

THE CRUSADER

A PUBLICATION OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS REGIONAL SCHOOL

SUMMER/FALL 2014

USA Science and Engineering Festival



**Aquinas Celebrates Science,
Technology, Engineering and Math
at the Washington Convention Center**



PLUS

**The New Evangelization
Middle school students see the sun in *Annie, Jr.***

LETTER FROM SISTER



DEAR FRIENDS OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS REGIONAL SCHOOL,

Praise Be Jesus Christ who is present to us each moment of our lives.

This past 2013–2014 school year, Our Lord has blessed us with wonderful parents, a dedicated faculty, and most importantly, the children with their many gifts. We continue to learn from each other, with God present in each of us, we learn by His lead to love each other, to be grateful for each other and to Him, and to forgive and be forgiven for our failings. Each moment is an opportunity to thank the Lord for His unconditional love for us and for His presence in our lives. We have prayed, had a good time and worked together allowing Jesus' presence and will to form our day. What a tremendous gift this is!

We had another successful year at Aquinas. Our PTO raised the money for the new playground surface. The event, Race for Education, was a great help with this endeavor. Thank you to so many of you who donated and to the many parents who give of themselves at school events to improve our school. We participated in the USA Science and Engineering Festival as an exhibitor and X-STEM school, including an academic symposium. The Science Fair, Science Olympiad, middle school musical, choir, band, STEM and Advanced Language Arts Programs, sports teams and a rigorous curriculum benefited from the efforts of our parents, faculty and staff, and you, our benefactors. What a great team we have here at Aquinas!

Most importantly, our Catholic identity is strong in our families and our school community. The Design for Excellence Visiting Team recommended Aquinas for full accreditation this year. The Design for Excellence is an accreditation process sponsored by the Virginia Catholic Education Association (VCEA), approved by the Virginia Council for Private Education and recognized by the Virginia Department of Education. We passed with many commendations and the team identified our Catholic identity as one of our greatest strengths. We applaud our faculty, staff and families on this achievement.

The second graders made their First Reconciliation meeting Our Lord in His mercy and love with the assurance of forgiveness. Later, in May, they received Jesus—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity for the first time in the Eucharist. He humbles Himself and becomes present to us for the nourishment of our souls and our lives—in our hearts—in all we think, say, do, and are. The eighth graders completed their Christian initiation from their Baptism in the Sacrament of Confirmation. They receive the Gifts of the Holy Spirit to strengthen them to carry out their Baptismal Promises as a child of God to be missionaries, to love God and others, and be faithful to Him in giving themselves for the service of His Kingdom here on earth.

The whole school raised money for those affected by the typhoon in the Philippines by holding a “Penny War”—boys versus girls. For the first time in a long while, the boys beat the girls; although, it was close. We also helped the Our Lady of Angels Conference St. Vincent de Paul by bringing in food and clothing items.

The Middle School students learned to defend their faith and speak to others of Christ Jesus in their Apologetics club. The fourth and fifth grade boys and girls learned about living as virtuous young men and women in the Blue Knights and the Maidens of Mary clubs. The whole school participated in the Virtues in Practice Education Program where we put on the mind of Christ and learn to walk the way of charity in thinking as He would think, in saying what He would say, in doing what He would do, and in being who He wills us to be.

May God truly reward you and bless you abundantly for the gift of yourself in prayer, monetarily, and with resources. You are a blessing to us.

Sincerely in Jesus and Mary, Our Mother,

Sister Martha Ann, O.P.
Principal

This is Saint Thomas Aquinas Regional School because of God's grace and His work through each of us.

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Development Assistant Mary Beth Ranieri
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St. Thomas Aquinas Regional School
AQUINAS

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STEM TAKES CENTER STAGE



AT THE USA SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING
FESTIVAL EXPO IN WASHINGTON D.C.



Approximately 325,000 people participated in a four day celebration of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) at the USA Science and Engineering Festival on April 24–27, 2014, at the Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C. Known as the “*Superbowl of STEM*”, it is the largest, free opportunity in the United States for students from kindergarten through high school to try seemingly endless amounts of STEM activities. Aquinas students and faculty fully enjoyed the amazing opportunities associated with the Festival Expo.

The Festival Expo is designed to inspire the next generation of innovators in STEM fields. “Staying competitive as a nation means we have to encourage more kids to think about careers in STEM. What better way to capture their imaginations than gathering the rock stars of science in one place and providing activities that they can really do?” explained Larry Bock, Festival Expo co-Founder. Students were able to choose from over 3,000 hands-on exhibitor activities as demonstrated by schools including colleges/universities, corporations, and non-profit and professional organizations from across the nation. The Festival Expo occupied the entire convention center of 703,000 total square feet of exhibitor space, which is spread across multiple levels of three city blocks. Families traveled from as far away as New York, New Jersey and Ohio for their children to participate in the Festival Expo. There were multiple stages that hosted speakers with larger science demonstrations, a Career Pavilion and a Book Fair section for authors to meet students and sign books.

Science celebrities were in abundance at the Festival Expo. There were those who are familiar to many: Mayim Bialik, from the cast of CBS’ *The Big Bang Theory*, who

is also neuroscientist; Mike Rowe from the Discovery Channel’s *Dirty Jobs with Mike Rowe* and a section sponsor in the Festival Expo that promoted technical training; *Bill Nye the Science Guy*; two-time Grammy Award winning band, They Might Be Giants, who specialize in children’s music with

professional cheerleaders pursuing science and technology careers.

Not all of the guest speakers had accomplished amazing scientific feats as adults, however. One of the notable participants, Jack Andraka, is a 16-year old Baltimore high school student, who

“STAYING COMPETITIVE AS A NATION MEANS WE HAVE TO ENCOURAGE MORE KIDS TO THINK ABOUT CAREERS IN STEM. WHAT BETTER WAY TO CAPTURE THEIR IMAGINATIONS THAN GATHERING THE ROCK STARS OF SCIENCE IN ONE PLACE AND PROVIDING ACTIVITIES THAT THEY CAN REALLY DO?”

science themes; three astronauts including Cady Coleman, Sandy Magnus and B. Alvin Drew; the mathematician behind *Money Ball*, Paul DePodesta; and Nobel prize-winning physicist, William Phillips. There were also many who are not household names but are legends in their respective fields including doctors, mathematicians, physicists, authors, engineers, hosts of science television shows, meteorologists, magicians, computer programmers, government policy advisors, historical scientist impersonators, and even sports cheerleaders from a network of current and former NFL and NBA

developed (at age 15) an innovative diagnostic test that detects pancreatic cancer. His test is 368 times more sensitive, 150 times quicker and 26,000 times cheaper than the medical standard currently used for pancreatic cancer. Jack is only a couple of years older than our middle school students at Aquinas but he is an example of someone who accomplished something remarkable as a student. “We want to show students that STEM is fun, and that scientists and engineers change the world for the better,” said Dr. Ray O. Johnson, Festival co-Founder and Lockheed Martin senior vice president and chief technology advisor.



Top: The Aquinas booth with our students, visitors and an Aquinas faculty member

Right: Ice cream being made with liquid nitrogen

Bottom: One of the X-STEM School Symposium sessions that demonstrated a walking, inflatable elephant, designed by the expert presenter

Aquinas got involved early by becoming an X-STEM school (X, as in, extreme), to become a recognized partner of the Festival Expo. Five middle school students were identified by the Aquinas faculty to act as “student ambassadors” for the Festival Expo activities, and Aquinas STEM teacher, Ms. Walsh, served as faculty advisor. The student ambassadors wrote a mission statement for Aquinas: “‘STEM Crusaders’ will actively promote STEM subject areas throughout the school community in fun and exciting ways. Our goals are to provide greater awareness of STEM opportunities for students and to share knowledge on STEM topics with the community.” X-STEM schools met regularly to share their team’s activities and discuss the latest developments for the festival. Aquinas student ambassadors received a neon green Festival Expo t-shirt for their support of the festival. All of the X-STEM schools who fulfilled the qualifications were showcased on the Festival Expo website (usasciencefestival.org) with a picture of each school’s student ambassadors. X-STEM schools were able to participate in exciting opportunities throughout the 2013–14 school year leading up to the festival.

Aquinas was selected to host a “Nifty Fifty” speaker, from a signature program only available to X-STEM schools. The “Nifty Fifty” are a group of noted professionals who spoke about their work and careers at various middle and high schools in the Washington, D.C. area. In early December, 2013, Aquinas Middle School students heard a discussion about the future of technology careers by Ruthe Farmer, Director of Strategic Initiatives for the National Center for Women and Information Technology (NCWIT). Ms. Farmer was one of ten achievers honored by the White House as “Champions of Change for Tech Inclusion”, an initiative to better equip American graduates for the demands of a high-tech economy. Ms. Farmer spoke to our students about the expanding deficit between the number of computer programmers needed to fill future high-tech jobs and the number of American students who are taking computer classes. She also discussed some girls from diverse backgrounds (including a homeless teen) that she worked with in her organization while they were the same age as our Middle School students, and who were currently college students with job offers after college with Google or Apple Inc. Students

asked questions about ethics in using computers and recommended courses they could take in high school.

After Ms. Farmer's talk, she was invited to lunch and conversation with our student ambassadors and science and math faculty members. Ms. Farmer asked each student ambassador about their interests and hobbies and then suggested possible career options that would incorporate the student's interests in a STEM field. For example, she suggested that one student who enjoyed dance might consider a career in biomechanics because a thorough understanding of kinetic articulation was a requirement for this position and she would already have that knowledge from her dance classes. Ms. Farmer and a Festival representative, Julie Reiss, both thought that our students had very interesting questions and they were excited to hear about Aquinas student science projects. Ms. Reiss enthused, "I was incredibly amazed that a core group of the X-STEMmers (mostly girls) are building a hologram cube... That's truly amazing!"

While the Festival Expo occurred during our Easter Break, our student ambassadors actively

promoted the event the week before by greeting the students during morning announcements with a fun STEM fact and an invitation to come to the Festival Expo. One morning, students were asked "did you know you can make a diamond from peanut butter?" (answer: It is possible, under conditions of intense pressure and very high temperatures!) Each student was also given a Festival Expo bookmark with the festival dates, location and more STEM facts, quizzes or scientist biographical information.

A highlight for X-STEM schools, including Aquinas student ambassadors, was exclusive participation in an all-day X-STEM Symposium before the Festival Expo opened with noted science visionaries. Students were able to attend a series of lecture demonstrations or workshops in a stunning array of topics, ranging from a cockroach neurosurgery demonstration to a paleontology lecture that included sifting through potentially millions-of-years-old fossils. Aquinas students attended lectures and demonstrations by a three dimensional (3D) printer company, stunt scientist, pyrotechnic expert and storm chasers, among others. "The speakers at the Symposium were so cool and that whole day was really beneficial. I'm

so glad I got to be a part of Aquinas' team of ambassadors," said Aquinas student, Claire Bassett. Aquinas students experienced a scientific symposium many years before their friends might have that opportunity later in their education. STEM teacher, Ms. Walsh, quoted C.S. Lewis in saying, "'The task of the modern educator is not to cut down the jungles, but to irrigate the deserts.'" At the Symposium, I witnessed many a-ha moments from my students, and happily, I was able to check off another oasis formed in my presence."

Sneak Peek Friday was the kick-off day for the Festival Expo. Aquinas participated as a booth exhibitor throughout the festival from Friday through Sunday. More than 40,000 students, teachers, military families, government officials and members of the press attended Sneak Peek Friday as special guests. The cover photograph of the convention floor was taken

Nifty Fifty speaker, Ruthe Farmer, Director of Strategic Initiatives at NCWIT, with Aquinas X-STEM school student ambassadors and students in the Aquinas STEM program





AQUINAS WAS THE ONLY CATHOLIC SCHOOL IN NORTHERN VIRGINIA TO PRESENT A HANDS-ON ACTIVITY FOR CHILDREN AS A FESTIVAL EXPO EXHIBITOR.



on Sneak Peek Friday, which had the lightest attendance of the weekend.

Sneak Peek Friday was the first time many of our students had a chance to look around and see all of the exhibits. Aquinas student, Maria Mendoza, was thrilled by the 3D printer demonstrations. She watched the 3D printer make a variety of objects like race car figures, SmartPhone cases, and action figures. She said, "while I was there, I learned that 3D printers could also make working prosthetic limbs, piece by piece!" Another Aquinas student, Tristin Youtz, especially loved the Lockheed Martin F-16 flight simulator. He said, "it was very realistic and well-built to inspire young minds." Claire added, "Just being at the festival all day on Friday really gave me an idea of how many organizations and schools are out there in the world, looking for interest in STEM. It was really an inspiration to know that there are many people who want to know more." Participating exhibitors were invited to a special VIP reception on Friday including opportunities to meet celebrities and enjoy snacks, such as instant ice cream sundaes made with the assistance of liquid nitrogen.

Neurosurgery is performed on a cockroach by an X-STEM School Symposium expert and demonstrated on an ohmmeter application

Aquinas was the only Catholic school in Northern Virginia to present a hands-on activity for children as a Festival Expo exhibitor. Student ambassadors and mentors volunteered—over their Easter Break—to demonstrate a computer program at the Aquinas booth. Students previously learned the computer animation program in Mr. Wage's computer class. Aquinas students worked one-on-one with each child to create a short animation using stick figures and their imagination. Tristin commented, "It was fun teaching other kids at our booth." Maria agreed, "I loved working at the Aquinas booth!" The finished product was put on a large screen television to the delight of the children and their family. Many children spent a long time perfecting their stick figure animations and experienced the beginning of how popular animated movies are created. Some Aquinas STEM students also demonstrated their programming skills with their LEGO Mindstorms robot configurations. Faculty members including Ms. Walsh, Mrs. Mendell, Mrs. Glascock, Mr. Wage, and Mrs. Wage, managed the booth activities and answered questions. Parent visitors inquired about Aquinas programs while they watched their children work on the computers. All visitors to the Aquinas booth also received heat sensitive pencils, that change color from blue to white when they come into contact with a heat source (like a human hand!) The Aquinas pencils were very popular with Festival Expo participants. When they were not at the Aquinas booth, students from Aquinas were able to enjoy all of the Festival Expo shows, exhibits and activities.

The Festival Expo itself was an incredible sight, with so many activities and things to learn about, it was impossible to see everything. Roughly 140,000 people came to the Washington Convention Center each day. We accomplished our goal in giving our students the opportunity to participate in the largest, ultimate celebration of science and engineering in the country, inspire children of all ages to explore careers in STEM and show off the great things we are doing at Aquinas!

AQUINAS & JP

BUILDING TRADITIONS TOGETHER



**AQUINAS FAMILIES,
PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR
FALL OPEN HOUSE!**



Sunday, November 16, 1–4pm

Presentation, 1:15pm; House Games, 3pm

**The first 50 8th graders to pre-register for the
Open House will receive a free JP t-shirt!**



Please visit jpthegreat.org today!

17700 Dominican Drive, Dumfries • 703.445.0300 • info@jpthegreat.org



ANNIE, JR.



Our middle school musical, *Annie, Jr.*, was another big hit for Aquinas! Last spring, over 100 middle school students auditioned for parts or signed up as crew members to make the magic of the theater look effortless. While we had some scheduling difficulties that required a change in venue, our students and parents adapted beautifully to make an incredible show.

We were lucky to partner with Woodbridge Middle School—who also performed *Annie, Jr.*—in order to share resources and volunteer talent. The drama teacher at Woodbridge M.S., Ellen McKinstrie, worked with us

throughout our show preparation by providing technical advice and occasional notes for our students. Mrs. McKinstrie allowed us to store large set pieces at the school, coordinated efforts to construct sets with parents and students from both schools, helped to fill in props and set pieces for both shows and worked with us to have “tech week” practices on their stage. By working together, both schools were able to save money, have access to a large costume wardrobe and perform in a large theater. Mrs. McKinstrie was happy to attend our performances and some of our parents attended the Woodbridge M.S. production.



Aquinas Middle School students are the cast and crew of *Annie, Jr.*



Mrs. Lillian Riley, our music teacher at Aquinas, was at the helm of another spectacular show with our students. She said, “every year after each musical performance, I wonder how we can achieve the wonderful performances we do with so little time to prepare... but I know the answer: with lots of work and enthusiasm from everyone involved.” Mrs. Riley credits all of the many people involved in the musical, particularly Sister Martha Ann, who was very supportive and enthusiastic about the show, and the PTO. She noted that there were so many parents who lent their talent to the show but who are too

numerous to mention individually. The support of our parents in such a large show is essential to creating a successful musical. Mrs. Riley is also very proud of the *Annie, Jr.* cast and crew “for their hard work and performances.” The importance of a positive theater experience is not lost on Mrs. Riley. “I know this is an experience the kids will draw on at different moments in their life. It is a confidence booster, a reminder that hard work pays, (and) that we should take chances to find out our hidden talents...” Mrs. Riley says she cannot wait to start working on the next middle school musical, *The Wizard of Oz*!



THE APOLOGETICS CLUB

Each week in the Middle School Religion classroom after school, the Apologetics Club tackles the form and substance of defending the Catholic faith. They address such important questions as:

- How do I share my faith with others?
- How do I defend my faith when it is opposed?
- How do I argue effectively about the truth?
- Is there anything I should not do in trying to share my faith?



The Apologetics Club was formed by Sister Maria Faustina, O.P. in November, 2013, with an aim towards giving middle school students the tools necessary for sharing the Catholic faith in a society suffering from confusion and hopelessness. Many of us have witnessed the faithful intensity and enthusiasm of students, who so clearly grasp the reality of Christ. It is the purity of their faith that has been the source of countless conversions, reversions, and deepening of the faith by adults.

Many students in middle school have this same zeal, along with a budding knack for argumentation. It is this quality in a classical education that was developed and honed at this precise moment in a student's intellectual journey. The Aquinas Apologetics Club provides some of the basic tools for argumentation and answers to common misunderstandings about Catholicism. It also teaches eager "apostles of truth" that Apologetics is just one aspect of evangelization, and must be approached, not with the desire of winning a debate, but with the hope of winning a soul.

This year's Apologetics Club had a steady membership of 12–15 middle school students who met to learn the basics in the art of argumentation and logic. One lesson included comical demonstrations of arguments appealing to *ethos* (justice), *pathos* (emotion), and *logos* (reason). Another lesson included a humorous examination of popular commercials and classifying the methods of persuasion employed in them. Students also identified and simulated basic logical syllogisms, which allowed them to identify fallacies and weaknesses in arguments that would otherwise be quite persuasive.

Perhaps the most powerful meeting in Apologetics this year, however, was the day the students gave their own personal testimonies. They were asked to describe a moment that affected their own life of faith as Catholics. Each testimony was powerful in its own way, and allowed the students to understand more clearly that our faith is about a *relationship with the Person of Christ*, and it is meant to be shared.



CONGRATULATIONS TO THE GRADUATING 8TH GRADE CLASS OF 2014

Soniamariana Acuna
Jordan Allen
Zach Amados
Megan Arata
Kristina Bow
Peyton Boyd
Zane Brunsman
Samantha Carley
Rachel Chambers
Sebastian Collazo
Evan Cooper
Kaitlyn Cox
Tara Croce
Megan Curran
Selena Dagdagan
Sophia Davis
Jacqueline Days
Justin DeGuzman
Rose Dennis

Chloe Doty
Shannon Dumais
Caitlin Firth
Cristina Herrera
Earl Higgins III
John Hurst
Nitin Jenson
Curtis Kasiski
Braden Kita
Kyler Knapp
Thomas Liuzzo III
Alexandra London
Carlie Marshall
Micaela McGillis
Amelia Metzler
Kim Nguyen
Jakob O'Hearn
Donald Palmer
Stephania Penaloza

Kallyn Perroots
Nathaniel Raffier
Maeve Randall
Blaize Reissland
Alexandra Samarov
Blake Savage-Collins
Lucy Schafer
Jacqueline Sereno
Ashley Sese
Michael Stawski
Kevin Tickle
Sydney Tucker
Julia Wakefield
Laura Wenzel

AQUINAS ALUMNI: HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 2014 LIST OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (REPORTED)

Barry University

Bridgewater College

Bucknell University

Catholic University of America

Christopher Newport University

Clemson University

Coastal Carolina University

College of William and Mary (2)

George Mason University (4)

James Madison University (2)

Johnson and Wales University

Longwood University

Loyola University Maryland

Marymount University

NVCC (5)

St. John's University (2)

University of Dallas

University of Dayton

University of Virginia

Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Military Institute

Virginia Polytechnic Institute (3)

West Virginia University

**Catholic*

** Top 100 nationally ranked school*

SCHOLARSHIP TOTAL: \$1,605,740



“MASTER TEACHER” LORRAINE SMYTH RETIRES

Lorraine Smyth retired at the end of the academic year in 2014 with a distinguished career in education that included 29 years at St. Thomas Aquinas Regional School. Colleagues and students alike regarded her as an integral part of Aquinas. Mrs. Smyth felt that she always belonged at a Catholic school.

Mrs. Smyth attended Catholic schools from primary school through college. She began her teaching career in 1979 as a fourth grade teacher at Sacred Heart School in Monroe, New York. In 1982, Mrs. Smyth moved to Northern Virginia with her husband, Dave, and their two sons, Sean and Jeremy. She taught third grade at Aquinas for four years. The family then moved to Australia for two

years to accommodate Dave's military career. The family returned to the area in 1989 and Mrs. Smyth and her son, Jeremy, returned to Aquinas. Mrs. Smyth taught sixth grade and Jeremy continued his elementary education.

After eight years of teaching sixth grade, Mrs. Smyth was asked by Sister Mary Anne Zuberbueler, O.P., the principal at the time, to serve as the very first assistant principal at Aquinas. She served in this capacity for six years. During this time, Mrs. Smyth cultivated a reputation as a hard worker who also exuded professionalism. Karen Cardinale, Admissions Director, said, “she was always willing to pitch in to help with anything at the school.”

Mrs. Smyth is surprised by faculty, staff, family members and former colleagues at her retirement party



Mrs. Smyth asked to return to her first love—the classroom—to teach middle school Spanish in the 2003–2004 school year. She continued to teach middle school Spanish until her retirement. One activity at Aquinas that she became involved in is the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe celebration. Mrs. Smyth handled the Spanish Mass translation for the school's celebration. She also took her Spanish students to have lunch at a local Spanish restaurant each year. Approximately 90% of her eighth grade students who took the high school placement test were able to test out of Spanish I and place into Spanish II.

Throughout the years, Mrs. Smyth has amassed impressive credentials. She served with seven Dominican principals, beginning with Sister Christine Born, O.P. and ending with Sister Martha Ann Titus, O.P. She was nominated for the Agnes Meyer Outstanding Teacher Award in 2008, sponsored by the Washington Post, which recognizes excellence in education. She was included in the ninth edition of “Who’s Who Among America’s Teachers” in 2005. Most importantly, however, she gained the respect of her students and colleagues. Mr. Shawn McNulty, former assistant principal, deemed her to be a “master teacher”. He noted, “She was as calm, patient, and professional with the faculty and staff as she was with her

class.” Mrs. Cherish Reale, Spanish teacher at Aquinas, said that Mrs. Smyth “truly inspired her and all of the fortunate educators and students whose path she crossed.”

Former administrative assistant, Debbie Evans, characterized Mrs. Smyth’s influence on her son’s education at Aquinas as a lifetime gift that carried him through college and into his career. She said, “It was the high standards she required in her classroom that inspired him to work hard, to persevere, and take pride in his accomplishments.” A survey of middle school students in 2007 revealed that Mrs. Smyth was recognized as the middle school teacher with the best classroom management. They described her as consistent, fair; students knew what to expect from her and what she expected of them. It was important to Mrs. Smyth that she also taught life lessons. She said, “I strive to instill in my students a desire for lifelong learning... a desire that goes beyond the classroom and that will be a driving force throughout their entire lives.”

Mrs. Smyth also earned an esteemed reputation at the diocesan level. When Assistant Superintendent of Catholic Schools, Sister Karl Ann Homberg, SSJ, heard that Mrs. Smyth was mentoring a new teacher, she said, “Oh, then (that teacher) has one of the best.” Mr. McNulty

“I strive to instill in my students a desire for lifelong learning... a desire that goes beyond the classroom and that will be a driving force throughout their entire lives.”

had the unique experience of serving as Mrs. Smyth’s colleague, subordinate, and supervisor during his tenure at Aquinas, before becoming the Assistant Principal for Student Life at Saint John Paul the Great Catholic High School. He said that, “Mrs. Smyth possessed a quiet strength and demeanor, which was reflected by her students.” He credits her example as the basis for what he learned and still uses in his role as high school disciplinarian. “Mrs. Smyth was my mentor and role model in administration,” he said.

Although Mrs. Smyth has retired from full time teaching, she is not leaving Aquinas entirely. When she is not spending quality time with her husband and her four grandchildren, she has agreed to serve as a substitute teacher at Aquinas. It is the tradition of many former Aquinas faculty members who have retired but still love to come back and substitute teach. They are all lifelong members of the Aquinas family.



AQUINAS ATHLETICS: “BUILDING STRONG CHARACTER AND SELF-DISCIPLINE”





AQUINAS
TEAMWORK:
“GIVING YOUR
BEST FOR
THE TEAM”



THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

BY SR. MARTHA ANN TITUS, O.P.

In every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit. The real newness is the newness which God himself mysteriously brings about and inspires, provokes, guides and accompanies in a thousand ways. The life of the Church should always reveal clearly that God takes the initiative, that “he has loved us first” (1 Jn 4:19)

and that he alone “gives the growth” (1 Cor 3:7).

This conviction enables us to maintain a spirit of joy in the midst of a task so demanding and challenging that it engages our entire life. God asks everything of us, yet at the same time he offers everything to us.” Pope Francis, Evangelium Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel), n. 9.

The New Evangelization to which the Church is urging us is a call to each of us to bring the Gospel—to bring Jesus’ saving love—to all whom we encounter each day.

Happiness in life is simple; happiness is a life lived in love for God. The most important part of our lives and the link to all happiness, joy, peace, and love is our intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior.

The heavens and the earth and all they contain were created by God. He gave each of us a soul with its powers of intellect and will, imagination and memory; and a body with its five senses. These gifts of human nature enable us to come to know and love God and be always full of gratitude for His creation; yet, even more wondrously, through the grace of our Baptism God shares His very life, the life of the Trinity with us. Nourishing this life through the Eucharist, He gives His very Self, coming to us in Holy Communion with His unconditional love and mercy.

WHO IS JESUS?

He is the Son of God, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, whom God the Father sent into the world. God gave us Himself, His only “begotten Son”. (Jn. 3:16) “For the immense love He bore us, He sent His beloved Son to make satisfaction for us and restore us to the life which sin had taken away.” (*Love God and Do as You Please*, 1970, pg. 9) “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he has for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ by grace you have been saved.” (Ephesians 2:4–5). Our God loves us so much that He humbled Himself to take “the form of a servant and to submit Himself to all the miseries which men endure” (*Love God and Do as You Please*, 1970, pg. 9). How great a God we have because in His infinite goodness and love He continues to seek out the lost and bring them to Himself.

The Gospel, which presents the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, points out the way to happiness and gives us the way to holiness in that loving encounter with Our Lord. We all desire to have this relationship with our God, a personal and intimate relationship with the

One in whom all things are possible; “*I can do everything in Him who gives me strength*” (Philippians 4:13). He has written on our hearts this longing, this desire to come to Him in love (“*the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us* Romans 5:12). As in the Trinity, our lives are relational; we are social beings, drawn to live in communion with others.

The happiness that comes from this love of Jesus for each of us can never be found in anything else. This love of God for us is infinite and He desires only one thing, our love in return. This is another way of saying that He desires our happiness. Only one thing is necessary—love of God and to do His will.

Our love of God is true when:

1. We desire to do great things for Him and never to displease Him.
2. We cooperate with God’s grace and avoid temptations.
3. We choose to follow God’s will and not our own.
4. Our Love is pure.
5. We desire to influence all men to love God.
6. We unite our wills to God’s will.
7. We desire to be with God.

“Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails” (Corinthians 13:4–8).

How do we continue to strengthen our relationship with Jesus and be prepared to bring Him to others?

We cling to Our Lord in prayer and receive Him in the Eucharist. He is our strength, our sustenance, our fortitude to remain faithful. “*The true activity comes from God and only by inserting ourselves into the divine initiative, only begging for this divine initiative, shall we too be able to become—*



with him and in him—evangelizers”
(*Evangelium Gaudium—The Joy of the Gospel*, 2013, n. 112).

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church there are four parts that are foundational for our Faith. The four pillars (parts) direct our lives lived in Jesus Christ.

- I. The Creed: This is what we believe and in believing we live our Faith.
- II. Christian Mystery: The Sacraments are helps, God's grace, given to us to help to do good and follow God's will for us and help us reach heaven.
- III. Life in Christ: This is the way we are to live our lives to be happy—the Moral Life. Jesus teaches us how to live our lives and follow Him.
- IV. Prayer: This is the way we communicate with God. *“For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.” St. Therese*

We also continue to take Jesus to others each day by the four pillars in the mission of St. Thomas Aquinas Regional School. As a parent, student, teacher, staff member, we bring Jesus to others in four ways. They are:

PRAYER:

First and foremost we are all called to a close relationship with God through prayer. We lead each other, students and their parents, teachers, and staff to encounter God in prayer and to grow in faith through our encounter with Him who loves us.

STUDY:

Veritas—to give the truth *in love* is the greatest charity. We are obliged to provide an education of the highest academic quality. Parents and teachers are partners in bringing Jesus to the students and others.

COMMUNITY:

In the image of God, we are called to live in relation with one another. We are part of the community beyond our homes, our neighborhood, our family, our classroom. We are present to each person we encounter through Christ present within us.

PREACHING/SERVICE:

Love is diffusive of itself. God leads each of us to witness selflessness and to give of ourselves to one another, first to those in our own family and then to the greater community.

How can I enter into this New Evangelization and do as Jesus commanded?

WE ARE CALLED:

We are called to *“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age”* (Matthew 28:19).

The greatest command of Our Lord is this: *“You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself”* (Matthew 22:37–39).

Jesus draws all to Himself and we, as His instruments, witness to Him by the daily practice of our faith. We can choose to speak of Jesus to others. Our conversations can be uplifting, speaking of the good, the true, and the beautiful. We can speak to people of Our Lord and how blessed we are. There are many opportunities in our parishes to learn more of Jesus and our call to holiness. When we take time to be together as a family to pray, to visit the Blessed Sacrament, to have supper together, to be together and do “family things” together—all of this is part of the New Evangelization. In addition to these, observing Catholic traditions (such as the Advent wreath,

blessing of the Christmas tree, prayer before and after meals, etc.) and celebrating the Liturgical year together as a family helps us to grow in our faith. In conclusion, I would encourage all of us to be with Jesus before the Blessed Sacrament. Let us allow our love for Him to deepen and He will change us. He is everything for us! Let us make time for Him each day and bring Him into each part of our day. Let us step back from the busyness of our lives and be sure He is there leading us to all that He wills to accomplish through us. Let us praise, thank, adore, and love Him always. Let Him be everything for us.

“This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

The salvation which God offers us is the work of his mercy. No human efforts, however good they may be, can enable us to merit so great a gift. God, by his sheer grace, draws us to himself and makes us one with him. He sends his Spirit into our hearts to make us his children, transforming us and enabling us to respond to his love by our lives. The Church is sent by Jesus Christ as the sacrament of the salvation offered by God. Through her evangelizing activity, she cooperates as an instrument of that divine grace which works unceasingly and inscrutably. Benedict XVI put it nicely at the beginning of the Synod’s reflections: “It is important always to know that the first word, the true initiative, the true activity comes from God and only by inserting ourselves into the divine initiative, only begging for this divine initiative, shall we too be able to become—with him and in him—evangelizers”. This principle of the primacy of grace must be a beacon which constantly illuminates our reflections on evangelization.” Pope Francis, Evangelium Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel), n. 112

ALUMNI NEWS



Fr. Akers with the Most Rev. Paul S. Loverde, Photo Courtesy of Spiering Photography

We joyfully note God's Providence in two Aquinas alumni who were ordained into the priesthood this year, within one week of each other.

Father Christopher Christensen (class of 1998) was ordained on June 8, 2014, at St. Thomas More Cathedral in Arlington. He celebrated his First Mass on June 9th (Pentecost Sunday), at the 5:15 p.m. Mass at Our Lady of Angels in Woodbridge. His parents are still active members of the parish. Following his First Mass, there was a reception with Father Christensen's family, many local priests and Aquinas community members in the Parish

Hall. Co-sponsored by the Arlington Diocese and the military archdiocese, Fr. Christensen is serving as Parochial Vicar at Saint John the Apostle in Leesburg, before serving as an active duty Navy chaplain.

Father Zachary Akers (class of 1997) had a traditional ordination to the priesthood on June 14, 2014, at Saint John the Apostle Church in Leesburg, Virginia. Pope John Paul II established the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter (FSSP) as a Clerical Society of Apostolic Life of Pontifical right. Father Akers celebrated a Traditional Latin Mass on June 16, 2014, at Our Lady of Angels Church. A reception was also

held for Father Akers in the Parish Hall following his First Mass. Father Akers' father is an Extraordinary Minister at OLA. Father Akers is serving as Assistant Pastor at St. Stephen, the First Martyr Parish in Sacramento, California.

We interviewed both our alumni about their experiences at Aquinas and the impact that Catholic education had on their vocation:

FATHER AKERS

Q When did you attend Aquinas? Do you recall a favorite teacher at Aquinas?

I started at Aquinas as a kindergartener and attended until my 8th grade graduation in 1997. I had many good teachers at Aquinas but my favorite teacher was probably Sr. Mary Anne Zuberbueler, O.P. My greatest mentor among the faculty and staff was most certainly Mr. Shawn McNulty. In his *Life Skills* class, and as our wrestling coach, he taught us the importance of discipline and virtue.

Q Can you relate a special event or memorable experience at Aquinas?

I remember very fondly playing the trumpet in the school band, as well as being a member of the Diocesan Honor Band for many years. My love for music was fostered during my years at Aquinas. I am also grateful that I had the opportunity to play team sports as a middle school student at Aquinas. I was a "Crusader" soccer player and a member of the wrestling team. It was during that time that many friendships were formed and some of those friendships continue to this day.

Q Do you feel that Aquinas was instrumental in your faith formation?

Aquinas certainly played a major role in my faith formation and in helping foster my

priestly vocation. Although I wasn't aware of my priestly calling while I was a student at Aquinas, I now see the great importance of the influences given to me by the many wonderful Dominican Sisters of Nashville and all of the priests who offered the school weekly Masses.

Q How and when did God call you to be a priest?

The seed of my priestly vocation was certainly cultivated and formed during my nine years at Aquinas. I am truly grateful for those wonderful and happy years. I am most grateful to my parents for making sacrifices so that my siblings and I (six in all) could benefit from a great Catholic education. My education at Seton High School and Christendom College continued the great formation that I received at Aquinas. I strongly encourage all parents to send their children to Catholic high schools and universities that are *truly* Catholic. We are uniquely blessed in our diocese to have this opportunity, which is rare in most dioceses. Upon my graduation from Christendom, I asked God very earnestly in prayer what He wanted from me. I first worked for two years in Catholic education and formation in Pennsylvania and Kansas. Then, I worked for one year in Youth Ministry for St. John the Apostle Church in Leesburg. After that time, I entered Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary in Nebraska and continued my seminary formation for the next six years with the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter. The Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter (FSSP) is an international priestly society that was founded by Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI in 1988 in order to preserve the beautiful liturgical traditions of the Church.

Q What are some special memories about your ordination?

Through the grace of God and the kind permission of Bishop Paul Loverde, I was ordained a priest for the FSSP in Leesburg, Virginia on June 14, 2014 by Bishop James Conley. It was literally a "dream come true". The FSSP has over four hundred members

and operates parishes and schools throughout the world in two hundred locations, offering all the sacraments in the *Extraordinary Form* of the Roman Rite, entirely in Latin (1962 Missal).

Q What aspects of priestly life are you enjoying and are there specific areas that you wish to focus on through your vocation?

In my first priestly assignment in Sacramento, California, I am blessed to have the opportunity of teaching—giving back some of the great truths I learned at Aquinas.

FATHER CHRISTENSEN

Q When did you attend Aquinas? Do you recall a favorite teacher at Aquinas?

I attended Aquinas from 5th through 8th grade and I graduated in 1998. My favorite

teacher was Sister Theresa Joseph, O.P. She taught me in 5th grade, my first year at Aquinas, and her last year there.

Q Can you relate a special event or memorable experience at Aquinas?

One of my most memorable experiences at Aquinas was winning the basketball championship in 7th grade. We beat a team who had demolished us a few weeks prior, and who gave us, I think, our only loss.

Q Do you feel that Aquinas was instrumental in your faith formation?

Absolutely, I learned the fundamentals of the faith there and I was given good examples of a joyful Christian life, in particular from Sr. Theresa Joseph, O.P. and Sr. Mary Jordan, O.P. Both of them became instrumental in helping me to reason through intellectual challenges and



Father Akers' ordination
Photo courtesy of Spiering Photography



Father Christensen's First Mass at Our Lady of Angels Church Photo courtesy of Lisa Julia Photography

to persevere through the difficulties that we all have to face at some point.

Q How and when did God call you to be a priest?

Really, God calls in many ways. Deacon Danny Johnson clearly remembers telling me while I was at Aquinas that I would be a priest but I have no recollection of that! Perhaps, he helped to plant the seed. God gave to me at some point a deep sense of the truth of the Catholic faith, and that is something that I have held onto and fallen back on many times. It has also meant that I have been invited to enter more deeply into what the faith means for my life. God was able to lead me and guide me to the priesthood. It began with a desire to seek truth and to spread it. In high school at Thomas Jefferson (HSST), I had to hone my reasons, broaden my horizons, and begin to bring into the picture human experience,

to see how real life held up against the intellectual foundation in the faith I received at Aquinas. I survived, by the grace of God, and partly, through sheer will power.

I had one desire in life to go to Notre Dame for college, so I did. As a Navy ROTC midshipman at Notre Dame, I got very involved with people who were interested in promoting the University's Catholic identity, and the spiritual journey for me was a continuation of the journey that I started in high school. My new goal became, gradually, seeking Jesus and bringing people to Him. My spiritual sustenance was daily Mass, the rosary, and prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament. I really don't know why I latched on so tightly to these things so quickly, but I did, and I can only attribute it to God's Providence. By the time I was finishing up in South Bend, priesthood sat heavier on my mind, but I knew I couldn't do anything

about it because I had a four year Navy commitment to fulfill.

The Navy sent me to Yokosuka, Japan and the USS Blue Ridge for a 2 year tour. As soon as I got there, I found that the call only got stronger. In December of 2006, I attended a vocations discernment retreat hosted by the Archdiocese for the Military Services (AMS) at Yongsan Army Base in Seoul, Korea. It was there that I couldn't ignore the desire to become a priest, anymore.

The next year and a half was a game of patience and perseverance. There was a lot of trust involved, that God was doing the right thing and that I was actually following His will. When I finally heard in June that the Navy was going to allow me to resign my active duty commission as an officer, enter seminary, and eventually return as a chaplain to finish out my ROTC

commitment, I was ecstatic. Somehow, I had known it would happen. My prayer throughout had been, “Jesus, if this is Your will, you make it happen.” And He did.

Q What are some special memories about your ordination?

It is hard to pinpoint one thing that stood out the most. I am extremely grateful to all of my family and friends who came to support me and pray for me. I was very happy to be able to share it with all of them.

If I did have to choose something that stood out, it would be the Gospel reading at the Holy Hour the night before ordination. It was from John: “Remember, it was not you who chose me, but I who chose you.” It was a confirmation—perhaps unnecessary, but certainly appreciated—that all the doubts that I had had in the discernment process were unfounded. It was a testament to God’s care, concern, and presence, and that His hand has been in the process the whole time.

IN MEMORIAM:

The Aquinas community mourns the loss of Louise Leardi (age 71). She was a beloved teacher in Middle School for over twenty years at Aquinas. On May 7, 2014, Mrs. Leardi was remembered at a memorial Mass at our Lady of Angels Church and the eighth grade students participated in the May Crowning of the Virgin Mary, a tradition begun by Mrs. Leardi. Afterwards, a beautiful painting of the Holy Spirit, donated by a friend of Aquinas, was dedicated to her. The memorial reception included her daughter and granddaughters, many former colleagues and alumni. Former faculty remembered Mrs. Leardi by making a donation towards the painting. Mrs. Leardi’s daughter, Meg, and her husband have generously founded scholarships in her memory, one of which recognizes excellence in religion and math.

Q What aspects of priestly life are you enjoying and are there specific areas that you wish to focus on through your vocation?

I love celebrating Mass and hearing Confessions. I wouldn’t say there is a specific area I wish to focus on, except knowing and following God’s will for my

priesthood. As a priest at St. John the Apostle in Leesburg, I am focusing on the work I have here in the parish. It is, perhaps, less my choice than it may seem, but true peace and happiness are found in the charity of obedience, and that has been my experience even in the short time I’ve been ordained.



Father Christensen, center in red and gold stripe vestments, and concelebrants at his First Mass. Photo courtesy of Lisa Julia Photograph

St. Thomas Aquinas Regional School admits students of any race, color, and national origin.



SAVE THE DATES

NOVEMBER
10 & 11, 2014

Parent/Teacher Conferences

NOVEMBER 14, 2014

Race for Education

NOVEMBER 18, 2014

Fall Open House

DECEMBER 19, 2014

Advent Program

JANUARY 27, 2015

Winter Open House

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