

# Soaring Eagles



A newsletter for parents, alumni, and friends of  
St. John the Evangelist School of Clinton, Md.

**NEWS**

**VOL. 1, ISSUE 1 | Fall 2025**

## From the Pastor



Dear Parents, Alumni and Friends,  
Welcome to the 2025-2026 school year, and this new newsletter that we're publishing to connect you to our parish school, St. John the Evangelist School in Clinton.

I am a priest of the Archdiocese of Washington ordained in 1997, and this is my third year at St. John's. I have served several parishes during my priestly ministry, and I also served as priest chaplain of the Sisters of Mary, who serve the poor in several countries.

By the grace of God, we're seeing a renewed interest in our school. Our enrollment has increased to 280 students (PK3-8th grade), in part due to the closure of St. Philip the Apostle School in Camp Springs in June. "Anchored in Hope" is the

theme of the school year for the Archdiocese of Washington, and we are certainly hopeful this academic year.

This is also the second year of our principal, Mrs. Sarah Bento, who was a vice principal in Calvert County before joining our school. Working with Mrs. Bento and our staff and contractors, we've spruced up our school this summer, including installing a new, prominent school sign and creating a middle school wing in our school building.

We are honoring the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters from Scranton with a plaque on our school grounds, very much indebted to them for their decades of service.

The complexion of our student may have changed from previous decades, but our mission has not changed. We are serving young people from Clinton and surrounding areas, many of whom are parish children.

Through the spirit of solidarity, we welcome you to partner with us during this school year and beyond, whether you are interested in volunteering, considering enrolling your children or grandchildren, or working with us. During the upcoming months,

you can plan to read in this newsletter about our school, both past and present, and underlying the content will be the rationale for why you should partner with us.

Some of you might also consider giving to St. John the Evangelist School. We are proactively seeking resources. In addition to financial aid from the Archdiocese of Washington and the BOOST program in the State of Maryland, we are applying for grants and beginning to work towards increasing giving to our school. Our children and families deserve your support, in any way that you can share your time, talents, and treasures.

We are in Ordinary Time in the Catholic Church's liturgical calendar, but the end of the year is right around the corner, to be followed by Advent. This is also a Jubilee Year in the Church, a special time marked by an increased focus on practices such as pilgrimages and the forgiveness of debts, as ways to draw closer to God.

Whether you are near or far, please know you're in my prayers. I welcome you to visit our parish for Mass, if you're not doing so already.

**Fr. Daniel Leary**

## From the Principal



We are pleased to share with you the very first edition of our St. John the Evangelist School alumni newsletter!

Our school continues to flourish, and this growth is a testament to the dedication, support, and prayers of our cherished alumni. Recently, our staff had the joy of meeting with some of the founding Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Their presence was a

powerful reminder that so many of the traditions they began still thrive in our school today.

Catholic life remains vibrant at St. John's. Each day begins with prayer, and every class attends daily Mass once a week. Once a month, we celebrate a school-wide Mass, with different classes taking turns leading as readers, ushers, and gift bearers. New this year, we have provided every student and staff member with a subscription to the Hallow app—an incredible resource filled with prayers, sacred music, and stories of the saints to deepen our faith life.

We also look forward to many beloved traditions, such as May Crowning, Living Stations, and the Living Rosary. This year, our 8th grade students will present the Glorious Mysteries, dramatizing each meditation to help bring the rosary to life for the younger grades.

In October, we will host a school-

wide Faith Rally, centered on the theme: *"Hope does not disappoint"* (Romans 5:5). The day will include Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, and faith-based activities that help our students grow in their relationship with Christ.

Sacramental life is strong at our school. Last year, 21 students received First Reconciliation and First Communion, while 11 students were Confirmed. Two students entered the Catholic Church, and this year, the father of one of those students plans to follow in their footsteps. These moments of conversion are a powerful testament to the mission we live each day—to form *citizen-disciples of Jesus Christ*.

As you reflect on your own time at St. John's, we ask that you continue to pray for our staff, students, and their families. Choosing Catholic education is a worthy and meaningful sacrifice. Your ongoing support makes it possible for us to carry forward this vital mission with hope and joy.

**Mrs. Sarah Bento**

## Class of 2025 graduation



June 2, 2025. St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church Clinton, Md.

# New Teacher Roundup

*As St. John the Evangelist's enrollment has surged to 280 students. Principal Sarah Bento has hired several new teachers. They bring a broad array of experiences, with these new staff members born in three different countries, with two new teachers having international teaching experience. We will introduce these teachers over the next two issues. Here are the first four:*



**Mrs. Chantel Wynn-Banks** (First Grade) is teaching 27 students this school year, after teaching at the elementary level at St. Philip the Apostle School in Camp Springs. She enrolled her daughter as a PK3 teacher at St. Philip's in 2016, and she

came to work at the school after several years as a very involved parent and volunteer.

Mrs. Wynn-Banks grew up in Maryland and the District of Columbia, earning a bachelor's degree in Accounting at University of the District of Columbia.

"I love it," she said of St. John the Evangelist School. She describes the staff and parents at the school as "super nice" and she appreciates how the school is run.

She would like to become a certified teacher within 18 months.



**Ms. Kameron Dreher** (Middle School Social Studies) comes to St. John's after working at Bishop McNamara High School in Forestville, her alma mater, for five years. She earned a bachelor's degree from Salisbury University in

International Studies with a minor in Regional Studies of the Middle East, during a time when she was really intrigued by the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

She initially taught journalism at McNamara as a Moreau Fellow, a one-year appointment designed to encourage alumni who are considering educational careers. After being hired as a full-time staff member, she taught Western Civilization at McNamara. She also taught English in Korea for 13 months to children from 7 to 13 years old.

Born in Atlanta and raised in Upper Marlboro, where she attended St. Mary of the Assumption School, she appreciates how St. John's tries to help "families feel heard," including holding Back to School Night events in both English and Spanish. She likes how parishioners attend the School Mass.



**Ms. Terita Jones** (4th/5th Grade Math) is a paraeducator who began her educational work in 2016 as an aftercare worker and substitute teacher at St. Mary's School in Landover Hills. From 2022 to 2025, she served as a second grade paraprofessional there.

She works with students in small groups in Reading and Math. "I'm like Nike: I just do it," she said of teaching.

Born in Washington, DC, she has lived in Maryland for 50 years and finds herself making the sign of the cross while praying in her Baptist church, showing the influence of Catholic practices on her faith life.



**Ms. Samantha Potthast** (Middle School Math) has earned a bachelor's degree in World History from University of Maryland College Park, in addition to a master's in International Relations from American University.

She comes to St. John's after working in global security and international relations in the corporate world.

She began to look for career alternatives after finding her work from home arrangement dissatisfying and evaluating how artificial intelligence could result in less of a personnel need in the areas she worked in.

She discerned that she enjoys working with children and as a practicing Catholic, supports the mission and purpose of Catholic schools. Born in Ukraine and adopted by a Catholic family, she graduated from Archbishop Spaulding High School in Severn, Md. Her family is very supportive of Catholic education, with a few generations of males in the family having graduated from Loyola Blakefield, a prep school in Towson.

"We hold them to a high standard," she said of St. John the Evangelist and its work with students, including its 86 middle schoolers. The stamp system for demerits, for example, helps to encourage positive student behavior in school. "I've got really good kids here."

# School's development director provides stability



In 1997, when Mrs. Mary Jane Harris was looking for a change of pace, she came to work at St. John the Evangelist School.

After working for 21 years for Prince Georges County, with her final position a lead budget analyst for the Child Support Office, she had decided to resign her position, since she felt that the county leadership was increasingly hiring political supporters to take important positions, enabling career civil servants less opportunity. On April 9, 2007, her husband's 50th birthday, Mrs. Harris submitted her resignation, effective June 30.

Since she had worked for four days a week for the county, this gave her a fifth day (Friday) to volunteer at St. John the Evangelist School, helping with budgeting and accounts payable. By the 1997-1998 school year, her children Carly (Sixth Grade) and Dean (Third Grade) were making their way through the parish school.

Sister Jean Louise Bachetti, IHM, principal, then hired Mrs. Harris to become director of development at St. John the Evangelist School. She continued working in budgeting, paying the school's bills, and she added grant applications to her job duties, with a mixture of foundation grants and State of Maryland grants.

Over the years, Mrs. Harris came to apply for State of Maryland Textbook grants, in addition to the Aging Building Fund, Safety grants, and the BOOST scholarship program for low-income families.

As the years passed, she took on tuition collections responsibilities, as well as the aftercare program. She initially used Excel spreadsheets to track tuition payments, and in 2014, the school started using the TADS tuition management system. During this period, she also took over admissions responsibilities for St. John the Evangelist School.

She also took over responsibility for facilities management of the school building.

"Over the course of time, the job evolved," Mrs. Harris said.

For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, St. John the Evangelist School benefited from a school supplies grant, in addition to the CARES program, and Paycheck Protection Program loans.

Like other staff members, parents, and students, Mrs. Harris had to deal with uncertain times, such as the Beltway Sniper saga, when ten seemingly random people were killed over three weeks in October 2002, with one shooting taking place in Clinton. The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 were also a cause of anxiety because of the school's proximity to Joint Base Andrews.

"I've seen a lot of changes (at the school)," she said.

She initially came to live in Clinton with her family in 1972, after being born and raised in Capitol Heights and later District Heights.

Having served under five principals, Mrs. Harris is now the longest serving employee at St. John's, and her son serves as a

lawyer in Pennsylvania, while her daughter is a fourth grade teacher with Frederick County Public Schools. With both of her children married, she has four grandchildren.

She shows up to work at 6 a.m. four days a week (Monday through Thursday), working until 4:00 p.m. While she takes off Fridays, usually to spend with her grandchildren, she oftentimes comes to the school on Saturday or Sunday to oversee the work of contractors on the school building.

With 282 students enrolled, St. John the Evangelist School is in the strongest position since she started to work at the school, with the enrollment peaking during the last four years. The school has managed to at least break even with its budget 25 of the last 27 years, she noted.

Although she confesses to not being able to speak "a lick of Spanish," she has partnered effectively with Mrs. Ady Hoffens, an employee of the school for 11 years who handles admissions for Spanish-speaking families.

Even as the school's enrollment has increased, Mrs. Harris, Mrs. Hoffens, and Ms. Loreli Martin, school librarian, who assists them, have been able to keep uncollected tuition amounts low, with only \$9,000 in uncollected tuition last school year.

Mrs. Harris credits her office's keeping in touch with families through the phone and email and relying less on TADS' tech tools with the high rate of tuition collection. Her personal touch can be seen every day, as she tends to call students "Hon," and chats with parents in the afternoon car pickup line, remembering the names of young alumni who stop by the school.

# St. John's alumnus is a local music education leader



Growing up at St. John the Evangelist Church in Clinton, Terry N. Eberhardt '90 was shaped forever by his experiences going to Mass and receiving the sacraments.

"We had the seventh row, left side," he recalls, remembering going to Mass with his mother, two of his brothers, and his grandmothers. "That was the Eberhardt row." His mother sang in the church choir, and he later joined while he was a student at DeMatha Catholic High School in Hyattsville. "Family and God were an important part of my upbringing," he said.

His childhood memories include former pastors Fr. David A. Bava and Fr. Ray Schmidt. He remembers the parish music director, Doug Sorensen, as well as his wife, Connie, who was cantor and also music teacher at St. John the Evangelist School. He remembers the Bull Roast, not to mention the hymns in Mass, from "Here I Am," "Taste And See," and his mother's favorite, "Trust In the Lord."

He attended the parish school for two years, and he remembers Sister Ignatius, his religion teacher, in addition to Connie Sorensen, his music teacher, as well as the late

John B. Leishear, Sr., his middle school English teacher and eighth grade homeroom teacher.

He initially attended DeMatha on a percussion scholarship, even though he jokes about his lack of drumming ability. Eberhardt immersed himself into Stag life, active in the Black Student Union, Campus Ministry, and Student Government, in addition to the school band and two choirs. On many weekdays, he would spend 14 hours a day on campus, from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.

He later matriculated from Peabody Institute in Baltimore, where he studied voice and also earned a master's degree in opera performance from University of Maryland College Park.

Eberhardt taught for 15 years in middle schools and high schools in Howard County and Montgomery County.

He has served as music director at St. Louis Parish in Clarksville, Md. In Howard County, since 2019. Eberhardt worked as music director at Little Flower Parish in Bethesda from 2014 to 2019, hired by longtime pastor, Rev. Msgr. Peter J. Vaghi. Eberhardt had no intention of leaving Church of the Little Flower, but St. Louis' then pastor, Rev. Msgr. Joseph L. Luca, came calling and made a compelling offer to work at a parish much closer to the family home in Ellicott City.

Earlier, Eberhardt served as music director at Immaculate Conception Parish in Washington, D.C., with much of his time coinciding with that leadership of Rev. Msgr.

James Watkins, who was pastor of Immaculate Conception then.

Since 2014, Eberhardt has directed music instruction at Howard County Public Schools, overseeing music instruction at 77 schools with 56,000 students and more than 200 music teachers. Eberhardt is involved with setting the music curriculum, as well as budgeting, staffing, and evaluations. He thinks that music education and the arts are valued in Howard County.

He serves as executive director for the Denyce Graves Foundation, a non-profit named for the African-American mezzo-soprano that seeks to honor overlooked musical voices and empower the next generation of world-class artists.

He also serves as associate artistic director of Young Artists of America, a summer program serving nearly 300 students that launched 11 years ago with campuses at Our Lady of Good Counsel High School in Olney, University of Maryland Baltimore County, and University of Maryland College Park.

One of the reasons why the camp is his "favorite five weeks of the year," is that he can work more directly with students through it.

As if these activities didn't make him busy enough, Eberhardt also has a recording studio, Red Bridge Studio, in Savage Mill.

"I'm probably the luckiest person," Eberhardt said. He enjoys doing what he's doing, and he and his wife have been married since 2010, and they have sons who are 11, 8 and 4 years old.

# Young alumnus starts Arlington restaurant

It was his family that got *Jesse S. Correa '12* involved in the restaurant business.

At the behest of his future father-in-law, Correa opened Mpanadas, a fusion empanada and coffee restaurant on Columbia Pike in June 2023 in the Penrose neighborhood of Arlington, Va. Jesse married Paola Herbas in March 2024, and they operate the restaurant with one of Paola's cousins, Gabriela.

Empanadas are baked or fried pastries with a filling. Practically every country in Central and South America has some version of this food, although not all countries call it an empanada, according to Correa. Some also think there is a similarity between samosas and empanadas.

Working with his family, Correa came up with empanada recipes he thought would appeal to Americans. The restaurant also offers handcrafted coffees and gourmet paletas.

The restaurant business is very challenging, with a high failure rate, since it is hard to translate a great idea into a profitable business. During its first 30 days, Mpanadas had more than \$80,000 in sales, during a "crazy opening month," according to Correa, but the number sharply declined in the following months, as a result of a two-year nearby construction project and logistical issues.

"You unfortunately spend much of your time doing things you don't want to do," he said of running a business. For example, his time in recent days, when interviewed in



late September, had been taken up by fixing the faucet on a sink, in addition to a problem with the soap dispenser.

Correa has used Instagram to market Mpanadas, and the restaurant has earned 4.7 stars out of 5.0 on Google. Correa came back to his alma mater, St. John's, in August, to provide in-service meals for teachers and staff, as they were preparing for the 2025-2026 school year.

Reached at the end of September, Correa said that September revenue would be between \$50,000 to \$60,000, which roughly doubles what Mpanadas made in September 2024, with profitability feasible. Mpanadas is opened at 7:00 a.m. seven days a week, it's open at least 12 hours each day, with a closing time between 7 p.m. and 8 p.m., for those seeking a delicious dish, such as an empanada shell taco with ground pork and pico de gallo.

Growing up in Upper Marlboro, Correa attended St. John the Evangelist School from

Kindergarten through Grade 8. He remembers getting into trouble in nearly every class during his time at the parish school, even though he graduated in June 2012 as class valedictorian. He thinks he got into trouble because he was bored and remembers the fun he had a student with his classmates. He also thinks he took Grades 6 through 8 more seriously, since he became more interested in social studies and current events, leading to a love of politics.

He remembers Ms. Green's class, as well as Mrs. Ann Gillespie's class, and having to write his name in green, yellow, or red, on the days when he had a discipline infraction, depending on the severity of the problem and his previous failure to live up to the class standards.

He matriculated from St. John's College High School and studied chemical engineering at the University of Maryland College Park but departed before earning a degree to pursue a business career.

## Welcome Back BBQ - August 22



## Joint Base Andrews Air Show - September 12



## St. John the Evangelist School

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Mailing Service Requested



### SOARING EAGLES NEWS • VOLUME 1, NUMBER 1 • FALL 2025



Congratulations to our Debate Club 8th Graders who attended their first debate in Chantilly, Va., in early October.

#### *In Memoriam*

*Elizabeth Anne Hornyak  
Bradley '91*

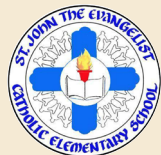
*Robert Lawrence O'Meara  
'74*

*Stephen Paul Prestipino '70*

*Michael Allen Slezak '69*

*Kim LaVerne Wiggins-Revere  
'79*

May the souls of the  
faithfully departed, through  
the mercy of God, rest in  
peace.



### St. John the Evangelist School (PK-8)

Clinton, MD

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Pastor

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for your patience with us.*