

# SAINT JOHN PAUL II FOUNDATION

WINTER 2025 EDITION



Wishing you a blessed Christmas filled with  
the peace of Christ.

*'For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.'*  
ISAIAH 9:6

The Saint John Paul II  
Academy Foundation Board

# CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 2025

ARCHBISHOP RICHARD SMITH

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,  
Every heart longs for hope. At Christmas, that longing is fulfilled in the child of Bethlehem — God Himself, who enters our story to remind us that we are never alone. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

In that little child we see the reality of our own lives. We are vulnerable to loneliness, longing for love, searching for meaning. Yet it is precisely in our weakness that the Lord draws near with tender love and warmth.

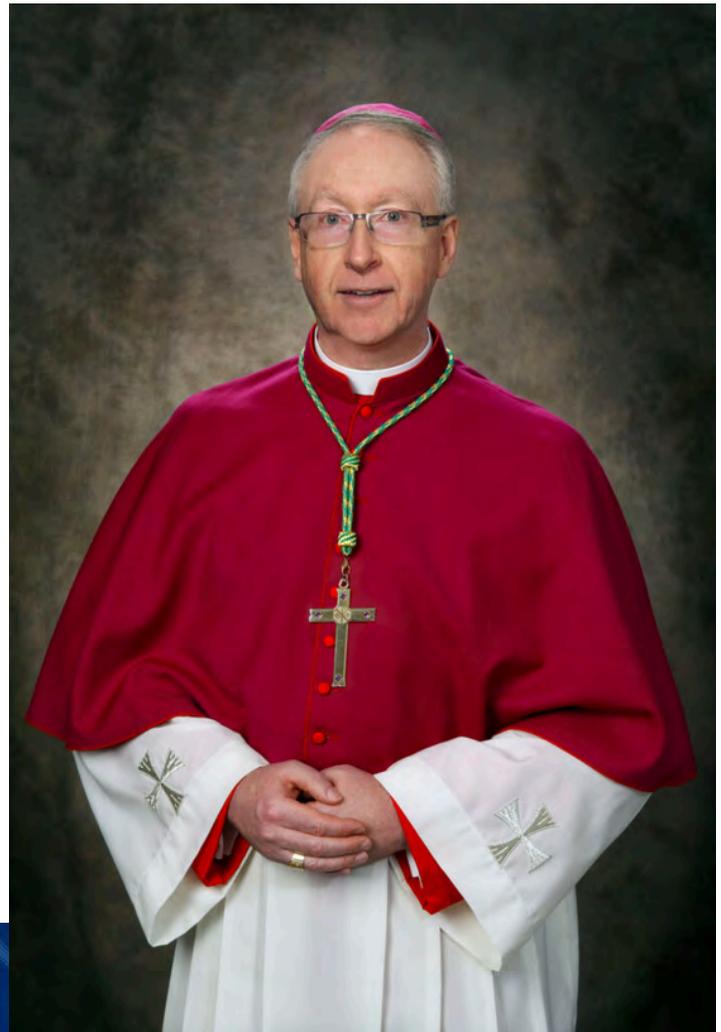
The wonder of Christmas reminds us that God’s glory shines through what is small and simple. May that beauty open our hearts to welcome Christ anew.

As we enter the final weeks of the Jubilee of Hope, I invite you to reflect on where you need hope most in your life. Christmas is the season of hope — when God reminds us that everything will be all right, that all things work together for good, because He draws near and remains with us. No matter how dark things may seem, the hope born in Bethlehem assures us that Christ’s light will always prevail.

My friends, as we celebrate this season together, may the peace of Christ dwell in your heart. May His gift of hope bring light to your days. And may His love move you to serve Him with gratitude.

With prayerful best wishes for a blessed and joyful Christmas,

✠ Richard W. Smith  
Archbishop of Vancouver



# A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM FATHER AUGUSTINE

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we enter the sacred season of Christmas, my heart is filled with profound gratitude for each one of you and for the beautiful community the Lord is forming here at Saint John Paul II Academy. Christmas draws us once again to the manger at Bethlehem, where Heaven touches Earth and the Eternal Word becomes flesh for our salvation. In that humble place, the angels proclaimed a message that resounds through every generation: “Peace on Earth to all of goodwill.”

This peace is not merely the absence of conflict. It is the peace that flows from the Heart of Jesus Christ — a peace rooted in love, mercy, and complete trust in the Father. It is the peace that lifts us beyond ourselves and allows the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, shaping our thoughts, our actions, and the way we care for one another.

As we celebrate the birth of our Saviour, let us renew our commitment to love as He loves. The Lord calls us to lift up the lowly, to bind the wounds of the afflicted, and to remember those who live without comfort, security, or companionship. Our Catholic Christian way is always one of generosity — generosity of heart, of presence, of compassion. In this holy season, I invite you to hold the homeless, the forgotten, the suffering, and the lonely close to your heart. Pray for them, honour their dignity, and, when possible, let your love take the form of concrete acts of mercy.

At the same time, let us also extend that same Christlike charity to one another. Families, colleagues, teachers, students, and friends — we are all called to be instruments of peace in each other’s lives. Be patient, be gentle, be slow to anger and quick to forgive. Lift one another up, especially when burdens feel heavy. “Love one another as Christ has loved you.” This is not simply a suggestion; it is the commandment that builds the Kingdom of God in our midst.

May the light of the newborn Christ fill your homes, your families, and your hearts. May His peace, the peace the world cannot give, rest upon you and remain with you always. And may the Holy Spirit strengthen you so that your life becomes a reflection of His love in a world longing for hope.

Wishing you a blessed and holy Christmas,

In Christ,  
Father Augustine



## THE GRACE OF GOD ALONG OUR JOURNEY: REFLECTIONS FROM THE HEART OF OUR MISSION

As we enter this sacred season of Christmas, my heart is filled with gratitude for the remarkable community that surrounds Saint John Paul II Academy. Every day, I am reminded that our strength does not come from buildings or programs alone, but from the families, students, volunteers, staff, clergy, alumni, and benefactors who make this Academy a place of light, joy, and hope for the future.

Over these past months, I have had the privilege of meeting many of our new parents and welcoming them into this vibrant and faith-filled community. Your enthusiasm, generosity, and willingness to engage with the life of the school have been deeply inspiring. It has truly been a blessing to walk alongside you as you discover the spirit and mission of this Academy.

This year's Open House was a beautiful testament to what we can accomplish when we come together with purpose and love. More than 650 people attended the main presentation, and over 1000 individuals visited the campus throughout the evening. The energy that filled our halls was extraordinary. Families explored classrooms, spoke with staff, met student ambassadors, engaged with our volunteers, and witnessed firsthand what makes Saint John Paul II Academy a place where children are known, loved, and formed for greatness.

To every family who came to learn more about our Academy, please know that you are already part of our story. Whether you have chosen us for your child or are discerning your next steps, we welcome you with open arms. To those who will join us next year, we cannot wait to see you grow, thrive, and lead as future Royals.

To our current parents, supporters, donors, and friends: thank you. Thank you for your trust, your prayers, your sacrifice, and your belief in this mission. Our progress would not be possible without you. Together, we are building not only a school, but a legacy that will serve generations of young people formed in faith, character, academic excellence, and joyful service to others.

And to our students: you are at the heart of everything we do. Your laughter, your courage, your curiosity, and your desire to serve remind us daily why this mission matters. You are the living witnesses of Saint John Paul II's words, "Be not afraid." Continue to dream boldly and lead with kindness.

Christmas is a season that reminds us of God's profound love for humanity. It is a time when light breaks into darkness and hope is renewed. As we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, may we also renew our own commitment to shaping the next generation in the beauty of truth, goodness, and faith.

On behalf of the Saint John Paul II Academy Foundation, I extend my heartfelt blessings to each of you. Thank you for making this community a place where grace is visible and where young people can discover who they are called to be.

May the peace of Christ fill your homes, may joy surround your families, and may the New Year bring abundant blessings to all who walk through the doors of our beloved Academy.



With gratitude, hope,  
and great affection,  
Silveria Roselli  
President  
SJPII Academy Foundation



# THE GIFT OF GIVING: A REFLECTION ON TWELVE YEARS OF BUILDING A DREAM

For the past twelve years, I have had the privilege of being part of a journey that has been as much about faith and community as it has been about bricks and mortar. When I first committed my time and resources to the creation of the St. John Paul II Academy, it was more than just a project—it was a calling deeply rooted in our Catholic faith.

The concept of giving is often associated with material contributions, but for me, it has always been about something deeper. It is the gift of one's time, effort, and heart that truly shapes the foundations of a lasting legacy. Over these twelve years, seeing the Academy grow from a hopeful blueprint into a thriving reality has been one of the most fulfilling experiences of my life outside of having my own family.

This fulfillment is rooted in a lesson passed down from my late father, Nick Van Vliet, who always said, "You need to give until it hurts." His words have guided me throughout this journey, reminding me that true generosity often requires us to step beyond our comfort zones and invest deeply in something greater than ourselves.

In making my own sacrifices for this cause, I was not alone. My wife, Lisa, and my daughters, Tayla and Annika, also made sacrifices along the way.

Their support and understanding have been an integral part of this journey. It is a reminder that the gift of giving is not just a personal act but a family commitment, one that is deeply intertwined with our shared faith and values.

There is a profound joy that comes from knowing that the Academy stands as a testament to what a community can achieve when it comes together with a shared purpose. My heart feels full knowing that every bit of effort, every late-night planning session, and every act of generosity has contributed to a legacy that will endure for generations.

In the end, the gift of giving is about the impact we leave behind and the joy that fills our hearts when we see those around us thrive. It has been my honor to give to this cause, and I look forward to watching St. John Paul II Academy continue to flourish as a beacon of faith, learning, and community.



Troy Van Vliet



# A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS: EDUCATING HEARTS AND MINDS THIS CHRISTMAS

At Christmas, the Church invites us to pause, to contemplate the quiet miracle of the Incarnation, and to reflect on the future entrusted to us through our children. In the humble birth of Christ, we are reminded that renewal often begins small, unseen, and rooted in faith.

More than a decade ago, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of what he called an “educational emergency.” Writing in 2008, he observed that while we deeply love our children and young people, many struggle today to discern good from evil, to give direction to their lives, and to grow not only in physical health, but in moral and spiritual strength. His words resonate even more powerfully now.

We live in a time of great complexity. Many of the moral foundations that once shaped education and public life have been replaced by uncertainty and fragmentation. Young people are often left navigating confusion about truth, identity, meaning, and responsibility, all while being asked to carry burdens far beyond their years. Families feel this strain deeply. So does society.

It is precisely within this moment that Saint John Paul II Academy exists. Rooted in the Catholic intellectual tradition, the Academy stands as a place where faith and reason walk together, where truth is not feared, and where young people are invited to discover who they are by first discovering whose they are. Our mission is not simply academic excellence, but the formation of the whole person, mind, body, and soul.

Saint John Paul II Academy welcomes families of many backgrounds who share a common desire: that their children be formed with integrity, compassion, and a deep respect for life,

family, and service to others. Within our classrooms, students are encouraged to think critically, to act justly, and to live courageously, guided by eternal truths that do not change with cultural trends.

At Christmas, we are especially mindful that Christ came into the world as a child, entrusted to the care of a family and a community. In the same spirit, our school community understands education as a sacred responsibility, one that shapes not only individual lives, but the future of our society.

The generosity of our supporters makes this mission possible. Through the Bursary Fund, families seeking an education grounded in the Catholic tradition are welcomed regardless of financial circumstance. Each gift is more than financial support; it is an act of hope, an investment in young lives, and a proclamation that truth, beauty, and goodness still matter.

This Christmas season, we give thanks for all who walk alongside Saint John Paul II Academy, our priests, educators, staff, volunteers, donors, parents, and students. Together, we continue the vital work of forming disciples, leaders, and witnesses of Christ in a world that urgently needs light.

May the peace of the Christ Child fill your hearts and homes this Christmas, and may God bless Saint John Paul II Academy, now and always.

Dr Joseph King  
Chair, Society Board



# A CHRISTMAS BLESSING FROM THE PRINCIPAL

As we enter the sacred season of Christmas, our hearts are drawn once again to the humble manger in Bethlehem, where God chose to enter the world not with power or noise, but in love, simplicity, and truth. In the quiet presence of the Christ Child, we are reminded that every new beginning is born of hope.

At Saint John Paul II Academy, Christmas invites us to pause and reflect on the blessings of this past year. It is a time to give thanks for our students, who continue to inspire us with their curiosity, kindness, and desire to grow in wisdom. It is a time to honour our families, whose trust and partnership allow us to share in the sacred responsibility of forming young hearts and minds. It is also a time to express deep gratitude for our teachers, staff, priests, volunteers, and supporters, whose dedication makes our mission a lived reality each day.

Our school exists to form the whole person, mind, body, and spirit, in the light of Christ. In a world that often feels rushed and uncertain, Christmas reminds us that true peace is found not in achievement alone, but in relationship with God and with one another. Through prayer, learning, service, and community life, our students are invited to discover the joy that comes from living with purpose and faith.

Saint John Paul II once reminded us that education is an act of love and a path to freedom. This Christmas season, we recommit ourselves to this calling, ensuring that our classrooms remain places of truth, compassion, and hope, where young people are encouraged to think deeply, act justly, and love generously.

As we celebrate the birth of our Saviour, may the light of Christ shine brightly in your homes. May His peace fill your hearts, His love strengthen your families, and His presence guide us into the new year with courage and joy.

On behalf of the entire Saint John Paul II Academy community, I wish you a blessed and holy Christmas, and every grace in the year ahead.

With prayerful gratitude and Christmas blessings,

Mr Anthony Walters  
Principal  
Saint John Paul II Academy



## COMMUNITY UPDATE: SERVING IN THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Dear Saint John Paul the Second community,

We want to take a moment to thank each of you for your continued generosity and compassion. Through your support, our community has been able to extend God's love to those most in need.

Recently, we collected feminine products and rain ponchos for the unhoused in partnership with Providence Health Care. They will be distributed November 7th in Oppenheimer Park. These simple yet powerful gifts bring comfort and dignity to those experiencing hardship.

We are now continuing our outreach by collecting Halloween candy to share with the unhoused, spreading sweetness and joy to those who may often feel forgotten.

Looking ahead, on November 21st and 22, we will be running a concession stand at our school to raise funds for a school in Colombia that works tirelessly to rescue and protect children from human trafficking. We will also be selling poinsettias to raise funds for Saint Paul's hospital. This fundraiser will support the patients who are discharged and are in need of clothing. Every purchase and every prayer helps us shine Christ's light into the darkest places.

Thank you for being a living example of faith in action. All that we do, we do in the love of God and in service to His people. "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." – Hebrews 13:16  
May God bless you abundantly for your kindness and generosity.

In Christ,  
The Outreach and Advocacy Team



Colleen Girvin



Anne Boyle



# THE ROYAL'S BALL — A NIGHT OF GRACE, FRIENDSHIP, AND PURPOSE

On the evening of October 25, 2025, the Saint John Paul II Academy Foundation gathered its extended family of supporters, parents, alumni, and friends for a night that beautifully reflected the heart of our mission: faith, community, and the joy of giving. The Royal's Ball, held at the elegant Northview Golf and Country Club, was far more than an event — it was the culmination of months of planning, prayer, creativity, and collaboration that drew together the very best of our community.

In the weeks leading up to the Ball, friendships deepened, laughter filled countless planning sessions, and volunteers poured heart and soul into every detail. From securing auction items and designing the décor, to preparing guest lists and sponsorship packages, the sense of shared purpose was palpable. It was not just about one evening — it was about building a culture of generosity and togetherness that mirrors the Gospel itself.

When the doors opened on that crisp October night, guests stepped into a scene of nautical elegance — a sea of black and white sophistication, brought to life through stunning design and thoughtful detail. Thanks to the extraordinary artistic vision of Fern and Daniel Cole, every corner of the ballroom shimmered with grace and beauty. The atmosphere evoked both timeless class and a sense of joyful celebration — a reflection of the unity and generosity that define our community.

The evening was alive with warmth and excitement. The room buzzed as guests bid generously on both live and silent auctions — curated through hours of dedication by our volunteers and the meticulous coordination of José Vargas on Givergy, whose expertise ensured that every bid, every item, and every donation flowed seamlessly. Local sponsors and artisans offered their finest, turning each auction piece into a story of giving. And as dinner was served and music filled the room, the joy of being part of something truly meaningful resonated deeply in every heart.

Behind the glamour stood a committee of extraordinary individuals — our Royal's Ball Committee — whose tireless work made this night possible. Countless hours were spent in meetings with Northview, liaising with vendors, arranging sponsorships, and creating a seamless evening that reflected not only professionalism, but also faith-filled devotion.

This year's Royal's Ball was a triumph of spirit and solidarity. Funds raised will go directly to the school's bursary program, ensuring that every student, regardless of circumstance, has the opportunity to receive an education rooted in faith, excellence, and compassion. This is what community looks like — hearts united for a purpose beyond ourselves, inspired by the call to serve, give, and lift one another in Christ's love.



# THE ROYALS BALL

To our sponsors, donors, auction contributors, and every volunteer who gave so selflessly: thank you. You turned vision into reality, generosity into impact, and faith into a living, breathing witness of what can happen when we come together for a higher purpose.

To anyone considering joining next year's committee — step forward. Be part of something transformative. The planning, the laughter, the friendships forged, and the sense of fulfillment that comes from serving this mission are unmatched. The Royal's Ball is not simply an event — it is a testament to

what happens when faith meets action, and when love for our students and our school moves us to give our very best.

Saint John Paul II Academy Foundation extends heartfelt gratitude to all who made this unforgettable evening possible. Together, we build not just a school, but a future grounded in hope, excellence, and the radiant light of faith.

“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”  
— 2 Corinthians 9:7



# THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO WERE INVOLVED WITH THE ROYALS BALL



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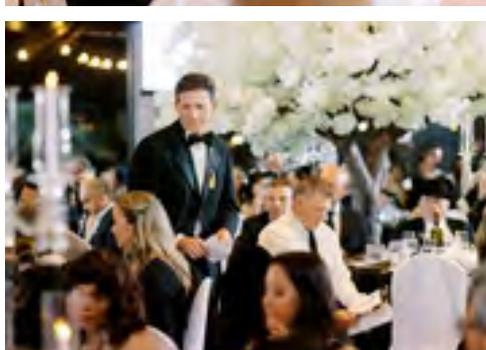


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# CATHOLIC EDUCATION MATTERS

With Troy Van Vliet

Welcome to “Catholic Education Matters,” a podcast dedicated to exploring the vital role of Catholic education in shaping the minds and hearts of students. In each episode, we engage with educators, leaders and thinkers who share insights on how Catholic education fosters academic excellence, spiritual growth, and a commitment to service.

Our discussions delve into the unique values and traditions that make Catholic education a transformative experience, preparing students to navigate the complexities of the modern world with faith and integrity. Join us as we uncover why Catholic education truly matters and how it continues to inspire and empower future generations.



*On November 14, 2025*

**From Tragedy To Purpose: Robb Nash's Journey Of Faith, Music, And Mental Health**



*On October 31, 2025*

**Leading With Heart: Andy Szocs On People, Purpose, And The Power Of Generosity**



*On October 17, 2025*

**From Pastor's Son To Catholic Scholar: David Hunt's Journey Of Faith And Truth**



*On October 2, 2025*

**Plato, Aristotle & Catholic Schools: Why Virtue Still Matters**



*On September 8, 2025*

**Sculpting Faith Through Art: A Conversation With Timothy Schmalz**



*On August 23, 2025*

**Family Matters: A Conversation With Sister John Mary Sullivan, FSE**



*On August 8, 2025*

**A Superintendent's Calling: Sandra Marshall's Mission In Catholic Education**



*On July 18, 2025*

**Super Habits: Why Virtue Is At The Heart Of Catholic Learning**



*On July 4, 2025*

**Faith, Science, And Storytelling: A Conversation With Darrell Hall**



Silveria Roselli  
Creator and Producer



Clay Lmoo  
Editor



*On June 6, 2025*

**From Mennonite Roots To Catholic Scholar: Dr. John Martens' Journey Of Faith**



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## COMMUNITY UPDATE: SERVING IN THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Dear Saint John Paul the Second community,

We want to take a moment to thank each of you for your continued generosity and compassion. Through your support, our community has been able to extend God's love to those most in need.

Recently, we collected feminine products and rain ponchos for the unhoused in partnership with Providence Health Care. They will be distributed November 7th in Oppenheimer Park. These simple yet powerful gifts bring comfort and dignity to those experiencing hardship.

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May God bless you abundantly for your kindness and generosity.

In Christ,  
The Outreach and Advocacy Team



# ROYALS VARSITY ATHLETICS

Cindy Akyuz

Royals Athletics was absolutely buzzing this fall! We had 3 volleyball teams in action, along with both Junior and Senior Cross Country athletes representing SJP2 all over the South Fraser.

## Grade 8 Girls Volleyball

Our Gr. 8 Girls fielded two teams this year. Our Tier 1 team had an incredible first season — and will be competing at the upcoming Provincial Tournament being co-hosted here at St. John Paul II Academy! This ten-athlete squad has been practicing like crazy – and we cannot wait to see where this group takes Royals Volleyball over the next four years. Massive thank you to student-Coach Torin Roa-Cole! Torin is a graduate this year and has pre-signed with York University's volleyball program in Toronto.

Our Tier 2 team was a developmental program, coached by none other than Mr. Anthony Walters. Our girls played their hearts out and most importantly had fun! Our season has come to an end, but the girls had lots of laughter and memories.



## Senior Girls Volleyball

Our Senior Girls wrapped up Tier 2 competition with a full-spirited Halloween Tournament — and yes... it was all about 6-7! A heartfelt thank you to our graduating seniors Gemma Walters, Ava Watt, Maddie O'Reilly and Kayleigh Hessels for an amazing final season at SJP2. We look forward to celebrating them at our year-end Athletics Banquet.

## Varsity Cross Country

Our XC team trained daily to qualify our largest team in school history, with an incredible 14 athletes represented at the Provincials in Nanoose Bay! We are extremely proud of every runner who pushed through the rugged and muddy course, helping the girls team win bronze, and the boys win silver! Congratulations to our two senior athletes: Ellyse Dee (1st in Sr Girls T1A) and Charlie King (2nd in Sr Boys T1A) . Amazing work Coach Wilkie!

With fall athletics wrapping up, we now turn our focus to WINTER basketball season — including our exciting upcoming Grade 6 Elementary School Royals Basketball Tournament.

Stay tuned for more Royals Athletics energy, stories, highlights, and results all year long!



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# BISON AND WATER BUFFALO FARM IN LANGLEY OFFERS HAYRIDES, LOCAL MEATS—AND LIFE-CHANGING TRAINING PROGRAMS

A rare intersection of agriculture, education, and social purpose is flourishing in South Langley at Academy Farms—an expansive 136-acre bison and water buffalo farm tucked within the Agricultural Land Reserve. While the farm is known for its premium, ethically raised meats, its mission extends far beyond livestock. The farm is also home an innovative employment training program for young adults.

Academy Farms is operated by the John Volken Academy, a social enterprise dedicated to helping young men build stable, independent lives. Training employees work alongside professional farm managers and herdsman, gaining hands-on experience in animal care, sustainable farming practices, and day-to-day operations. State-of-the-art facilities support both the farm’s high standards of animal welfare and its commitment to teaching practical, employable skills.

For many, the impact is transformative. Dominique, a recent graduate and current full-time staff member, describes Academy Farms as “a unique therapeutic community where employees live an abstinent lifestyle, gain hands-on skills training, and find purpose by caring for our herd of bison and buffalo.”

While the farm’s mission is deeply rooted in personal growth, the public plays an important part in supporting it. Visitors are invited to enjoy scenic hayrides and shop for locally raised bison, water buffalo, and pork. Community members can also get involved by volunteering to teach life-skills workshops—an essential piece of the Academy’s training model. Workshops in budgeting, communication, personal finance, fitness, cooking, computer skills, and other practical areas are consistently in high demand.

“Whatever your skill set, our students are eager to learn it,” says the Academy. “This is a launchpad for their personal and professional growth. We welcome anyone who wants to contribute.”

More information about Academy Farms and the John Volken Academy can be found at [academyfarms.org](http://academyfarms.org).

Contest: Enter to win a hayride and bison-burger barbecue for up to 30 people by emailing [gabrielle@volken.org](mailto:gabrielle@volken.org). Contest closes December 31, 2025.



# KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS FUNDRAISING

Charity, Unity, Fraternity, and Patriotism. These are the four pillars that guide Brother Knights as they put their faith into action in service to God. The Knights are known as the Right hand of the Church. Membership for the Knights of Columbus is open to men over the age of 18 and are practicing Catholics.

Grand Knight Dan Seibel invites men at Star of the Sea Parish to join not only the Knights of Columbus Council but to also be part of a brotherhood of Catholic men totaling more than 2.1 million members around the world. The heart and soul of the Order are found in our local councils where ordinary men work together to perform extraordinary deeds for the Church, our priests and our community. Often people think of the Knights for simply their pancake breakfasts or selling shopping cards or perhaps attending a Remembrance Day service.

In fact the Knights are parishioners, parents and volunteers. Many are very active in different ministries within our parish. For example, at Star of the Sea Parish, Knights are lectors, ushers, Holy Eucharistic ministers, part of the Friday Morning Men's Group and Parish Finance Committee.

The Knights Star of the Sea Council's fundraising supports and has assisted:

- The Parish in providing Bibles, rosaries and religious education books to our catechumens
- Assisting two SPJ2 students attend World Youth Day
- Buseries for Catholic students university education

- Financial support for the Star of the Sea School and SJP2 fundraising initiatives
- The SPJ2 Academy - Feed the Homeless Sandwich Program
- SPJ2 School Athletic Awards and
- Boy Scouts and Special Olympics, just to name a few.

Some men feel that they're too busy with work and activities to help out. The Knights are asking to commit to an hour or two each month, it can make a big difference to both family and community.

Can you spare just 2 hours a month? That's what the Knights are looking for.

Our Council needs young men with bright new ideas and initiative to continue forward. For further information please go to [www.koc.org](http://www.koc.org).

If you're interested or have any questions please contact Star of the Sea Council Membership Director Mic Fronteddu at email ([FRONTEDDU\\_Mic@hotmail.com](mailto:FRONTEDDU_Mic@hotmail.com)) or Grand Knight Dan Seibel ([d.p.seibel@shaw.ca](mailto:d.p.seibel@shaw.ca))

Thank you and God Bless.  
Dan Seibel, Grand Knight.



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# CATHOLIC LIBERAL EDUCATION: REDISCOVERING THE TRUE END OF SCHOOLING

When our school community began its journey into Catholic Liberal Education (CLE), one truth became clear immediately: a school can only decide how to teach after it has decided why it teaches. Everything else flows from this first question. In education, as in life, the end determines the means.

This became the central theme of our conversations with parents. At meetings, in hallways, and through monthly articles, families asked deeply thoughtful questions: How is CLE different from mainstream education? What does this mean for my child's future? How do we support this at home? These questions were not obstacles—they were signs of hope.

## **The End Determines the Means**

I often use a simple analogy: If I tell you to “dig a hole,” your first question must be, “What is the hole for?”

A hole for a seed is not the same as a hole for a foundation or an archaeological dig or an ice-fishing hut. The purpose—or end—tells you the tools you will need, the depth you will aim for, and the care with which you work.

The BC Curriculum defines a successful graduate as one who possesses the skills to enter post-secondary, join the workforce, and “compete in a global economy.” Skills matter deeply, of course.

Imagine creating an entire curriculum based on an incomplete view of a successful graduate. This definition of success rests upon a particular vision of the human person: a producer, a consumer, an individual whose value is tied to achievement.

## **Catholic education begins with a radically different anthropology.**

As the Congregation for Catholic Education teaches in *The Catholic School* (1977): “The integral formation of the human person is the purpose of education.”

And in *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965), the Church insists that education must: “direct the human person to his last end and the good of the societies of which he is a member.”

This “last end” is not economic advantage but eternal beatitude. A child is not primarily a future worker; a child is a beloved son or daughter of God whose life has meaning, purpose, and dignity independent of productivity.

When you change the definition of the human person, you change everything. The curriculum, the teaching methods, the assessment, the classroom culture—all of it shifts.

## **Truth, Goodness, and Beauty: The Real Curriculum**

Catholic Liberal Education is grounded in the transcendentals—the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. These are not decorative concepts; they are the building blocks of reality itself. Children are naturally drawn to them. They are made for them.



### **When learning is oriented toward the transcendentals:**

- Truth forms the mind in clarity and reason.
- Goodness forms the heart in virtue and moral vision.
- Beauty forms the soul in wonder and gratitude.

This is why we read living books rather than worksheets, why we integrate subjects rather than fragment them, why we teach through stories, why we spend time outdoors observing creation, and why we encourage deep, thoughtful conversations in every grade. Children deserve nourishment—not just information.

### **Pope Benedict XVI once said,**

“The human person is made for the infinite.” If that is true (and we believe it is), then an education that settles for the merely practical is insufficient. Skills matter, but skills without meaning produce restlessness, not wisdom.

### **A School’s Journey: Learning to Walk Together**

When St. Anthony of Padua School began embracing CLE, we knew this would not be a shift in textbooks but a cultural renewal. The classroom began to change almost immediately. Teachers moved from “coverage” to contemplation. Students were invited to wonder before they analyzed.

History became the narrative spine of the curriculum—connecting literature, science, geography, religion, and art into one coherent story of humanity.

In each class, we don’t ask “What did you get on the test?” but rather:

- What surprised you?
- What truth did you discover?
- What does this teach us about courage, justice or faithfulness?
- How is this beautiful?

We saw students respond with newfound attentiveness, deeper joy, and a stronger sense of purpose.

But perhaps the most surprising transformation came from our parents.

### **Parents as First Educators**

Early in our journey, we told our families again and again: You are the first educators. We simply partner with you. The Church emphasizes this repeatedly. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states clearly:

“Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children.” (CCC 2223)

Our families wanted to know how to live this at home. So we invited them to simple, beautiful practices:

- Read aloud together, even with older children
- Tell family stories
- Reflect on the Sunday Gospel
- Share meals slowly
- Explore nature and wonder together
- Reduce screen time in favour of conversation
- Play games, pray together, learn together

These are not “programs”; they are ways of being. And they create a home culture that harmonizes with the school culture. When home and school speak the same language of truth, goodness, and beauty, children flourish.



Parents began telling us that their children were calmer, more curious, more articulate, more grateful. Families reconnected. And our school community grew stronger, more joyful, more unified.

### A Return, Not an Innovation

Catholic Liberal Education is not new. It is a return to the Church's own understanding of what education is for. Archbishop J. Michael Miller, in *The Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools*, summarizes the five marks of an authentically Catholic school:

- Inspired by a supernatural vision
- Founded on a Christian anthropology
- Animated by Communion and community
- Imbued with a Catholic worldview
- Search for wisdom and Truth
- Faith, culture and life
- Sustained by the witnessing of teaching

These marks have guided us at St. Anthony's. They remind us that an authentic Catholic school must be more than doctrinally correct; it must be culturally Catholic—a place where faith and reason are woven naturally into daily life.



### Conclusion: The Hope of a Recovered Vision

In a world that often mistakes productivity for purpose, Catholic Liberal Education stands as a gentle but firm corrective. It returns the child to the center—seen not as a data point or a future economic unit, but as a human person made for God.

When a school reorients itself toward the true, the good, and the beautiful, the effects ripple outward—into families, parishes, and communities. Students learn not only what to think but how to think; not only how to work but why to work; not only how to live but what makes life worth living.

Our school is still on this journey, and always will be. But the fruit is unmistakable: joy, depth, wonder, virtue, and a renewed sense of belonging to the great story God is telling.

*Catholic Liberal Education is not simply another educational model.*

*It is an invitation to encounter reality in its fullness—and to become fully alive.*

Blessings,  
Kate Ayre





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# MADONNA HOUSE APOSTOLATE VANCOUVER

Advent is a time of expectant hope. This year we were refreshed by the Jubilee Year of Hope and experienced living little advents in the everyday. We wish to share with you how these little lights of hope emerged in the ordinary. Madonna House Apostolate members have been asked by our Directors General to meditate deeper into The Little Mandate – the heart of our spirituality.

Looking back, our lives in Vancouver were bookended by 'Arise, go... and Pray always, I will be your rest'. Emmanuella Kim's term as Local Director (LD) ended earlier this summer. Philomena Lim and I were called to arise in a new way, bowing to the Lord in each other and serving without an LD from July 2025 until January 2026. Praise God that we are living Advent awaiting the arrival of a wonderful, newly assigned leader, Christina Milan!

Love, love, love never counting the cost captures our shared community life with Emmanuella who laid down her life for us. We miss her. She is assigned as the women's Director of Training in Combermere, ON our main center. The Lord's generosity is not outdone for in October He sent us Raandi King, a wise and gentle elder, for a 3-month assignment. Love asks of us to say many 'yesses' in time of transition.

'Go without fears into the depths of men's hearts – I shall be with you'. The monthly recollections have created a family in Christ among our friends whose trust is built on shared vulnerability. They have been enriched by speakers on various topics including; Kenosis (emptying of self); Byzantine lens on the Resurrection; Ignatian Discernment; advocacy against human trafficking; and Grief-to-Grace post-abortion ministry. In October, Raandi witnessed to living from a heart lanced and wounded by God's love.

Little...simple, poor, childlike. Thank you – how often, we remember our friends as we switch on a light, or turn on a tap or answer emails or the phone. Without your prayers and support, our life in God would not be possible.

Listen to the Spirit, He will lead you. We gather with young adults to read our foundress' writings that speak to their hearts. This accompaniment keeps fresh our spirit as we pass it on to the next generation. This Advent let us be fools together and Sell All you Possess – our will, and attachments to gift it to the Holy Family. (L-R – Philo, Lisa and Raandi)

Let us meet at the manger with JOY! Lisa Diniz (This article was adapted from the MH Christmas letter)

## THE LITTLE MANDATE

Arise – Go! Sell all you possess.  
Give it directly, personally to the poor.  
Take up My cross (their cross) and follow Me,  
going to the poor, being poor,  
being one with them, one with Me.  
Little – be always little! Be simple, poor, childlike.  
Preach the Gospel with your life – without  
compromise!  
Listen to the Spirit. He will lead you.  
Do little things exceedingly well for love of Me.  
Love...love...love, never counting the cost.  
Go into the marketplace and stay with Me.  
Pray, fast. Pray always, fast.  
Be hidden. Be a light to your neighbour's feet.  
Go without fears into the depths of men's hearts.  
I shall be with you.  
Pray always. I will be your rest.



L-R – Philo, Lisa and Raandi



# IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE A CHILD

When I first walked into St. John Paul II Academy as a Grade 8 student, I definitely came to learn but the idea of serving wasn't really something I thought about. I was focused on finding my classes, fitting in, and figuring out who I was.

Back then, I never imagined becoming Student Council President. Honestly, the dream of being in this position felt completely out of reach. I didn't have the confidence to take that leap of faith.

But as I grew here, something changed. It started with the people, my teachers, my friends, and this amazing community. My friends gave me the confidence to see what I was capable of, they also pushed me to try new things, even when I doubted myself. And this school became a place where I wasn't just passing course I was learning who I am

There's a saying "it takes a village to raise a child." For me, it has truly taken this school community to shape the person I've become.



One of my biggest lessons came from courage. Neil Armstrong once said, "Courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it." For me, being courageous didn't mean I wasn't afraid it meant doing something even when I was afraid. Whether it was putting my name forward for Student Council, speaking at assemblies, or just stepping out of my comfort zone, I learned that fear doesn't have to hold you back.

Looking back, I realize that St. John Paul II Academy isn't just a school, it's a community that helps you grow, challenge yourself, and discover what you're capable of.

If someone asked me why I'd recommend this school, I'd say this:

It's the community.

It's the teachers who genuinely care.

It's the opportunities: there's something for everyone here.

And it's the feeling that everybody knows your name.

When I entered SJP2, I came to learn. But today, as I prepare to leave, I know what it means to serve and to be part of something bigger than myself.



Chayse Petranik - Byer  
Student Council President 2025 -26



# OUTREACH AND ADVOCACY CLUB

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## SERVING IN THE LOVE OF CHRIST

The Outreach and Advocacy Team continues to live out its mission of caring for the marginalized, the homeless, and the forgotten in our wider community. As St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta reminds us, “Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier.” Though we remain low-key in our approach, our work continues quietly and faithfully in the background.

First, we want to extend our heartfelt gratitude for your ongoing generosity and compassion. Your support makes our outreach possible. Because of you, our school community has been able to share God’s love in concrete, meaningful ways with those most in need.



Our first initiative this year was the collection of feminine hygiene products and rain ponchos for our unhoused neighbours, in partnership with Providence Health Care. These items were distributed on November 7th in Oppenheimer Park, offering dignity, comfort, and practical support to those facing daily hardship. We continued our outreach by gathering Halloween candy to share with the unhoused—small acts of sweetness and joy for those who can often feel unseen.

On November 21st and 22nd, we operated a concession stand at school to raise funds for Talented Children and Youth Foundation in Cartagena, Colombia, an organization dedicated to rescuing and supporting children affected by human trafficking. With the addition of several generous donations, we were able to send \$350 directly to the foundation through our contact, José Vargas, Society Board Chair—ensuring every dollar reached those who need it most.

Our final project for 2025 was our Christmas Hamper initiative. Each advisory class was invited to contribute to this worthy cause, and once again, our community rose to the occasion with generosity and heart.

As we look back on these initiatives, we are reminded that outreach is not just something we do—it is who we are as a Catholic school community. Rooted in the example of Christ and guided by the teachings of the Church, we strive to be instruments of hope wherever there is need. Thank you for embodying our shared values of compassion, service, and solidarity. Together, we are making a real difference—quietly, faithfully, and with open hearts.

In Christ,  
The Outreach and Advocacy Team



# CONNECTING HEARTS THROUGH MUSIC, ILLUMINATING THE WORLD WITH LOVE

Ambrose & Matilda Music Connection (AMMC) is a Vancouver-based non-profit organization dedicated to connecting people through music and sharing love and hope through meaningful artistic experiences. Rooted in faith, AMMC has grown into a unique community where music, education, service, and international exchange come together.

**A Journey Founded in Faith (2014–)**  
AMMC began in 2014 with Ambrose & Matilda Fundraising, founded by Matilda Kim and her husband, Ambrose. Through music, the couple supported St. Paul's Hospital, St. Mark's College Leadership Program, L'Arche Community, and many others in need. From the beginning, music for them was more than performance — it was an expression of faith, compassion, and Christian service.

**When Loss Became a New Mission (2021)**  
In 2021, Ambrose passed away suddenly from a heart attack. This profound loss became a turning point for Matilda. To carry forward Ambrose's vision for education, service, and young musicians, she developed a new music education initiative: the AM Canada International Music Competition.

**Love That Did Not Stop Even in a Pandemic**  
During COVID-19, when concerts everywhere were cancelled, AMMC continued its mission of encouragement and healing. Matilda created "Matilda's Chocolate" and delivered gifts to over 20 hospitals and community organizations; hosted a Healing Concert at YVR; and organized a charity concert for Ukraine.

**A Growing Vision of Education and International Exchange**

Ambrose was a founding board member of Xavier International French School in Korea. This connection has developed into a formal international collaboration.

**2026 September — Canada-Korea Collaborative Concert**

Young musicians selected through the AMMC International Music Competition will travel to Korea in September 2026 to perform a joint concert with Xavier International French School.

**The 3rd Dumpling Concert (February 6, 2026)**  
The 3rd "Dumpling Concert" will be held on February 6, 2026 at the John Paul II Hall, Archdiocese of Vancouver. After the concert, delicious dumplings will be served.

**Support & Contact**

Ambrose & Matilda Music Connection (AMMC)

Vancouver, BC

[ammusicconnection@gmail.com](mailto:ammusicconnection@gmail.com)

[www.ambrosematilda.com](http://www.ambrosematilda.com)

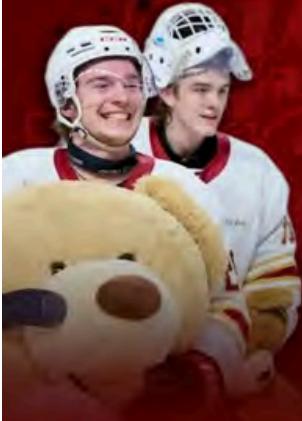
"May every note I play be a prayer of gratitude and love."

— Matilda Kim



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# LIVING WHILE LIVING: A CHRISTMAS WITNESS OF FAITH, STEWARDSHIP, AND HOPE

## A Christmas Reflection on Andy Szocs

Christmas is the season when the Church invites us to look again at the mystery of gift. Not the kind that can be measured or wrapped, but the kind that transforms both the giver and the receiver. At the heart of Christmas is the truth that God Himself chose to give, freely and completely, entering the world as a child so that humanity might rediscover love, dignity, and hope.

It is in this sacred light that the story of Andy Szocs is best understood.

Andy's life does not unfold as a story of achievement alone, though he has achieved much. Nor is it merely a story of generosity, though generosity marks nearly every chapter of his journey. Rather, it is the story of a man who came to understand that life itself is a gift, and that the only fitting response is to give oneself away in return.

## Formed by Work, Grounded in Faith

Andy Szocs was shaped early by values that would quietly guide his entire life: discipline, humility, responsibility, and faith. Trained as an engineer, he entered the world of business not with the intention of personal acclaim, but with a desire to build something meaningful and lasting. In founding Norpac Controls and leading it with integrity for decades, Andy demonstrated a rare combination of competence and conscience.

Yet when Andy reflects on those years, he does not speak first of growth, scale, or success. He speaks instead about people. About trust. About responsibility. About the understanding that leadership is not about control, but about service.

This orientation would later become foundational to what Andy describes as his life's guiding principle: giving while living.

## Giving While Living

Andy uses this phrase deliberately and repeatedly, not as a slogan, but as a conviction. In his reflections, he speaks plainly about how easy it is to postpone generosity, to imagine that one day, after enough success or security, we will give back. Andy's life took a different turn.

He came to believe that generosity is not something reserved for the end of life, but something meant to shape the whole of it.

"Giving while living," he explains, "allows you to see the good that comes from it. It allows you to walk alongside the people and communities you are supporting."

This approach transformed Andy's understanding of stewardship. What he had built through years of work was no longer viewed simply as personal achievement, but as something entrusted to him, meant to be shared intentionally and thoughtfully.

## Faith as the Source, Not the Afterthought

At the center of Andy's life is a quiet but unwavering Catholic faith. It is not performative. It is not loud. It is steady, reflective, and deeply integrated into how he sees the world.

Andy speaks about faith not as an accessory to success, but as its foundation. He understands generosity not as philanthropy alone, but as participation in God's work. To give, in his view, is to respond to a call, to recognize that everything we possess ultimately belongs to God.



This conviction has guided his support for Catholic education, faith-based leadership formation, and initiatives that uphold human dignity, particularly in areas where society often struggles to respond with compassion and clarity.

## Education and the Formation of the Whole Person

One of the most consistent themes in Andy's reflections is the urgency of education that forms the whole person. He speaks candidly about the challenges facing young people today, confusion about meaning, pressure without purpose, knowledge without wisdom.

Andy believes deeply that education must do more than prepare students for careers. It must prepare them for life.

"Young people are searching for meaning," he reflects, "and they need places that help them discover who they are and why they matter."

This belief has drawn Andy to support Catholic institutions that unite faith and reason, places where truth is not fragmented, and where students are encouraged to think critically, act morally, and serve generously.

For Andy, supporting Catholic education is not about preserving tradition for its own sake. It is about safeguarding the human person. It is about ensuring that young men and women are formed with clarity, courage, and hope in a world that often offers them very little of any of the three.

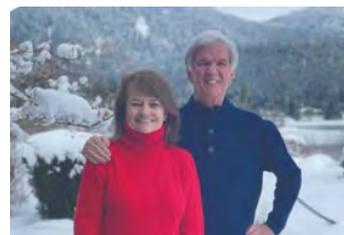
## Humility as a Hallmark

What is perhaps most striking about Andy

Szocs is not the scale of his generosity, but the humility with which it is carried. In conversation, he redirects praise quickly. He speaks often of gratitude. He emphasizes that giving is a privilege, not a burden.

He does not see himself as a benefactor standing above others, but as a fellow pilgrim, responding to the same call that comes to all of us: to love God and neighbor with what we have been given.

This posture of humility gives Andy's witness a particular credibility. His generosity is not transactional. It is relational. It is rooted in encounter, respect, and a desire to see others flourish.



## A Christmas Witness

At Christmas, Andy's life offers a powerful reflection on the meaning of the season. Christ came into the world with empty hands, offering Himself entirely. Andy's story echoes this truth in a human key: that joy is found not in accumulation, but in self-gift.

His witness invites us to reconsider our own approach to giving. Not someday. Not later. But now. While we are living. While we can see, participate in, and be changed by the good that generosity makes possible.

In a world marked by noise, division, and uncertainty, Andy Szocs reminds us that quiet faithfulness still matters. That generosity, when rooted in love, still has the power to heal. And that Christmas, at its core, is about a God who gives, and calls us to do the same.

May this Christmas season inspire each of us to reflect on the gifts entrusted to us, and to respond, as Andy has, with faith, humility, and courage.

Written by  
Silveria Roselli



# BENDING TOWARD JUSTICE: A JOURNEY OF FAITH, PURPOSE, AND GIVING

“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” This is a favourite quote by Martin Luther King Jr. paraphrasing part of a sermon delivered in 1853 by the abolitionist minister Theodore Parker. I believe this quote speaks truth and it gives me great hope for this beloved world. How extraordinary it is that our Lord came to be with us, one with us in fact, and that he cannot do what he wants to do without us. It is both humbling and esteeming at the same time.

As we experience history unfolding in real time, our polarized world is in desperate need of people and places of action, strategically trained as bridgebuilders and peacemakers in the Jesus Way tradition.

My name is Lise Owen Struthers. I would describe myself as a Trinitarian pilgrim from Vancouver and a multigenerational family bent on action towards justice. When I say justice, I do not mean legal punishment or retribution. For me justice and mercy are synonymously linked as we see in Jesus, and this is what draws me to St. Stephen’s University.

Anchored in the Christian faith, St. Stephen’s University in New Brunswick equips students from Canada and worldwide to do the holy work of justice, peace, and reconciliation.

The mission of St. Stephen’s is to prepare people, through academic, personal, and spiritual development, for a life of justice, beauty, and compassion, enabling a humble, creative engagement with their world.

I serve joyfully on St. Stephen’s Board of Governors. I believe the world needs more of

St. Stephen’s University (SSU). It is bridging people and breaking down barriers to create hope and trust, with a beautiful gospel of inclusivity committed to the restoration of all things.

St. Stephen's University is a graduate studies learning community comprised of three schools:

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THE CENTRE FOR RECONCILIATION STUDIES

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- CERT. IN THEOLOGY & PEACE STUDIES \*
- M.A. IN PEACE & JUSTICE
- MASTER OF PEACE & JUSTICE
- M.T.S. IN PEACE & JUSTICE
- CERT. IN RELIGION, PEACE & JUSTICE \*
- CERT. IN STORY, TRAUMA & PEACEBUILDING
- CERT. IN RECONCILIATION STUDIES \*
- MULTIFAITH CHAPLAINCY

\* Denotes a Certificate program that can be completed at the undergraduate level instead if the student is not eligible for graduate studies.

Let me share a story to illustrate what I mean about the world needing more of SSU. Our Principal, Bradley Jersak recently shared a story about one of our students who called him in October explaining how she was in an ambulance with two babies trying to quickly get them out of Gaza so they could get the care and medical attention they needed and while she was doing this she had her laptop open and was working on her SSU homework.



A sample of student vocations include:

#### British Columbia

- Tracey Thiessen — Integrated Homelessness Action Response Team (IHART) nurse, Abbotsford, BC and peacebuilding in multifaith spaces through BL4P
- Taylor Wilson — Director of Programs & Operations, Abbotsford Restorative Justice and Advocacy Association

#### Canada

- Jus n Eisinga — Exec. Director of 541 Eatery & Exchange, Hamilton, ON (Urban Core Health Care)
- Tamara Mitchell — Intern, Curve Lake First Nation, ON

#### International

- Madelyn Froiland – Director for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s “Sumud: for Justice in Palestine and Israel” initiative
- Michael McDougale (Lithuania) — Certified conflict mediator through Dialogue for Peaceful Change and PhD (cand.) in Intercultural Studies at Columbia International University
- Jon Soriano (Minanau, Philippines) — Theology Network and Engagement (TNE) Manager for Reconciled and Peaceful Societies (RPS) in the Asian Region for Tearfund.
- Mercy Aiken (Palestine) — Relationship Manager for the Network of Evangelicals for the Middle East and Program Manager for Peace Catalyst International
- Natalie Neubauer (Sydney, Australia) — External Facilitator for Community Programs at the NSW (New South Wales) Department of Communities and Justice / on the Core Team of Building Leaders 4 Peace
- Steve Schallert (Cape Town, South Africa) — Director of International Solidarity with Iziko Lamacabane, support centre for urban peace and justice practitioners throughout Africa
- Phinius Sebatsane (Cape Town, South Africa) — Founder and CEO of Rea Thusana Foundation, serving needs of unhoused people.

All these dear people are being equipped through their studies with SSU to work on the side of justice and mercy in their spheres of influence in this time frame of the long arc of the moral universe.

The part I play on the Board with SSU is through the holy work of fundraising and governance. I am also a donor. It feeds my soul to support SSU in this way. To learn more about SSU: <https://www.ssu.ca/>.

I believe our work is important to God. I have been given much, and my prayers for giving of time, talent, and treasure, are in seeking from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit what is expected of me. What is my Purpose in this regard? I am sure you have thought the same thing.



Giving has always been part of my life. It has never been static and is constantly evolving. I grew up in a family where giving was modeled through the generations. I married Robert Struthers, a man with a generous spirit, well-practiced in sacrificial giving that was modeled in his family as well. We decided from the beginning we would give as we earned trying to increase the percentage of our giving to earnings ratio each year instead of larger giving in the later years. We were raising four children and were astounded by how we managed to do this incremental yearly increase.



Besides working on increasing the percentage of giving yearly, in 2003, I took a trip to Nicaragua shortly after joining the Board of Directors of Opportunity International Canada, a global Christian microfinance organization <https://opportunityinternational.ca/>. This was earth shaking, and heart shaping and brought clarity on intentional Purpose by further evolved my relationship with money.

Some of the implications and consequences that unfolded were...

- Developing a “the good enough line”. Applied, that would translate to buying a used car not a new one, getting an older model cell phone or iPad, not the latest and greatest, shopping at H&M, not Holt Renfrew or Value Village, not H&M. Staying at a two- or three-star hotel, not four- or five-star.
- We adopted a family mission statement about money gleaned from John Wesley. “Earn as much as you can, save as much as you can, and give as much as you can.” Also, Jesus words from Luke 12:48 “...to whom much is given, of them much will be required...”. Biblical stories of stewardship and justice stood out more. These were intentionally considered and lived out in our day to day lives.
- In 2007 something else grew my relationship with money and overarching Purpose to guide our giving after I heard a couple speak of their “personal lifetime giving goal”. What that meant for them was in retirement, him starting a new company, and her going back to work with 100% of their earnings being given away. I presented the idea of a “lifetime giving goal” to Robert and suggested we each pray about it for a week. We did, and we both heard the same number so decided to apply that while not being rigidly focused on “achieving a goal” but continually holding it prayerfully before God. There is a lot we did not spend so we could honour this plan.

At 60, I became a widow, and the giving is still evolving as I carry the baton forward. The Robert Struthers Memorial Fund, a gift of \$100,000 from close friends, was established in 2019. At the anniversary of Robert’s death, our four adult children and I gather with a special purpose to remember Robert. In his spirit of generosity, every year we choose a project together that will receive 5% of the investment fund’s proceeds.

Another important part of growing my Purpose in giving is suffering: my own and others suffering deepens my prayer life and gratitude quotient which I know adds Purpose and further guides the giving. Teachers like Henri Nouwen, Theresa of Avilla, John of the Cross, Ignatius contemplative practices, and studying Trinitarian Theology further informs my heart, mind, spirit, and yes, the giving.

- As a widow, I have been surprised by the depth and breadth of life and beauty found while being emersed is deep grief and sorrow. These attentional learnings have prompted me to commission an eleven-foot public art sculpture that was borne out of what Julian of Norwich might describe as a lesser version of one of her showings.



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Discerning the Purpose that guides my giving has elements of community integration, is experiential and has a multiplier effect.



Let me illustrate all these elements with a story:

In 2012, with a community of people, I led a pilot project of a giving group for Opportunity International Canada. We gathered seven families, who did not all know each other, and formally covenanted together to support a microfinance project in Colombia. We agreed on a stretch amount, to give or raise a total of \$250,000.00 over three years. We did that and then traveled as a group of 14 adults and 9 children (whose ages ranged from 4 to 17), to Colombia to visit the people the funds supported. We met entrepreneurs who were given access to transformational training and support like financial literacy, health, topical Bible lessons, and small loans and visited their businesses.

Though we didn't all know each other at the start, we all became friends and chose to fund five projects together over ten years in Colombia, Honduras, and India totalling \$1,125,000. AND the Opportunity International Canada staff have used the pilot project of a giving group to develop other giving groups across the country!

For SSU, we bring communities of people together to fund Bursaries for Bridgebuilders. To keep school fees accessible for students each one is subsidized by about CAD\$5,000.00. We are building community integration and introducing students to donors and seeing the multiplier effect in how the student's education is making a difference and connecting donors to be a part of that.

Through life lessons and experiences of being moved by the Lord, patterns emerged, and the giving process grew with much grace and mercy which developed my Purposeful Giving. What I consider, in short, and you probably find the same thing, comes by paying attention and applying intention.



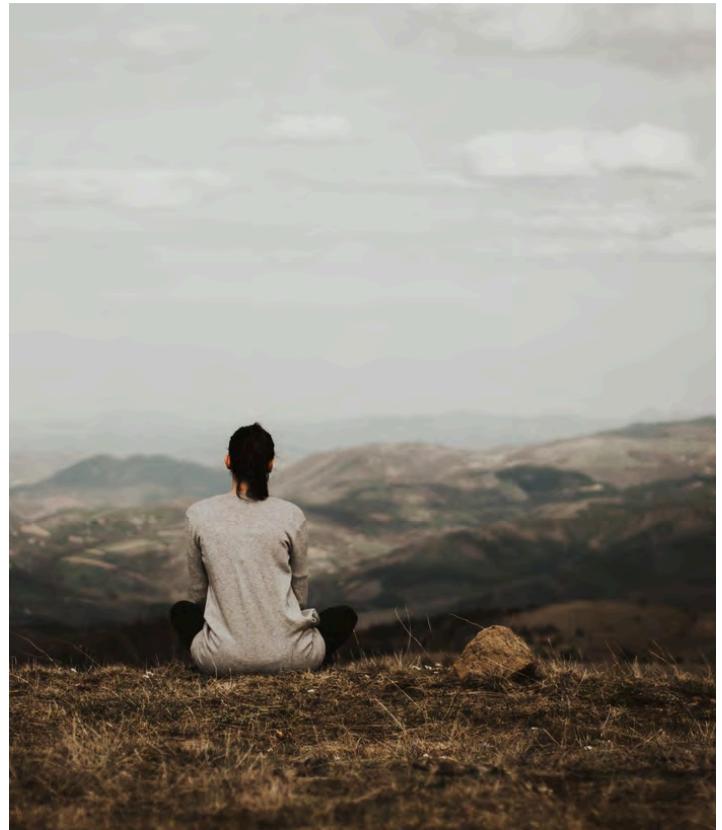
For granting, let's assume the usual business of philanthropy of due diligence, growing relationship with the people and work of an organization or project, alignment with mission, vision, values, and business models, then add being attentive and intentional about listening, and learning with God, as opposed to about God – because it is a real walking with – it is then that I am led to integrated community, transformational experience, and the glorious multiplier effect we see in the Trinity, that Kenosis - self giving, out pouring, other centred love. AND here is the key: what guards, undergirds, and assures all of this is prayer and for me that means contemplative prayer.

Contemplative attentive and intentional listening prayer: sitting quietly before God with no agenda but to dwell with and enjoy the Trinity is massively important to me and my giving. This has taken years of learning and practice and is probably the thing that has most led my Purposeful Giving. The prayer is where the alignment happens. That YES and AMEN to the intimate, organic, creative expressions of the Lord.

If I am present, and still enough, there is a gentle unveiling, a tender knowing and quiet communion that emerges. I enjoy making time for this focused posture of attention and intention in my living and in my giving. I think the Holy Trinity invites us to bring our whole selves to our philanthropy to meet the Lord in his philanthropy with and through us. Prayer and our giving are a bridge for this. It does not always align, but when it does, it is worth the effort of the long obedient road in the right direction, and is for me, a breathtaking holy ground experience.

Contemplative prayer and giving is where the means and the ends meet for me. The ends being community integration and experience which is a blessed benefit in my giving - and the means being attention, intention, and contemplative prayer. The ends and means meet in the giving. They have created this space and place for me to experience God and in doing so have created opportunity for others to experience God and his giving to them through the granting process. I have witnessed this often. I can expect to meet and be guided by the Trinity in my giving. This has surprisingly helped me to find my place in this whole ecosystem of God's redeeming love and work.

Frederick Buechner says it this way, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."



## SWIMMING IN THE ATMOSPHERIC RIVER': CELEBRATING NEARLY 100 YEARS OF CATHOLIC POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Saturday 1 November was an extraordinary day for Corpus Christi College and St. Mark's College, celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> and our 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries respectively. The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Fundraising Breakfast for the two colleges was held at St. Thomas More Collegiate, and attracted over 400 guests, a record for this event. It is perhaps not surprising that there was special curiosity and interest given that this was Archbishop Smith's inaugural Keynote address as the Chancellor of the colleges. Needless to say, he did not disappoint.

His Grace reminded us of the critical importance of the mission of Catholic education, and of post-secondary studies in particular. Using a uniquely British Columbian metaphor, Archbishop Smith noted that 'a Catholic academic institution must be on the alert for a different kind of atmospheric river. I refer here to currents of thought flowing through the atmosphere of the mind. Some of these have streamed mightily for centuries, while others are only beginning to bubble up and flow. Their tributaries extend into politics, law, culture, economics, and, of course, the academy.'

He went on to say, 'Our Catholic colleges serve God's people and the Church's mission by seeking to understand what beneficial effects might be carried by these rivers in order to learn from them, while also pointing out the harm that arises if we allow what is erroneous and contrary to the Gospel to stall over our way of life and flood into our manner of thought and patterns of behaviour. That such harmful flooding is now awash globally is obvious from our worldwide disorder and conflict, underscoring the urgency of Catholic higher education's vital mission.'

While Archbishop Smith was undoubtedly the star of the event, there were other notable moments. One of these was the speech by the Premier of British Columbia, David Eby, who assured the audience of his government's belief in Catholic education and the mission of the colleges. 'I am a defender and a supporter of Catholic education ... I've been a beneficiary of Catholic Education for my whole life.... Through that education, I believe that, in addition to what is core to what the Jesuits laid out for us, which is that we need to seek truth when faith calls us to seek truth as Christians, is also the importance of compassion, the importance of bringing your values with you when you go to work, when you're in the community, loving each other, looking after those who are disadvantaged.'

The Premier closed his remarks with a salute to the Catholic colleges at UBC: 'I wish you a wonderful 25- and 70-year anniversary, respectively. I wish you many more years of success in education. I had the opportunity—my staff briefed me on many of the awards won by students here studying issues related to health care, to homelessness, to how systems work, and how we can serve people better—and I hope you continue to turn out inquiring, bright minds, that are committed to the goal of truth, to the goal of compassion and concern for others, and to changing the world for the better because that's what we need right now. Congratulations to everyone involved and I wish you many, many more years of success.'

Both addresses put into context the accomplishments of the colleges which were the subject of my own president's address. Now in my fourth year, I spoke of both



the challenges and the opportunities that Corpus Christi and St. Mark's are experiencing. On the negative, I began, perhaps inevitably, with the impact of the Federal Government cuts to international student numbers, and the attendant Provincial Government allocation of places—a move that initially reduced Corpus Christi's ability to welcome international students by close to a 100%. While all the colleges and universities in the province are impacted by these cuts, none were stripped of virtually all, and the impact of this loss of almost a quarter of our student body will be felt for years to come.

Nevertheless, we rally, and despite the challenge, we have worked to continue offering significant scholarships for top academic achievers, including for students facing significant financial barriers. Thanks to our generous donors, we have been able to offer up to \$200,000 in scholarships each year, supporting some of British Columbia's brightest students. Our smaller classes, the comprehensive support and wrap-around care we provide our students, allows them to succeed in impressive and sometimes astonishing ways. Our recent success with a team that competed in Oxford University's global Map the System competition is a case in point. Our first- and second-year students, competing against doctors, lawyers, and professionals in graduate programs from universities as diverse as McGill, Queen's and UBC, not only won against all the Canadian teams, but once in Oxford for the finals were selected as the Best Undergraduate Team, over some 1700 competing universities.

Where Corpus Christi, our undergraduate Liberal Arts College, which provides the first two years of university for those seeking programs in Business, Nursing, Science and the Arts, is charting success after success, St. Mark's College,

our Graduate School of Theology, is no less impressive. St. Mark's delivers high quality academic programming for deacons, theologians, teachers, lay leaders and more. Recently, the academic team coordinated a major summit, The Future of Ministry: Forming and Empowering Leaders for Mission, bringing over 30 participants from all the dioceses in BC and the Yukon to the College for a series of presentations focused on exploring the role of formation for ministry in a rapidly changing pastoral landscape. The initiative was funded by a prestigious Lilly Endowment Grant, which itself led to the academic team being awarded a \$1 million USD Lilly Endowment-funded "Pathways for Tomorrow" Individual School Implementation Grant to carry forward this work over the next five years.

While the Breakfast celebrated a plethora of anniversaries, we were able to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> year of the naming of the Dr. Micallef Library by announcing a new \$50,000 donation by the family to improve security. Margot Micallef, in her gift announcement, noted that, 'My father would be so pleased to know his books are housed in one of the best theological libraries in Canada. You and your team have done a great job as stewards of the gift we gave so many years ago. My son attended Corpus Christi for two years.... Corpus Christi was life changing for him and we have never forgotten that the College was there when we needed it.'

Two final surprises closed the morning. One was the announcement that long-time supporters, Mark and Barbara Cullen, were funding the establishment of a new Chair in Media and Communications, a gift that would help us to expand one of our most popular academic areas, including the unique ShowBiz program that brings art and business together in a dynamic combination.



It is hoped that this academic appointment will be in place by September 2026.

And finally, in an announcement that charmed the audience, we unveiled the Colleges' new mascot, a Winged Lion named Marko. Thanks to a generous donation from long-time supporter Jenny Cheng, Marko made his auspicious appearance to the cheers of the assembled. St. Mark's and Corpus Christi Colleges combined have delivered almost 100 years of quality Catholic higher education to British Columbia. Informed by our Catholic Intellectual Tradition, we have focused on developing remarkable young men and women to prepare them not just to go out successfully into the world, but also to bring with them an ethical faith formation that will see them engage the world and transform it for the better.

As Saint John Henry Newman reminded us in his seminal work, *The Idea of a University*, a Catholic University, prepares students to dive into what he calls the 'troubled waters' of real life, armed with the skills and talent to swim against the tide — not to drown but to take a victory lap, in a world that needs ethically-informed citizens.

The final word should go to the Archbishop who noted, 'What a gift, then, for us all to have this deep and broad intellectual current flow in the Archdiocese of Vancouver through the Catholic Colleges whose anniversaries we are marking this year.... St. Mark's and Corpus Christi accompany well the intellectual formation of students seeking trustworthy guides to help them grow in wisdom and faith as they follow the Lord Jesus.'

To that we can only say, Amen!  
Gerry Turcotte



**Gerry Turcotte** · 2nd

President & Principal,  
St Mark's College & Corpus  
Christi College, Vancouver





SAINT JOHN PAUL II  
ACADEMY FOUNDATION

# ONE FAMILY

sharing, joy, and togetherness

# CARNIVAL

24 MAY, 2026

ST. JOHN PAUL II ACADEMY

RSVP: [volunteer@sjp2foundation.com](mailto:volunteer@sjp2foundation.com)



# HUNGRY FOR THAT MYSTERY AND AWE': CHAPEL ALTAR RAIL BRINGS SCHOOL COMMUNITY TOGETHER

Archbishop Emeritus of Winnipeg Archbishop Richard Gagnon anoints the altar in the Saint John Paul II Academy chapel during the Mass of dedication. (Nicholas Elbers photos)

The Catholic altar rail is a symbol of many things: reverence, faith, and humility. At Saint John Paul II Academy in Surrey, the chapel's altar rail has an added meaning: it expresses the commitment of the school's community to building the best Catholic school possible.

It was also a fitting final piece of architectural punctuation in the new building that finally opened for students this fall.

The railing almost didn't make it. Without the enthusiasm of one teacher, Tony Walters, and the support of parents and students, it might never have been ready in time for the chapel's dedication on Oct. 31.

The dedication Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Emeritus of Winnipeg Richard Gagnon, formerly of the Archdiocese of Vancouver.



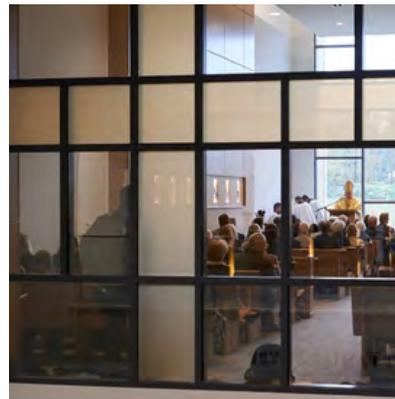
Archbishop Richard Gagnon celebrates Mass. Walters told The B.C. Catholic the Holy Spirit and the generosity of the school community made the altar rail possible.

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"A couple of parents and a couple of people from the school's community were like, 'You know what? We can do this!'"

He initially thought it might cost less than \$10,000, but after talking with Troy Van Vliet, chair of the SJPIIA Foundation Board of Directors, he was astounded to find that the bill would be more than double that. The nearly \$23,000 pricetag didn't stop him, and with Van Vliet's promise that the altar rail would be there if the money came in, Walters began asking around.

His first donations came at a school open house where after mentioning the project, parents immediately offered to contribute. By the end of the night, they were nearly halfway there. Walters had thought it might take six months to a year to get the money together. Instead it was soon bought and paid for.

Walters believes the community was eager to contribute toward something tangible. "People want to be involved in a thing that resonates with them," he said. "They want something they can say, 'Yeah, I get behind that idea.'"



Archbishop Gagnon delivers his homily as seen through the chapel window.

Parents also wanted their children to experience the sacredness of kneeling at the altar rail. “They talked about the idea that they hoped and believed that [kneeling] would be something that would help instill in the kids a deepening respect and reverence for the Eucharist,” said Walters. “I think kids are hungry for that mystery and awe, and otherworldliness,” he said.

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In his homily, Archbishop Gagnon spoke to the students, teachers, and parents about the nature of Catholic education and thanked them for supporting its mission.

“Today we give thanks for all those who share in the work of Catholic education: clergy, lay advisers, benefactors, volunteers, teachers, and support staff,” he said. “We give thanks especially for parents, who are the primary educators of their children, and for students—many of whom are here today—who are proud to belong to this school.”

“A Catholic school is a concrete expression of the Gospel; it becomes an educational gesture, a relationship, a culture,” he said.

Altar servers lay out the altar cloth for the first time.

“We will dedicate the sacred space within the school, set aside for one purpose only: the worship of God,” he said. “The chapel will be a physical reminder of the beating heart of faith, hope, and love at the centre of everything.”

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NICHOLAS ELBERS



# FAITH MATTERED TO MY FAMILY DURING MY UPBRINGING ON THE FARM

I remember a time when, as a little girl, I prayed for my father's safe return from the field at night. I learned through my parents and teachers to trust in God. This beautiful gift of faith and dependence on God was reinforced through the years. As I headed off alone on the bus to the big city to begin my university education, my dad assured me that all I really needed was my green suitcase and God.

We need to teach our children to pray so when their young hearts are broken, hurting or confused, they can go to God instead of turning to the world.

As a grandparent, I feel blessed to have had parents and grandparents that understood the need for faith in my life. Now, as a grandparent, I seek a better world for my grandchildren to grow up in. I want them to be equipped with as many tools as possible in order to succeed – spiritually, academically, emotionally and physically. Our Grade 8 grandson enthusiastically updates us on his participation in school cross-country meets, playing in the school band, or enjoying penne pasta cooked on site at the cafeteria!

The school provides students with state-of-the-art science labs, successful sports programs, highly-qualified coaches and excellent teachers. The central location of the beautiful chapel serves as a steady reminder to all present of the importance of faith. I am encouraged by the accessibility of the chapel to the broader Catholic community to further support and demonstrate the school's commitment to the mission.

I feel uplifted and hopeful as I consider the many ways that St John Paul II Academy is structured to help children grow in all these ways. The school provides an environment where students and families share common values that serve to complement rather than compete with what parents are trying to achieve at home. Dave and I have been blessed with the health and means to assist in any way we can to help this school succeed in this mission. Truly, it takes a community to raise a child.

I feel optimistic that, at St John Paul II Academy, our children are in good hands.

Elizabeth and David Wilkie



# TORIN COLE

1. What initially sparked your interest in volleyball?

I always watched my sister play volleyball back when I was in elementary school, and I remember thinking how fun it looked. When I got to grade 8, I decided I wanted to try out for a club volleyball team myself, and honestly, the rest is history. From my first club practice, I knew I'd found something I really loved. I fell in love with the speed of the game, the energy, and how it pushes me to be better every single day.

2. Can you share some highlights from your volleyball career so far?

One of the biggest highlights of my career so far was playing for England's U22 National Team. We spent two weeks training in the Netherlands against their national team, living on their Olympic campus, which was such a cool experience. After that, we flew straight to Italy to compete in the CEV European Championship Qualifiers, where we faced Italy, Denmark, and Ukraine in our pool. The whole trip was unforgettable, from the level of competition, the friendships I built and the memories I made. It gave me a glimpse of what it's like to compete internationally and made me hungrier to keep improving.

3. What are some key lessons or tricks of the trade you have learned along the way?

The biggest lesson is that consistency beats talent when pressure hits. As a libero, you have to be mentally unshakable, staying calm even when everything feels chaotic. Technically, I've learned how much difference footwork and reading hitters make. Every touch matters, so staying locked in every point of the game is key. Being able to have a positive mindset on and off the court, and strong relationships with teammates also plays a very important role when it comes to getting to that next level.

4. How has your experience with the Girls Volleyball program influenced your approach to the sport?

It taught me that just because I'm a good volleyball player doesn't mean I'm automatically a good coach. Coaching takes time, patience, and a different kind of understanding of the game. Working with younger players showed me how much goes into helping others grow, it's about communication, encouragement, and finding ways to make the sport enjoyable while still pushing for progress. It's made me appreciate my own coaches even more and taught me how to lead by example.

5. What are your goals and aspirations as you head to England to play volleyball?

Being on Team England at such a young age gives me a huge opportunity to grow, not only as a volleyball player, but as an independent young person too. My commitment to York University at the start of my grade 11 year was exciting, but it also came with a reality check. I know there are big expectations for me right after graduation, and I've got big shoes to fill and an important role to play at York. Being part of Team England has given me so much experience and has helped me prepare for what's ahead. I hope to keep representing England throughout university and continue building toward the international stage for years to come. I head to England at the end of this month and also in December for some international scrimmages and training.



# WHISTLER CHURCH 'WHAT GOD WANTS US TO DO

VANCOUVER -- Fr. Andrew L'Heureux dreams of a future when a flock of pilgrims, backpacks loaded and spirits high, assemble outside of Holy Rosary Cathedral in downtown Vancouver. The pilgrims take one last, respectful look at the cathedral's evocative Homeless Jesus statue — the Catholics among them making the sign of the cross — and then they turn to start a multi-day, 123-km hike to Whistler, B.C.

Whistler's awe-inspiring scenery will surely draw such trekkers, said L'Heureux, pastor of Whistler's Our Lady of the Mountain Parish. But a more powerful pull may emanate from a beautiful new church the parish is planning. "People who come looking for an earthly paradise could find themselves discovering a heavenly one as well," he said.

The prospect of a Vancouver-to-Whistler pilgrimage trail is one of several opportunities that L'Heureux sees as arising from the "New Church Project."

A proper, new church, replacing the parish's church hall that is currently in use, "has the potential to put Whistler on the worldwide map as a spiritual destination for pilgrimages, retreats, Catholic weddings and conferences," he said in newsletter describing the project. "The word has spread, and we already have interest from a few retreat masters."

Although closely associated with Vancouver, Our Lady of the Mountains is actually part of the Kamloops diocese. It has already raised \$3.3 million towards the church project and is counting on major donations, likely from well-heeled Vancouverites who have second homes at Whistler, to help it reach its \$5-million goal.

Philanthropist Andy Szocs heads the parish fundraising team.

"We're not trying to siphon off from the Vancouver archdiocese," he said, "but we're looking for people who could give to both." When the Whistler resort opened in the mid-1960s, Catholic services were held in the non-denomination 60-seat Skiers' Chapel, a tiny A-frame building built in 1968. Our Lady of the Mountains Parish was officially established in 1993 and construction of the multi-purpose church hall began a year later.

Although the parish has fewer than 100 families, it must also serve the needs of the 2.5-million skiers, hikers, cyclists and other vacationers who, in pre-pandemic times, travelled annually to the all-seasons resort community.

L'Heureux, who has been pastor of the Whistler parish for less than two years, admits to being astonished at the speed at which the new church project is coming to life.

"The whole thing is ridiculous to me," he said. "But I believe this is what God wants us to do." The new church will seat 200, but will adjoin the existing hall, which will be reengineered so it can open to the new church to provide an additional 300 seats during busy seasons such as Easter and Christmas.

"We're in the third round of design and once that's finished, we can start with the permitting process, which should take about nine months," L'Heureux said. If all goes well, ground-breaking will take place in the spring of 2023.

The primary purpose of the new church is to provide parishioners with a truly sacred space.



“For we Catholics, there’s such a necessity for the sacraments and that’s the opportunity to spend intimate time with God,” L’Heureux said. “And right now, because our church is a multi-purpose centre, it doesn’t really have that. It’s never fully set aside for the worship of God, to show the importance of why we worship as Christians and how essential it is to have a space set aside solely for the worship of God.”

While incorporating natural-wood structures and finishes that have come to be associated with Whistler, the new church will also be traditional in design.

An important part of L’Heureux’s vision for the future of the parish is to expand its mission to

make Whistler “a place of Catholic destination,” where Catholic organizations can hold satellite events.

“Whistler is a beautiful place,” L’Heureux said. “It’s a natural destination. So we also want to make it into a supernatural destination.” The final part of the vision is the pilgrimage trail. There’s no continuous trail at present, but L’Heureux thinks it is inevitable that a full trail will eventually be completed.

He notes that on famous pilgrimage trails like the Camino de Santiago in Spain, perhaps only five per cent of hikers actually have religious intentions in mind when they begin, but “100 per cent of the people have a spiritual experience while being on the trail.”



Andy Szocs



Father Andrew L’Heureux | Our Lady of the Mountains Catholic Church



# SAINT JOHN PAUL II ACADEMY 3<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL GOLF TOURNAMENT SAVE THE DATE: MAY 14, 2026

We are excited to announce that our annual golf tournament is returning for its third year. After two successful years, our hope is that the 2026 event will be bigger and even better and we'd love for you to join us for this amazing day in support of Saint John Paul II Academy bursary and scholarship programs.

This fundraising event will take place May 14, 2026, at the prestigious Tsawwassen Springs Golf course and we are pleased to host this day in support of SJPII, its students, Alumni and the Foundation. Our goals for this event are to raise funds, build community and raise awareness for the school. The day will consist of a brunch, complimentary driving range, an amazing gift bag, 18-holes of golf, all followed by a buffet banquet, a live auction and give aways.

For anyone interesting in volunteering on event day, please contact either Silveria Roselli ([silveria@sjp2foundation.com](mailto:silveria@sjp2foundation.com)), Jose Vargas ([secretary@sjp2academy.com](mailto:secretary@sjp2academy.com)) or myself ([fannin43@gmail.com](mailto:fannin43@gmail.com)). Volunteers are the success of any community event so extra help is always welcome and appreciated.

For those interested in supporting the event through sponsorship (either monetary or in-kind), or to simply donate a product or service for our auction table, please email Jose Vargas (Sponsorship Coordinator) at [sponsorships@sjp2academy.com](mailto:sponsorships@sjp2academy.com)

Please join us next May to help make the 2026 event a success!

Thank you and stay tuned for more updates on this exciting SJPII community event.



David Fanning



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# A BLESSED ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS SEASON FROM SAINT JOHN PAUL II ACADEMY

Dear Members of the Saint John Paul II Academy Community,  
As we enter this sacred season of Advent and prepare our hearts to celebrate the Nativity of

Our Lord, I extend my heartfelt gratitude and warmest wishes to all our families, donors, supporters, faculty, staff, and friends of the Academy.

This year has been nothing short of extraordinary.

In September 2025, after years of prayer, generosity, perseverance, and shared vision, our school community moved into its new permanent campus—a facility we believe to be among the most beautiful new high school campuses in the province. What began years ago as a small Grade 8 class of just thirteen students in our former White Rock location has grown into a thriving school filled with energy, faith, and promise.

Walking the halls of this new building and seeing students learning, competing, studying, praying, and forming lifelong friendships is a powerful reminder of how far we have come—and how abundantly God has blessed our community.

And this is only the beginning. The planned additions—our future arts wing, theatre, track, and trades areas—will make this campus even more remarkable in the years ahead. These developments stand as a testament to the faith, dedication, and generosity of those who believe deeply in Catholic education and our mission.

At the heart of our school remains a simple and profound vision: to form students in Christ so that they grow in favor with God and their fellow man. This vision shapes everything we do.

To our donors and supporters: thank you. Your generosity made this year's historic transition possible. You have built more than a school—you have invested in generations of young men and women who will bring leadership, integrity, faith, and service to our Church and to the world.

To our families: thank you for your trust, your involvement, and your belief in our mission. To our faculty and staff: thank you for your devotion and excellence. To our students: thank you for your joy, your courage, your hard work, and your witness.

As we light the candles of Advent, we wait in joyful hope for the coming of Christ—the Light who shines in the darkness and who brings peace to all who welcome Him. May His presence fill your homes, your families, and your hearts this Christmas.

On behalf of the Saint John Paul II Academy Society Board, I wish you a blessed Advent, a joy-filled Christmas, and a grace-filled New Year.

May God bless you and your families.  
Sincerely,

Joseph King  
Chair  
Saint John Paul II Academy Society Board



# STITCHING STRENGTH: AN UPDATE ON OUR WOMEN'S SEWING PROGRAMS

Over the past year, Rick's Heart Foundation's women's sewing programs have continued to grow into safe, empowering spaces where women in recovery can rebuild confidence, learn new skills, and rediscover their sense of worth. These programs—run in partnership with local recovery homes—offer more than fabric and thread. They offer community, healing, and hope.

## A Safe Place to Rebuild After Trauma

Many women entering recovery have faced significant trauma and arrive at these programs carrying heavy emotional burdens. At such a critical moment in their lives, accessible and meaningful support can make all the difference. Our sewing programs provide a consistent, hands-on environment where women can slow down, feel safe, and begin to rebuild trust in themselves and others.



Each project—whether a pillowcase, tote bag, or repaired clothing—becomes an opportunity to practice patience, problem-solving, focus, and self-expression. The act of creating something with their own hands is powerful. It reminds them that they are capable, resilient, and deserving of a new beginning.

## Skills That Strengthen Recovery

Sewing teaches far more than technical skills. It strengthens the building blocks of long-term recovery and independence:

- Patience & perseverance: learning to try again after mistakes
- Mindfulness: staying present, stitch by stitch
- Attention to detail: developing pride in craftsmanship
- Confidence: finishing a project and seeing tangible progress
- Life skills: planning, measuring, organizing, and budgeting



*“Community is the spirit, the guiding light, whereby people come together to fulfill a purpose, to help others fulfill their purpose, and to take care of one another.”*

Most women who participate in the program graduate with a renewed sense of confidence, a meaningful skill set, and an overwhelming feeling of accomplishment. Many go on to sew for their families, volunteer, or pursue employment that builds on their new abilities.

### Support That Goes Beyond the Classroom

At RHF, we know healing doesn't happen in a single program—it grows through consistent reminders that each woman is valued and supported. Throughout the year, we deliver handwritten cards, small gifts, and Christmas packages to celebrate milestones and brighten holidays.

One of the most joyful moments every year is the visit from the mini therapy ponies. Their gentle presence fills the room with laughter and light, reminding the women that compassion can arrive in unexpected forms.



### Growing Our Impact in 2026

The programs continue to welcome new participants throughout the year as women graduate from recovery and new women begin their journey. This natural flow keeps the environment vibrant and full of encouragement.

Looking ahead, our goal for 2026 is to expand and launch two additional sewing programs across the Greater Vancouver Area, bringing this transformative experience to even more women who need it.

If you would like further information about the sewing program or to donate towards it, please visit our website at [ricksheartfoundation.com](http://ricksheartfoundation.com) or email Alethea at [info@ricksheartfoundation.com](mailto:info@ricksheartfoundation.com).



# A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS TO YOU

A very Merry Christmas to you,

I am grateful at this opportunity to greet our SJP2 Academy community with a message during this wonderful time!

Our shining new campus is an outstanding contribution to the bricks and mortar of our faith made possible by the tireless efforts of the parents and supporters I have grown to know and love.

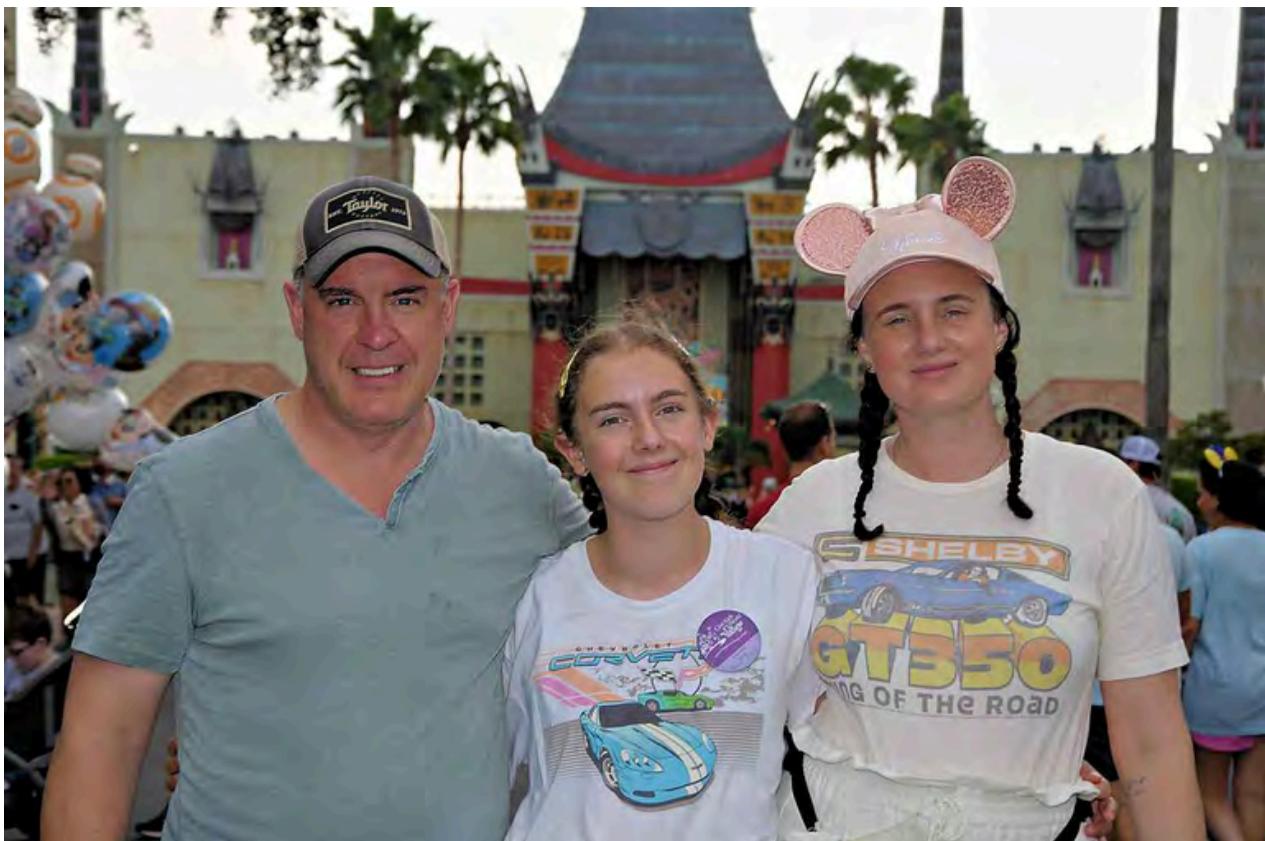
My family has been with SJP2 since 2017 and at this time of year I am reminded of messages and themes from the great writer Charles Dickens whose timeless stories I have seen mirrored within our own SJP2 family.

We are all fellow travellers on this journey; kindness, forgiveness, and a focus on others during this time is how we welcome the gifts of the Holy Spirit into our own lives.

Whatever is happening in your world, remember it is not too late! You too can share in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Get involved today, find someone to give to and take part in the spirit of the season through charity and festivity.

From my family to yours, have the happiest Christmas, and God bless us everyone.

Sears Family  
Dec 2025



Dear Achilles members,

I am writing to update you on the current situation at SFU. I spoke to Ken at length yesterday and he suggested I brief all of you. Achilles has long been the driving force for athletics in this province as well as nationally. I have had the privilege of being a recipient of their support as an athlete, and now as a coach at Simon Fraser University. Your passion for the sport is unmatched and I am grateful for the small part I was able to contribute over the years.

Universities across Canada are struggling financially and inevitably this has impacted athletics programs at many universities. Most recently these challenges have struck SFU's Varsity sports.

The decision of the university has been made to leave the NCAA. This decision was made after the conclusion of an external review and the McLaren report was submitted. There were many factors that impacted the decision including NCAA Governance and bylaws, cost and sustainability. This decision will see the retirement of Women's softball, Men's and Women's Golf and Outdoor track and Field.

The Provost (Dr Rassier) announced less than 10 days after receiving the report, that SFU would be leaving the NCAA and seeking membership in U Sport. Not the decision any of the programs wanted, but out of our control. I was preparing to accept the U sport model of Cross Country and Indoor Track and Field and attempt to develop a program that would benefit all our athletes.

The same day of the announcement there was one line that indicated they would also be "reviewing Indoor Track and Field". This came as a shock to me as this had never been on the table before.

This would effectively destroy 60 years of track and field at SFU and the thousands of Alumni in the community that had supported Track and Field for decades. That week was filled with emotion and disappointment for myself, coaches and athletes. Many suggested this might be the time I retire:).

I have decided to stay and fight and to continue our commitment to the athletes in our program. I can't ignore the legacy we have built and strongly believe we can save track and field at SFU.

I have spent the last week developing a report on a proposal for our track and field program when we leave the NCAA in two years. It includes responses to their concerns, including key messages on recruiting, sustainability, commitment to high performance and providing a vehicle to provincial and national teams. It also includes proposed competitive schedules that would include some meets across the border to enhance the student-athlete experience.

The report was quite extensive outlining our history of success, climate in BC and many other factors. This report was submitted to the Athletic Director for review on Friday and she will finalize a proposal to the Provost and university leadership this week. I am optimistic that they will consider this carefully



We will be staying in the NCAA for the next two years of track and field. If accepted, we would transition to U Sport Fall of 2027. All funding and resources remain the same. We will need to comply with U Sport bylaws and guidelines but I am confident we can deliver a successful program in a high performance environment. We have adopted some excellent policies and strategies from our time in the NCAA which will be continued in our new model. We also have excellent resources for the athletes including a Sports medicine clinic, priority registration, free tutors and full time academic advisors for athletes, strength and conditioning centre with full time strength coaches and more.



The fight continues. I am grateful for your support and passion for athletics. We have not been given a timeline for the decision but I would anticipate it would be in the new year (possibly even January). Ken suggested Achilles may want to write a letter. I have also reached out to Athletics Canada and they are writing a letter of support.

Alumni is submitting a letter in the next couple of days. A leader in the Kinesiology program has also written a very comprehensive and passionate letter. I have had so many messages and calls of support.

Letters of support can be sent to:

Dr Rassier [provost@sfu.ca](mailto:provost@sfu.ca)  
Joy Johnson President [pres\\_office@sfu.ca](mailto:pres_office@sfu.ca)  
[Input@sfu.ca](mailto:Input@sfu.ca)

Can also CC:  
Athletic director Breanne Watson  
[breannew@sfu.ca](mailto:breannew@sfu.ca)  
Executive director Luc Simard  
[luc\\_simard@sfu.ca](mailto:luc_simard@sfu.ca)

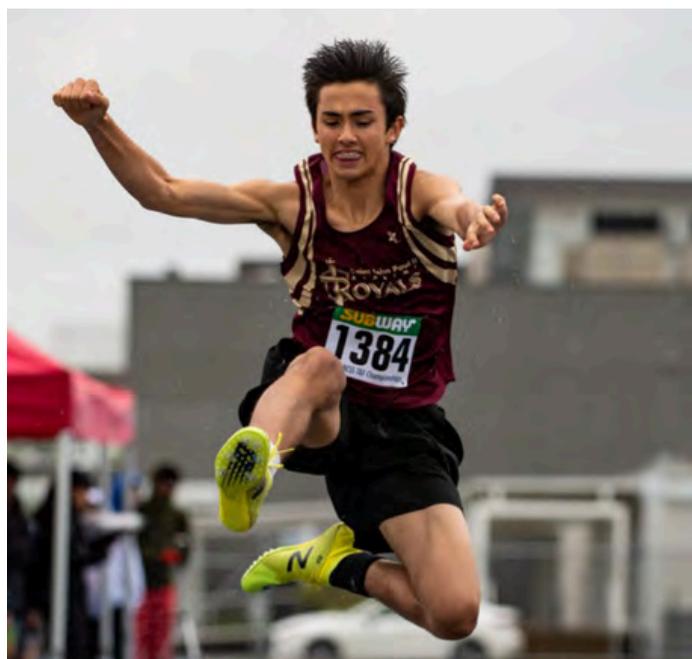
Thank you in advance! Brit Townsen



# I WAS ONCE TOLD THAT THERE ARE TWO VERY IMPORTANT DAYS IN A PERSON'S LIFE: THE DAY YOU ENTER THE WORLD, AND THE DAY YOU DISCOVER WHY YOU WERE BROUGHT INTO IT.

In a hedonistic society, discerning God's plan (our vocation) can feel especially difficult. My own journey toward discovering my purpose begins with my parents. Through their generosity, they welcomed ten children into the world, with me arriving sixth. The everyday sacrifices they made for us, not out of mere obligation but from genuine love, were a constant, living expression of charity. Because of them, my siblings and I grew up in an authentic Christian home that seemed to travel with us wherever we went (although my dad insists this came more from farming than anything else). Learning from their example each day had a great impact on how I would eventually be able to give my life in service to the Church.

When I reached my early teenage years, sure, my family would pray rosaries now and then,



and we went to Mass and confession regularly. But I personally had only a basic understanding of the Catholic faith. I called myself Catholic, but was I really Catholic? From the outside, it seemed like being a Christian meant rejecting the world and everything it offered in the hope of attaining some distant eternal life. What teenager would willingly do that when endless hours of video games and Instagram were readily available? I certainly wasn't one of them.

In grade nine, I began attending Opus Dei's weekly activities for high school students, which changed everything. Through these gatherings, I received not only doctrinal formation but also the invaluable help of spiritual direction. I then came to understand that Christianity is not about abandoning every good thing in the world until we've proved ourselves "worthy." Rather, it's about offering everything in the world to God. This is one of the central teachings of Opus Dei: that every person, regardless of their state in life, is called and able to become a saint. How? As St. Paul writes, "Whether you eat or drink, do all for the glory of God."

If you reflect on Jesus' life, you realize that nearly 90% of His time on earth was spent doing ordinary work as a carpenter, living as anyone else of His time did. Yet everything He did was part of His mission of redemption. Because of this, the most routine parts of our own lives take on a redemptive value as well. By offering God even the smallest tasks of our day, we not only receive grace and sanctity but also share in Christ's redeeming mission. In other words, we practically become superheroes.



Therefore, without altering the external circumstances of my life, I found myself becoming genuinely happier. I wasn't pursuing what the world claimed would fulfill me, yet I felt more fulfilled than ever. This came from realizing that holiness is not something remote or dramatic. I didn't need to change my daily routine: school, sports, being with my family and friends. Instead, my task was to find Christ in these everyday things and offer them to Him. It's certainly not easy, but there's an element of beauty in doing it all for and with Christ since, as Saint Paul says, "It is not I who live but Christ who lives in me." Ultimately, the goal is for Christ to reign in our hearts so that all our actions are directed toward the fulfillment of His will.



Discovering that life was more than comfort and pleasures, through the grace of God and the support of my family and friends, I was able to answer God's call as a numerary member of Opus Dei, where I can now help other young people strive for the one true, fulfilling source of happiness that I myself sought and have found.

To end with a quote from Saint Josemaría, Founder of Opus Dei: "There is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it."

Matthias



# EMPTY ARMS AND A FULL HEART

Christmas Eve was fast approaching and the shop windows were laden. Window shopping was a pastime in this particular neighbourhood where real want was just around the corner. \*

A young man and his waist-high daughter were admiring sleds, tool kits and hockey sticks and—a doll. Not just any doll, but “the doll”, just waiting for someone to take her home. The father had explained that there were only so many toys in the world and maybe the doll was already spoken for.

The daughter seemed to accept this wisdom when suddenly she saw a man walking towards them. He had a long white beard accentuated by his long black coat. His black hat failed to contain his white hair.

Dropping her father’s hand, she rushed to the stranger. “Oh Santa!” she exclaimed, grasping his hand in hers. The stranger stood stoically still and listened while she explained how she would give that doll a good home, if only— Her father caught up and took her away, apologizing.

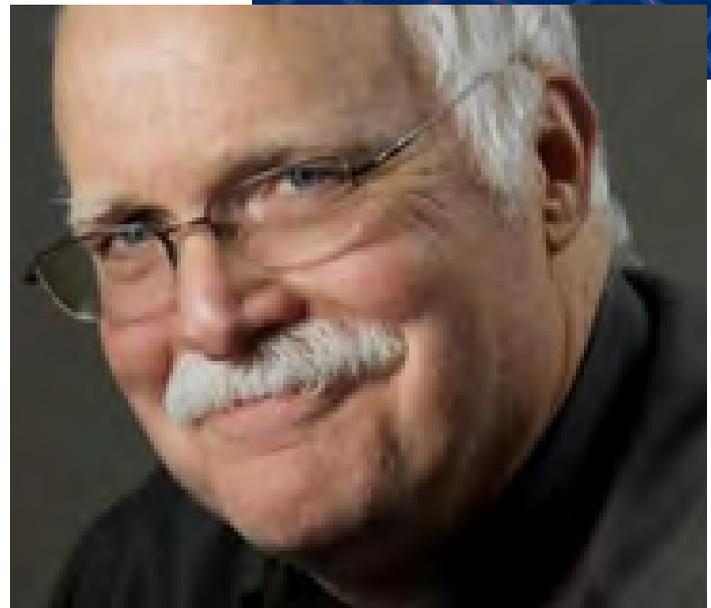
On Christmas morning her stocking had a sewing kit, a book about Bethlehem, and in the toe, an apple and a big orange. She was happy and so were her parents.

A knock came to the door and she rushed to open it. There stood the tall man with a white beard and dressed in a black coat. And in his arms the doll.

The little girl’s joy was indescribable. The parents were overcome. Taking the older man’s hand, her father said, simply, “Thank you. Thank you so much, Rabbi.”

And like the Wise Men from the east, the Rabbi returned home with empty arms and a full heart.

Merry Christmas,  
Tom



Tom Cooper  
City in Focus  
Founder and President



# OUTREACH AND ADVOCACY CLUB

## SERVING IN THE LOVE OF CHRIST

The Outreach and Advocacy Team continues to live out its mission of caring for the marginalized, the homeless, and the forgotten in our wider community. As St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta reminds us, “Spread love everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier.” Though we remain low-key in our approach, our work continues quietly and faithfully in the background.

First, we want to extend our heartfelt gratitude for your ongoing generosity and compassion. Your support makes our outreach possible. Because of you, our school community has been able to share God’s love in concrete, meaningful ways with those most in need.

Our first initiative this year was the collection of feminine hygiene products and rain ponchos for our unhoused neighbours, in partnership with Providence Health Care. These items were distributed on November 7th in Oppenheimer Park, offering dignity, comfort, and practical support to those facing daily hardship.

We continued our outreach by gathering Halloween candy to share with the unhoused—small acts of sweetness and joy for those who can often feel unseen.

On November 21st and 22nd, we operated a concession stand at school to raise funds for Talented Children and Youth Foundation in Cartagena, Colombia, an organization dedicated to rescuing and supporting children affected by human trafficking.

With the addition of several generous donations, we were able to send \$350 directly to the foundation through our contact, José Vargas, Society Board Chair—ensuring every dollar reached those who need it most.

Our final project for 2025 was our Christmas Hamper initiative. Each advisory class was invited to contribute to this worthy cause, and once again, our community rose to the occasion with generosity and heart. As we look back on these initiatives, we are reminded that outreach is not just something we do—it is who we are as a Catholic school community. Rooted in the example of Christ and guided by the teachings of the Church, we strive to be instruments of hope wherever there is need. Thank you for embodying our shared values of compassion, service, and solidarity. Together, we are making a real difference—quietly, faithfully, and with open hearts.

In Christ,  
The Outreach and Advocacy Team





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# SANCTA MARIA HOUSE: A BEACON OF HOPE AND HEALING

Nestled in the heart of Kitsilano, Sancta Maria House has been a quiet force for good since it opened its doors on Valentine's Day in 1960. Founded by the Sancta Maria Praesidium of the Legion of Mary, this long-term recovery home offers more than just a place to stay—it provides a lifeline for women seeking freedom from addiction. Here, women battling substance abuse find a structured, abstinence-based program within a nurturing, family-like setting. The goal is simple yet profound: to offer the support, direction, and unconditional encouragement needed to journey toward lasting freedom.

Operating entirely on private donations, Sancta Maria House has helped over 300 women of all ethnicities, backgrounds, and faiths. Grounded in the teachings of Jesus, the home's core mission is to ensure every resident hears a message of love and experiences a transformative power of healing.



## OUR VISION

- **Christ-Focused:** Our Catholic and Christian values guide us to help marginalized women who are often forgotten and in need of support.
- **Caring:** Through prayerful action, women experience unconditional love and a chance to be individually known and cared for.
- **Encourage:** We provide a supportive atmosphere for those who wish to change their lives through Sancta Maria House.
- **Renewal:** We foster self-esteem and self-actualization through spiritual and psychological counseling, believing in healing the mind, body, and spirit through prayers, creative arts, a 12-step program, health and wellness, and A/A meetings.
- **Participation:** We encourage involvement in community activities and help reunite women with loved ones for reintegration back into families.

Sancta Maria House opened as a Catholic hostel for women in need, operating under the love and care of Mary Sawyer, who served as a housemother for nearly 40 years. In 2004, Agape Street Ministry assumed facilitation, continuing Mary Sawyer's legacy of love and service. A structured, Christ-centered, twelve-step program was adopted to address the significant needs of women struggling with drugs and alcohol.





**SANCTA MARIA HOUSE**  
PROVIDES LOVING SUPPORT, DIRECTION,  
AND A HOME TO WOMEN IN ADDICTION.

Over the years, more than 300 women have found refuge at Sancta Maria House. Some have stayed for as short as three months, while others have lived there for over a year. Many have expressed feeling at home as soon as they walked through the doors and have come to know Jesus deeply, experiencing much healing. God's unfailing grace and years of unconditional love have borne much fruit, as women have been reunited with their families and reintegrated into the community. Many have embraced Christianity and been welcomed into the Catholic Church at St. Augustine's.

Sancta Maria House president, Sharon Dobin, reflects, "As I look over the names of the women who have graced us at Sancta Maria House, my heart is full of so many memories, so many special, beautiful women—women who have struggled, suffered, endured, and loved so much. Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of Sancta Maria House to us and to the women you love so dearly.

We pray that you will send many more women to us—to be loved, nurtured, and led to your heart, where they find healing, wholeness, and freedom. We thank you, Lord, for your great providence. We thank all the wonderful volunteers, facilitators, and all those who support us financially and in prayer. We thank you for hearing God's invitation to give your love to the women in need."

For those who wish to learn more or donate to Sancta Maria House, please contact Clara Lum at 604-618-7699.



# TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT: GOD WITH US.

The Christmas story proclaims a profound mystery: God chooses to come close. In the humility of the manger, we meet Emmanuel, God with us, entering human vulnerability, fear, and longing, and suffering. This mystery of divine nearness is not confined to Bethlehem; it becomes a living reality in the Eucharist, where Christ is truly present, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. The God who once lay in a manger now dwells in our midst in every Tabernacle, offering the same tenderness, companionship, and hope. This truth speaks powerfully into the experiences of young people today, many of whom feel experiences of languishing, feeling

unseen, or pressured to appear “fine” even when they are struggling internally. The Church faces an urgent calling: to become a place where conversations about mental health are approached with understanding, compassion, and theological depth. Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries created the Sanctuary Youth Series precisely for this purpose. It is a free, faith-informed resource that equips schools and youth ministries to engage mental health wisely. Now, with new data from a controlled trial impact study and growing international momentum, including global attention at the recent Conference of Hope in Rome, the transformative power of this resource is becoming unmistakably clear.

## PRAYER REIMAGINED: HONEST CONNECTION WITH GOD

From January through May, 2025, Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries partnered with an established U.S. based research firm to conduct a randomized control trial study of the Sanctuary Youth Series in churches and schools. For many, this process of testing outcomes and deliverables is considered the gold star of research. One of the most compelling findings from the study was a 23-point increase in participants’ understanding and practice of prayer as “a conversation with God about what’s really going on with them.” For many young people, prayer has often been perceived as an activity requiring polished words or emotional composure. Yet the Sanctuary Youth Series reframes prayer as a place where vulnerability is welcomed—not avoided. It even invites young people to pen their own psalm of lament.

This shift toward authentic, relational prayer is transformative because it allows youth to bring their full selves before God. This reconceptualization of prayer is significant beyond spiritual formation. Research shows that integrating emotional awareness with spiritual practice builds resilience, fosters healthier coping strategies, and positively impacts overall mental well-being. The impact study confirms that when young people are invited into honest dialogue with God, they develop a deeper sense of trust, identity, and hope.



Bryanna Russell



## MENTAL HEALTH REDEFINED: A CONTINUUM, NOT A LABEL

The study also found a 44-point increase in participants' understanding of mental health as a continuum rather than a fixed state of being "sick" or "well." This shift is foundational to reducing stigma and preventing the casual self-diagnosis that is increasingly common among teens. By understanding that mental health naturally fluctuates, just like physical health, youth are better equipped to name their

experiences without fear or shame.

This continuum-based understanding also reinforces that spiritual practices, professional care, and community support are not competing approaches but interconnected elements of holistic well-being. By normalizing fluctuations in mental health, the Sanctuary Youth Series empowers youth to navigate challenges with confidence and compassion, without attaching identity to diagnosis.

## GLOBAL MOMENTUM: THE CONFERENCE OF HOPE IN ROME

The transformative impact of the Sanctuary Youth Series is not limited to local ministries. Its reach is expanding globally, and this international enthusiasm was powerfully evident at the Conference of Hope in Rome—a gathering that brought together Church leaders, theologians, mental health practitioners, and ministry innovators from around the world.

At the Conference of Hope, Sanctuary was invited to share about the Youth Series as part of a broader conversation on how the global Church can respond compassionately and wisely to the mental health crisis facing young people. Participants were eager to understand both the theological foundations and the practical outcomes of the series, and many responded with deep gratitude that such a resource exists.

What resonated most with global leaders was that the Youth Series is not only faithful to Christian theology but also freely accessible. This combination, robust theology and accessible design, positions it as an invaluable tool for communities with limited resources or emerging mental health infrastructure. For many attendees, particularly those working with youth in regions deeply affected by social instability or economic hardship, the series offered a hopeful starting point for conversations that felt long overdue.

The Conference of Hope served as a moment of affirmation that the Sanctuary Youth Series is meeting a global need. It also highlighted that the impact of the series is part of a larger movement—a movement toward equipping the Church to be a place of healing, belonging, and encounter with our Lord, for today's youth.

## GLOBAL MOMENTUM: THE CONFERENCE OF HOPE IN ROME

Taken together, the controlled trial impact study and the global enthusiasm witnessed at the Conference of Hope reveal a profound truth: young people are hungry for spaces where faith and mental health can be explored together without shame, stigma, or fear. The Sanctuary Youth Series is helping create those spaces—locally, nationally, and internationally.

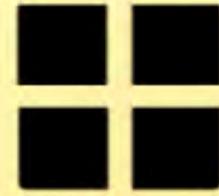
As ministries across North America, Europe, Asia, and beyond adopt the resource, the data affirms what youth leaders have been

saying for years: when the Church steps into mental health conversations with humility and wisdom, young people show up. They engage. They grow. They discover that they are not alone. In a world that is often overwhelming, the Sanctuary Youth Series is offering youth a path toward connection with God, with others, and with themselves. It is yet another means to encounter Emmanuel, the God who is with us.





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# A LEGACY OF FAITH, FAMILY, AND GENEROSITY: THE CONVERSION AND WITNESS OF MURRAY AND PATTY NEILSON

In the vibrant tapestry of Catholic life in British Columbia, few stories shine as brightly as that of Murray and Patty Neilson. Their journey into the Catholic Church has become a profound source of inspiration, evangelization, and generosity for countless others. Their lives demonstrate, with striking clarity, that when the Holy Spirit moves within a family, the ripples of grace extend far beyond one household, shaping generations.

Recently, on the "Catholic Education Matters" podcast, host Troy Van Vliet welcomed the Neilsons, recalling fondly the friendship that began nearly two years ago through the Legatus community. Their presence has become a cherished blessing for the Archdiocese and for Saint John Paul II Academy. What unfolded in their interview was an unforgettable story—part conversion narrative, part testimony of beauty rediscovered, and part masterclass in Christian stewardship.

## **A Family's Unexpected Path to Rome**

Although both Patty and Murray were born and raised in Vancouver, their beginnings were far from Catholic. They grew up within the Plymouth Brethren tradition, rooted in Scripture, simplicity, and suspicion of Catholicism. They married at twenty-one and built a life steeped in biblical study and active church involvement.

The turning point arrived unexpectedly through their son, Kyle. While studying Christianity and Culture at Trinity Western University, he returned home one Thanksgiving with a question that startled his mother: "Mom, do you have any idea how many Protestant denominations there are?" His answer—45,000—was the spark that set the family on a new path. Kyle had begun studying the history of

Christianity and encountered a truth largely unknown in their upbringing: the unbroken doctrinal continuity of the Catholic Church.

Patty, determined to "save her son from a dire mistake," began reading the books he brought home, including "Rome Sweet Home" by Scott Hahn and "Surprised by Truth." But the Holy Spirit had other plans. In those pages, Patty encountered a Church she had never truly met: ancient, scriptural, sacramental, beautiful. Her heart opened quickly and decisively. "I realized there was so much truth I had never known." The Eucharist, the Church Fathers, the Councils, the unbroken lineage of teaching—layer upon layer of truth drew her home.

## **Murray's Journey: From Reluctance to Peace**

Murray's path unfolded differently and more slowly. Though a deeply social man, he admitted that in all his years helping plant and build Protestant churches, he never felt fully comfortable. Something was missing. Yet when he followed his family to Saint Francis of Assisi Parish on the East Side, he encountered something he could not deny: "Father Mark Schwab would bless me, and I would weep. It felt like Jesus was looking straight into my soul." It did not matter that nobody spoke to them or invited them out. The presence of God was unmistakable. "I felt like I had come home."

Their journey was not without pain. Many Protestant friends drifted away. Their mothers struggled to understand. But grace prevailed. In 2005, after two years of prayer, study, and quiet transformation, Murray and Patty were received into full communion with the Catholic Church.



Today, their entire family—three children and fourteen grandchildren—shares the same faith.

### **Beauty Rediscovered and Faith Reawakened**

Patty spoke powerfully about what she discovered in the Catholic Church that she never knew she was missing: beauty, symbols, music, sacrament, sacred art, and mystery. Coming from an austere tradition—no stained glass, no cross, no iconography—the liturgy was a revelation. “God began meeting me in every one of my senses.” Their experience is a reminder of what Saint John Paul II so often proclaimed: beauty evangelizes. Beauty speaks directly to the heart when arguments alone cannot.

### **A Call to Generosity: Stewardship as a Way of Life**

Beyond their conversion, the Neilsons have become known as joyful philanthropists—living witnesses that giving is not merely a duty but a deep source of Christian fulfillment. Murray shared formative childhood memories of his father, a humble house painter, quietly slipping folded bills into the hands of widows after Sunday worship. Tithing—giving ten percent of one’s income—was normal, expected, and spiritually essential. Today, Murray and Patty continue that legacy with extraordinary humility. “It is not our money. It is God’s money.” They speak with refreshing clarity about the spiritual freedom that comes from giving generously, even sacrificially. “You cannot out-give God.” Murray added that one of his greatest joys now is encouraging other Catholics to give—gently nudging hearts toward mission, formation, and holiness.

### **A Gift to the School: The Corpus and the Sculpture of Life**

Saint John Paul II Academy has been profoundly shaped by the generosity of the Neilsons.

### **The Corpus in the School Chapel**

Through a providential friendship with a Czech missionary who supports elderly Slovakian master wood-carvers, Murray learned of a magnificent hand-carved corpus—six feet wide and eight feet tall. Its power and beauty were undeniable. That corpus now hangs in the Academy chapel, a striking and sacred reminder of Christ’s love. It has become the heart of the school’s spiritual life.

### **The Sculpture of “Life”**

Equally moving is their support of the school’s soon-to-arrive Life sculpture by world-renowned Catholic artist Timothy Schmalz. The piece depicts a modern Madonna with the unborn Christ visible within her womb—an unmistakable proclamation of the sacredness of human life. For the Neilsons, the sculpture is deeply personal: a memorial for the babies they have lost, a testimony to the value of every soul, and a beacon of hope for future generations. Placed at the heart of the school, it will silently evangelize thousands of young people for decades to come.

### **Forming Leaders for the Future: Their Support of Catholic Pacific College**

Their love for Catholic education does not end at the high school level. Patty and Murray are committed supporters of Catholic Pacific College (CPC), an extraordinary Catholic liberal arts institution affiliated with Trinity Western University. Their granddaughter now studies there. Patty describes CPC as a place where faith deepens, identity matures, and young adults discover their vocation in Christ. “CPC builds the spiritual foundation that our future leaders will need—in business, healthcare, education, engineering, and every field.”



## The Heart of Their Witness

Perhaps the most beautiful aspect of the Neilsons' story is the joy with which they live their faith. They attend Mass joyfully, build their travel around Sunday liturgy, and remain united in the rhythm of sacrament and prayer. After fifty-six years of marriage, they marvel at the grace that allows them to say: "I cannot believe we get to sit here together, sharing this faith." Their life is a testimony to perseverance, openness, and the quiet, persistent work of the Holy Spirit.

## Why Catholic Education Matters

Troy reminded listeners that Catholic schools are one of the three great pillars of formation—family, parish, and school. He stressed the vital role Catholic education plays in giving young people a spiritual foundation strong enough to withstand a secularized world. The Neilsons' story, he noted, is a living example of this truth. Their conversion, their children's conversions, and the legacy of faith now flourishing in their grandchildren are all tied to strong Catholic relationships, authentic community, and solid formation.

## A Final Word

At the end of the conversation, the Neilsons offered no grand speeches—only humility and gratitude. Their story speaks for itself. It is a reminder that:

- Grace often begins with a simple question.
- Beauty has the power to evangelize.
- Generosity transforms both the giver and the receiver.

- Families can become icons of God's love.
- Catholic education truly does matter.

And most of all, that when God opens a door, He opens it for generations. May God continue to bless Murray and Patty Neilson, their children, and their fourteen grandchildren. Their witness is a gift to our Archdiocese and to every family discerning how to live a life of faith, conviction, and joyful generosity



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# TORIN COLE

Hello, my name is Torin Cole, and I am a Grade 12 student at St. John Paul II Academy.

In Grade 8, I signed up for my very first club volleyball tryout. I made the team, and that moment marked the beginning of a journey that has completely changed my life. From countless hours in the gym to bloody kneepads and taking more than a few volleyballs straight to the face, I slowly turned that Grade 8 kid who just wanted to try something new into the player I am today.

Last year, in Grade 11, I reached a major milestone in my career by becoming the first Class of 2026 recruit in Canada to commit to a U SPORTS university, officially committing to York University. This opportunity was the result of years of dedication, sacrifice, and belief in myself and of course the love and support from my family and coaches.

This past summer was one of the most impactful experiences of my volleyball career. I had the honour of representing Team England's U22 National Team, spending two weeks in the Netherlands training and scrimmaging against the Dutch National Team. We trained daily and lived on campus at the Olympic Training Centre in Papendal, fully immersed in a high-performance environment. From there, we travelled to Italy to compete in the European Championship Qualifiers, playing at Palasport di Cisterna di Latina against Ukraine, Denmark, and Italy. Competing at this level challenged me both physically and mentally and played a huge role in my growth as an athlete and person.

Most recently, I completed another solo trip to England to compete in international scrimmages. I also received exciting news that this February our national team squad will be travelling to either Germany or Portugal, an opportunity I am incredibly grateful for and excited about.

This year brings both excitement and a sense of sadness, as it will be my final club volleyball season with Fraser Valley Volleyball Club. I get to finish this chapter alongside some of my closest friends, who are also among the best players in the country. Our entire starting lineup is made up of U SPORTS commits, with one NCAA Division I commit. We begin our season in Salt Lake City, Utah, at the annual SoCal Cup, with goals of travelling the country to win Best of the West, Provincials, and finishing the season at the most prestigious tournament - Canadian Nationals, where over 200 of the top teams compete over three days, with one team taking home the national championship title.

I would like to sincerely thank Mrs. Roselli for giving me this opportunity and platform to share my volleyball journey and successes.

God Bless,  
Torin Cole



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**Welcoming Our Community**

Located in Surrey, British Columbia, St. John Paul II Academy is a new state-of-the-art high school campus that reflects the dignity of Catholic education while offering spaces designed for community gatherings, sports, meetings, and worship. Our facilities are available for rental outside of school hours, and we are pleased to make them available for events that align with our mission and values.



**Highlights**

- Priority is always given to school activities (Mon-Fri, 7:00 a.m.–3:30 p.m.).
- External rentals require \$2–5 million liability insurance.
- Refundable security deposit of \$250–\$500 applies.
- Custodial/cleaning services may be billed separately.
- Multi-day rentals may receive a 10% discount.

| Facility                   | Hourly | Half Day | Full Day |
|----------------------------|--------|----------|----------|
| Gymnasium                  | \$150  | \$600    | \$1000   |
| Chapel (150)               | \$150  | \$400    | \$750    |
| Boardroom (25)             | \$50   | \$175    | \$325    |
| Commons / Staff Room (100) | \$100  | \$300    | \$750    |
| Outdoor Field              | \$150  | \$600    | \$1000   |



# SURREY EAGLES



# GROWING THE NEXT GENERATION OF CATHOLIC WOMEN – WHO IS DOING IT?

We are witnessing a rediscovery of true womanhood emerging, where women are seeking happiness within their relationships, their families, and within themselves. Women are reaching out to new opportunities to grow their faith, whether it be online in group chats or in-person through small meetings or larger conventions. But we must also recognize women have struggled to find their footing in a changing secular society. In 2023, Catholic author Carrie Gress wrote a book titled “The End of Women” (ISBN: 978-1-68451-529-5). She shares the history and impact of feminism and how women are increasingly dissatisfied with their lives. Data shows 70% of all divorces are initiated by women. Suicide, depression, substance abuse, and other societal ills, have increased in the past 5 decades. For such negative trends, there is light in a complex ever changing world, especially for women of faith.

This begs the questions: Who can help grow the next generation of strong Catholic women in a post Christendom world? Where should Catholic women turn for guidance, relevant resources, leadership and a community of sisterhood? Let’s look at the options available in women ministries.

## Women Ministries

Many ministry options are open to women and should be explored. However, one may find the current majority are online based with a narrow scope or focus, offer few in-person community experiences, and lack the

depth or consistency required to bolster and sustain a woman’s Catholic faith for a lifetime.

Also, many of the ministries available are headquartered in the USA and in Western Europe, where the cost to join is high (for Canadian women) due to fluctuating currency conversion rates and their events are typically located near their headquarters. In Canada, there is one which encompasses many of your expectations in one place: The Catholic Women’s League of Canada (CWL).

Do you really know CWL?

With a rich history of 100 + years of tradition and a voice for the marginalized through our resolution efforts in Ottawa, our value add proposition for members today is as strong as the women in the League.

Our focus is on 3 core purposes: Faith, Service, and Social Justice. Catholic women of all ages, show up for our purposes in different ways, backgrounds, and interests. Whether it is hosting a faith retreat or an online education webinar, or a social event like a Parish potluck or cleaning up a local beach, writing to our local MLA, we are present, eager to be involved and positively influencing our communities.

CWL value in a fractured western society Recently, an article appeared in the New York Times (as part of a series, Believing) entitled “Believing and Belonging” by Lauren Jackson, May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025. The author shared that religion offers people three B’s: Beliefs, behaviors, and Belonging (in a community or culture). Everyone wants to belong in rich, profound, and sustained ways she writes.



We often hear how people feel disconnected and alone in an increasingly “connected” virtual world and how they are now turning to faith based communities to support them. After the Pandemic, we have seen the societal impact of isolation and distancing ourselves from one another. Scripture tells us we are built for community – John 13: 34 and 35 “I give you a new commandment: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” There will always be a deep spiritual need for authentic human interaction.

Women find the true and genuine connection in the CWL. Our ladies support each other through heading to college, getting married, the birth of children and family life, and even when we lose our parents and our spouses. Mothers and daughters find shared faith, common ground and interests when participating in CWL. As you can see in action, CWL women are women supporting women throughout their lives.

Thinking about your future?

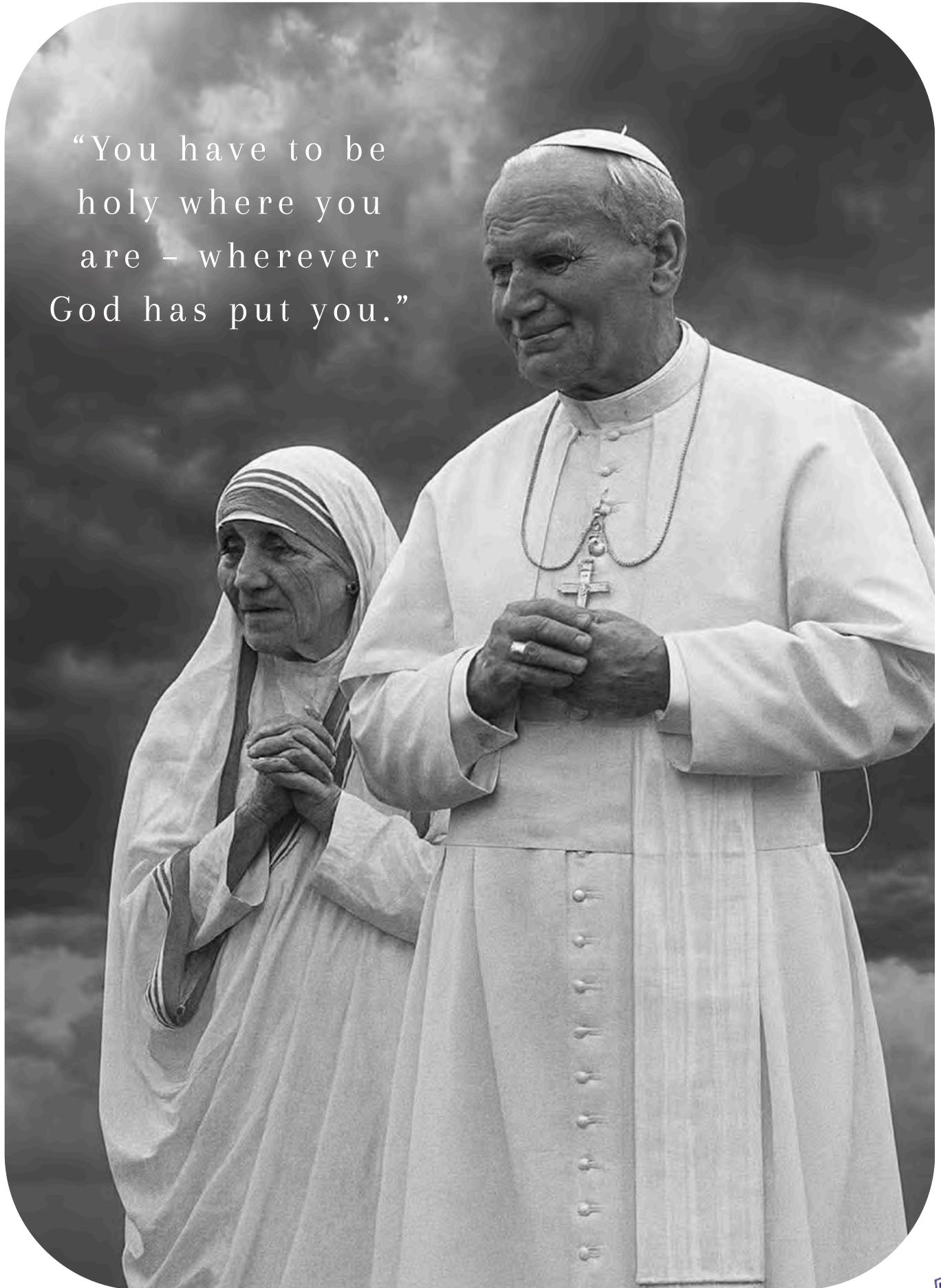
If you are a woman 16 years old and older, and you are not a CWL member, you owe it to yourself to check CWL out. If you are a mother with a teenage daughter, there are tons of benefits to having her involved in CWL – exposing her to Catholic women practicing their faith, access to bursaries, volunteering, networking, and growing a lifetime of beneficial skills.

Maybe next time you are in mass, ask the lady sitting next to you in the pew or at the social time after mass, if she is a member of CWL. You may be surprised to find you are surrounded by them. Or maybe the Holy Spirit is encouraging (or nudging you), it’s time to grow and expand your faith journey with CWL.

Please visit our national website at [www.cwl.ca](http://www.cwl.ca) OR any local Parish office for a membership form. 56 active Councils exist in the Arch Diocese of Vancouver and hundreds more across Canada. Join the CWL today.



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