school property, the decision was made to offer it to a school supporter at the SPIRIT Auction in April. After a lively round of bidding, the old cross raised over \$1,000 and will soon have a new home in the community where its legacy will live on.

Top to bottom: A crew from Quigg Bros. Inc. use a crane and manlift to prepare for removal of the old school cross; Gordy Scure observes the cross removal and installation; “changing of the guard” as the old cross is lowered to the ground and the new cross takes its place; the new cross shining brightly at night.



Teacher Feature**Liz Brueher: Spreading Smiles, Laughter, and High Fives**

Fourth grade and PE teacher Liz Brueher is known among staff and students for her positive attitude and great sense of humor. We asked Mrs. Brueher to share what keeps her smiling.

Tell us about yourself both as a teacher and a person, including your time at SMS

I will start my eighth year at SMS for the 2023-24 school year. I had taught and been an after-school site coordinator in the Hoquiam and Aberdeen School Districts before coming to SMS. When I came to SMS I started at half time and was an assistant in the classroom. The next year I assisted and started teaching PE and Health too. I did this until the 2022-23 school year. This last year I have jumped back in the classroom and team taught in 4th grade. Before that time, I was busy staying home with my girls, Paige (16) and Linnea (13).

I received my teaching certificate from St. Martin's College (now University) in 1998. Before that I graduated from Hoquiam High School 1991 (Go Grizzlies!) I then attended GHC and WWU. Wow, I am getting old!

How has your time at SMS influenced you and/or your family?

My time at SMS has influenced my family and myself greatly. Both my girls have learned so many wonderful life lessons and had such quality classes and teachers from their time at SMS. My oldest daughter has taken many of the things she learned at SMS and has had great success at high school. As for myself, I found some wonderful lasting friendships during my time at SMS. I also have grown in my faith as well. What a wonderful blessing to profess our faith with coworkers and be able to pray and share together.

What aspect of teaching do you enjoy the most and why?

I do love my PE classes, especially the kindergarten class! But I also really like Washington State History. I enjoy talking with the students about places around the state they can go or may have been. I think the thing I love the most about teaching at SMS is just interacting

with as many of the students as I can and trying to give them a positive word or high five.

What is a favorite memory of your time at St. Mary School?

I think my favorite memories/times are our Field Days. There is something special when we all get together in our "school families" and compete together. The older students role modeling and working with the younger students. The smiles and laughter are contagious. I love the school spirit that comes with the day.

What are your plans and goals for this coming year and beyond?

This next year as I have PE K-8, I would like to start some school-wide monthly Fitness and Health Challenges. I would also like to continue to improve my teaching techniques, and maybe my singing and dancing skills! Hehe!

Anything else you want to share?

I am so grateful that God brought me and my family to SMS. I can look back now and see the path God took me on to get back full-time teaching at SMS. About two years before I came to SMS and was having a tough time, my dad came to me and said maybe God is going to have you teaching at St. Mary's, which wasn't even a thought or opening at the time. That was ten years ago and I am here now full of Lion Pride! SMS is a special place with some of the best people and students I know. I thank God that I can say I teach at St. Mary School.



Liz Brueher and middle school teacher Richard Villar "show their colors" after being doused with colored powder during the SMS Fun Run in May



A Message From Mrs. Marlow

Greetings St. Mary School Community and Supporters,

"I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

-Psalm 91:2

As I sit at my desk in the principal's office of our beloved St. Mary School and contemplate my five years as school principal, I am struck by how much of this job and how much of the strong tradition of St. Mary School is built upon faith, full trust in God and His plan. This school year has been a great example of trust in God and trust in each other. As a school community we have faced personal challenges as well as professional challenges with grace and humility and most of all, trust in each other and trust in God.

As I reflect on this school year, it is amazing to me how each year brings so many blessings and so many challenges, yet through it all God is providing us who and what we need to continue providing a quality faith-based Catholic education to the youth of Grays Harbor. We have been blessed this year with staff and parents dedicated to partnering in education and in supporting St. Mary School through time, talent, and treasure. Our phenomenal fundraising efforts this year, including Oktoberfest, the SPIRIT Auction, and the FUNRUN, have proven again the generosity of our community, our church, our alumni, and our families. In addition, our students made great strides academically this year and learned many valuable lessons about faith, good decision making, and citizenship. Our staff weathered challenges with teamwork, collaboration, and professionalism beyond measure.

The 22-23 school year may have come to a close, but a new school year is on the horizon and we await it with great anticipation and excitement. I know God will continue to have many great things in store for our St. Mary School community. I pray that as we place our continued faith and trust in God, St. Mary School will continue to thrive under the Lord's protection and grace.

May you all have a blessed summer!

Together in Christ,

Carrie Marlow
School Principal



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