

March 2020



SAINT CATHERINE CENTER FOR *Special Needs*

Adult Program Celebrates 5th Anniversary

This month marks the fifth year of the Adult Program at Saint Catherine Center. In fact, today, March 9, was the first day of the program, according to Patrick Gorman, one of the first staff members along with Sonia Vielot (pictured at right).

Shortly after coming on board as Executive Director in 2008, Helen Burland recognized the need for quality programming for young adults after they completed a school program. With Board support, she initiated a feasibility study for a program at Saint Catherine and hired Laura Grozier (now Director of Operations) to assist her. They visited numerous adult day facilities in the area and determined that a program for young adults would be viable and offer a seamless transition for individuals graduating from the Academy.

“We made the commitment that there would be a place in the Adult Program for any Saint Catherine Academy student who wanted to continue with us,” Helen said.

To facilitate this evolution, Saint Catherine Center for Special Needs was established in the fall of 2014 as an umbrella entity to encompass the Academy, the Adult Program, and an Office of Parish & Community Support. In March 2015 the Adult Program opened with three former Academy students and one individual from the Fairfield area. Parents immediately appreciated the small size, access to transportation, the quality of the staff, and the continued focus on life skills. Bowling, swimming, and community outings have been part of the schedule from the beginning. Over time, art, music, and yoga classes were added, as well as vocational experiences.

“The goal at both the Academy and the Adult Program has always been independence,” said Helen. “Our role is to support each individual in doing as much



as they can. There is a palpable energy at the Center that comes from the feeling of purpose that our young people have.”

Today, the Adult Program has reached capacity with 26 participants from 14 towns. A Board committee is actively looking at ways to expand the facility to serve more adults and enhance vocational opportunities. Stay tuned for the next evolution at Saint Catherine Center!



Faith Formation at Saint Catherine Academy

As a faith-based school, religious education is integrated into the daily curriculum at Saint Catherine Academy. From daily prayer activities in the classroom to weekly services as a community, ritual and repetition are key to helping students develop their faith.



Each class approaches faith formation differently, according to students' needs. In Sr. Cheryl's class each morning, the sign of the cross is followed by the Our Father Prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. Students offer up the names of people they want to pray for, and a special booklet called "Good News" is used as a guide to discuss the upcoming Sunday Gospel. The day also concludes with prayer. "Jesus is important to them," said Sr. Cheryl. "They want to talk to him and know they can do that through prayer."



Students in Ms. Patty's class use the pictures in the booklet "Seeds" to become familiar with Jesus and the Golden Rule. "What's the most important thing?" she asked. Ronald pointed to the phrase on the worksheet: "Be kind."

Ms. Joanne uses the liturgical seasons to structure religious education in her class. "We use coloring sheets, crafts, and music to make faith more concrete," she said. Briana shares her enthusiasm for Gospel music with her classmates, and Vinny leads everyone in a daily prayer that is now familiar to them: "Dear Jesus, Help us to be good to each other today. Help us to be good students. We love you."

These daily and weekly rituals are enhanced by special Masses and events during the year, such as Ash Wednesday,

a May Crowning, and the annual Christmas Pageant. Fr. Peter Cipriani of Our Lady of the Assumption Church in Fairfield (pictured at right) regularly welcomes Academy students to Mass on First Fridays. Although most of the Academy's students are Catholic, parents of other faiths can choose to what extent their child will participate.

"We want our students to become familiar with the rituals of the Church," said Eric Spencer, Director of Education, "but most important is the Christian message that we are loved by Jesus and are called to share that love."



Mardi Gras Dance is "a Rockin' Good Time"

The dancers were in motion as soon as the music began at the annual Mardi Gras dinner dance hosted by the Center on February 28th at St. Pius X Church. More than 120 adults from around the region came together to shake off the end of winter. Along with beads and other bling, the centerpieces created by Cathy Romano of Assumption Church in Westport created a festive Mardi Gras atmosphere.

Each dance brings more participants from the Adult Program as they hear what a great time it is. While Jessie and her parents demonstrated the Hokey Pokey, Tyler T showed off a few high-leaping moves. After serving the guests dinner, volunteers from the youth ministry at St. Andrew Church in Bridgeport joined in the conga line. As one guest said, it was "a rockin' good time!" [View the photos](#)

The next dinner dance will be held on Friday, May 15.



HAPPY
St. Patrick's
DAY



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