



THE *St. Austin* SCHOOL

✠ A Magazine for Families and Friends of the St. Austin School





Dear St. Austin Community,

Fifteen years ago, a small group of families set out to do something quietly radical: to build a school where children would encounter Jesus Christ as the living center of every classroom, and where that encounter would produce not only faithful Catholics but genuinely excellent minds. They chose their patron wisely. Saint Austin, the Benedictine monk sent by Pope Gregory the Great to evangelize a people who had never heard the Gospel, gave this school his name and his animating spirit. At the heart of the tradition he carried was a profound confidence that the love of God and the love of learning are not rivals. They feed one another, and always have.

As I close my first year as Head of School, I find myself returning again and again to one word: gratitude.

What moves me most is how thoroughly this community has absorbed the Benedictine charism of its patron. Saint Austin arrived in England committed to prayer, stability, and the patient work of building up a Christian community. He trusted that a life faithfully lived would speak for itself. That instinct is alive here. It is in the family who fills a volunteer gap without being asked, the father who stays two hours after trivia night to carry boxes, the mother who transforms a gymnasium into something luminous for Advent by Candlelight, inviting the women of our community to encourage one another in faith. This is the Benedictine way: hospitality as witness, service as prayer, ordinary faithfulness as the most persuasive argument for the Faith.

I am grateful for the founding families who sacrificed to give this school its bones, and equally grateful for those who have arrived since, pouring themselves into the same work with the same generosity. Together they have built what Saint Austin built on the shores of Kent: a living community capable of forming the next generation from the inside out.

Walking into classrooms this year, I have watched students argue with great texts, work through Latin with the patience of young scholars, and write and speak with a clarity and charity that keeps intellectual rigor from curdling into arrogance. That hunger for truth is not incidental to their faith. It is, in the classical Catholic tradition, an expression of it: to think well is to honor the Logos.

I am grateful, too, for the generosity that keeps this mission alive: for the Raising Saints benefit dinner, where shared purpose fills the room, and for trivia night, where the competition is genuine and the laughter is louder. My deepest gratitude is for the moments no program captures: the men of the Dad's Club camping retreat who joked together and prayed for one another in authentic fellowship; the father and son watching a rocket rise into a cold blue sky; the families at First Communion and Confirmation recognizing the full weight of what was being handed to their children.

These are the fruits of fifteen years of faithful labor. They are also the seeds of the next fifteen.

Saint Austin crossed the English Channel with forty monks and the conviction that a small, faithful community could change the world. He was right. So, I believe, are you.



In Christ the Teacher

Dan Dilber

Mr. Dan Dilber, Head of School



OUR MISSION

The St. Austin School cultivates the hearts and minds of students through classical education, forming lifelong Catholics grounded in the truth of the Faith. We partner with families in the intellectual, spiritual, moral, and physical formation of their children, fostering a life of cheerful virtue and the pursuit of excellence as a gift returned to God.

OUR MOTTO

Evangelizare Investigabiles
Divitias Christi
To preach...the unsearchable riches of Christ (Ephesians 3:8)



Fr. Dominic celebrates the inaugural St. Austin First Communion with the 2nd graders.

WHERE TO FIND US:

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Where It All Begins.

OUR MONTESSORI-INSPIRED PREK



Imagine a child in the PreK cottage next fall, tracing a sandpaper letter with her fingertip while saying its sound. She is four years old. A year from now, she will be in Kindergarten singing Latin vocabulary and prayers. Seven years from now, she will be sitting with Shakespeare, Tolkien, and Chesterton, bringing to those pages the same habits of attention

and love of language her fingers first practiced on sandpaper. The thread is that long, and it begins that early—and though the cottage has historically been Montessori-inspired, St. Austin is now investing in that beginning more deliberately and deeply than ever before, reflecting what we hear from our current and prospective families and the importance of this foundation.

This is what St. Austin is strengthening: a PreK–8 education in which the classical curriculum unfolds continuously, each stage growing from the one before it. St. Austin is the only Montessori-inspired program for ages 3–5 in St. Louis that is fully integrated within a PreK–8 arc of formation, a model embraced by some of the finest Catholic classical schools in the nation. The Montessori method's emphasis on order, concrete learning, and the formation of good habits is the natural soil for the grammar stage of classical education, and a child who has spent three years in that environment is ready for the demands of Kindergarten in a way that is hard to manufacture otherwise.

In language arts, children build from oral language and phonemic awareness through the Sandpaper Letters and Movable Alphabet, composing words and



sentences before they are expected to read them, and meeting the parts of speech through the Grammar Farm before encountering them in an English textbook—or, soon after, a Latin one. In mathematics, a child who holds a golden bead, then a bar of ten, then a square of one hundred, then a cube of one thousand does not need to be told what place value means: she knows it the way she knows the weight of things—and will arrive in Kindergarten with genuine number sense, the thing that carries a student through years of increasingly demanding work.



There is a reason rain boots now appear on the PreK supply list. The outdoors is treated as a classroom, and children will use it that way: on nature walks, tending vegetables and fruits, digging and building—building the habits of observation and wonder that the classical tradition will later ask them to bring to great books and great ideas. Catechesis of the Good

Shepherd begins here and continues through the next several grades. The Ward Method for vocal music starts with bells and tone-matching and carries students all the way through Middle School choir and Mass. Grace and Courtesy lessons—greeting someone, offering help, drawing another person's attention politely—are the Benedictine virtues of hospitality and reverence practiced in miniature, before a child can name them. From Kindergarten onward, students recite the Scholar's Pledge: I will treat my teachers and peers with the utmost dignity and respect. That disposition starts being formed beginning at age three.

Leading this work beginning in the 2026–27 school year is Mrs. Micaela Plumb, who has spent the past two years working in the cottage and is known to families throughout our community.



She will soon earn a diploma in Montessori Early Childhood Education from the North American Montessori Center, brings prior experience in both Montessori and classical settings, and is herself a mother of three sons educated in the

classical tradition. She engages the intellectual and spiritual depth of that tradition personally, referencing St. John of the Cross as easily as Laura Berquist. She brings to the cottage something harder to credential: a genuine wonder at the children themselves.

"Children of this age," she reflects, "are especially attuned to the present moment, and though they may not realize it yet, to the presence of God. Their natural sense of delight in the simple things of everyday life, their instinctive draw to order, their enthusiastic love for learning never fails to leave me inspired." When she watches a child pause to pick up a bug, or take in the beauty of a changing leaf, she hears in it the words of Matthew 18, and she receives the work of these foundational years as exactly what it is: a privilege. Of the three-year-old washing a table or sorting objects with tongs, she says: "I see a child who is



developing independence, body control, coordination, concentration, and the satisfaction of the sense of order he is bringing to the greater community of the classroom. I see a child who knows he belongs."



Mrs. Plumb is joined by Teacher Assistants Mrs. Brigida Leonard and Mrs. Michelle Grojean, both of whom hold

elementary education degrees and bring direct classroom leadership experience. Mrs. Grojean's additional training in the Wilson Reading System ensures that the approach to literacy is grounded in current, evidence-based practice. Every day of the week, our youngest students will be in the care of a full professional team, one that understands exactly where these children are headed, and takes seriously the work of getting them there. ✚

In Remembrance



A TRIBUTE TO FR. DOMINIC

It is with deep sorrow that we share the passing of our beloved chaplain for 10 years, Fr. Dominic Lenk. On May 3rd, Fr. Dominic went home to our Lord after a battle with cancer. A tireless and devoted servant, he touched countless lives through his ministry at St. Louis Abbey, Visitation Academy, and as Chaplain at The St. Austin School. His full obit can be found at <https://www.stlouisreview.com/story/obituary-father-alan-dominic-lenk-osb/>. We will miss Fr. Dominic dearly. His gentle presence, faithful service, and profound kindness left a lasting and beautiful impact on all of us at St. Austin. ☩

We remember the loved ones from our community who have moved on to meet our Lord.

Fr. Dominic Lenk: Beloved chaplain of St. Austin for 10 years

Mary Knollmeyer: Former Advisory Council member, dear friend, and advocate our school

Carol Schenk: Beloved wife of Advisory Council member Dick Schenk

Dan Ryan: Beloved uncle of Laura Stock

Robert Anthony: Beloved father of Jeanmarie DeCoster

Steve Notestine: Advisory Council member and dear friend of our school

Parents and Friends Association

This year, the PFA Board once again ushered in joy through its events, including but not limited to Fall Fest, Grandparents & Special Friends Day, Ladies of St. Austin Cake Swap Soiree and Field Day. Each was a beautiful success in cultivating the Benedictine virtues of community, hospitality, and service among our St. Austin Families and Friends. We extend our gratitude to this year's PFA Board for their "yes" to service and their successful efforts – Julia Bergman (returning member), Monica Sanchez, Margaret Tucker, and Bridget Yallaly. Special thanks to our Event Coordinators for their leadership in planning: Maria Rivero for Adoration Advent by Candlelight, Kate Davey for the Mother-Daughter Tea, Bill Kay for Father-Son "Rocket Man," and Laura Stock for Teacher Appreciation.

Lastly, we would like to recognize you – the many parents and friends that have helped in moving the PFA ship forward. We simply couldn't do so without your volunteerism and support! We feel blessed to be among a community that works together for the growth of our children and the flourishing of our school community. ☩



Wholly Holy

In the unity of who we are we are called to prefer nothing to Christ who preferred nothing to us.

Yet, we are imperfect as we stand in the presence of the One who is perfection itself.

In the totality of our being, we are called to embrace our true self in the presence of the God who created us.

It is in this embrace that we present to our merciful and loving Father our brokenness to be healed.

For when we are healed our fractured selves come together in a blessed unity with God Himself.

Wholeness is Holiness

Father Dominic Lenk, O.S.B.

Upcoming Events

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|--------------------|--|
| August 16 | Back to School Mass and Social
8:45 a.m. |
| August 19 | First Day of School (K-8) |
| August 20 | First Day of PreK |
| September 2 | Story & Craft Hour
for Toddlers
(first Wednesday of each month)
8:30 a.m. |
| October 2 | 5:30 p.m. Open House + Speaker
6 p.m. Food Truck &
Fellowship in the gym
7 p.m. Speaker |
| October 23 | Grandparents &
Special Friends Day |
| November 14 | Raising Saints Trivia Night |

Honoring Faith, Virtue, and Country

Two cherished traditions at the St. Austin School embody the virtues of patriotism, service, and gratitude—our Veterans Day Program and See You at the Pole. Each reflects our Catholic classical mission to form students who live lives of faith, virtue, and love of neighbor.



In November, the St. Austin School and community gathered for our Annual Veterans Day program to honor those who have served our country with courage and sacrifice. We were especially blessed to

host over a dozen veterans from Autumn View Gardens, across the street.

The program featured a series of musical performances, recitations, and presentations that expressed the students' appreciation for the sacrifices made by those in uniform. Pre-K students opened with the Pledge of Allegiance, and Forms VII and VIII offered a moving demonstration of the Folding of the Flag, sharing the meaning of each fold. One veteran from Autumn View Gardens remarked with tears in his eyes, "Those students displayed more honor than some military men I've seen fold the flag." Other performances included You're a Grand Old Flag, Over There, and The Battle Hymn of the Republic.

The keynote speaker was Major Jody B. Pettis of the United States Air Force and father of our very own Form IV teacher, Ms. Pettis, whose message wove together the themes of faith and service. His emphasis that true freedom is grounded in virtue and sacrifice was a great reminder for us all.

In September, we gathered for "See You at the Pole", where our Form VIII students led us in praying the Rosary —alongside parents, siblings, Board members, St. Richard parishioners, and friends of St. Austin. It was beautiful to see everyone come together to join in this worldwide, patriotic event.

In March, St. Richard parishioner Colonel Binek approached us with the desire to retire a worn American flag with proper dignity and ceremony. Forms VII and VIII again put into practice their traditional Folding of the Flag, while the student body gathered to observe and pray for our nation.



These moments remind us that our mission at The St. Austin School reaches far beyond academic formation. We strive to nurture hearts rooted in gratitude, service, and faith—virtues that form the foundation of true Christian citizenship. This year's gatherings were shining examples of that mission brought to life. ✚

Rocketman Father/Son Event Reaches New Heights



Our recent Rocketman Father/Son event was nothing short of a spectacular success, with more than 110 attendees, making it the largest parent/child event in St. Austin history.

Guided by the event's mystery launch coordinates, father/son teams successfully navigated to Stacy Park in Olivette, where they were greeted by near-perfect skies, calm winds, and ideal launch conditions. The day began on a meaningful note with a prayer led by father and son Greg and Michael Miller, setting the tone for a day built on faith, fun, and shared memories.

Throughout the day, rockets soared, cheers erupted, and burgers disappeared almost as quickly as the rockets themselves. St. Austin dad Mike Stock later shared a favorite moment from the ride home: "I asked James what he thought, and he said, 'This was the best day!'". The final rocket of the day delivered one last surprise: a rocket-mounted camera captured stunning video of its full ascent and descent. *Use this QR code to see Rocket Man's highlight video! 4, 3, 2, 1...*



Special thanks to Brian Giammanco and Matthew McBride, who took leadership roles in planning and executing a great event under budget. Special appreciation to St. Austin mom Allison Balderrama, Historian and Curator at The Boeing Company, whose expertise and historical materials connected Rocketman to St. Louis' rich aerospace legacy, helping elevate the day into a true STEM-focused experience. Additional thanks goes to Joe Gardner, LCDR, USNR and Project Engineer at The Boeing Company, whose engaging lunch presentation traced the history of rocket propulsion from McDonnell Aircraft in St. Louis to SpaceX and Elon Musk catching rockets with "chopsticks."

Most importantly, Rocketman was a reminder of what makes St. Austin special: fathers and sons building, exploring, laughing, and creating lasting memories together. ✚





Raising Saints

CELEBRATING 15 YEARS

What an amazing night spent with friends, sharing news about the school, and seeing your support of our mission!

We are excited to announce that we raised over \$220,000!

We are very grateful for your support to help us realize another 15 years of raising saints together!

If you haven't donated or know friends or family who would like to support St. Austin, please call Mark at 636-751-0420.

Scan to view
"A Vision Being Realized"
the video that moved the hearts
of our guests and donors!

See all of the photos from
this glorious evening at
SaintAustinSchool.org





Raising Saints

CELEBRATING 15 YEARS

Thank You to Our Generous Sponsors

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SaintAustinSchool.org

DISCOVER TRUTH.

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INSPIRE OTHERS.

Donations and Pledges

- SaintAustinSchool.org/donate
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- Call Mark Kraus at 636-751-0420



*We greatly appreciate
your support!*

Gave the Date!
TRIVIA NIGHT
RAISING Saints
NOVEMBER 14
7:00 PM DOORS OPEN AT 6PM
benefiting THE ST. AUSTIN SCHOOL
11211 SCHUETZ RD, ST. LOUIS, MO 63146