



Smack Dab in the Middle

A Newsletter serving the
Middle School Families of
St. Francis Xavier School

O Come, O Come Emmanuel!



The season of Advent brings many new changes for us at the liturgies we celebrate. The students have been working on the new responses for the Mass parts including the Gloria, Holy Holy, Memorial Acclamation and the Lamb of God. The changes affect both singers and instrumentalists which means we have to learn lots of new music! The Middle School students will be the choir for the season of Advent during our liturgies and will assist the younger students with the changes taking place in Advent.

We are also working hard to prepare for our biggest concert of the year! The Christmas Concert is on December 15th at 7:00 pm. We encourage those who are not able to attend the evening performance to come to the afternoon dress rehearsal at 12:45pm. It is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the story of Jesus' birth and to hear the sounds and talents of so many wonderful students! God Bless You during this beautiful season of anticipation and preparation for the coming of Christ!

Mrs. Swearingen

Working on Keystrokes and Keynotes

December, *really*? Where has the time gone? The Middle School students started out the year with learning a new typing program purchased this past Summer. The new program, *Type to Learn 4*, is an intriguing, futuristic world of adventure and information, where students are recruited as new members of an ancient society, the Agents of Information. The keyboard becomes the communicator and the medalion a reward for success. All activities are age appropriate and students move through 7 efficiency levels beginning as a recruit. A diagnostic pre-test and formative assessments are also placed throughout the lessons. Assessments analyze students accuracy and speed, setting and adjusting achievement goals as the student improves. Lessons also track students accuracy and speed and assign immediate, individualized

remediation where needed. It has been a great addition to computer class. All of the students seem to really enjoy it and even ask to work on it!!

Currently, the students are working on Keynote presentations, another application that the students really enjoy. Keynote allows them to create presentations with powerful yet easy-to-use tools and dazzling effects. The sixth and seventh graders chose to do their presentations on something they are passionate about, such as vacations, sports, theatre, health, or animals. The eighth graders are doing presentations about themselves, school life and their plans for the future. I am looking forward to seeing all of the great presentations!

Mrs. Feldman

Art Brings Color to our World

We finished our projects using line, perspective, drawing, shading and shapes. This month students created projects using the elements of color, value, and warm/cool colors. The 6th graders were given the three primary colors and through mixing created all twelve colors on the color wheel. They will complete various projects for which they will need to mix the colors themselves. The 7th graders painted a monochromatic vase using only one color, plus black and white. Through mixing they created shades and values of the same color. They also created ink silhouettes

with a tempera wash. The 8th graders have been busy all month making paper mache piñatas in conjunction with their Spanish classes, for all the K-8 students to celebrate Las Posadas in December. It was a huge project and the students are slightly disappointed that they will be broken as they look really lovely. They will be in charge of the piñata breaking part of the Las Posadas celebration for each wing of our school.

Mrs. Mahon

Soaring through Science

The 6th graders just finished their first big unit on force. The four major points being Newton's first, second and third laws of motion and the law of conservation of momentum. They did action-reaction labs with balloons and cars, had a contest with paper airplanes, made propellers, momentum labs with marbles, and friction labs with 5 different materials. They did a distance and time in air contest with the planes which they made themselves. They experimented with pendulums and parachutes studying gravity. Of course, Bill Nye, the Science Guy, was a big help in demonstrating some of these concepts. The next unit has to do with acids, bases and other aspects of chemistry.

The seventh graders, after finishing their big leaf project, (at which they were great!) went on to cells, bacteria, viruses, protists and now plants. They built cell cities, did labs on osmosis and diffusion, looked at paramecium and 6 different algae and protists under the microscope and did some fantastic disease reports. In between, I try to show them a DVD on the major different animals of Minnesota. They have seen the bison, beaver, coyote, white-tailed deer

and antelope. They did labs on moss, ferns and horsetails and we will be dissecting a flower. They also designed and built recyclable bird feeders. Now hopefully some birds will come and eat some of the sunflower seeds that were sent home with them!

The eighth graders are recovering from their huge and very well done rock and mineral collections project. They moved on to weathering, water, gravity, wind and glacial types. We viewed a "Dirty Thirties" DVD which showed the effects of drought and wind and erosion over a long period of time. They also did labs on erosional effects on sand, gravel and soil, and made a map of Minnesota rivers, lakes and divides. I showed them the effects of a flash flood (Little Falls) and a spring flood (Delano). We also viewed caves and geysers and did labs on porosity and permeability. The current unit is on the atmosphere, starting with the different layers, including the ozone layer. We'll be doing labs on the greenhouse effect, studying winds and moving on to weather and storms.

Mrs. Fiedler

Middle School Religion

All classes are in the third unit of their texts entitled "Jesus Christ." These three chapters are Jesus' Relationships, Life in Christ, and the Church. Each Monday we begin the week with an Advent prayer service with all of the middle school students. The Sacrament of Reconciliation will be on Friday, December 16th. Students will pack food at Feed My Starving Children

during Lent and we will be looking for parents to join us. The date is Friday, February 24th. Please let Mrs. Lenczewski know if you are interested.

Mrs. Lenczewski

Read Any Good Books Lately? We Have!

Language Arts 6: We have started reading *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norman Juster. This book is full of word play and very fun to read with a group. Students are studying vocabulary and literary devices as we read and discuss the novel. We continue to work on a spelling unit each week as well as working on nouns and daily oral language. Students are also preparing for a short play on December 6th for the Feast of St. Nicholas. It will be in Trinity Hall at 10:00am. You are welcome to join us!

Language Arts 7: We are reading the timeless classic from Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*. Although the students are familiar with this story, we are looking at its setting of Victorian England and Dickens' commentary on that society's treatment of the poor and oppressed. Along

with the novel vocabulary, we are learning about the literary elements that make Dickens fun to read. Students continue to study Greek and Latin roots weekly. Students are also studying pronouns as indirect objects.

Language Arts 8: We are reading Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. This great American novel has so many insights with its revelation of society's evils and ironies contrasted with Huck's supposed ignorance. The novel makes for interesting discussions. Students are working on weekly vocabulary assignments and are studying pronouns as indirect objects.

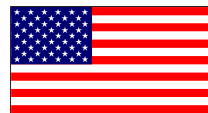
Journals are due weekly for all Middle School students.
Mrs. Lenczewski

Exploring Our World

6th Grade Social Studies has begun to look into ancient Egypt. We are learning about the mighty Nile River, and the builders of the pyramids (no, they were not built by ancient aliens). Some of the students wanted to recreate the mummification process, but we're still looking for volunteers. And for some real tongue twisters, try pronouncing some of the names of the Pharaohs!! Hatshepsut, Akhenaton.

The **7th Grade** is looking over the United States Constitution. It is simply one of the greatest works of art ever written. We are so lucky to live in this country. We will also be looking at the War of 1812.

The **8th Grade** is studying the Geography of the United States of America (including Wright County). Then we'll take a look at our wonderful neighbors to the north...Canada.



Mr. Muller

Accelerated Reader has Arrived!

We now have a reading program for our students which allows them to take comprehension quizzes on books they have read. All of them took the tests on the novels we read in class to give them an idea of what the quizzes are like. These quizzes can be taken in my room or during computer classes. Students will take a quiz as they finish reading the books they read on their own. These books should be in their lexile range, not too easy nor too difficult. They know their lexile range and you can find this range on the MAP results you received in November. Mrs. Miller is labeling books in my room with the lexile and lexiles can also be found on the site: www.lexiles.com Using this program encourages students to set reading goals for themselves to select and finish books. What a great enhancement to our Language Arts curriculum!

Mrs. Lenczewski

STFX Middle School Team

Nancy Lenczewski:	MS Religion MS Language Arts
Erin Marsyla:	MS Math
Al Muller:	MS Social Studies
Carol Fiedler:	MS Science
Joy Swearingen:	K - 8 Music
Sue Nelson:	4—8 Band
George Mead:	K - 8 Phy. Ed. MS Health
Michelle Feldman:	K - 8 Computer
Gina Kowalczyk:	K - 8 Spanish
Mary Mahon:	MS Art
Jan Hance:	MS FACS (4th Q)
Don Soupir:	MS Tech. Ed. (3rd Q)

**Middle School
Physical Education**

We are abandoning the cold outdoor weather and moving indoors to begin units in soccer and speedball. The games are played using Nerf balls to help eliminate injuries. We use multiple soccer balls at one time which allows more students to participate, and this also provides for a great deal of action. (In other words, no sitting around waiting for a turn to play!) We play both regular soccer with the goal nets, and line soccer using the walls as a goal. Speedball is a very fast game and is a combination of soccer, fastball and basketball.

Mr. Mead

Math in the Middle

The Course 1 Class has started Chapter 5 with adding and subtracting fractions. The students struggled some in Chapter four with finding Least Common Multiple (LCM), and Greatest Common Factor (GCF). I taught them a new, sometimes faster way, to find both the LCM and GCF by using the Prime Factorization rather than listing all of the factors and multiples until they came to a common one. Some still preferred listing the factors and multiples, which is just fine as long as they are understanding what to do and how to do it. I often tell them that there may be more then one way to get an answer and it's okay to do it differently as long as they show all of the work they do to come up with an answer.

The Pre-Algebra classes continue to work in Chapter 4. We are also working with fractions, prime factorization, LCM and GCF (now sometimes called Greatest Common Divisor, GCD). The difference between the Pre-Algebra classes and the Course 1 class is that in Pre-Algebra we take away numbers and add in variables to simplify fractions and find GCF. For example the GCF of $6a^3b$ and $4a^2b$ is $2a^2b$.

The Algebra classes have finished the first three chapters in the book and then took a break to go back and review a few concepts from those chapters that were challenging. We needed to review solving inequalities as well as setting up and solving proportions. We are starting Chapter 4 this week where the students will be introduced to functions.

The Geometry class has finished the first two chapters. The boys just took the Chapter 2 test last week and all of them scored 90% or higher! This week started with a Vocabulary test of 65 words from the first two chapters. Never did we know there were so many vocabulary words in Geometry, lots of Postulates and Theorems! Proofs have been a struggle for this group and they often question why they need to write everything down, especially steps that are a given. I just remind them they have been doing it for years with showing their work for all other math. Now they just have to write the property or step in words. They are continually amazed at how much Algebra is found in Geometry, they can't get away from it! They were all thinking and hoping we would only be studying shapes, but there is much more to Geometry than that!

Mrs. Marsyla

St. Francis Xavier School

Mission Statement

As a faith-filled community, we foster spiritual growth, academic excellence and a commitment to Christ-centered values in the education of our students.