

SERVANT LEADERSHIP AT THE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OF FAIRBANKS



At the Catholic Schools of Fairbanks, “WE BELIEVE the life and message of Jesus Christ as shared through the Gospel is a foundation of our school community, encouraging all members to accept the call to leadership and service in church and society.”

This faith-based education and call to service is an integral part of why I love to attend the Catholic Schools of Fairbanks. February started with Catholic Schools week, which led right into Lent, so I thought it would be the perfect time to shed light on this part of my school and in particular, our call to leadership and service. A Jesuit education isn't only learning about, well, Jesus—it is about the values integrated into every part of education here. From community building to service, God is visible throughout everything and everyone within the building.

I started with someone many of you may know, a great example of a servant leader: Kathleen Kohler-Balko. Mrs. Balko has been the religion coordinator for the schools since I first began attending. She plays an indispensable role and nobody is more credible on how faith-based education benefits everyone.

“Our faith permeates our whole life, and how we see the world. That faith perspective changes the way we look at people and situations—helping young people look for God in all things and others. They can learn to trust that God will lead them and guide them.” One of the most impactful things she said to me was that the school was a “holy mess.”

“We aren't perfect but hopefully we are inspiring students to go forward and set the world on fire. The school is fertile soil—a loving community—that changes the hearts of students.”

She is a perfect example of the amazing and dedicated people answering God's call here at the schools. She says “My job isn't a job, it's God's work, and my teaching space is the chapel. It's an honor and a privilege.” It is also a privilege for students like me to have such an amazing servant leader here on campus!

Another incredible example of our servant leadership in our daily lives can be found in our Magis Houses. Staff and students in grades Pre-K through 12 are sorted in a variety of houses named after saints (Avila is the best house). Houses participate in games and activities, service, and mass together. The older students often lead the prayers and activities together and while we participate as a House, the younger students look to the older students as examples.

Ultimately we form relationships that wouldn't normally occur within the school. When a junior like me greets a third grader from my house in the hallways, we share a strong sense of interconnectedness and community that is extremely valuable.

One of the more obvious displays of servant leaders at CSF are those called to help at weekly Masses. Students are called to be Eucharistic ministers, altar servers, cantors, and classes rotate duties of lecturing.

One of my personal favorite parts of CSF's religious education program is class retreats. Grades 5-12 have an annual retreat at St. Raphael's Church. Students focus on reflection and community building, depending on each retreat's theme. In keeping with our tradition of servant leadership opportunities, older students act as leaders on retreats for younger students. Participating as a student leader gives me a day to grow closer to God and those around me while modeling my faith for others.

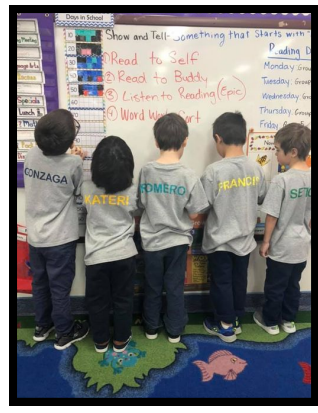
The call to leadership and service extends beyond Mass, retreats, and religion class. Student Claire Higbee points out that, “though I am not Catholic, Monroe offers me the ability to mix with other faith-based students and families. I appreciate the focus on service and I know I am well-prepared for life after high school.” During her time here at the Catholic Schools of Fairbanks, Claire is gaining the tools to “set the world on fire.”

As school community, we are called to do something more, something greater for God. *Magis*, meaning “greater” is a part of our school slogan: *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*—“for the greater glory of God.” Even though students may groan hearing the song *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* so frequently, this slogan encapsulates the purpose of the schools. Our call to *more* is rooted in the call to leadership and service in church and society.

Thanks to our dedicated staff and strong community, I truly do believe that the fertile soil Mrs. Balko spoke of exists here at the Catholic Schools of Fairbanks, and that soil has the ability to change hearts. CSF provides something unique: a chance to think deeper about history, society, and community, and our role within that, not to mention, learn a little about Jesus and answer the ultimate call to leadership and service.

**Our community makes our school possible!
To donate visit www.catholic-schools.org/donate**

All students attending Catholic Schools of Fairbanks are assigned to a Magis house for the duration of their tenure at our schools. The goal of this program is to help build a stronger community, especially across grade levels.



Monroe Catholic students are encouraged to participate in the Mass each week. They can choose to serve as lectors, Eucharistic Ministers, servers, gift bearers, singers, and musicians.



Students celebrate the Mass together at Monroe! Two weekly Masses are offered in Holy Family Chapel. Kindergarten through 6th grade Mass is on Fridays at 8:15AM and 7th-12th gather for Mass on Wednesdays at 9:44 AM. All are welcome.



About the author:
 Ronni Bennett, a junior at MCHS, is involved in a variety of activities at CSF including Track, Cross Country, Band, Academic Decathlon, and National Honor Society. She serves as both a Eucharistic Minister and Altar Server at Mass. In her parish, Sacred Heart Cathedral, she serves as a lector. She is employed in the After Care Program at Monroe Catholic Schools.

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Kathleen Kohler-Balko in an interview with Ronni Bennett

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RELIGION AT THE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OF FAIRBANKS BY RONNI BENNETT