

Madonna del Sasso School Alumni Newsletter



Class of 2023 campus mural

**INSTRUCT
MOTIVATE
NURTURE**



A Message from Our Principal

Dear Madonna del Sasso Alumni,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to our alumni community through this newsletter. As Principal of Madonna del Sasso School, I am excited to share the wonderful things happening on our campus and to keep you connected to the place where your own journey began. Our school continues to flourish because of the contributions and prayers of so many—students, families, staff, and yes, our cherished alumni. Madonna del Sasso School remains dedicated to providing an academically rigorous program for preschool through eighth grade. Our students embark on an educational journey that values social, emotional, and academic growth, while also being firmly rooted in faith. With small class sizes, individualized attention, and a challenging curriculum, we prepare our graduates for success in high school and beyond.

At the heart of all we do is our commitment to faith formation. Every day, our students grow in God's love through prayer, reflection, Mass, and service to others. These experiences help build strong character and leadership, just as they did for you when you walked these halls.

We are proud of the community you helped build, and we look forward to continuing this connection with you. Whether by visiting our campus, attending events, or simply staying in touch through this newsletter, you are an important part of the Madonna family.

Thank you for being part of our story. We are excited to share the journey ahead with you.

Blessings,

James Evans

Principal, Madonna del Sasso School

Madonna del Sasso School Undergoes Major Growth and Innovation in Recent Years:

Faith, Academics, and Community at the Heart of Transformation

Over the past six years, Madonna del Sasso School has experienced a season of exciting change and significant growth. From achieving full accreditation status to expanding curriculum and enrollment, MDS is building on its strong foundation with an eye toward the future.

One of our school's most notable achievements was earning full accreditation status from the Western Catholic Educational Association (WCEA) in 2024. This milestone affirms the school's commitment to academic excellence, faith formation, and continuous self-improvement across all grade levels.

This recognition came during a time of substantial growth. Enrollment has nearly doubled, reaching approximately 300 students today—the highest numbers the school has seen in years. With this growth has come renewed energy, expanded programming, and a deepened sense of community.

Academically, Madonna del Sasso has broadened its curriculum, particularly at the middle school level. Students now have access to enrichment courses such as guitar, career education with guest speakers, leveled Spanish, sports conditioning, finance, theology, threading, art, music, fitness, and yearbook production. Middle schoolers also gain leadership experience through a teacher's aide program and student council, helping to build confidence and responsibility.

For both the middle school and younger students, Madonna has made a strong investment in enrichment, offering dedicated instruction in art, music, Spanish, and physical education. These opportunities allow students to explore their talents and develop essential skills beyond core academics.



Middle School guitar class practicing

Faith continues to be central to daily life at Madonna del Sasso School. The recently implemented Virtue Program highlights a different Christian virtue each month, recognizing students who exemplify those values. The school choir, led by the 8th-grade religion teacher, Jenna Prieto, now plays an active role in Mass, helping lead worship and building liturgical participation. Meanwhile, the Big Buddy/Little Buddy Program pairs middle school students with younger grades, fostering relationships that model compassion, service, and leadership.

Academic support has also expanded. A reading interventionist now works directly with students who need targeted literacy support, while the Homework Club offers after-school tutoring from credentialed teachers, ensuring that all learners have access to the help they need to succeed.

In the classroom, educational technology has been upgraded to support modern teaching methods. Interactive tools and digital platforms help enhance instruction, personalize learning, and prepare students for a technology-driven world.

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Additional curriculum has also been added including a new writing program to help students develop critical skills in English Language Arts. Concurrently, a new writing assessment was developed by the school to monitor and track student progress in this critical domain and of the overall efficacy of the writing program.

Perhaps one of the most impactful additions to the school is its new Service Learning Initiative. Each grade level participates in specific service projects, providing students the opportunity to engage directly with community needs. At the end of the school year, students will share the outcomes of their projects with the school community, learning firsthand the value of giving back and the joy of making a difference. According to Catherine Rowe, Director of Curriculum and Advancement, “The Service Learning Initiative will provide a transformative experience for students, connecting them to the community and to those in need beyond their classrooms, providing a foundation for a lifetime of charitable giving and sharing of their time and talents.”

As these changes take root, Madonna del Sasso School continues to thrive—balancing tradition with innovation, while always staying grounded in our Catholic mission.

“The Service Learning Initiative will provide a transformative experience for students, connecting them to the community and to those in need beyond their classrooms, providing a foundation for a lifetime of charitable giving and sharing of their time and talents.”

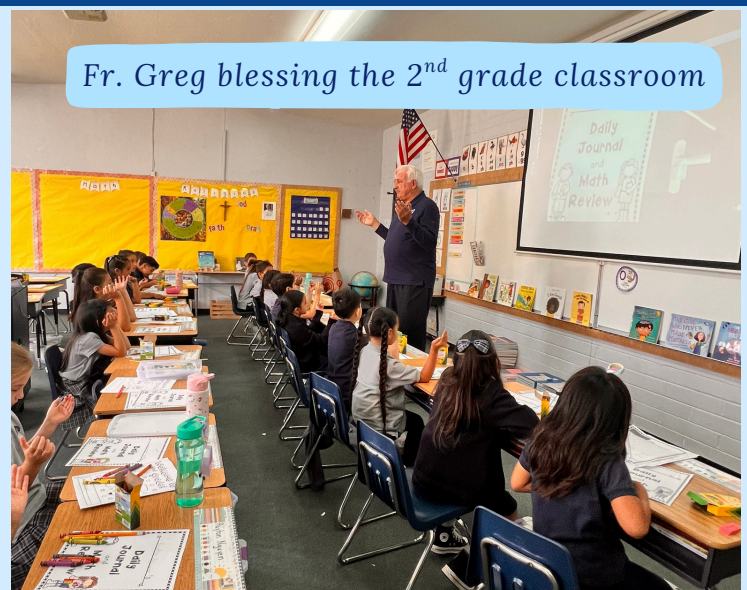
Catherine Rowe- Director of Curriculum and Advancement



MDS Virtue Program trait of the month board

Cultivating a School Year Rooted in Faith: Father Greg Blesses the MDS Classrooms

Father Greg started the school year by planting the seeds of faith in our school. On the first day of school, Father Greg visited each classroom and performed a blessing of the room, teacher, and students. This wonderful, annual tradition exemplifies Father Greg’s commitment to the faith formation of Madonna’s students and highlights the beautiful partnership between Madonna del Sasso School and Church. The teachers are now ready to cultivate each student’s faith journey this year, providing the critical foundation for a life filled with Catholic values, hope, and love!



Fr. Greg blessing the 2nd grade classroom



Students and grandparents celebrated Mass together

Generations of Love and Faith: Celebrating Grandparents Day at Madonna del Sasso School

At Madonna del Sasso School, tradition and community go hand in hand—and few events capture this spirit more beautifully than our annual Grandparents Day celebration. On Friday, September 5th, 2025, the campus came alive with joy as MDS welcomed grandparents and special friends for a day of faith, family, and fellowship.

The day began with a heartfelt morning assembly that included a special blessing for all of our guests. As part of the school's monthly tradition, the Virtue Award ceremony was held, recognizing students from preschool through 8th grade who best exemplified the virtue of respect. Each homeroom teacher selected two deserving students, highlighting the importance of character and kindness within the school community. Following the assembly, guests were invited to Cross Hall to enjoy a light breakfast of beverages and breakfast treats and a welcome from Principal James Evans. It was a lovely time for connection and conversation among Madonna families.

Next, visitors headed to the classrooms, where students eagerly shared a special craft activity with their grandparents and special friends. These moments of creativity and collaboration brought generations together in a meaningful way. Meanwhile, the middle school students upheld another beloved tradition—hosting a lively and fun-filled Bingo game, always a favorite part of the day.

To continue promoting a love of reading, families were encouraged to visit the school Book Fair. Grandparents had the opportunity to help their grandchildren select new books, supporting literacy and learning beyond the classroom.

The celebration concluded with a beautiful Mass, presided over by Father Greg and assisted by Deacon Carl.



Grandparents Day Mass

Grandparents and special friends sat proudly beside their grandchildren as the entire school community came together in worship and thanksgiving, celebrating the shared faith that is the heart of Madonna del Sasso School. Grandparents Day remains a treasured event, reminding us of the vital role family and faith play in the life of MDS school. We are grateful to everyone who joined us and helped make the day so special.

Alumni Spotlight: Jenna Prieto, Class of 2005

From MDS Student to MDS Teacher: A Beautiful Full-Circle Journey

This fall, we're thrilled to highlight the story of Jenna Prieto, a proud member of Madonna del Sasso's Class of 2005, who has returned to the very classrooms that shaped her—as a middle school history and religion teacher.

Jenna began her journey at Madonna del Sasso School in 1st grade and spent eight memorable years here, filled with laughter, faith, and formative experiences. Some of her most vivid memories come from her 5th grade year with Ms. Allie. "There were so many smiles and happy moments," she recalls fondly.

But it was her early elementary years that quietly planted the seeds for her future career. Her 2nd and 3rd grade teachers, Mrs. Delacruz-Martinez and Mrs. Mustain, had a profound impact. "They made me feel important and loved. We did so much reading, singing, and joyful learning.

Whatever it was, something at 8 years old stuck with me," she shares. Jenna kept in touch with Mrs. Delacruz-Martinez through the years and even attended her retirement celebration. Although Mrs. Mustain has since passed, her legacy lives on through Jenna's teaching.

After graduating from MDS, Jenna earned her degree in Elementary Education from Arizona State University's Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, along with her teaching credential. Over the past 13 years, she's taught grades 1 through 8—most often in 4th grade—and spent a decade in public education before feeling a strong pull to return to Catholic schools.



Jenna's 4th grade Madonna school photo

"It feels like a full-circle moment," Jenna says. "I'm walking the same halls I once walked as a student, teaching in the same classrooms that inspired me to pursue this career."

That calling led her back home to Madonna del Sasso School, where she now teaches middle school history and religion. "It feels like a full-circle moment," Jenna says. "I'm walking the same halls I once walked as a student, teaching in the same classrooms that inspired me to pursue this career."

Among the teachers who inspired her was Mr. Sullivan, her middle school Spanish and religion teacher. "He challenged us in ways we didn't always enjoy at the time, but now I understand why. His lessons stayed with me." Today, Mr. Sullivan is the principal at Palma School, and Jenna still sees him around town and at Mass—a meaningful reminder of her roots in Catholic education.

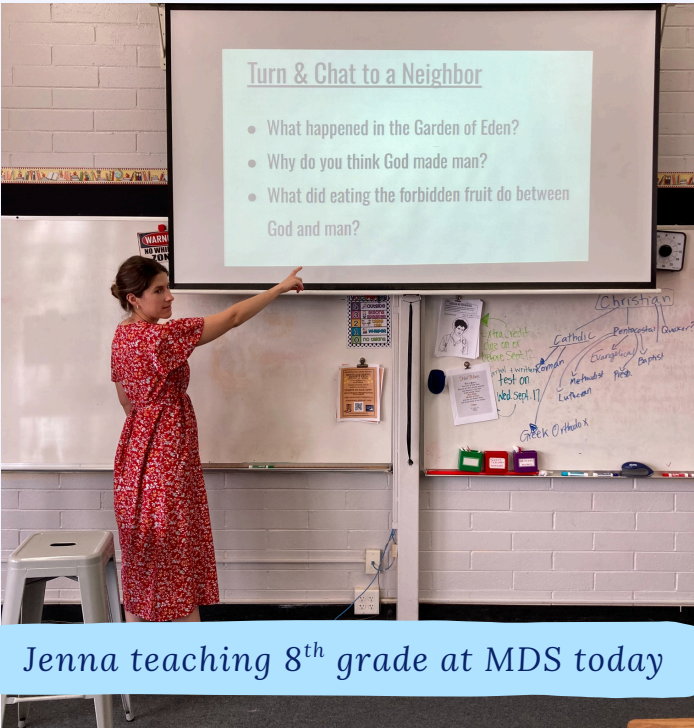
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Jenna recalls one of her favorite MDS traditions, Game Day, reflecting that it was one of the most spirited days of the year. “Every grade had a color, and we’d compete in the same fun games every year. We would dress in that color, paint our faces in that color, make posters, all to show class spirit! It was the best day of the school year!”

Another special memory and tradition that is still part of the school today is Grandparents Day, where her grandfather would always win for having the most grandchildren attending the school— at one point he had ten at once!

As a teacher now, Jenna brings her heart, faith, and experience into the classroom with clear goals: “I want every student to encounter the Lord in a special way, to develop their own personal relationship with God, and to approach history and religion with open hearts and minds. It’s such an honor to walk with them as they explore both their faith and their education.”

Today, Jenna is also a proud Madonna parent, as her own children now represent the third generation of her family to attend Madonna del Sasso. “This school holds a very special place in my heart,” she says. “I couldn’t be happier to see my children growing, thriving, and becoming part of this beautiful legacy.”



Jenna teaching 8th grade at MDS today

ART IN ACTION!

THE CLASS OF 2023 AND THE CLASS OF 2024 COLLABORATED WITH A PROFESSIONAL MURALIST TO LEAVE A TRULY MEMORABLE MARK ON THE MADONNA DEL SASSO CAMPUS. EACH CLASS USED A GRID-STYLE TECHNIQUE TO PAINT A UNIQUE MURAL. ALL STUDENTS IN THE GRADUATING CLASS CONTRIBUTED IN THE PROCESS. THE MURALS SERVE AS A CONSISTANT REMINDER OF FAITH, CHARITY, HOPE, LOVE, AND SPORTSMANSHIP FOR THE CURRENT MADONNA STUDENTS. THEY ARE ALSO A BEAUTIFUL AND WELCOMING DISPLAY FOR ALL WHO VISIT THE CAMPUS!

Are You an MDS Alum?

We’d love to hear your story! Whether you’re near or far, teaching or traveling, let us know where life has taken you after Madonna del Sasso. Email us at crowe@mdsschool.com to be featured in an upcoming edition!



Class of 2024 mural painted outside of Room 8

Crusader Spotlight: Sebastian Perez

From Game Day Tug-of-War to Global Health Research

When Sebastian Perez reflects on his time at Madonna del Sasso School, his memories are filled with warmth, connection, and meaningful beginnings. From preschool through 5th grade (2008–2015), Sebastian was a familiar face in the hallways, on the playground, and especially during one of his favorite annual events—Game Day. “Tug of war was always the biggest deal,” he recalls, smiling. “Every class would practice during P.E. to get ready. It was a full, Olympic-style competition. Everyone was involved—it brought the whole school together.”

That small, tight-knit community left a lasting mark on Sebastian. With a class size of just 20 to 30 students, he remembers the strong bonds formed during those early years. “It was a special environment. I still hear about classmates and what they’re doing now,” he says. Those connections and the school’s traditions—like the Christmas program at Sherwood Hall—helped shape his sense of belonging and purpose.

One pivotal moment came in 3rd grade, when his teacher ignited his academic curiosity. “She didn’t just teach the basics,” he explains. “She brought topics to life and set a high standard for what being a good student meant. The values I learned in her class have stuck with me ever since.”

After MDS, Sebastian attended Monte Vista for middle school and Alisal High School (Class of 2022). Sebastian’s passion for academics deepened throughout high school, eventually leading him to the University of Chicago. Originally considering a career in law, he quickly realized his true calling was in medicine. “I liked writing, but I found law to be more stressful than exciting,” he admits. “Science came naturally to me, so I started exploring pre-med.”



Global health advocate and researcher, Sebastian Perez

His journey took a meaningful turn when he worked as a nurse assistant in the psychiatric ward at Natividad Medical Center. The experience gave him real-world insight into patient care—and solidified his decision to pursue medicine. From there, he began working in research, eventually connecting with renowned breast cancer researcher Dr. Olapade at University of Chicago. Their work, in collaboration with UCSF, focuses on increasing access to breast cancer screenings and understanding disparities in healthcare—especially among underserved communities in South Chicago. But Sebastian’s impact doesn’t stop there. This summer, he traveled to South Africa to conduct liver cancer research at the University of Cape Town, under the guidance of Dr. Sobnach. There, he gained hands-on surgical experience and contributed to vital research examining liver health demographics across Sub-Saharan Africa. “We’re working on a new scoring system for liver cancer patients—a more affordable way to assess liver health, especially important in areas with limited medical resources,” he explains.

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Sebastian is now co-authoring a paper based on that research, aiming to improve early detection and care for liver cancer patients across the continent. He plans to return to South Africa with classmates from University of Chicago to continue his work and support a thesis project focused on liver health in the region.

“We’re working on a new scoring system for liver cancer patients—a more affordable way to assess liver health, especially important in areas with limited medical resources.”

Currently majoring in Public Policy with a concentration in Public Health, Sebastian is passionate about addressing gaps in healthcare access. One of his research projects even explored drug policy reform in Oregon, highlighting his interest in how policy and medicine intersect to serve vulnerable populations.

As he prepares to apply to medical school this coming spring, Sebastian isn’t yet sure what kind of doctor he’ll become—though surgery is a strong contender. What’s certain is his drive to make healthcare more equitable, both locally and globally.

And through it all, one thing remains his favorite: spending time with his beloved dog, Sosa. Sebastian’s family also has close ties to Madonna—his sister, Annie, graduated in 2024, and their father, Justo, continues to volunteer at the school. Justo plays an integral role in maintaining the MDS website.

From MDS tug-of-war champion to future physician and global researcher, Sebastian Perez continues to live out the values he first learned in a small 3rd grade classroom—a testament to the power of community, curiosity, and compassionate care.

*Have a Crusader Spotlight story you’d like to share?
Email crowe@mdsschool.com*

Welcome Catherine Rowe – Director of Advancement and Curriculum

We’re excited to welcome Catherine Rowe as our new Director of Advancement and Curriculum at Madonna del Sasso School.

Catherine brings over 15 years of teaching and leadership experience in both public and Catholic schools, including the last 10 years within the Diocese of Monterey (5 at MDS). For the past two years, she has served as Assistant Principal at MDS, where she led major initiatives such as launching the Virtue Program, developing a disciplinary intervention system, implementing a new writing curriculum and assessment, overseeing Student Council, leading the successful WCEA accreditation process, founding the Homework Club intervention program, starting a school choir, and directing major school events and liturgical celebrations.

She holds a BA in English from Aurora University, a MA in Education from National-Louis University, and a Master’s Certificate in Catholic School Leadership from Loyola Marymount University.

Catherine is passionate about Catholic education and looks forward to advancing our curriculum, writing grants, fundraising, and building strong alumni connections. Feel free to reach out to her at crowe@mdsschool.com.

From Eyesore to Inspiration:

Shed Renovation Project Underway at MDS

What was once a crumbling, forgotten storage shed on our campus is now the focus of an exciting transformation—and we're inviting our alumni family to be part of it!

Over the summer, the long-dilapidated shed, previously marked by a hole in the roof and years of disuse, was completely gutted. This marks the first step in reimagining the space as a vibrant hub for creativity, learning, and community. In the coming weeks, the roof will be removed as we prepare for the next phase of renovation.

Thanks to the generosity of one of our kindergarten parents, who is donating his professional roofing services, a brand-new roof will be installed as soon as we've completed fundraising for the necessary trusses, engineering, and permitting. This incredible act of stewardship reflects the spirit of giving that makes our school community so special. But that's just the beginning.

Looking ahead, we're planning to host an open-air art class in the space later this school year, with a fully operational indoor art and extension room launching next year. Once the roof is complete, we'll begin the next fundraising phase to install windows, doors, insulation, and flooring—turning this once-overlooked structure into a creative oasis for our students.

As we continue to envision this space, we'd love to hear from our alumni. We're considering ways to incorporate a dedicated alumni area within the new space—somewhere we can proudly display graduating class photos and celebrate the generations who have come before. Your ideas, memories, and support could help shape this space into something truly meaningful for both current and future students.



The MDS shed waiting to be revitalized

Dine, Dance, and Make a Difference: MDS Boots & Brews Benefit Returns October 10!

Madonna del Sasso School is thrilled to announce the return of our beloved Boots and Brews benefit fundraiser! Now in its 4th year, this annual dinner dance gala will take place on Friday, October 10, 2025, in Cross Hall, and promises an unforgettable evening in support of our amazing students.

Get ready for a night full of live music and DJ entertainment, silent and live auctions, raffles, and of course, a BBQ dinner that will satisfy your appetite while you dance the night away! We'll also be hosting a 50/50 raffle, so come ready to win big.

Boots and Brews is one of Madonna del Sasso School's largest fundraisers, and all proceeds help bridge crucial funding gaps to ensure we continue providing an exceptional Catholic education for our preschool through 8th-grade students.

Tickets are only \$50 per person and include dinner, two drinks, and an evening full of fun and community. Sponsorship packages are also available starting at \$250 for both individuals and businesses. All sponsors receive event tickets and media promotion as a thank-you for their generous support. To attend, become a sponsor, or to donate, please contact crowe@mdsschool.com or visit our event website: <https://ourschool.support/MDS>

Madonna del Sasso Welcomes 2025-2026 Student Council

Leadership in Action: A Letter from the President

Hello, my name is Emmalina and I was elected student council president. Let me tell you a little bit about myself. I have gone to this school since kindergarten and now I am in eighth grade. Last year, I was on the student council and was the commissioner at large. This year I hope to achieve a lot as president. I would like to plan fundraisers, fun events, and more things for the school. One task I would like to accomplish is reviving the garden to its original beauty. I have enjoyed MDS my whole time here. I enjoy our fun events such as our Hispanic Heritage food festival and the Halloween carnival. I also enjoy spirit dress-up days and school Masses. I look forward to Fridays when we go to kindergarten and do fun activities with our buddies. I hope this school year is amazing. Go Crusaders!

Madonna Memories

We would like to create a section highlighting Alumni memories of MDS. Please email your favorite memory of MDS to crowe@mdsschool.com to be featured in our next edition.

MADONNA DEL SASSO SCHOOL STUDENT COUNCIL 2025-2026!



YOUR STUDENT LEADERS