

“I always love being at St. Peter’s... It is a very special school”

Mary Puza, UWL Professor/Advisor

St. Peter’s School is Worth Celebrating!

Sandy: Catholic Schools Week is a great time to talk about how the school is doing and what our plans are for the future. Our mission statement is that we are a family of learners, trying to live like Jesus, in our school, homes, and community. We try to live out that mission by performing Works of Mercy throughout the year and by being a special place where everyone feels like family.

Rachel: Enrollment has gone up and down over the past two decades, but we are usually between 60 and 70 students, which is right where we are now. St. Peter’s School currently has five full-time teachers and two part-time teachers. We have 46 families and 63 students. We have a long-term strategic plan that we are always working on because we believe in continuous improvement and planning for the future. We are always working toward providing the best possible education that is based on the very best educational practices supported by research. We try to keep tuition at a price that families can afford. We want to share God’s love, and God’s purpose for our lives, with as many children and families as possible.

The staff and students of St. Peter’s School are very grateful for all the support this parish has given us over the last 100+ years. When I started as principal seventeen years ago, the parish was giving the school a subsidy of over \$80,000 per year. This year, the parish finance council is hoping they will be able to give the school a subsidy of \$35,000. This decrease in subsidy from the parish to the school has happened gradually over the past several years because fewer people are coming to church and because church support has gone down while expenses have gone up. That leads me to our current school finances:

This will be the first year that the school will run at a loss of several thousand dollars. The teachers and staff are trying very hard to minimize that loss by keeping our expenses as low as possible to give the parish time to catch up financially. Here are some examples of ways we’ve reduced costs:

- We cut a .5 teacher position. This was done by the principal reverting back to a principal/teaching position requiring 50-70 hours per week which is not sustainable. Teachers assume additional responsibilities while principal teaches.
- Staff keep their thermostats lower in classrooms and have kids wear warmer clothes
- Staff only receive a gas card when they go to diocesan meetings, instead of receiving mileage reimbursement. For example, a teacher receives a \$20 gas card for a trip to Rochester instead of \$54 for mileage
- To save the cost of a van to transport preschoolers to daycares (cheapest is \$130/day), the principal has been driving them daily.
- Whenever feasible, when there is a sick call, teachers take on additional classes to save money for a substitute.
- Teachers have been purchasing many items for classrooms out of their own pockets or donating time to write for grants for materials.
- Principal has been working with area businesses like Gundersen to acquire used equipment instead of purchasing new (examples stools, book cases, utility carts, desks, etc.)
- Some staff requests for purchases have been denied.
- Staff work for less money than they would get if they worked at public school or at Crucifixion. For example, at LaCrescent Public School, an average teacher with 10 years’ experience makes \$51,095. At St. Peter’s, a teacher with 10 years’ experience makes \$27,250. We teach here because this is our home and because we feel God has called us to be teachers here.

The church and school are vital to one another. Without this church, the school would not exist. Without this school, the church would lose more parishioners. Bishop Quinn believes strongly in Catholic Education. He has even said he will not close a parish that has a school. The church and school need each other. St. Peter's students want to help our church as well. Here are some of the ways that St. Peter's students help our church (Isabel):

- They put up the nativity set out front
- Put up/take down the angel tree in the lobby
- Help with shoveling sidewalks and entry ways
- Help put up and take down scaffolding for window updates
- Help their parents with church cleaning when assigned
- Sing and serve at every funeral in our parish
- Prepare special Sunday Masses (8 per year)
- Helped with renovation and other big projects
- Take out classroom garbage and recycling and sweep cafeteria and wash tables daily to help take care of our building
- Perform Stations of the Cross and share soup lunch with parishioners weekly during Lent and take a weekly turn with parish Eucharistic Adoration
- Make our parish proud by doing well academically and behaviorally in high school and beyond
- Share their faith and what they learn at school with their families (some having even been baptized)

St. Peter's students also help our community by these Works of Mercy (Isabel):

- Sing/visit at area nursing homes
- Send letters/cards to people serving in the military
- Ring bells for Salvation Army
- Collect food for Hokah Food Shelf and Place of Grace
- Caroling around town
- Clean up Hokah area and Adopt A Highway for Earth Day
- Collect hats and mittens for those in need
- Make bread, gifts, cards, and cookies, and deliver them to over 70 people in Hokah, Caledonia, Houston, LaCrescent, Brownsville, and LaCrosse every Christmas and Easter

These are just some of the things our staff and students do each day to share God's love with others by serving others.

Like you, we are praying that our parish starts to grow again. Did you know that the majority of St. Peter's church support is coming from the parishioners over the age of 65? And they are giving a crazy high percentage of their fixed incomes! It's sad that our generation and younger, people age 25 to 65, have such busy lives that going to church isn't as important to us. It seems like people will drop a couple hundred dollars over a weekend to go out of town for sports or take their family out for supper, but we won't give \$50 for church support. Maybe people our age just feel like their life is already full enough or that their life is complete without God? I don't know. But I do know that this is our church, and these people are our church family. We need to be here to support one another in this crazy life. Our grandparents built St. Peter's with horses and pulleys and every penny they had. Our parents are giving all they can give of their time and their money. Now it's up to us. We have to decide if our church and our church family are an important part of our lives. Maybe we should think about giving 10% of our income, tithing, like they used to do, or maybe just making a small change in our lives would be enough, like setting up \$20 automatic withdrawal for our church support using BillPay or some other online giving. Either way, please continue to pray for the future of St. Peter's Church and School.

Sandy: We appreciate everyone's suggestions on the surveys that were handed out today. After Mass, please drop the surveys in the box in back of church and pick up the handouts. The blue handouts are transcripts of what Rachel talked about today. The yellow handouts have contact information for the School Board, School Finance Council, Pastoral Council, and Parish Finance Council, as well as a list of ways you can help St. Peter's Church and School. Please take extra for your family members who are not here today. Everyone is invited to come downstairs after our last song for coffee and donuts. Thank you for your time and your support. God bless all of you! Please stand for our closing song, #733, Lead Me Lord.

How you can help:

- Pray for future of St. Peter's Church and School!
- Legacy Giving- contact a fraternal organization, lawyer, or financial advisor for ways to include St. Peter's Church or School in your estate planning through wills, annuities, insurance, etc. There are ways to leave money to St. Peter's while still collecting a guaranteed income each month. There are also ways to include St. Peter's and still help your family.
- IRA Gifting-Talk to your tax preparer for ways to help St. Peter's that are tax free or tax deductible. One way is through your IRA by giving your donation tax free before taking annual distribution.
- Get more involved at church or school- ask what needs to be done around the building (change decorations, paint/repair something, clean church, etc.), do things with our youth to get them more involved in church (fill rainbow activity bags; help with Sunday School; create handouts for school-aged kids to complete during church, start a children's choir, etc.), do lunch/recess duty for school on Wednesdays, etc.
- Support fundraisers (roast beef dinner, Extravaganza Auction, Football Mania, Annual Petition, Magazine Sale, etc.)
- BillPay- set up automatic withdrawal for your church support to ensure that St. Peter's has consistent income
- Online giving – Watch for a link coming soon on the parish and school websites; giving is just a click away
- Smile at each other at church; welcome strangers; help each other; make each other feel important

Are religious people happier than non-religious people? The short answer is yes. There has been a considerable amount of research addressing this question and findings tend to indicate that religious people are (or at least report being) happier than non-religious people. There are some studies out there that do not find this effect. However, the lion's share of the data on this topic suggests that levels of happiness are greatest amongst religious folks. For the full article, go to psychologytoday.com. God wants us to be happy!

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