

From Dr. Charles White, Principal

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What makes our school Catholic?

A question in a survey of Catholic school teachers asks, “would a visitor to your classroom recognize it as a Catholic classroom?” I am sure that the person who wrote that question was visualizing a crucifix, a picture of the Blessed Virgin, maybe a prayer corner with a book of scripture, candles etc. While all of these things signal some familiarity with Catholicism, their presence does not ensure the existence of a truly Catholic school.

What then? What does one point to as an indication that a school is a Catholic school is spirit and practice?

I point to the kids. And I mean the kids being themselves, not sitting in their seats doing their math or English or history. Kids show what a school really is on the playground. How do they treat each other? How do they act when there are adults around, does their behavior change when adults are not in the immediate vicinity? Our students are not perfect but that visitor that we referred to before will notice that our students are really nice kids, they are kind to one another, inclusive of classmates and respectful of adults.

A hallmark of our Catholic Identity is a lively Community Service Learning program. For years Madonna students have participated in various projects to help the people of our parish and Salinas in general. In conjunction with Dorothy’s Kitchen, IHELP, St. Vincent de Paul Society etc. our kids have made sandwiches, packaged food items and collected clothing for the needy. Our sponsored Cub Scout troop conducts a coat drive each year to provide people with warm clothing for winter weather.

Led in part by Deacon Carl Figenshow, the service learning aspect of our school is reaching new heights. When one of our parents, Dean Toler, went to Tanzania in 2008, our students began a relationship with students of Tanzania that continues. We have exchanged letters, pictures and videos. This year our eighth graders sent Christmas gifts to their African friends. Madonna students have gathered gifts also for local kids through the Christmas Angels program. And our sixth graders have already been to the Food Bank to help box food for distribution.

Symbols are important too. It is fitting and in keeping with the spirit of Catholic Identity that we have installed and dedicated the icon of Christ the Teacher. In doing so we dedicate our selves to the values which Jesus taught and lived. We also join with other Catholic schools throughout the nation in recognizing this as the Year of Christ the Teacher and praying the following prayer before class:

**O God You are my strength, my patience
My light and my counsel.
As I welcome my students this day,
Help me respond positively
To the needs of each young person
You have entrusted to my care.
Give me a spirit of wisdom, understanding
And gentleness
In all of my interactions this day.
May I always follow the example of Christ
Your Son, the Master Teacher**