Technology helps Butler Catholic preschoolers

JANUARY 15, 2021

Categories: News
Tags: Catholic Schools, Featured
While student-teacher relationships remain at the heart of an education at Butler Catholic, a new technology initiative is helping to transform learning.

Students in grades K-8 each have use of Google Chromebooks, and preschoolers began using iPads last week. Although the plan had been in the works, the timing was perfect due to remote learning needed for COVID-19 restrictions. The school building reopened January 11.

“We felt iPads would be easier for the little ones, said Sister John Ann Mulhern, principal. “Technology is important to ensure our students are prepared for leadership roles in the years to come.”

The school held a fundraising drive for the technology initiative and secured grants. Parents also pay a technology fee. Sister John Ann said they are supportive because

Butler Catholic preschool teacher Shannan Dorcy shares how the use of iPads enriches her students’ education.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=o5bRgEjb1W0
they see the benefits.

Ashley Gapinski’s daughter Kylie caught onto the new tablet right away.

“Her face just lit up seeing her teacher and classmates on the screen,” Gapinski said. “The touch screen is easier to use than a mouse. If we have to go back to remote learning, I think the iPad will help keep her engaged.”

Kylie Gapinski uses her new iPad from home.

Preschool teacher Shannan Dorcy said she would like to use the new technology to enhance work in the classroom as well.

“We teach classes in language arts, math and science,” she said. “It allows us to assign activities, look at assignments and watch videos.

“I believe it will help our students long-term,” Dorcy said. “It’s easier for parents to give their child an iPad and let them play with it. It’s attractive without them realizing they’re learning.”

One of the greatest benefits of educational technology is increased collaboration. Students working in teams can share documents and work on group projects at the same time whether at home or school. Teachers post supplemental materials and allow students to interact with class notes.
Technology also increases the ease of communication between teachers and parents on class attendance, assignments, schedules and grades.

“The iPads are a fantastic addition to an already fully enriched education,” Gapinski said.

Sevren (left) and his twin sister Syvette Mesanko with their iPads.
Holiday gifts of love

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Categories: News
Tags: Featured, Parish Life
Joan Ferris spent most of her life on Pittsburgh’s North Side, walking to Mass at Saint Peter Parish and attending dances in the church hall.

When her husband, William, passed in 2009, she moved to the North Hills. Today, at age 82, Joan doesn't get out much and felt she had lost touch with her faith community.

But her recently merged parish, Christ Our Savior on the North Side, didn’t forget about her.

Ferris was among hundreds of older parishioners who received home-delivered dinners for Thanksgiving and Christmas, prepared by 50 volunteers. The outreach mirrored similar efforts in other parishes over the holidays.

“I was very touched. It was a lovely thing,” Ferris said. “It made me feel connected to my parish.”
Pastoral associate Mary Swindal, whose ministry focuses on care of the elderly, wanted to express gratitude to seniors who helped to build the parish and its predecessors.

“They have given so much,” she said. “Service to others is a source of light and hope, and a reminder of God’s enduring love.”

Christ Our Savior volunteers cooked 177 Thanksgiving dinners of turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes and gravy, topped off with cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie for dessert.

Christmas dinner was even bigger—210 helpings of ham, scalloped potatoes, green beans almandine, cornbread and fruit. Parishioners baked or bought some 2,000 cookies, and donated poinsettias.

“Cooking, for me, is love,” parishioner Denise Chulack said. “When we’re feeding someone, we’re making them happy.” Added volunteer Tom Griffin, “It was very organized and a lot of fun. People who received the dinners were ecstatic.”

“While the pandemic has brought about many challenges, it has also provided so many opportunities for us to be blessings to one another, and these dinners are among them,” said Father Nick Vaskov, pastor. “We started by asking, ‘How can we do this?’ and now we wonder, ‘How can we stop?’ The joy of serving our seniors has become infectious.”
Members of Holy Family Parish in Oakmont, Plum and Verona assembled gift bags that included pastries, cookies, candy, crackers, fruit and a small ornament of the Holy Family.

Volunteer Faith Sisk said they delivered the gifts at Christmastime to 258 homebound people in and outside their parish boundaries. Despite the pandemic, “the team felt it was important to carry on with the spirit of Christmas,” she said.

One recipient remarked, “This gift of joy was a ray of sunshine in a very dreary year.” A volunteer added, “People were so grateful and happy to see us, it truly warmed our hearts.”

At Christ the Savior Parish, the Boy Scouts helped to deliver dinners and students at Northside Catholic Assumption Academy made placemats. Now the volunteers are preparing to cook up a Saint Valentine’s Day celebration.

Chulack is looking forward to it. “It just makes you feel good to do something for someone else,” she said.
Holy Family parishioners Lynn Verratt (left) and Faith Sisk prepare Christmas gift bags.
Mass honors Dr. King

JANUARY 15, 2021

Categories: News
Tags: Diocesan News, Featured

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. will be remembered in a Mass and program this weekend in Pittsburgh as the nation honors the influential civil rights leader. A Mass for Peace and Justice will be celebrated at Saint Paul Cathedral held on Sunday at 10 a.m. Livestream this Mass here.

Following the Mass, at 2 p.m., the Race and Reconciliation Dialogue Group of the Cathedral Parish will present its annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. program in a virtual format. Young liturgical dancers will perform the Lord’s Prayer, followed by a speech from the Honorable Dwayne Woodruff.

Students from the faith formation classes of Saint Mary Magdalene Parish participated in an essay and poster contest based on the program’s 2021 theme, The Dream Lives On Through Us. The winning entries will be presented.

“This is a time for all of us to lift up in prayer our great desire, through God’s grace, to build a civilization of life and love, a world that protects and defends every
human life,” said Father Kris Stubna, rector of Saint Paul Cathedral. “I want to highlight the ongoing work of the Race and Reconciliation Dialogue Group and their tremendous efforts to build bridges of unity, reconciliation, respect and love among all people.”

Program co-chair Judy Saunders added, “If Dr. King were here today, he would take the same position as Nelson Mandela who was imprisoned in South Africa for 27 years. We have to reconcile our differences, show each other kindness, generosity and peace, and move on.”

“As Catholics, we should value the church-centered and prayer-based movement that Martin Luther King led for basic human rights,” said Father Matthew Hawkins, parochial vicar of Saint Mary Magdalene and Benedict the Moor parishes in Pittsburgh. “King’s movement not only asserted the dignity of people who were treated by the law as less than human, he also declared the dignity and humanity of those who opposed him. Recent tragic events demonstrate what happens when we don’t live by these values.”

To access the 2 p.m. program, please email mlkprogram2021@gmail.com to receive a Zoom link and additional information.
Take 5 with Father Steve Neff: All in the family

JANUARY 15, 2021

Categories: Columns
Tags: Featured, Take 5 with Father

*Ordained in 2005, Father Steve Neff has served as a parochial vicar and pastor, and currently is the spiritual director to the seminarians at Saint Paul Seminary.*

1. How did God call you to the priesthood?

I feel that God called me in two ways. The first way was by giving me a family that loved the Church and the priesthood. My Grandpa Neff had been a seminarian but discerned that God was calling him to marriage. Because he had been a seminarian for many years, several of his friends were priests and came to family gatherings.

The second way that God called me to the priesthood was by showing me the examples of happy, healthy and holy priests who joyfully lived their vocations. Our pastor at Saint Joseph Church in Chicora, Father DePaul Ripko, celebrated many Masses at my Grandma Neff's house (she always said that I would become a priest). After I graduated from high school, I worked at an architectural/engineering firm, where I did computer aided drafting. I would go to Mass celebrated by Father Harry...
Bielewicz at Saint Paul Church in Butler on my lunch hour. Father Bielewicz was such a young, joyful priest and I remember thinking, *Wow, this guy is happy!* These priests showed me that a life anchored in the Lord is a joyful life.

2. What is the most meaningful aspect of your ministry?

It is celebrating the Sacraments, most especially the Mass. Our dear Lord is always present to touch the lives of His people and I am filled with awe and joy. I tell the faithful to buckle their seat belts and get ready for something exciting every time they come to Mass. It’s incredible to watch the miracle of the consecration and then to see from the look on the faces of the faithful when they receive the Eucharist. They, too, know a miracle took place. The faithful are so hungry to be fed and Lord does exactly that every time the Sacraments are celebrated.

3. What is the most challenging part of your ministry?

The most challenging part is helping the faithful believe that they are special and that they are loved by the Lord! The devil works overtime to trick people and convince them that this is not true. If we all firmly believed that God loves us completely and unconditionally, we would understand the Sacraments and we would never underestimate the power of God’s unconditional love for each of us. My hope is that Christ’s love can pour out through me to the people I serve.

4. What do you wish people knew about the priesthood?

I wish people knew that priesthood is a joyful way of life. It is very rich and fulfilling because every day I get to invite people into a relationship with Christ. No two days are the same. I am honored and humbled to be invited into people’s lives and to walk with them in good times and in bad. As a priest, I have seen the words of the Gospel of Matthew 19:29 come to life, when Jesus says, “And everyone who has given
For men who may think that Christ is calling them to the priesthood, they owe it to themselves and to Him to find out. It is my honor to serve as the spiritual director to the seminarians at St. Paul Seminary.

5. What do you do in your free time?

I love spending time with family—my parents, who have been married for 57 years; my sister Rebecca and her husband Jerry; and my nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles and many cousins. I love to be home, sitting on the porch and enjoying the beauty of God’s creation around us at our old farmhouse, pond and the 50 acres that we live on. I love nature, especially being there during a good snowstorm or throughout the various seasons.
Father Neff with his parents and Bishop Zubik at the diocesan Golden Wedding Anniversary Mass.
In a recent homily, Father Neff offered insights on how God the Father cares for us
How can I grow spiritually? Inspiration for Latinos

JANUARY 15, 2021

Categories: Columns
Tags: Featured, Guest Contributors

Hace aproximadamente dos años, en un esfuerzo por llegar a la vibrante y creciente comunidad latina de la Diócesis de Pittsburgh, Jorge Vela, director del Apostolado Hispano, comenzó a escribir una columna mensual de espiritualidad en español.

Esperamos que también lo disfruten los hablantes nativos de inglés, incluidos los estudiantes de nuestras escuelas católicas que están aprendiendo el idioma español.

About two years ago, in an effort to reach the vibrant and growing Latino community in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Jorge Vela, director of Hispanic Apostolate, began writing a monthly spirituality column in Spanish.

We hope that it also will be enjoyed by native speakers of English, including students in our Catholic schools who are learning the Spanish language. (English translation follows Spanish.)
La voz del mensajero

Una columna mensual de Jorge Vela

¿QUE PUEDO HACER PARA CRECER ESPIRITUALMENTE? (Primera Parte)

Cuando se hace con sinceridad, la persona que busca crecer espiritualmente encontrará respaldo de Dios durante su búsqueda. Crecer en fe, como lo es en cualquier otra parte de la vida, requiere tiempo y dedicación. Para crecer espiritualmente, debemos regresar a los puntos básicos de la vida cristiana: La oración, la Palabra de Dios, la comunidad de creyentes, y compartir con otros lo que Dios, con gracia, nos ha dado.

Leer la Biblia entera: Es fácil caer en la rutina de siempre leer los mismos pasajes bíblicos. Tendrás mejor entendimiento de lo que lees con frecuencia si lo pones en contexto de un libro entero de la Biblia entera. Recuerda que la Biblia es un mensaje completo de parte de Dios. Dedica un año para leerla entera y con la ayuda del Espíritu Santo, verás que crecerás en entendimiento.

Orar todos los días: La oración es clave para el cristiano porque es la forma en cómo se comunica con Dios. Es básicamente imposible estar en una relación, mucho menos una que es fuerte e íntima, sin tener un diálogo constante. Todos los días aparta tiempo para orar. Si eres un nuevo creyente, empieza usando el ejemplo del Padre Nuestro. Si tienes años en la iglesia, recuerdas que hay varias formas de orar y proponte practicarlas todas.

Practicar el ayuno: Cuando ayunamos le mostramos a Dios que él es más importante que nuestros placeres y necesidades humanas que el es nuestra fuente de fortaleza. Durante un tiempo determinado, una persona deja de comer y en vez dedica tiempo a la oración. Si nunca has ayunado, empieza con solo unas horas al
principio de un día y mientras vallas creciendo en tu caminar con Dios, ve aumentando lo que puedas ofrecer.

**Asistir a la iglesia todas las semanas:** ¿Porque debes de ir a la iglesia? Porque es el propósito de Dios para ti. Jesús fundó la iglesia como una familia para el creyente y como un instrumento para alcanzar al no creyente. Ir a la iglesia nos da la oportunidad de alabar a Dios por todas sus bondades, fortalecernos en la fe, y recibir instrucción a través de la predicación y las lecturas bíblicas. De los siete días de la semana, no debe ser mucho trabajo dedicarle por lo menos uno a Dios.

**Llegar a la iglesia temprano:** El propósito de ir a la iglesia es adorar a Dios con todo nuestro ser. Lamentablemente, a veces llegamos a la iglesia distraídos por una situación u otra y se nos hace difícil enfocarnos en lo que realmente es importante en ese momento. Si llegas por lo menos 10 minutos temprano, puedes orar y preparar tu espíritu para recibir las bendiciones que Dios tiene para ti. Usa ese tiempo para dedicarle tu adoración y entregarles tus cargas.

** Participar de los estudios bíblicos:** Diferente al servicio tradicional de los domingos, los estudios bíblicos que se ofrecen durante la semana permiten que levantes la mano si tienes alguna pregunta o si no entiendes algo. En general, estos servicios son más pequeños y más informales y a veces se ofrecen para grupos con intereses similares. Los estudios bíblicos de tu iglesia son de los mejores recursos que tienes disponible para entender la Biblia y los debes de aprovechar.

**Compartir las buenas nuevas:** La Gran Comisión en Mateo 28 nos manda a compartir el evangelio con los demás. Aunque no acepten tu invitación, trata de invitar a alguien nuevo a tu iglesia cada semana para que escuchen el mensaje de salvación. Si no van, trata de compartir con ellos tu testimonio. No solo estarás cumpliendo con un mandamiento, pero experimentaras el gozo de compartir las buenas nuevas con las personas que están a tu alrededor.
The Voice of the Messenger

A monthly column by Jorge Vela

WHAT CAN I DO TO GROW SPIRITUALLY? (Part One)

When done sincerely, the person seeking to grow spiritually will find support from God during their search. Growing in faith, as it is in any other part of life, takes time and dedication. To grow spiritually, we must return to the basics of the Christian life: prayer, the Word of God, the community of believers, and share with others what God has graciously given us.

Read the entire Bible: It is easy to fall into the routine of always reading the same biblical passages. You will have a better understanding of what you read frequently if you put it in the context of an entire book of the entire Bible. Remember that the Bible is a complete message from God. Take a year to read it in its entirety and with the help of the Holy Spirit, you will see that you will grow in understanding.

Pray every day: Prayer is key for the Christian because it is the way in which he communicates with God. It is basically impossible to be in a relationship, much less one that is strong and intimate, without having a constant dialogue. Take time to pray every day. If you are a new believer, start by using the example of the Our Father. If you have been in church for years, remember that there are several ways to pray and propose to practice all of them.

Practice fasting: When we fast we show God that he is more important than our human pleasures and needs that he is our source of strength. For a set time, a
person stops eating and instead spends time in prayer. If you have never fasted, start with just a few hours at the beginning of a day and as you grow in your walk with God, increase what you can offer.

Go to church every week: Why should you go to church? Because it is God's purpose for you. Jesus founded the church as a family for the believer and as an instrument to reach the unbeliever. Going to church gives us the opportunity to praise God for all his goodness, strengthen us in faith, and receive instruction through preaching and Bible readings. Of the seven days a week, it shouldn’t be a lot of work dedicating at least one to God.

Get to church early: The purpose of going to church is to worship God with our whole being. Unfortunately, sometimes we come to church distracted by one situation or another and find it difficult to focus on what is really important at the time. If you arrive at least 10 minutes early, you can pray and prepare your spirit to receive the blessings that God has for you. Use that time to dedicate your adoration to him and deliver your burdens to them.

Participate in Bible studies: Unlike the traditional Sunday service, the Bible studies offered during the week allow you to raise your hand if you have a question or if you don’t understand something. In general, these services are smaller and more informal and are sometimes offered to groups with similar interests. Your church’s Bible studies are one of the best resources you have available to understand the Bible and you should take advantage of them.

Share the good news: The Great Commission in Matthew 28 commands us to share the gospel with others. Even if they don’t accept your invitation, try to invite someone new to your church each week to hear the message of salvation. If they don’t, try to share your testimony with them. Not only will you be fulfilling a
commandment, but you will experience the joy of sharing the good news with the people around you.
Faithful Chronicles

*St. Joseph helps us understand our Catholic values.*

By Father Frank Almade

Pope Francis has declared 2021 the Year of Saint Joseph, a man of powerful faith who did his good works in silence. The husband of Mary gives us a much-needed lesson in humility, kindness and courage.

The Year of Saint Joseph, which continues until Dec. 8, 2021, marks 150 years since Pope Pius XI declared him patron of the universal Church. Pope Francis announced the year in an apostolic letter, *Patris Corde* (*With a Father’s Heart*), written against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. The global crisis, he wrote, has helped us see more clearly the importance of “ordinary” people, who are far from the limelight but exercise patience and serve their neighbors every day. In this they resemble Saint Joseph, the unnoticed, discreet and dutiful worker.
Pope Francis describes him as a tender father whose love is placed at the service of the Messiah. He is a father in obedience to God, protecting Mary and Jesus, and teaching the Son in his care. He is an accepting father, embracing Mary unconditionally as his wife. He is a father full of hope, who accepts life as it is, with all its contradictions, frustrations and disappointments. The carpenter of Nazareth lived with creative courage, turning problems into possibilities by trusting in divine providence.

Saint Joseph is a special patron of all those forced to leave their native lands because of war, hatred, persecution or poverty. From Saint Joseph, writes Pope Francis, we must learn to love the Church and the poor.

Saint Joseph earned an honest living to provide for his family. He teaches the value, dignity and joy of fruitful labor. Since 1955, the Church has celebrated the feast of Saint Joseph the Worker, in the words of Pope Pius XII, “with the intent that the dignity of work be recognized by all, and that it inspires social life and laws, based on the fair distribution of rights and duties” and promotion of the common good.

Pope Francis affirms Catholic social teaching on the meaning of work and support of all workers. In labor, we join in the work of salvation, developing our God-given talents and abilities to hasten God’s coming reign on earth. Especially in light of rising unemployment due to the pandemic, the pope calls nations to review their priorities and to declare that no young person or anyone with dependents should be without work.

Borrowing an image from a Polish theologian, Pope Francis describes Joseph’s paternal role as “the earthly shadow of the heavenly Father.”

The pope writes that, “Fathers are not born but made” because “man does not become a father simply by bringing a child into the world, but by taking on the
responsibility to care for that child."

In affirming Saint Joseph as “a most chaste father,” he indicates that it means the opposite of domineering possessiveness. Saint Joseph lived and loved with extraordinary freedom. He never made himself the center of things, but focused on the lives of Mary and Jesus.

As we entrust out daily activities to the protection of Saint Joseph, Pope Francis encourages us to offer this prayer:

_Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary. To you God entrusted his only Son; in you Mary placed her trust, with you Christ became man. Blessed Joseph, to us too, show yourself a father and guide us in the path of life. Obtain for us grace, mercy and courage, and defend us from every evil. Amen._

During the Year of Saint Joseph, Pope Francis invites all who have devotion to him to receive a plenary indulgence. The usual conditions necessary are sacramental confession, reception of Holy Communion, and prayer for the pope’s intentions.

Pope Francis has also expanded the conditions for those who are prevented from going to Mass. One may meditate for at least 30 minutes on Saint Joseph and his many titles and virtues. The indulgence can also be obtained by those who, following Saint Joseph’s example, perform a spiritual or corporal work of mercy. Praying the Rosary is encouraged in families and among engaged couples.

We are all tempted to tell others of our good works. In the spirit of the Saint Joseph, who is silent in the gospels and does his good works in Nazareth behind the scenes, during this year of prayer let us do many new acts of charity, justice and prayer without attention or publicity. Saint Joseph, pray for us!