November 20, 2014

Dear Parent:

Although Thanksgiving Day is still ahead of us, signs of Christmas are popping up everywhere. Holiday advertising and events seem to reach earlier into the fall each year. Even the weather didn’t allow us to enjoy a slow transition to the holiday season but instead walloped us with traditional January wind chills of five to ten below zero. It is easy to get pulled into the countdown to Christmas mentality that is so present in our culture. The fun and exciting focus on presents, treats, and Santa Claus catches the attention of children and adults alike. As a Catholic school we have the chance to steer students back to the true meaning of Christmas and to focus on the liturgical season which precedes it: Advent.

Advent is more than the shopping days before Christmas gift-giving, baking cookies, or writing cards. It is the season that helps us prepare for the birth of Jesus. Prayer, sacrifice, and service help to move students to a more spiritual frame of mind. We begin our Advent season in school with the creation of Advent wreaths. Traditionally, our school Advent wreaths are made up of the small, green, construction-paper “hands” made by the school children. The tracing of each child’s hand is part of the wreath. The wreaths are placed in the hallways of the elementary school and the middle school. The four candles of the Advent wreath symbolize the four weeks of waiting. The lighting of each candle on the wreath along with prayer that we offer each day gradually pushes away darkness and ushers in the coming of the Messiah, the Light of the World.

Sacrifice and service help to refocus students and remind them that it is through giving that they grow in compassion, empathy, and selflessness. Our holiday baskets for families in need have been very successful. You have helped children understand that by working together their contributions, regardless of size, can have a significant effect. Our Ohio State/Michigan Day fundraising will take place on Tuesday, November 25, 2014. The collection containers are decorated and out on display. If you have lived in this part of the state for any length of time, you probably know of the rivalry between these two huge football communities. In exchange for the right to wear their favorite team’s colors, students are invited to place a donation in one of the collection containers…Michigan or Ohio State. There has been a third container for many years for those students and families who have only one loyalty … Notre Dame! Contributions to the teams have been growing all week. Tuesday, at the end of the day, the final donation amounts for each team will be announced. (There is a bit of a myth that the team that collects the most in donations will be favored on Saturday, November 29, as the two teams face each other in Columbus. We want to reiterate that it is a myth, but it has led to last minute, enthusiastic, intense adult fans placing five, ten, and twenty dollar bills in our collection containers.) All donations are accepted and sent to Central City Ministries for the schools of Queen of Apostles and Rosary Cathedral…and they are truly grateful!
Our Thanksgiving basket collections were wonderful, and we were very happy to be able to share these gifts with those in need. As classrooms collect their holiday basket items, teachers have the chance to speak to students about the Catholic social justice principle of solidarity which reminds us that we are indeed our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers. Our children grow in their ability to understand this principle – to develop empathy for others - through service to their local and global communities.

St. Joseph Parish has for many years supported the local community by filling Christmas gift baskets for families in need. This year some St. Joseph School classrooms are partnering with our parish outreach to these families. In addition, primary classrooms collect hats, coats, mittens, and scarves for Central City Ministries of Toledo. Other classrooms are supporting holiday outreach to families with severe medical needs. As the weeks go by, children are encouraged to think about how they might give rather than receive.

School Safety. CRITICAL ALERT. One of our continuing goals is to maintain a safe environment for all children within our care. School safety plans establish response procedures for threats to the environment. Fire drills, tornado alerts, lock-down protocols, and potential evacuation events are a part of that plan. The plan is reviewed every year and filed with the Catholic Schools’ Office as well as various enforcement and oversight agencies. However, it is only as good as the compliance we achieve. There is an issue in the morning arrival procedures that is putting children at risk.

Our Traffic Pattern and Procedures for Arrival and Dismissal are posted on our web-site under Resources. A hard copy is sent home at the beginning of the year. We are a large school with many families. Many of those families drive their children to school in the morning. As a driver you have two options upon arrival:

- First, to park your car in the parking lot across from the elementary building and walk your child across the street, at the crosswalk, observing the light. There is an adult crossing guard at the light.
- Second, to get in the single line of vehicles that forms as cars enter the parking lot. The drivers in these cars are moving slowly forward and as they get to the drop-off spot, they stop their cars, their children open the car door/s on the passenger side and exit. The children walk to the crosswalk and wait for directions from the crossing guard.
- The problem. Some drivers are not observing the single line rule and are using this route through the parking lot to pass other cars….at a higher than safe rate of speed. You cannot do that. Absolutely cannot do that. It puts children at risk. It is a safety issue, not a convenience issue. Please be sure that everyone who drives your children to school is aware of this reminder.

The second safety issue in morning arrival involves drivers of cars that enter the elementary school driveway, drop their children off at the school doors, and head quickly south across the back parking lot into the headlights of on-coming buses. That route is closed to all traffic except buses between 7:30 am and 8:00 am. Again I ask that you make all those who drive your children to school aware of this safety issue.

Our maintenance staff provides for the excellent supervision of the crosswalk and parking lots. They are present in all weather conditions. They do it to keep children safe. They report to me any violations they see that are safety issues, and whenever possible they identify the driver. If you observe driver actions that are safety concerns, please help us by reporting the concern immediately to the maintenance staff on duty or to the office.
Christmas Programs.

Christmas Program. Thursday, December 18, 2014. This annual Christmas program is presented at the Franciscan Center by students in grades three, four, and five. The program begins at 7:00 pm. More information will be included in the Thursday Envelope of December 4th regarding dress, arrival time, and gathering locations for each grade level.

Grades One and Two. The Christmas Song-Fest for first and second grade students will be held on Friday, December 12, 2014, in the church from 9:00 am – 9:30 am.

As we prepare for our annual Christmas Programs, we are all reminded that though there is intensity in planning, rehearsing, costuming, staging, and thinking through any potential weather delays, it is wonderful to be part of a Catholic school during the Thanksgiving, Advent and Christmas seasons. Faith, belief, hope, and joy can be read on the faces of children. As we prepare ourselves and our students for Christmas Day, we begin with a day of...

...Thanksgiving...

And on that day, November 27, 2014, we pray that you with your family find a moment to offer prayers of blessing and thanksgiving: for parishioners who actively support our efforts; for parents, like you, committed to their children’s faith formation; and for teachers whose dedication makes our school’s mission a reality. On this day of Thanksgiving, each of us at St. Joseph School gives special thanks for the faithful support and commitment of this Catholic community. We accomplish our mission because of you!

Happy Thanksgiving!

Sally A. Koppinger
Principal