

Ascension Catholic School • St. John Paul II Catholic School • St. Peter Claver Catholic School

JPII pilots early childhood program

Robust preschool will better prepare scholars for kindergarten and beyond.

The Academy's first early childhood program began this fall at St. John Paul II Catholic School.

Many ACA scholars don't have the opportunity or resources to attend a robust preschool, and they enter kindergarten lacking school-readiness skills. ACA's program meets the need for high quality, accessible early childhood education in our urban areas.

"About 80 percent of the incoming kindergartners at JPII are not prepared, with half of the class more than two years behind academically," Principal Tricia Menzhuber said. "Early childhood education provides a foundation for learning and instills a strong sense of social norms that will help children succeed in their school journey."

Another goal of the program is to build overall enrollment by serving children from age 3 through 8th grade.

In this start-up year, enrollment was limited to 10 scholars.

New tools for scholars' mental health

Many scholars experience anxiety, depression, and ADHD; during a pandemic, those mental health challenges are magnified. Family illness, job loss, unstable home lives increase the trauma Ascension Catholic Academy scholars face.

St. Peter Claver Catholic School will be better prepared to meet scholars' mental-health needs through a three-year initiative called Peace of Mind. SPC is one of 10 schools participating in the wellness initiative developed by the Catholic Schools Center of Excellence (CSCO) and Phoenix School Counseling. The program's goal is to help children and adults gain emotional confidence and grow through social emotional learning (SEL).

The benefits for SPC are:

- An on-site school counselor working one day a week.



- A Peace of Mind team to help address unique challenges.
- Funding for a middle-school retreat that builds parent-child connections and SEL skills.

In addition, all SPC staff members are receiving strategy-based instruction, practice and coaching in Peace of Mind techniques. One-on-one consultations will be available for teachers.

Families and scholars will get access to resources such as webinars, hand-outs and recommended digital applications to help build SEL skills.

This is the first time SPC has been able to make on-site counseling available for scholars, Principal Terese Shimshock said. "We are grateful for concrete tools to bolster health and balance for everyone in our school community."

INSIDE

ALUMNI PROFILE



Seleeke Flingai lets his curiosity lead him and his Ascension education guide him.

ADVANCEMENT CHIEF IS ALUM

Quentin Moore, the Academy's new Vice President for Advancement, knows the benefits of an Ascension education first hand.

SCHOOL UPDATES

A new school year brings exciting changes to all of our schools. Ascension, St. John Paul II and St. Peter Claver Principals look ahead.

Visit our website:
ACAmn.org

ST. PETER CLAVER

We are thrilled to have so many exciting updates to share as we begin a new school year!

TWO KINDERGARTEN ROOMS

We have enrolled so many kindergartners that we needed to open another classroom. Because there always is uncertainty and movement during the first month of school, our enrollment numbers aren't published until Oct. 1. However, it's clear that word is spreading about our school.

Increased enrollment in elementary grades also is allowing us to offer single-grade classrooms this fall. For the past few years, we have combined 1/2 and 3/4; this year each grade has its own teacher and classroom.



NEW CHAPLAIN

Fr. Joseph Gifford is the new pastor of St. Peter Claver Catholic Church and our new school chaplain. Fr. Grifford came to us from All Saints in Lakeville and is



SPC scholars learned wilderness skills and ecosystem connections from Friends of the Boundary Waters, another new partner for our school.

looking forward to teaching our scholars, especially the middle schoolers. "They have a tendency to ask the most frank questions, and I appreciate that," Father said.

SISTER SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

Parishioners from St. Jude of the Lake in Mahtomedi spent many hours on a summer Saturday completing yard work, painting and doing odd jobs to spruce up our campus.

In addition, Fr. Chad VanHoose (who was one of the volunteers) presented us with a large financial gift raised by parishioners.

I am meeting with Principial Carrie Hackman to discuss how our scholars can build relationships, and we are excited about growing our partnership!

Terese Shimshock, Principal

ST. JOHN PAUL II

In addition to piloting an Early Childhood Learning program, the JPPI staff is excited to be launching a new program for Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports based on the slogan "Be a SAINT." Traits we are reinforcing:

- **Stewardship:** Taking care of people, places, things.
- **Accountability:** Taking responsibility for our actions.
- **Imitating Christ:** Striving to be like Christ in all we do.
- **Nobility:** Practicing Christian virtue.
- **Tenacity:** Putting in the work required; not giving up.

You will hear more about the program and its results!

Tricia Menzhuber, Principal

ASCENSION

After more years than she cares to remember as Phy Ed teacher, Jean Cerisier is now Assistant Principal. Her skills in relating to scholars and families will serve her well in her new job!

The first year implementation of our new English Language Arts curriculum went extremely well. This school year, we will be implementing our new math curriculum, enVision. Not only did our K-8 teachers pick the same math curriculum at Ascension, but all three Academy schools selected enVision for all grades too! We look forward to learning from each other as we move forward.

Benito Matias, Principal

SELEEKE FLINGAI

Following curiosity to opportunity

Curiosity helped Seleeke Flingai get where he is today: Doing research and advocacy around criminal justice reform. He credits the time he spent at Ascension Catholic School as his guiding force.

“Ascension, more than any other place, gave me the moral framework that has guided all of my career decisions,” he said. “It helped me see where I fit in the world. If I had not gone to Ascension, I don’t know what views I would have prioritized.”



Seleeke came to Ascension as a kindergartner, graduated in 2003 and got his high school diploma from Totino-Grace.

He surprised even himself when he was accepted at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). “I thought I was going to go to the University of Minnesota or Wisconsin,” he said. “MIT was a moon-shot school.”

At the time, he wanted to be a video game developer but ended up teaching himself programming with information he found online. He considered psychology and philosophy, eventually getting his degree in neuroscience. He worked as a researcher throughout his time at MIT.

Again, his curiosity led the way. “I wanted to solve puzzles, and that’s how I viewed research.” He went on to earn a doctoral degree in Cellular and Molecular Biology with a Certificate in Public Health at the University of Pennsylvania, and a master’s degree in Public Affairs at Princeton.

“I had to ask myself, how do I have the impact I want to have?” Seleeke said. “Going to MIT gave me the



Seleeke Flingai in kindergarten, left, and today.

privilege to dream big.”

In his work as Research Associate at the Vera Institute of Justice, he studies racial disparities in criminal justice and advocates for reduced incarceration. The work is rewarding, frustrating and tiring, yet he feels a strong moral purpose: “You’re in it, mentally, every day, dealing with discouragement,” Seleeke said. “It takes a mental toll, but I wouldn’t feel comfortable doing anything else.

“It never crossed my mind to choose a field just because I could make a lot of money.”

The staff at Ascension loves the scholars. “They gave me the opportunity to really believe in my abilities,” he said. “Teachers were nothing but supportive.”

His hope for today’s scholars is that they fully own what they want to do. “There are a lot of supportive pressures you should lean into rather than the negative pressures,” he said. “Even if you don’t see people like you who are doing something, you can still do it.”

And, above all, develop curiosity. “Feeding that can lead to so many great opportunities.”

From scholar to board member to VP of Advancement

Quentin Moore has come full circle from being a scholar at Ascension Catholic School to working as the Vice President of Advancement for Ascension Catholic Academy.

Quentin grew up in North Minneapolis. He and his two younger siblings graduated from Ascension School. After receiving a diploma from DeLaSalle High School, Quentin studied at the University of St. Thomas, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in



Advertising, Public Relations and Applied Communication as well as a Mini MBA in Non-Profit Management.

He developed his fundraising expertise in roles at the Penumbra Theater, YMCA of the North and Director of Development at Project for Pride in Living. He began his job at the Academy in June.

“I see Ascension Catholic Academy and its schools as our scholars’ home away from home,” Quentin said. “Scholars learn academically, and they’re able to grow socially and emotionally. Most importantly, they are continually reminded that they are loved and made in the image of God – that they matter.”

Quentin lives in North Minneapolis with his wife, Janae, and their daughter, Charlotte.

He is on the board of Association of Fundraising Professionals – (AFP-MN) and is a Vice-Chair for the Aquatennial Ambassador Organization. Quentin also has served for more than two years on the Ascension Catholic Academy board of directors and its Advancement Committee.



ASCENSION
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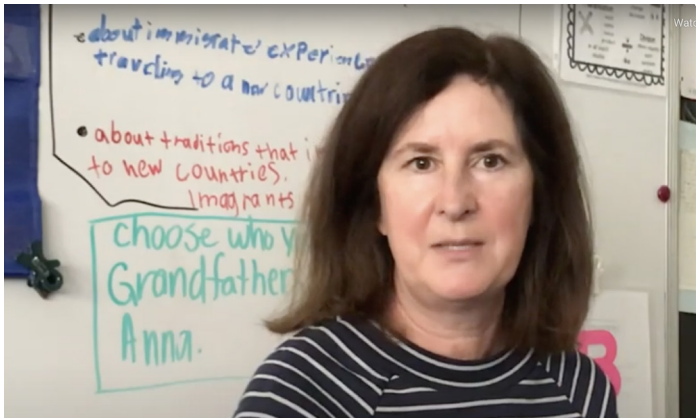
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VOLUNTEERS



"It's one of those volunteering things where if you give a little, you get so much back in return."

— Mary Underwood

Scan the code to read more about our volunteers or go to ACAmn.org/volunteer



Reading tutor is making a difference at St. John Paul II

Mary Underwood has helped scholars learn to read for five years as a volunteer at St. John Paul II.

"I've done a lot of volunteering over the years, and this is my favorite thing I have done because I feel like I am working individually, making a difference," Mary said. JPPII is a unique place where scholars learn more than academics. They learn skills such as how to greet each other and how to help others, she said

"I really enjoy the opportunity to be one-on-one with the children," Mary said, "and to watch them progress through the year." After working with 1st graders, she moved to 2nd and 3rd grade during the last school year. She has been impressed with the ability of JPPII teachers to keep scholars focused on learning.

The one day a week she spends at JPPII is a great gift, she said. "It's one of those volunteering things where if you give a little, you get so much back in return."

Interested in volunteering? Contact Margaret Conroy, mconroy@ACAmn.org or 763.760.3928