



MORNING STAR SCHOOL

PINELLAS PARK

S U M M E R 2 0 2 0

LOOKING AHEAD

August 10th
First Day of School

October 31st
Trunk or Treat

December 17th
Christmas Program

January 31 - February 6
Catholic Schools Week

May 1st
Auction Fundraiser

May 25th
High School Graduation

May 27th
8th Grade Graduation

May 28th
Last Day of School

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Principal's Perspective

By Principal Susan M. Conza

The 2019-2020 school year marked the 50th Anniversary of Morning Star School, and it certainly was memorable! In September, Morning Star School was recognized at a special Mass celebrated by Bishop Parkes. A reception followed, attended by parents, alumni, board members, and former teachers and staff. We also received a Papal Blessing from Pope Francis and a Proclamation from the mayor of Pinellas Park, Sandra Bradbury, for this milestone.

In November, we had the most successful auction ever, grossing over \$85,000. Thanks to the generosity of our supporters during this auction, we were able to complete our technology refresh. Thank goodness! Little did we know in November that the updated technology would enable us to transition to 100% online learning in March. During the COVID-19 quarantine, every student had an iPad to take home with them and each teacher had a laptop. Our students continued their education under extremely challenging circumstances. The teachers held Zoom conferences, read bedtime stories, created videos, and visited students at their homes to make sure the students had creative learning opportunities and stability during a time of uncertainty. I am so proud of how everyone at Morning Star handled quarantined learning. Who would have thought that we would spend the last 45 days of school remotely?

This year, Mrs. Aurswald retired after 20 years of teaching at Morning Star School. I am awed by the impact she has had on so many students throughout her career. Sadly, we were unable to give Mrs. A. a proper farewell due to COVID-19, but we wish her the absolute best in retirement. Mrs. Miles, the art teacher here at Morning Star for the last 23 years, also will not be returning. This decision was a particularly difficult one for her, and a very sad one for us. In addition, we said good-bye to classroom teacher, Ms. Vinachi, our OT, Ms. Christine, and our facility dog, Dimitri, Coach Scott and Ms. Cassidy, one of our teacher assistants. We will miss them and wish them the best of luck in their new ventures.

Morning Star is also eyeing new ventures. We are kicking off the next 50 years with the development of a Transition Program that will be known as The Morning Star Achievement Center. The goal of the center will be to educate students after they graduate from high school to 22 years of age. Building the center is a monumental task. But, with the support of our parents, our alumni, and the community, we can bring it to fruition. An outline of our plans for The Morning Star Achievement Center can be found on page 2.

2020 has been a challenging and humbling time. It is our faith in God and in one another that provides support and solace. As we look to the future, both for our school and our country, I find strength in the scripture, Philippians 4:13, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Together, we can.

*Many Blessings,
Susan M. Conza, Principal*

Morning Star School, a mission of the Catholic Diocese of St. Petersburg, recognizes the unique educational needs of students. The administration, faculty, staff and parents work together to provide an ungraded academic curriculum in which students can achieve their potential academically, socially and spiritually.

Morning Star Achievement Center

Continuing to Build a Future for Students Beyond Graduation



Morning Star Achievement Center
Creating Our Future

Our vision of providing a quality education for our students does not end when they graduate high school. We are currently in the midst of a capital campaign to raise funds to update our facilities to include the Morning Star School Achievement Center, a program specifically designed to help our young adults attain and continue to develop skills they need to be successful, productive members of society. The curriculum will focus on skills with practical applications such as effective communication, money and time management, problem solving, resiliency and wellness.

Working with the architectural firm ARC3, we have developed building plans that will help us move our entire campus forward in addition to adding a new building to house our growing high school program and our new transition program for young adults. This will allow us to facilitate individualized, quality education for up to 120 students from kindergarten through the age of 22 in a nurturing, faith-based environment.

The total cost of this project is \$3 million, but through the generosity of our community supporters, family and friends, we are well on our way to raising the first \$600,000 we need to break ground on this exciting project. We would especially like to thank the Guardian Trust Foundation and the Coleman Family for their generous support.

A CAPITAL CAMPAIGN FOR MORNING STAR ACHIEVEMENT CENTER

Morning Star's ***Creating Our Future*** capital campaign is investing **\$3,000,000** to expand and improve campus facilities.

The **Morning Star Achievement Center** will:

- Provide needed space for Transition Program and growing high school enrollment
- ★ Strengthen campus security
- ★ Create space for life skills classrooms
- ★ Improve our parking and create efficient traffic flow

Working together with your support, we will succeed in ***Creating Our Future!***

Celebrating 50 Years of Service in Pinellas County

Morning Star School first opened its doors to students for the 1969-1970 school year, and has provided a quality education to students with special needs in our area ever since. This year we celebrated our 50th Anniversary in style!

On September 18, 2019, Bishop Parkes celebrated a special Mass at Sacred Heart Catholic Church to commemorate this milestone. The Mass was followed by a breakfast reception in OTHERS Hall, where our newly founded Morning Superstar Choir made its debut, performing for the over 100 guests in attendance.

On October 23, 2019, students and staff celebrated the 50th day of school in honor of our 50th anniversary. Thank you to the Pinellas Park Fire Department, who allowed us to use one of their bucket trucks to get a wonderful sky-view photo of all staff and students on this day!

Our Annual Auction Fundraiser on November 9, 2019, was also centered around our 50th Anniversary. The parents did a wonderful job providing an evening of celebration and fun as we worked to raise money for our program. That night was our best fundraising ever, with more than \$85,000 raised to go directly into our operating budget!

A 50th Anniversary Alumni Picnic was also set to take place in the Spring of 2020, but with stay-at-home orders and school closures, this particular event had to be postponed. Still, it was a great year for celebration for Morning Star School, and we look forward to many, many more!



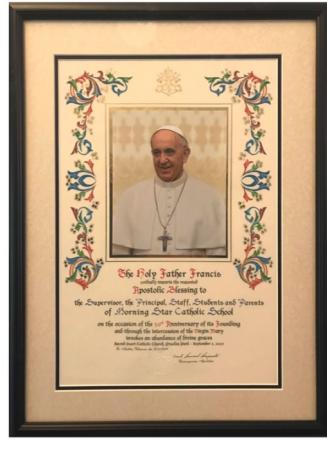
A student presents a gift to Bishop Parkes during the 50th Anniversary Mass



Students and staff celebrate the 50th Day of School



(Above) Bishop Parkes addresses guests at the 50th Anniversary Breakfast; (Right) The 50th Anniversary Blessing received from Pope Francis



Morning Superstar Choir Debuts



Spreading Christmas cheer at the Christmas Program



Choir sings the National Anthem around the flagpole for Veteran's Day

This year we saw the beginning of a wonderful new program at Morning Star. Under the direction of Mrs. Jennifer Ochoa-Rowland, and with the help of Ms. Jenelle Vinachi (accompaniment) and many other staff members, we had the absolute joy of having a full student choir. All students were invited to join, and about 50 students decided to participate.

Their inaugural performance was at the 50th Anniversary Reception on September 18, 2019, where they brought tears to the eyes of over 100 family members and visitors, including our Bishop Gregory Parkes. On Veteran's Day, the choir performed the Star Spangled Banner around the flagpole as all other students, staff and parents watched the flag raise; it was a beautiful commemoration of the sacrifices made by soldiers of the past and present. Our choir also performed at our Thanksgiving Prayer Service and our Christmas Program.

The choir was also due to perform for our Easter Musical, and did not let a tiny thing like a global pandemic or school closure stop them! Students sent in videos of themselves performing the musical selections from home, and Mrs. Ochoa-Rowland made a compilation of their performances that was posted to social media.

Though our continuing COVID-19 safety precautions will not allow us to start the school year with our choir, we look forward with great anticipation to when they can grace us with their beautiful music again!



Celebrating Morning Star's 50th Anniversary with beautiful music

We Remember a Friend

John Prine Visits Morning Star School



On April 7, 2020, Morning Star School said a tearful goodbye to Mr. John Prine. Mr. Prine was an internationally renowned singer-songwriter who was just honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Grammy Awards. As a longtime friend of one of our families, Mr. Prine recently visited Morning Star School, and he and his wife Fiona honored us with a generous gift. Mr. Prine died of complications due to COVID-19.

Though our relationship with him was new, it was very special, and his loss was felt very deeply throughout our community. We are truly thankful for the moments we had with Mr. Prine, and we offer our sincerest condolences to his family and friends.



Support Morning Star While You Shop!

You can support Morning Star every day just by keeping us in mind when you shop!

Amazon Smile:

Visit smile.amazon.com and choose Morning Star Catholic School Pinellas Park Inc. as your charity. Then 5% of your purchases will be donated back to Morning Star School!



Box Tops for Education:

Box Tops are now digital! Download the free Box Tops for Education app, where you can find all the great bonuses and weekly deals. Shop for eligible products, scan your receipt, and earn money for Morning Star!



Coca-Cola Gives:

Download the Coca-Cola app and you can give back to Morning Star with every beverage you purchase. Just scan the code on the inside of the cap of the bottle or on the inside of the box of cans and you'll help us continue doing what we do best!



Distance Learning at Morning Star School

On Friday, March 13, 2020, we received word that all diocesan schools would begin distance learning the very next week due to the rapidly spreading coronavirus outbreak. Thanks to the support of generous donors during our Raise the Paddle event at our Auction fundraiser in November, we were prepared! All students left that day with an updated iPad and all their materials for working from home, and every teacher had a laptop ready to use to conduct their classes from home. Not a single day of instruction was lost!

Staff, parents and students all worked together to find a successful balance in their stay-at-home, socially isolated roles, and though the journey was not an easy one for anyone, we found a way to still provide meaningful instruction, maintain (safe) social connections, and have some fun too! The staff got together to make an encouraging video for the students, May Crowning was celebrated in a unique and touching way, and we enjoyed a Virtual Spirit Week, where staff and students participated in dress up days and shared photos of themselves!

Ideally, we hope we never have to do that again; but preparations are already in place to provide an even better virtual learning experience for staff, parents and students should the time come that it is again necessary. Preparations are also being made to our campus and to standard operating procedures to ensure staff and student safety upon return to campus. Not even a global pandemic will keep us from providing a quality, individualized education to our students in a safe, nurturing environment!

Virtual Spirit Week



Students get creative with Hat Day



We don't let closed beaches keep us from fun in the sun on Beach Day!



Dress up fun on Costume Day



Go team! Sports Day!



School Year in Photos: Learning & Fun

Trunk or Treat



This has become a highlight of the year! Staff and students alike have a blast!



Students collected over 1,000 non-perishable food items for His Heart Society! As a reward, they got to decorate the principal like a Christmas tree!

Catholic Schools

week



Mr. C (above) was Principal for the Day! He was awesome at his job!

Working hard!

Milestones @ Morning Star

High School Class of 2020

Brianna Kelli Bosworth and Sara Jane Samek successfully completed their time at Morning Star School in May and are now considered Graduates! These wonderful young ladies and their families really wanted to celebrate this milestone in a traditional ceremony at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, so they opted to forego an official graduation ceremony this year and will be formally recognized next year with the Class of 2021.

Though their high school career ended in such a strange and sad way, this is still a happy occasion in their lives, and we wish them all happiness and success as they move forward.



Congratulations, Brianna and Sara!

Congratulations 8th Graders



Terry

On May 27, 2020, our 8th grade graduates were recognized in a festive drive-by ceremony. As cars lined the parking lot, Mrs. Aurswald led the families and staff in prayer over an outdoor sound system, followed by an address from Mrs. Conza. Each family then drove through the car line, where the graduate was presented with a plaque and a small gift, then drove through a line of masked staff waiting to congratulate them with signs and shouts. Though it was not the graduation ceremony anyone anticipated, it was definitely one our graduates will never forget!



Danny



Tommy



Christina



Emily



Sebastian



Monserrat



Kyle



Anthony



Anna



Nickolas



Morning Star High School

Exciting Additions to the Program

Our high school students were busy living that high school life! This year they enjoyed their own Homecoming festivities, went on several field trips, and learned valuable life skills they will need as adults.

In October, students enjoyed dress up days and activities specifically designed to celebrate our high school students. On Best-Dressed Day, all high school students dressed up in their nicest attire and took a picture together at Sacred Heart Catholic Church. On Tacky Tourist Day, students donned their silliest costumes and enjoyed a pizza party. On School Spirit Day, students wore all their blue and yellow clothes and were celebrated at a schoolwide pep rally.

Students also went on various field trips throughout the year to stores and restaurants to practice the skills needed to order food, find items in the store, pay for goods and services, and interact with others.

Students were anticipating their high school prom set for April 2020, which had to be cancelled due to COVID-19 closures.

Homecoming



Social Skills Field Trips



Life and Social Skills





Morning Star School of Pinellas Park

Annual Auction Fundraiser

Postponed

Morning Star School's Annual Auction Fundraiser, our most profitable (and fun) fundraiser each year, has been postponed due to COVID-19.

Please mark your calendar with the new date, and be on the lookout for more information later this year!

Saturday, May 1, 2021, 6:30-10:30pm

**Cathedral of St. Jude the Apostle
Parish Center
5815 5th Ave. N., St. Petersburg, FL 33710**



Meanwhile...

Though the Auction will not take place in the fall, there are still two major ways you can support Morning Star School **today**:



You can donate to the building fund of the Morning Star School Achievement Center. We hope to complete this \$3 million project in time to admit students for the 2021-2022 school year, so we need your support now!

Many Morning Star Families could use your assistance with their tuition this year. Though the pandemic has hurt their financial stability, they are still choosing Morning Star to education their students because we best meet the needs of their students. Consider making a donation today toward the tuition of a family need.



With Gratitude

As we reflect on the unforgettable 50th year we've had, we can't help but be overwhelmed with gratitude for all the support and kindness we've received this year. It is through the grace of God and with the prayers, work and donations of our community that Morning Star thrives. Please know that we thank God for you every day, our wonderful supporters:

- Morning Star Families
- OTHERS members and all individual donors
- All sponsors of and donors to our Annual Auction Fundraiser
- Bishop Gregory Parkes
- Mr. Chris Pastura, Superintendent, and Dr. Ann Davis, Associate Superintendent
- Krauss/Baschab Family Foundation, Seminole Lanes and Sunrise Lanes
- The Knights of Columbus Council 10157, Council 11226, Council 13657, Council 14456, Council 2105, Council 4892, Council 7109, & Council 8155
- Catholic Daughters of the Americas Court of St. John Vianney #1944
- John and Fiona Prine
- Canon and Lisa Coleman
- DeSesto Italiano Ristorante e Vino
- Guardian Trust
- Traffic Control Products of Florida
- The Jack Moore Group, LLC
- RAD Diversified
- Clearwater Central Catholic High School, St. Petersburg Catholic High School, & Espiritu Santo Catholic School
- Catholic Foundation, Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Cathedral of St. Jude the Apostle
- Pinellas Park Rotary Club
- Sons of Italy of St. Petersburg & St. Petersburg Social Club c/o Wayne Sokalski
- Morning Star Advisory Board members: Linda Champion, Jack & Kerry Moore, John Mulry, Yvonne Orr, Marianne Pasha, Denise Reilly, Julie Reyes, Rick Ryder, Mary Ann Smith & Karen Vogel

In Memoriam

We remember those who have recently passed away:

Salvatrice "Sally" D'Elia
John Prine
Allen Turner

So you have sorrow now,
but I will see you again;
then you will rejoice,
and no one can rob
you of that joy.

-John 16:22

Morning Star School

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O.T.H.E.R.S. Membership

The annual membership dues of O.T.H.E.R.S. is \$25 per year. Annual membership is from January 1 to December 31.

Please use the enclosed envelope for new membership and renewals. Thank you!