

Madonna del Sasso School Alumni Newsletter

MDS Class of 2026!



Welcoming Our Newest Alumni: Celebrating the Madonna del Sasso School Class of 2026

The Madonna del Sasso School Class of 2026 has officially graduated, leaving behind a legacy of leadership, service, faith, and unforgettable memories. As these students now join the Madonna alumni community, we celebrate a remarkable eighth grade year filled with academic growth, meaningful service, spiritual reflection, and joyful fellowship.

One of the defining accomplishments of the Class of 2026 was their incredible participation in the school's new Service Initiative Program. Throughout the year, the students demonstrated compassion and creativity while raising more than \$3,000 for charitable organizations, including the Breast Cancer Assistance Group and Coastal Kids Home Care. In addition to fundraising efforts, students organized the donation of more than 200 toys for children in need served by Coastal Kids Home Care.

The students enthusiastically led many of the fundraising activities themselves, including craft shops featuring handmade items, face painting events, free dress days, toy donation competitions between classes, and even coordinating a visit from the Kona Ice truck to campus. Their efforts reflected not only school spirit, but also a true commitment to serving others with generosity and love.

Beyond their service work, the graduating class embraced leadership opportunities throughout the school community. The eighth graders faithfully led their Kindergarten buddies throughout the year, building meaningful relationships through shared activities, school events, and Mass celebrations. Their mentorship helped create lasting connections between the youngest and oldest students on campus while modeling kindness, responsibility, and faith-filled leadership.

Continued on next page

Members of the Class of 2026 also played active roles in student life through Student Council, choir, and leadership at school Masses. Whether altar serving, leading prayers, singing in the choir, or representing their classmates in Student Council, the 8th grade students consistently demonstrated enthusiasm and commitment to the Madonna community.

The Class of 2026 also enjoyed an exciting and memorable year outside the classroom. During Spring Break, students traveled with Mr. Evans and parent chaperones to Washington and New York City, where they connected their study of U.S. History to real-world experiences and the arts. A major highlight of the trip was attending *Hamilton* on Broadway, an experience that inspired students long after they returned home.

Back on campus, the class brought that inspiration to life by choreographing and performing one of the musical's iconic song-and-dance numbers during the school talent show, complete with a surprise guest appearance by Mr. Evans that delighted students and families alike!



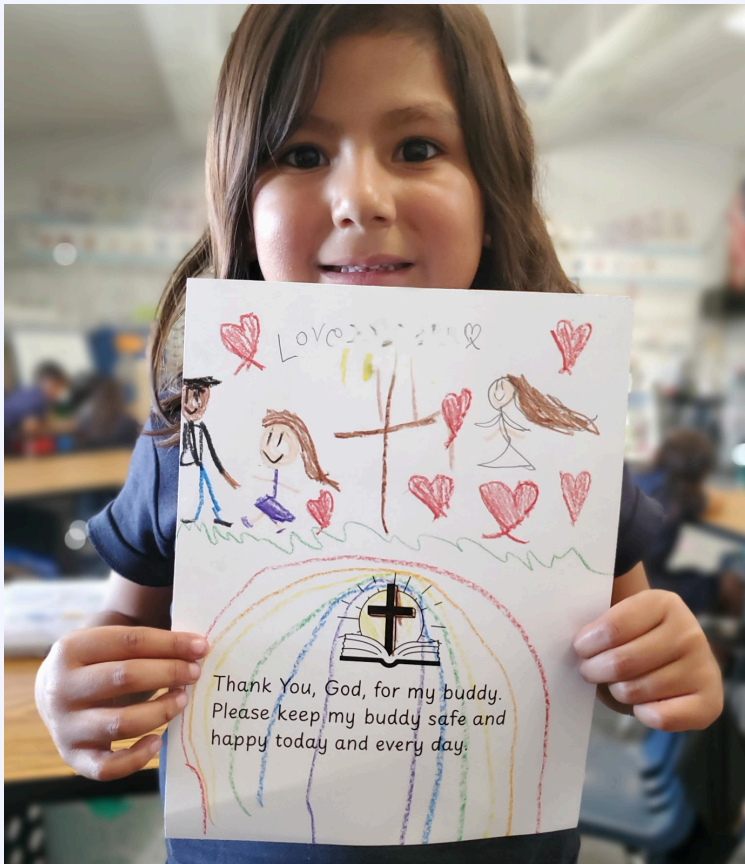
8th grade field trip to the Sunset Center

Additional highlights from the year included educational field trips to the Santa Lucia Preserve in Carmel Valley to study ecosystems and environmental science, a visit to the Sunset Center in Carmel-by-the-Sea to engage in the performing arts, as well as an exciting 8th grade 'fun day' trip to California's Great America. Spiritually, students participated in the meaningful traditions of an 8th grade retreat and of reenacting Jesus' Passion during Holy Week and the Stations of the Cross, demonstrating reverence and reflection during the Lenten season.

Throughout the year, the Class of 2026 embodied the values that define Madonna del Sasso School- faith, leadership, service, and community. They supported one another, embraced opportunities to grow, and made lasting memories that will stay with them for years to come.

As they begin the next chapter of their educational journey, we proudly welcome them into the Madonna alumni family. We pray that each graduate continues to be guided by our shared Catholic mission and remains inspired to live out their faith through hope, love, compassion, and service to others.

Congratulations, Class of 2026! Your Madonna family is proud of you and excited for all that lies ahead.



Kindergarten buddies created prayer cards for the 8th grade retreat

Alumni Spotlight: Charleen Milburn Ramey, Class of 1966

A Life of Leadership, Service, and Community

For Madonna del Sasso School alumna Charleen Milburn Ramey, the values learned during her years at Madonna became the foundation for a remarkable career in public service and healthcare leadership.

Charleen moved to Salinas in 1957 and began first grade at Madonna in 1958, shortly after the school opened its doors. Her family quickly became deeply involved in both the school and parish community. Her father devoted countless hours to school maintenance committees and landscaping projects, while her mother served actively in the Altar Society and other parish activities. Looking back, Charleen now recognizes how profoundly that example of service shaped her life.

“At the time, it was a little embarrassing because my parents seemed to be in the yearbook more than I was,” she laughed. “But at Madonna, that involvement was just part of life.”

Her parents’ examples extended beyond the parish. Through serving the community, the parish, and the country during World War II, they modeled leadership, civic responsibility, and commitment to giving back. Charleen fondly remembers helping prepare sandwiches and deliver meals to elderly residents through volunteer organizations, experiences that planted early seeds of compassion and public service.

Faith also played a central role in her Madonna experience. One of her proudest memories was serving as leader of the May Crowning procession, guiding prayers to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Worshipping in the parish hall before the church was completed sparked her curiosity about the Catholic faith.

“I was always asking questions,” she recalled.



*Charleen Milburn Ramey in 1st grade at MDS
1958-1959*

“About the Mass, the chalice, the priest’s vestments, the sisters in their habits. It inspired a real curiosity about faith and meaning.”

Charleen credits Sister Barbara, who served as principal during her years at Madonna, as one of her earliest leadership influences. Under Sister Barbara’s guidance, Charleen developed confidence and responsibility, eventually serving as student body president in eighth grade.

“Athletics weren’t really my thing,” she said. “Leadership and service to the school, that was my lane.”

The strong sense of community at Madonna extended far beyond the classroom.

Continued on next page

Monsignor Neary frequently joined her family for Sunday dinners, and her parents formed lasting friendships with many other Madonna families. Her siblings also attended Madonna, creating a deep and enduring connection to the school.

Those early experiences naturally carried into her years at Notre Dame High School, where Charleen continued her commitment to leadership by serving as both freshman and senior class president. She later participated in Girls State in Sacramento, a leadership and government program hosted at UC Davis, where students created mock governments, elected leaders, and debated public policy issues.

“That experience was another extension of my family’s commitment to community and problem-solving,” she said.

After graduating from high school, Charleen attended California State University, Sacramento and earned a degree in political science, intentionally choosing a school close to the center of California government. She soon began interning in the State Assembly during the administration of Ronald Reagan, focusing on healthcare and mental health policy during a critical period for California’s mental healthcare system.

Her internship launched what would become a distinguished career spanning nearly 30 years in public service. Charleen worked within the State Assembly, later joining the California State

Department of Health, where she served under four governors and became a legislative advocate on issues ranging from mental health to public health access and healthcare reform.

Throughout her career, she worked with administrations led by Ronald Reagan, Jerry Brown, Pete Wilson, and Gray Davis. Later, she transitioned into the private sector, joining the California Medical Association to manage healthcare advocacy efforts before eventually opening and leading a West Coast office for United Healthcare.

Her work allowed her to view healthcare from every perspective: government, physicians, public health agencies, and insurance providers, always with the goal of expanding access and improving care for those in need.

Reflecting on her journey, Charleen sees a direct connection between her upbringing and the path her life followed.

“I’ve been blessed with the background of family, community, and working together with people to solve problems,” she shared. “Madonna and Notre Dame taught me the responsibility of being a good citizen- to vote, to serve, and to care for others.”

For today’s students and alumni, Charleen’s story is a powerful reminder that the lessons learned in faith, service, and leadership at Madonna del Sasso School can ripple outward for a lifetime.



Charleen working directly with Governor Pete Wilson on California healthcare reform

Growing in Faith Together:

Spring Traditions at Madonna del Sasso School

This spring, the Madonna del Sasso School community came together through meaningful faith-filled traditions that strengthened students' spiritual connection and celebrated the heart of Catholic education. From Holy Week observances to sacramental milestones and Marian devotion, students across all grade levels participated in experiences that reflected the school's mission of faith, service, and community.

One of the most moving traditions of the season was the annual reenactment of Jesus' Passion presented by the 8th grade class during the Stations of the Cross. Held on Holy Thursday, the students faithfully led the school community through Christ's journey to the cross with reverence and devotion. This year's presentation took place inside Madonna del Sasso Church rather than on the school field as in past years, creating a more solemn and spiritual atmosphere that allowed students, staff, and families to experience a deeper sense of prayer and reflection during Holy Week.

Following the school presentation, the 8th grade students were honored to perform the Stations of the Cross once again for the parish community during the Good Friday Mass at Madonna del Sasso Church. Their thoughtful portrayal of Christ's Passion demonstrated both leadership and faith, continuing a cherished tradition that unites the school and parish communities.

Another beloved spring tradition was the school's May Crowning celebration honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary. In preparation for the event, every student was invited to bring a flower from their garden or purchase one to contribute. The flowers were collected in vases, and each class presented their arrangements around the statue



8th grade students reenacting the Stations of the Cross

of Mary, creating a beautiful display of devotion and community participation.

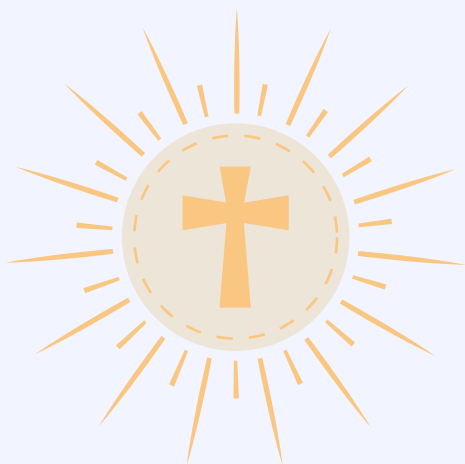
The celebration began with the entire school praying the Rosary together before processing outside to the Mary statue near the school entrance. Surrounded by song, prayer, and praise, the school community gathered as an 8th grade student placed the crown upon Mary, marking a joyful and reverent tribute to the Blessed Mother. The event was especially meaningful as students of all ages participated together in this cherished Catholic tradition.

This spring also brought a significant sacramental milestone for Madonna del Sasso's 2nd grade students as they celebrated their First Holy Communion. Guided in their preparation by their teacher, Ms. Garcia, and spiritually supported by Father Greg and Deacon Carl, the students took an important step in their faith journey as they received the Eucharist for the first time.

Continued on next page

First Communion remains one of the most treasured traditions in Catholic education, and the celebration served as a reminder of Madonna del Sasso School's commitment to nurturing students academically, spiritually, and personally. Through these experiences, students are encouraged to grow in faith and develop a lifelong relationship with Christ.

Throughout the spring season, Madonna del Sasso School continued to provide opportunities for students to live their faith in meaningful and memorable ways. Whether through prayer, worship, service, or sacramental celebration, these traditions help shape a strong spiritual foundation and strengthen the sense of community that defines Madonna del Sasso School.



The annual May Crowning ceremony



A Joyful Step in Faith: Second Grade First Holy Communion 2026



A Calling to Teach:

The Lasting Impact of Catherine “Delacruz” Martinez

For Catherine “Delacruz” Martinez, teaching was never simply a profession, it was a calling rooted in faith, service, and human connection. Although her educational journey eventually led her to classrooms and leadership roles across California, it was her years at Madonna del Sasso School that she still describes as “the highlight of my career.”

Mrs. Martinez’s path to education was not a direct one. At 18 years old, she discovered her love of teaching while serving as a catechism teacher at St. Jude’s Parish. After high school, she began working at Fort Ord in the purchasing department, planning for a stable career as a civil servant. But when Fort Ord closed, her future suddenly shifted.

Inspired by her sister Mary, Mrs. Martinez reconsidered her path and realized she was meant to become a teacher. While completing her degree and teaching credential, she worked for the Diocese of Monterey as secretary to Bishop Thaddeus Shubsda and later witnessed the installation of Bishop Sylvester Ryan. During that time, Bishop Ryan offered an act of kindness she has never forgotten- helping pay for her son’s first year of tuition at San Carlos School while she struggled to support her family and complete her education.

“It was such a blessing,” Mrs. Martinez recalled.

“People believed in me before I fully believed in myself.”

She earned her degree and teaching credential from Chapman University in 1994 and soon began what would become one of the most meaningful chapters of her life: teaching at Madonna del Sasso School from 1994 to 2002.

Mrs. Martinez began teaching first grade before moving to second grade, where she found her true joy preparing students



Catherine “Delacruz” Martinez and her former student, now MDS teacher and alumna, Jenna Prieto

for First Communion and helping them experience their faith in meaningful, hands-on ways.

“I really wanted the students to feel pride in their faith and conviction in what they believed,” she said. “I wanted them to develop a spiritual awareness even at a second-grade level.”

Her classroom was alive with creativity, warmth, and parent involvement. One beloved project centered around the book *Flat Stanley*. Mrs. Martinez created paper dolls featuring each student’s photograph and asked families to send them to relatives around the world. Students tracked the dolls’ travels on a giant classroom map with colorful strings stretching across states and countries.

Another memorable project came after reading *Corduroy*. A talented seamstress herself, Mrs. Martinez enlisted the help of parent volunteers who brought sewing machines into the classroom so students could create teddy bears while learning math concepts through measuring fabric and cutting patterns.

Faith formation was woven into every lesson.

Continued on next page

During Holy Week, students created Stations of the Cross using egg cartons, clay, wood, and handmade symbols. They made Rosaries out of wooden beads and participated in immersive retreats where they reenacted the washing of the feet, walked barefoot on straw, gathered around candlelight, and shared conversations about the Eucharist at a student-created Last Supper table. One especially meaningful tradition involved a tablecloth sewn by a parent using each child's handprints. That same tablecloth was later used at the altar during the students' First Communion Mass.

"These experiences engaged all the senses," Mrs. Martinez said. "The students didn't just learn about their faith- they lived it."

She credits Madonna's extraordinary parent community for making those moments possible.

"Every year, parents looked forward to volunteering and engaging," she said. "It truly felt like a family."

Her students also learned the importance of serving others. Mrs. Martinez fondly remembers making turkey sandwiches with her class and distributing them to individuals experiencing homelessness- a simple but powerful lesson in compassion and dignity.

Even after leaving Madonna, Mrs. Martinez carried those lessons of connection and inclusion into every stage of her career. While completing a Master's degree in higher education from San José State University, she transitioned into public education, where she worked extensively with migrant families and English learners. The experience transformed her approach to teaching.

"What I realized," she said, "was that the strategies that helped English learners really helped all students."

Her career continued to evolve through teaching middle school and high school English, serving as assistant principal at Everett Alvarez High School, and later becoming an instructional coach in Elk Grove Unified School District. She eventually returned to the classroom teaching sixth grade, where she focused on helping students become stronger writers and collaborators.



Catherine "Delacruz" Martinez teaching a literacy lesson to a Madonna 3rd grade class

During the pandemic, she compiled 600 pages of her students' writing into a book currently being published titled *Be Quiet and Let Them Speak*, a reflection of her enduring belief that students thrive when their voices are heard.

Most recently, Mrs. Martinez returned home to Salinas as assistant principal at Harden Middle School, where she created the "Iditerod" program to support at-risk students through mentorship, attendance incentives, and enrichment opportunities. The program significantly improved promotion rates to high school.

Today, Mrs. Martinez continues working as a student coach and tutor specializing in analysis and composition. She is also a proud mother of two, stepmother of three, and grandmother of eight.

Still, after decades in education, countless classrooms, and leadership roles across multiple districts, her heart remains closely tied to Madonna del Sasso School.

"It was not only wonderful for the children," she reflected, "it strengthened my own faith. The parents, the students, and the opportunity to share faith together- that was such a blessing."

Mrs. Martinez still keeps photographs, gifts, and mementos from her Madonna students, many of whom remain in touch with her today. Looking back, she says her years at Madonna were more than just the beginning of her teaching career. They shaped the educator and person she would become.

And for the generations of students and families whose lives she touched, her impact continues to be felt far beyond the classroom walls.

Spring Celebrations at MDS:

Honoring Talent, Culture, and Community

This spring, Madonna del Sasso School came alive with music, movement, culture, and community as students showcased their talents and celebrated traditions from around the world during two beloved annual events: the Talent Show and the Asian Pacific Food Festival.

The Student Activity Center was filled with excitement and applause as students took the stage for the annual Talent Show. From vocal performances and choreographed dances to instrumental music, students proudly shared their gifts and creativity with classmates, teachers, and families.

The event highlighted not only the incredible talent within the Madonna community, but also the confidence, dedication, and courage students develop through the performing arts. Classmates cheered one another on throughout the performances, creating an atmosphere of encouragement and school spirit that made the event especially memorable.

Immediately following the Talent Show, the campus transformed into a vibrant celebration of culture during the annual Asian Pacific Food Festival, a cherished Madonna tradition that combines learning, family involvement, and cultural appreciation.

Each class selected a country from Asia or the Pacific Islands to study, learning about its traditions, history, and cultural customs. Students then explored the country's cuisine and chose a featured culinary treat to share with the school community.

The event began with students across grade levels joining together for an opening choreographed performance, highlighting traditional music and dance from the world region.

Then, with the help of dedicated parent volunteers, samples of each dish were carefully prepared and served for students to taste throughout the festival.



MDS student performers at the Asian Pacific Food Festival

As students traveled from table to table, they experienced new flavors and learned firsthand about cultures from around the world.

The event provided students with a meaningful opportunity to expand their understanding of global traditions while celebrating the diversity that enriches the Madonna del Sasso community. More importantly, it reflected the school's ongoing commitment to fostering curiosity and an appreciation for others.

The success of both events was made possible through the hard work of students, faculty, staff, and parent volunteers whose enthusiasm and dedication continue to make Madonna traditions so special.

Together, the Talent Show and Asian Pacific Food Festival served as joyful reminders that learning extends far beyond the classroom, and that creativity, culture, and community remain at the heart of the Madonna del Sasso experience.

Sharing Love Through Service:

Madonna del Sasso Students Create 900 Cards for Local Seniors

Madonna del Sasso School students put faith into action this spring through a school-wide service project that brought joy and encouragement to local seniors in our community. As part of the school's new Service Initiative launched this academic year, students from Kindergarten through 8th grade created an incredible 900 handmade Mother's Day and Father's Day cards for seniors in partnership with the Alliance on Aging.

The Service Initiative was created with the goal of engaging every student in meaningful service opportunities that connect classroom learning with compassionate action. Rooted in Madonna del Sasso School's shared mission of faith and love, the initiative provides students with opportunities to serve alongside their classmates through hands-on experiential learning experiences that make a positive impact in the wider community.

Throughout the project, classrooms across all grade levels filled with creativity, kindness, and thoughtful messages as students designed colorful cards intended to brighten the days of local seniors. From heartfelt drawings by kindergarteners to carefully written notes from middle school students, each card reflected the care and compassion of the Madonna del Sasso community.

The completed cards will be distributed to seniors throughout the region through the Alliance on Aging organization, helping celebrate Mother's Day and Father's Day while reminding recipients that they are remembered, valued, and loved.



MDS Students designing cards for seniors



MDS Alumna Paula Matelli wins a prize at Bingo Night!

Community, Fellowship, and Fun Shine at Madonna Bingo Night

On May 1, 2026, the Madonna del Sasso School community came together for a fun and successful end-of-year Bingo Night fundraiser filled with laughter, friendly competition, and school spirit.

With 120 attendees in support of Madonna, the evening featured multiple prize and cash games that kept families, alumni, and friends engaged throughout the night while strengthening fellowship and community connection.

One of the biggest highlights of the evening was the grand prize drawing generously donated by alumna Paula Matelli and her company PJ GrafX - NFL tickets to see the Dallas Cowboys take on the Los Angeles Rams! Additional prizes included tickets to the California Rodeo Salinas, lottery scratchers, and a variety of gift cards donated by Madonna families and supporters.

Parent volunteers played an essential role in the event's success, helping organize, set up, run games, and create a welcoming atmosphere for all who attended.

By the end of the evening, the fundraiser raised more than \$17,000 to support future programs and projects at Madonna del Sasso School. More than just a fundraiser, Bingo Night was a celebration of the strong community spirit, fellowship, and generosity that continue to help Madonna thrive.

Remember When...

Through the Years at MDS

“I remember being very close with my friends at Madonna. We were always happy together, and because it was such a small class, those friendships have lasted through the years. I graduated in 2014, and one of my favorite memories is of my religion teacher, Deacon Carl, who was always encouraging me and telling me I was smart. He used to say that one day I would marry a good man and have a beautiful future, and I’m grateful to say that today, his words came true.”

-Andrea Navarro, Class of 2014



MDS 2nd grade First Holy Communion, 1959-1960

“I remember Sr. Ann Thomas, my second grade teacher, was preparing us for our First Communion by showing us how to genuflect in the original church (currently the Student Resource Center). To enter the school grounds, we had to pass by the church doors every day. Sr. Ann noticed that all of a sudden her class was genuflecting as we passed by the closed church doors. She used that as a teaching moment.

Sr. Ann said, ‘I noticed you genuflecting as you passed the church doors. Why did you genuflect?’

The class replied, ‘Because Jesus lives there. To show our respect to Jesus.’

Sister Ann responded, ‘Did you know that Jesus is in each person?’

The class, with light bulbs coming on, replied, ‘Maybe we should genuflect to each other?’

Recess was very strange that morning... second graders were seen genuflecting to each other on the playground!

This memory shaped my adult life: How do I respect others? Do I treat others as if God is present in them and in me? Should I ‘genuflect’ to you as a way to show my love and understanding?”

-Larry Gardepie, Class of 1970



MDS First Holy Communion, 1958-1959, at Sacred Heart Church

Take a trip down memory lane with these throwback photos from Madonna del Sasso! From classroom moments and school events to friendships that lasted a lifetime, these memories are a special part of what makes the MDS community so meaningful.

Do you have a “remember when” story of your own? We’d love to hear it! Whether it’s a favorite teacher, a memorable tradition, or a moment that still makes you smile, please send in your reflections or photos to be featured in future alumni newsletters.

Because at Madonna del Sasso, the memories don’t fade—they connect us across generations.

Madonna Memories

Share your favorite
memory to be featured
in a future edition!

Email
crowe@mdsschool.com

