

faith

WEST TENNESSEE

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RELIGIOUS VOCATIONS
An offering to the Lord

FEATURE STORY
St. Francis of Assisi
Catholic School lifts
up God-given talents
of its students

SPECIAL REPORT
In celebration of
Pope Benedict XVI



God's Grace
BROUGHT
US BACK
together

ONE COUPLE'S JOURNEY
TO MARRIAGE MINISTRY

lifts up God-given talents of its students



ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI CATHOLIC SCHOOL (SFA) IN CORDOVA, Tennessee, serves students age 2 through eighth grade and prides itself on creating a productive and nurturing environment to prepare students to reach their full potential.

For Principal Mrs. Alicia Brown, serving each child and helping them to discover their God-given gifts and talents while preparing them for high school and the future is her number one priority. She understands that to create leaders of tomorrow it takes a village – both parents and teachers – working together.

Mrs. Brown says, “It is important to me that everyone who steps through our doors – teachers, students and parents – are excited to be here! This attitude enables us to meet the challenges of academic excellence in a positive, fun, and nurturing environment.”

Faith recently had an opportunity to sit down with Mrs. Brown and catch up about all the great things happening at SFA. Here’s a snippet of our conversation.

Faith: For those who don’t know, can you tell me about SFA?

Principal Brown: St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School serves children age 2 through the eighth grade. We are a coed school, and our philosophy is based on the teachings of St. Francis. We focus on the teaching values of Jesus Christ and how he served others. From academics to athletics, we do a lot and offer everything, from STEM to robotics and many extracurriculars like band, yearbook, choir and more. Our gifted program(s) start in first grade and there are options for advanced class options as well. We partner with Project Lead the Way, a nationally recognized STEM

“
I’ve been here for 29 years, since 1994. A majority of our teachers have as well. I have parents who were once my students – they are now my grand students.”

– Principal Alicia Brown.

program, which allows students from 3K to eighth grade to develop a strong foundation in math and science. It’s a feeder program to STEM programs at St. Benedict at Auburndale and Christian Brothers High School. We are a family here and urge our students to find the gifts that God has given them. On average, there are 15 to 20 students per class, and we encourage collaboration between the grades. For example, our eighth graders preparing for confirmation are helping our second graders with First Communion, and our seventh graders

are Mass buddies with our kindergartners. As for our mascot, we are the Timberwolves, based on the wolf of Gubbio. The Wolf of Gubbio was a wolf who, according to the *Fioretti di San Francesco*, terrorized the Umbrian city of Gubbio until he was tamed by St. Francis of Assisi acting on behalf of God. As for curriculum, we use the Eureka method of teaching kids to think deeper about solving problems. The method encourages students to use various mental strategies to solve problems, and to focus on the process instead of the answer.





Faith: What was it like educating through a pandemic, and what, if anything, about that time have you adopted permanently?

Principal Brown: March of 2020 hit, and we extended spring break and never came back. Then we met with leadership and found a way to reach our students via technology. After lots of training, we began teaching remotely for the remainder of the year. The little ones used SeeSaw, an online platform, and we did the best we could. Our kids missed the social interaction though. When we came back to school that fall, we made it work by creating pods to reduce the spread. Then we started doing sports again and even offered a hybrid option for families not ready to have their kids back in person. In the end, we tried to make everything as normal as possible. Our whole community found a lot of acceptance during this time as we all supported one another. Our guidance counselor and school nurse were vital during this time. Flexibility was crucial during this period of time as teachers and students became well versed in using technology. Before the pandemic technology was daunting, now everyone is proficient in the classroom and beyond.

Faith: What are you most looking forward to in 2023 during the second semester?

Principal Brown: I love the second semester. This is when all of the fun events come one after another, including Catholic Schools Week, Grandparents Day, Stump the Priest trivia game and more. The kids participate in the St. Jude Mathathon and school field trips start. It's an exciting time for our students, especially our eighth graders, who get to go to Washington, D.C., for a week during the week before they graduate.

Faith: Can you tell me about Feast Week?

Principal Brown: On the Feast of St Francis, students and faculty work together to follow in the footsteps of our patron saint, Francis of Assisi. We come together in prayer at Mass. We join with our community to have a special blessing of pets. We've had several hundred dogs, cats, rabbits, gerbils, hamsters, birds, chickens, donkeys, miniature horses and steer. Each year, we have a visit from the MPD K-9 unit or the mounted patrol.

After that, the students come together to complete projects for those in need. They make candy poppers for the VA hospital, blessing bags full of toiletries and snacks for the homeless for Room in the Inn and St. Vincent DePaul, baby gifts for Birthright of Memphis, tray favors for Ave Maria Nursing Home and more than 1,000 sandwiches for St. Mary's Soup Kitchen. All of these activities help our students to do as St Francis taught, "Preach the Gospel at all times ... and when necessary, use words."

Our students know that to be a true leader, you must serve others. In this way, we believe that SFA students can change the world, one student at a time.

Faith: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Principal Brown: We have a new house system similar to Harry Potter where students are able to create bonds and learn leadership skills. It's highlighted by contests, service opportunities and more. It unifies the school and creates healthy competition amongst the grades and different classes. We follow the students' lead and offer support where needed. †

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Get ready for the St. Francis of Assisi Mardi Gras Parade coming up on Tuesday, Feb. 21. From live music to games and delicious food, this annual event never disappoints. More info can be found at atsfawolves.org.

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