

# St. Mary Magdalen Catholic School

## 2025 NEWSLETTER

Dear Friends in Christ,

These are exciting days at Saint Mary Magdalen School. Our students are happy and thriving in many spiritual, academic, athletic, and artistic pursuits. The sounds of recess, music practice, and instruction fill our campus. Our school is a lively community, and I am privileged to be a part of it as pastor.

This work, as you know, does not just happen. It requires the collaboration of parents and the cooperation of students. In a particular way, the good work of our school only takes place through the dedication of our amazing faculty and staff, who have in our principal, Mrs. Amy Bauer, a gifted educational leader. Deacon Joe's administrative support and calm spiritual presence are also a major part of our success. To these and many others, I express my profound thanks.

There is still much work to do. Our school is a vibrant Catholic community, but I believe there is room to grow in this area. Our physical space is beautiful, and our academic programs are impressive, but in these areas, our School Board is constantly striving for more. For this reason, we rely on the key collaboration of a circle of friends—grandparents, parishioners, and other community members—who support the work of our school spiritually, financially, and in many other ways.



In reading this newsletter, I hope you will find that our mission is worth supporting and that our future is bright. If you agree, I would be grateful for any support you can offer to this great work.

May the Lord  
grant you peace!

—Father Eric Banecker



## In Word & Deed

### Teacher Earns Praise for Literacy

In January, **Miss Erica Braunlinger**, M.Ed., a fourth-grade teacher at St. Mary Magdalen, received word that she was selected to be among those on a prestigious list from the *International Literacy Association (ILA)*. The non-profit organization announced Erica as one of its '**30 Under 30**' in 2025.

The ILA highlights emerging leaders transforming literacy education and promoting equity in classrooms, communities, and beyond.

This distinction only occurs every two years and celebrates 30 young professionals across twelve countries whose commitment significantly impacts literacy and education.

"Literacy is more than a skill; it's a pathway to opportunity, equity, and empowerment," said ILA Executive Director Nicola Wedderburn.

At only twenty-four years of age, Miss Braunlinger is making her mark by driving innovation and advocating for accessible and inclusive learning experiences for her students. As a St. Joseph's University student, she organized a literacy event as Alpha Upsilon Alpha's ILA president.

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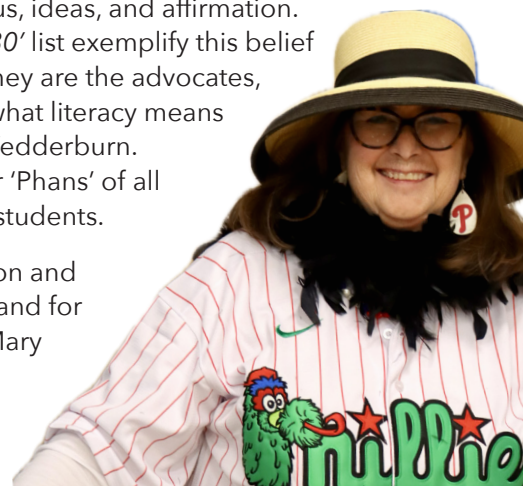
## Teacher Earns Praise for Literacy Work

Today, she addresses phonemic awareness deficits heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on phonology, orthography, and morphology. Miss Braunlinger also serves on the ELA Curriculum Team for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Additionally, she serves as a member of the National Council of Teachers in English, where she reviews and writes book rationales based on how they can be implemented into curricula. Miss Braunlinger is her students' number one fan, saying, "When I see the light bulb go off in their minds when they understand a concept, it makes me feel proud." As a lifelong skill, reading offers numerous benefits, including improved brain function, reduced stress, increased knowledge, enhanced empathy, better vocabulary, comprehension, and writing skills. Plus, it helps to promote better sleep and can even contribute to a longer lifespan.

## We're 'Phanatics' about Literacy and Reading

In addition, Miss Erica Braunlinger is also an active member of the Phillies' *Phanatic About Reading* program. Due to her commitment and her fourth-graders being active and diligent readers, the Phillies celebrated their achievement by sending the Phanatic himself to SMM for a special assembly in February for the entire school. Everyone enjoyed the antics, and some participated in the ensemble, including Miss Braunlinger, Principal Amy Bauer, and Maureen Scheuerman, who portrayed the Phanatic's mom. The *Phanatic About Reading* program presented by Xfinity is a free program that encourages students in grades Pre-K through 8 to read or be read to for a minimum of 15 minutes a day to improve their literacy skills. In addition, teachers have students use a reading log to track how often they are reading. Groups like the International Literacy Association and Phillies' *Phanatic About Reading* initiatives, along with many dedicated educators and parents, come together to directly impact young minds through their focus, ideas, and affirmation. "The young leaders on our '30 Under 30' list exemplify this belief through their groundbreaking work. They are the advocates, educators, and innovators redefining what literacy means in an ever-changing world," remarks Wedderburn. We could not agree more or be bigger 'Phans' of all our outstanding teachers, faculty, and students.

We congratulate Erica for her dedication and service to literacy, Catholic education, and for her devotion to all the students at St. Mary Magdalen School. Way to go!





## Pennies for a Cause

A friendly competition, dubbed 'Penny Wars,' was part of the school's February service projects for students. They participated in the contest across four levels (*Pre-K, Kindergarten through Second, Third through Fifth, and Sixth through Eighth*) to determine which team level would collect the most pennies. To enhance the rivalry and fun, pennies and bills added team points based on their face values, while 'silver' coins placed into competitors' buckets deducted points based on their face values. This kindness 'war' resulted in a win-win since all the collected currencies benefited a cause close to our SMM hearts—***Bringing Hope Home***. This non-profit organization was founded by parishioner **Paul Isenberg** in 2008. His vision and mission provide Unexpected Amazingness® to local families with cancer through financial and emotional support. Through its 'Light of Hope Family Program,' ***Bringing Hope Home*** offers one-time financial assistance to cover essential household bills for families with a loved one battling cancer. So far, they have assisted over 10,000 families. Paul's first wife, Nicole, endured six years of intense chemotherapy and two bone marrow transplants. Her fight ended in 2003, but her legacy lives on through the exceptional work done every day in her honor. Through his family's very personal experience, Paul recognized the unmet need for financial and emotional support for those undergoing life-saving cancer treatments. That is when Paul and co-founder Tim Sherry decided to begin ***Bringing Hope Home*** to address this vital necessity faced by so many families. Josslyn Savko, a seventh grader, understands the importance of caring for others, declaring, "The Penny Wars were fun, and the best part was that it raised money for a good cause."

I appreciate the fact that I get the opportunity to give to others  
and make a positive impact on other people's lives.

— Lily Lake, 8th Grade

The students rallied and collected \$3,395.50, which began on January 27 and ended appropriately on Valentine's Day. When the ***Bringing Hope Home*** representative came to pick up the donation, she declared, "This is unbelievable! I don't think we have ever broken \$1,000 on Penny Wars." Mrs. Bauer remarked, "Thanks to all our students, parents, and teachers for rallying to meet this challenge and for your beautiful spirit of giving. Congratulations to the Pre-K classes—our big Penny War winners! It appears no one wanted to 'sabotage' the little ones."



MLK Day of Service



The Giving Tree



Thanksgiving Baskets





# Care Like Christ

As Catholics, we want our children to know they are called to serve and care for others as disciples of Jesus. This foundation is at the heart of our beliefs and is self-evident throughout the school. Our students are always eager to participate in community service. With the heart of this in mind and with the assistance and blessing of Father Eric, Mrs. Bauer established the **Community Service Corps** (CSC) for middle-school students during her second year as principal. This program provides more opportunities for students to grow in faith and service. Students began with 'Churches and Cheesesteaks' on November 1, with Fr. Eric guiding the tour around Philadelphia, which included several churches and lunch at the Reading Terminal Market. Mrs. Bauer added, "During the year, the students have visited St. Edmond's Home for Children and Divine Providence Village (twice), and they have taken the lead with SMM's monthly stewardship projects. CSC members were invaluable with this year's Christmas Giving Tree and preparing the blankets for **Project Linus**."

"I like that we do most of our stewardship projects with our Prayer Partners, which gives us a chance to bond with other students we would not usually get to work with and be leaders for them."

—Tessa Mersch, 8th Grade

In tandem with CSC, each month, the school collaborates to support the needs of others around our community. In addition to the **Penny Wars** project, some of the service works undertaken this year included making breakfast bags for the **Connelly House**, creating blankets for child patients for **Project Linus**, a 'Pajama Day' fundraiser for **CHOP**, a 'Cereal Box' collection for **Catholic Social Services**, and the Thanksgiving Baskets and Giving Tree benefited many non-profit groups in the area. With a special affection to aid those affected by the fire at **St. Francis of Assisi School** in Springfield, students and their families collected donations to help SFA's efforts to rebuild their school. On MLK Day, many students, faculty, and parents came to school to make PB&J sandwiches and collected diapers to benefit the **Amnion Pregnancy Care Medical Center**. Mrs. Bauer summed it all up, saying, "According to Pope Francis, 'Our life spreads light when it is given in service.' Serving others is the hallmark of our Catholic faith. Providing these opportunities for our students and watching them put their faith into action is one of the best parts of my job. We are helping to shape Catholic leaders who will hopefully share their faith and kindness with others throughout their lives."

## CYO Photo Finishes



Sr. Girls at Penn Relays

On April 24, Alexis D., Maggie M., Keira S., and Kate K. won Penn Relays' Sr. Girls 4 x 100 at Franklin Field in Philadelphia with a finish time of 52.84! Congratulations to these amazing girls and the track and field team.



Varsity Boys' Basketball

Congratulations to our Varsity Boys' Basketball team, coaches, and families on placing third in the state this winter. We could not be more proud of thier efforts.



At the start of the new school year, and for the third time in four years, St. Mary Magdalen recieved the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's School of Distinguished Instruction for Growth and Exceeding Potential based on Terra Nova test scores.



## Scientific Method Guides Discovery

Beginning in September, all middle-school students engage in the Scientific Method by selecting a topic of interest to explore and test through a hands-on project. This process culminates during Catholic Schools Week at the end of January with its annual science fair, judged by volunteers within our SMM community. Project topics span a variety of scientific fields, including chemistry, botany, physics, consumer science, and more. Maureen Clark, Academic Resource Coordinator for the school adds, "The science fair has become a cherished SMM tradition—one that continues to foster essential skills such as organization, time management, research, data analysis, formal writing, collaboration, and a deep sense of pride in one's work."

This year, twelve student projects advanced to the Delaware County Science Fair at the Aston Community Center, where they competed against top entries from Catholic and non-Catholic schools across the county. Of those, four were recognized for excellence, and two moved on to the Delaware Valley Science Fair in Oaks, PA: **Mary Henry**, 8th grade, with *"Can You Handle the Heat?"* and **Carson Victoria**, 7th grade, with *"Captivating Curds."* Carson earned third place from the American Chemical Society Delaware Section for a project that "aligns with their mission to advance the broader chemistry enterprise and its practitioners for the benefit of Earth and its people." Congratulations to all our middle-school students for their hard work and dedication.

## Religion Bee Finalist

The school was abuzz during Catholic Schools Week when **Brady Sirkin**, 7th grade, competed in the Religion Bee against eighteen fellow students in grades four through eight to demonstrate his knowledge in theology. He beat the stiff competition at St. Mary's and then went on to the Regional Religion Bee at Cardinal O'Hara, where he placed in the top six. Afterward, he advanced to the Diocesan Religion Bee at the Shrine of St. John Neumann, where he placed second against twelve other students across the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Quite the inspired effort!

*A special note of thanks to our content contributors: Fr. Eric Banecker, Amy Bauer, Maureen Clark, Maryanne Amalfitano, Meggie Gribbin, Erica Braunlinger, Deacon Joe Boyle, Jessica Savko, and the school and parish staff. — Kerry Boyle*



The Class of 2025



Brady S. and Carson V.



## Alumni Spotlight



SMM Class of 2014

In November, Grace Grassi reached out to her fellow SMM alumni from the Class of 2014 who had returned to town for the upcoming holiday. Almost the entire class was able to get together in Media for a very special reunion celebrating 10 years.

Have alumni news? Share the details with us at [alumni@stmarymagdalen.net](mailto:alumni@stmarymagdalen.net).

# St. Mary Magdalen Catholic School Donors

# 2024

Through your generous donations to the **Annual School Fund**, we will secure the legacy and sustainability of an invaluable Catholic education for our children today and into the future. We raised **\$1,154,787** over the past fiscal year. We thank God for your generous hearts! We are grateful to all our **Annual School Fund Donors** and **Legacy of Love Gala Donors** (\$726,800) donors, which includes the following donors who gave \$250 or more:

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*Gifts of \$20,000+*

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Gifts of \$250 to \$499

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*Gifts listed were donated from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024 in excess of \$250+, cumulatively.  
This list includes our 2024 School Gala gifts. We are grateful to our many supporters and donors.*

## The Little Mermaid, Jr.

After the very successful debut of the Theater Club's first production, *Seussical, Jr.*, which we featured in last year's newsletter, we are delighted to announce the Theater Club will present ***The Little Mermaid, Jr.*** in May. The talented student cast and crew of 125 is ready to make a splash in what is sure to be a marvel for the eyes and ears as Ariel, Prince Eric, Flounder, Scuttle, and all her companions take to the stage in Fr. Hughes Hall from Friday, May 16 to Sunday, May 18. Once again, under the care of co-directors, **Mrs. Meggie Gribbon and Mrs. Katie Knee**, children in Kindergarten through 8th grade will sing and dance their way into the hearts of every audience member. While most shows are sold out, a limited number of tickets remain for the **Saturday, May 17 Matinee at 2 PM**. Don't miss your chance to be part of the magic!

**Dive Under the Sea with SMM Theater!** For ticket inquiries, please contact Meggie or Katie at [theater@stmarymagdalen.net](mailto:theater@stmarymagdalen.net).



The Theater Club's The Little Mermaid in Rehearsal



## Ways to Give

Through generous donations to the **Annual School Fund**, we secure the legacy and sustainability of an invaluable Catholic education at St. Mary Magdalen for our children now and in the future. You can make an impact through the School Fund or by directing gifts to the **Endowment Fund, Academic Program and Merit Scholarships, Legacy and Planned Giving, Sponsor-A-Student, EITC Program in PA, Named Gifts, In Memory and Honor Donations**, as well as **Employee Match Program** options offered by some companies.

We are so appreciative of the many parents, parishioners, alumni, faculty, staff, volunteers, and friends for their spiritual and financial gifts, which enable us to fulfill our vital mission in Catholic education.

To give the gift of faith and education at SMM, scan the QR Code below, visit 'giving' at **[stmarymagdalenschool.com](http://stmarymagdalenschool.com)**, or contact our parish office. Any gift no matter the size is much appreciated and vital to our mission's continued success.





The God Squad



## The God Squad

This year's *ManUp Philly*, a faith-based event that empowers men to live out their Christian faith, definitely produced fruit on our campus! Some of our Magdalen Football team enjoyed attending the event and met one of the renowned Philadelphia Eagles players—**Brian Dawkins**! He spoke to the crowd about his journey towards the will of our Lord. Brian talked of humility as “power under control.” Brian’s testimony was a deeply powerful witness for the boys.

Seventh-grader **Carson Victoria** heard the presenters’ words and took to heart the gathering’s mission: “Go out, lead, and become missionary disciples to your family, friends, and cohorts.” After reflecting on the mission of *ManUp Philly*, Carson felt a spiritual need for a middle school Gospel reflection group. It was a moment when the Holy Spirit was truly at work. Soon after, he and twenty schoolmates joined to form **The God Squad (TGS)**. In their own words, TGS is a “group of young men who, through Christian living, prayer, group discussions, community service, and fun, hope to realize God’s plan for their lives.”

The God Squad meets during the academic year on Mondays after school from 3:15 PM to 4:15 PM. Each meeting begins with a prayer and a pledge to honor the dignity and respect of every club member. Following this, there is an activity centered on living out the Gospel. Typically, small and large group discussions accompany the activity. The meeting concludes with a prayer, during which members set their goals for the next gathering.

Recently, TGS shared what their time together has meant to them. Here are a few quotes:

**“I enjoy how everyone has a different perspective about the Gospel and how everyone sharing makes it feel complete.”**

**“TGS is a place where we can be holy together and learn about God. When TGS does its best, God will do the rest.”**

**“TGS is a very passionate group of guys eager to learn about Jesus. We have a strong connection with each other. At the end of every class meeting, we pray for everything we need, want, and care about.”**

**“TGS is a place where I can be holy and share my emotions. It makes me feel comfortable with Jesus and with others.”**