Fall Issue 2026

Madonna del Sasso School Alumni Newsletter

Remembering...

A few years ago, Father Greg and I had the opportunity to attend the Latino Enrollment Institute at the University of Notre Dame. During our time there, we recognized the importance of incorporating more cultural Catholic traditions into the life of Madonna del Sasso School.

One of the traditions we wanted to embrace was the celebration of Día de los Muertos, creating a meaningful opportunity for our students to honor and remember loved ones who have passed away. This year marks our fourth year creating altars in every classroom, allowing students and families to share memories, celebrate the lives of those they love, and experience this beautiful tradition of faith, family, and remembrance.

James Evans, Madonna Principal



Pre-Kindergarten



Grade 5



Office

In the beginning...

Sister Yvonne Bondi ("Sister Marie Denise")
Madonna's original 3rd Grade Teacher, 1958-1960



1957... first and second grade classes met at the Portuguese Hall (Laurel Drive and Natividad Road) while the new school was under construction. Sister Mary Albert (principal) and Sister Teresa Maiorana were the first Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdN) at this school envisioned by Msgr. Thomas Earley, pastor of Sacred Heart Church.

1958... Sister Yvonne Bondi (formerly, Sister Marie Denise) arrived after the new buildings were finished. She became the first third grade teacher with 44 students in her class. She recalls how new everything was, and was amazed at the beautiful terrazzo floors. Coming from her first assignment, an all-girls school at Mission Dolores in San Francisco, she needed to adjust to teaching boys and girls.



She recalls teaching her class the "Star Bangled Banner." When they got to "The bombs bursting in air," the boys started shooting each other. She was guileless, such innocence, and how funny the boys were. She started laughing, which made the situation worse. It took some time to get control of the class!



One of the students, John Fitzgerald, wanted to bring his snake to school for science class. She gave approval but only if the snake was in a cage. John arrived with the snake in a box and placed it in the back of the classroom until science class.

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At one point the girls began screaming: the snake had escaped the box and was slithering camouflaged against the terrazzo floor. Lessons learned about the difference between girls and boys!

At that time, there were five SNDdN teachers living in the convent on Rosarita Drive. Three Sisters taught at Madonna and two at Palma Junior High. It was a four-bedroom house, with one of the rooms reserved as the chapel. Msgr. Earley would say Mass at 6:30 am before school began.

Each year the school added grades until the school was full. At one point each class had 50 students!

One significant event was the arrival of the Madonna del Sasso statue. It came from Switzerland and was moved to the area outside the new church and school. It almost looked like it was in the middle of an open field as nothing else was built. Class photos would be taken in front of the Madonna and Child statue.



Grade 3 1958-1959



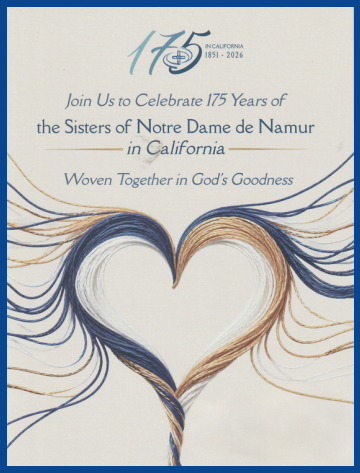
Sister Yvonne and the "clicker" (September 2023)

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur celebrated their 175th anniversary in California on October 4, 2026. There were over 350 guests attending this celebration.

Madonna School is part of this rich and beautiful legacy of a California teaching ministry.

Congratulations

Thank you to the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur for your decades of love, service, & commitment to Madonna del Sasso.

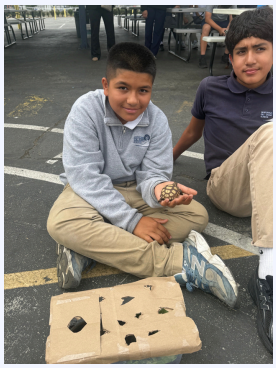


Madonna Today

Blessing of the Animals







One of our favorite traditions at Madonna del Sasso School is our annual Blessing of the Animals, held each October near the October 4th Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals and the environment. This special tradition brings our students, families, and their beloved pets together to celebrate the beauty of God's creation and remember our responsibility to care for all living things. Over the years, we have welcomed at least 50 dogs and cats each year, along with bunnies, birds, and even a goat, the most unique visitor in all my years! This year, we added a turtle to the list! It is always a wonderful reminder that God's love extends to all creatures, great and small.







Announcement

Are you interested in an in-person reunion to celebrate Madonna School's 70th Anniversary (2028)?

We are exploring initial interest and would appreciate your feedback!

Please complete the survey found at:
https://forms.gle/7na3hxYy6C9N5ijD9

Madonna Today

School Updates

Goal: finish the 9-foot fence down Maryal Drive



New Fencing



Old fencing to be replaced

Enrollment 2020-2021

140 students

Enrollment 2026-2027

319 students

At capacity in Kindergarten and Grades 1, 2, 5, 7



Veggie Garden location (before photo)



Prayer Garden location (before photo)

Garden Veggie Project: Update

The Winter 2026 edition of the Madonna alumni newsletter announced plans and fundraising for a vegetable garden (between Cross Hall and the school) and a prayer garden (near the playing field and Maryal Drive).

The vegetable garden is being guided by lead parent, Jaclyn Bennett. The prayer garden will be developed in the near future after addressing some logistical issues.

Thank you to parents, students, and alumni who are helping make this dream come true!





Veggie Garden: in progress (current photos)

Alumni Spotlight: Peter Holewinski, Class of 1968

The World is Calling

Peter Holewinski describes his years at Madonna as a time of transition and transformation: the immediate impacts of the Second Vatican Council were experienced directly at Mass (changing from Latin to English and introducing the new "Folk Mass") and the Sisters' clothes ("habits") were being modernized. "We could now see their hair and legs!"

As an altar server, Peter no longer needed to recite the Latin responses, and as a student, he noticed changes in the classroom (more lay people teaching).

From an early age, Peter enjoyed geography – learning about different countries, capitals, cultures, and native costumes. He began stamp collecting to connect to this wider world.

His parents, Peter and Rosemarie, were involved in the school, Cub Scouts, and Boy Scouts (Troop 212). The connection between church and school was strengthened when his architect father developed the drawings for the "new church and rectory." In 1971, our church was one of the first in the diocese to implement Vatican II liturgical changes: an open sanctuary (no altar rails) and sitting closer to the altar (pews on three sides of the sanctuary). This was new back then!

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Grade 6 (1965-1966)



First Communion, 1962



RELIGIOUS AWARD—Timothy Farrell, Cub Scout Pack 112, holds Parvuli Dei award for other pack members receiving the award to see. Besides Farrell, getting award were (left to right, front) Richard MacDonald, Larry Gardepie, Neil Milburn, and Terry Foster. Standing, from left, are Peter Holewinski, Stanley Slawinski, and Steve Gardepie. Father Thomas Neary presented awards to boys at Madonna del Sasso Church. Medals are lifetime awards in cub scouting for religious knowledge advancement. 1965

Parvuli Dei Award (1965)

Among other projects, his father created plans for the original cells at the Camaldolese Monastery in Big Sur and worked with Sr. Barbara on the school's first expansion (the Monsignor Neary wing that currently houses preschool, TK, and kindergarten).

Peter has the artist's original prototype of Mary's face. This medallion was given to his father and illustrated what the Madonna and Child relief above the altar would look like.

Peter's love of geography and the early transitions inspired him to pursue bachelor's and master's degrees in international relations from Johns Hopkins University locations in Baltimore and Washington, D.C.

He has lived and worked in France, Singapore, Hong Kong, Amsterdam, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Connecticut. In fact, his three children were born in different places: Los Angeles, Chicago, and Singapore. His career has spanned banking, credit management, debt placement, project management, among other responsibilities.

Peter's curiosity, studies and travel influenced his language skills: he is fluent in French, and has a knowledge of Spanish, Russian and Dutch. His daughter speaks Mandarin, and his son speaks Spanish. They all studied two languages in addition to English in the Dutch tradition while in Amsterdam.

Peter's world called him to a life of transition and transformation, something he continues to do as he volunteers as the president of the Rotary Club of Santa Rosa, an international organization that improves local and international communities. He is looking for his next adventure!



With Madonna prototype



Rotary President, Santa Rosa

Thank You

Catherine Rowe, as Madonna's assistant principal, created the 2025-2026 alumni newsletters. She and her family moved to the Sacramento area over the summer. Thank you for all you did for the Madonna alumni this past year!

Let's celebrate our graduates!



Class of 1967 (60th Anniversary)



Class of 1977 (50th Anniversary)



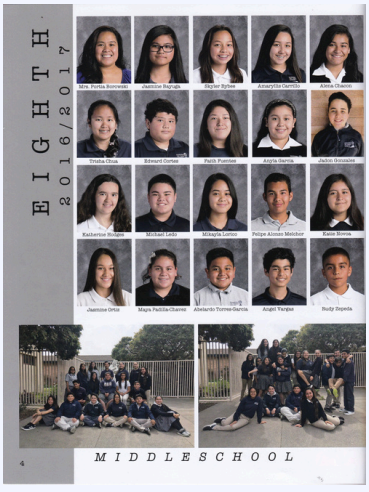
Class of 1987 (40th Anniversary)



Class of 1997 (30th Anniversary)



Class of 2007 (20th Anniversary)



Class of 2017 (10th Anniversary)

Contact James Evans, Madonna's principal, at jevans@mdsschool.com if your class would like to use school facilities to celebrate your anniverary.

Parent Spotlight: Mrs. Geri Dorney

Library Volunteer

Do we ever fully understand the impact that we have on others or how our past actions continue to influence our present and future? I had these questions while listening to Geri Dorney, mother of Sheryl (Class of 1967), Mike (1969), Frank (1973), and Teresa (1975).

Tom, Geri, and their young family moved to Salinas in 1960. Madonna's church and school were new and had limited resources. According to Geri, annual tuition was about $125 per student — which was a lot of money back then! Parents volunteered to help the school any way they could.

Diane Silveira, the original PTA president, asked for volunteers to set up a school library. Geri remembers joining Diane, Mickey Farrell, and Mary Smith.

Parents were very generous at book fairs, buying books for the library. The donor family's name was inscribed on the book's name plate inside the front cover. The superintendent of the public schools also donated books to this fledgling library.

Geri admitted not knowing a lot about how to setup and maintain a library, but she listened and learned from the others.



Early on, though, several volunteers dropped out when they became pregnant, leaving Geri to manage the library. She would bring 5-year-old Teresa to the library to play while her siblings were in class and Geri worked.

She recalls the children's excitement when coming into the library! Teachers would bring their class and help pick out age-appropriate books. Geri would check out the books and talk with the students. Books were sorted on the shelves by theme and class levels.

At the end of each school day, some children would use the library as a place to do homework and read while waiting for their parents to pick them up. In a way, it was the first "after school program" or extension!

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Geri remembers Sr. Barbara being full of ideas and projects just waiting for volunteers. Being on campus all day allowed Geri to be involved in many of these projects.

If you get a chance, ask Geri about the Sisters and bathing suits! A story that needs telling — about how our lives influence and impact others. We don't always need to know how. We simply need to listen... and be willing to help.

Madonna Memories

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



Email:
mdsalumni@mdsschool.com



Geri and Teresa, September 2023

Do you live in or near Salinas? Passing through?

Reach out to the school office (831-424-7813) or email James Evans (jevans@mdsschool.com) for a tour/visit or if you would like to learn more about what is happening at Madonna. Alumni are welcome!

Stay Connected...

Explore the MDS Alumni Webpage:
https://www.mdsschool.com/news-events/mds-alumni.cfm

Join the Madonna del Sasso School Alumni Facebook group:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/775645430538120/members

Madonna Today

Boots and Brews 2026



Surpassed the Goal!



One of two alumni tables

L to R: Mrs. and Mr. Dan Anderson (diocesan superintendent of schools), Matthew Villegas (1997), Eileen Wallace Villegas (1968), Steven Villegas (Eileen's husband), Christine Villegas Campos (1991)



Shout Out to the Sponsors!

Photo Booth Fun

Paula Matelli (1976) and Rosie Mendoza (parent of alumni)







Madonna Parents, Sponsors, and Employees

Raised over $87,000 - event sold out!

In Memoriam

In memory of community members who journeyed with us during our Madonna years. Let us pray and give thanks for their lives!

Alumni

Class of 1961
Barbara Groth Marcantonio

Class of 1964
Christy Pearce Dowden
Donna Losado

Class of 1965
David Barlogio
Mary Louise Allen Derichsweiler
Nicoline Groth Hiserman
William Patterson
Amy Olea Smelser
Sandra Wells Smith

Class of 1966
David Ashworth
Robert Babione
Michael Field

Class of 1967
William Benoit
Maureen Driscoll
Linda Stoffey Howard
Colleen Burns Johnson
Cheri Kennedy
Jim Prola
Kim Scornienchi
Teresa Smith
Daniel Vasquez

Class of 1968
Fidel Caballero
Ken DeMoor
Jim Glaser
John Kane
Stanley Slawinski
Sheila Toner
Gordon Tucker

Class of 1969
Steve Babione
Frank Seydel
Gerald Toner

Class of 1970
Rudy Carrillo
Cheryl Ahtye Castillo
Brian MacDonald
Lawrence McCauley
Virginia Wasuleski Strankman
Colleen Titgen

Class of 1971
Lawrence Gowin
Gene Ledo
Brian Smith
Charlie Smith
Jeri Wayne

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In Memoriam

Class of 1972
Holly Boeh
Kathleen Cole
Patrick (Dennis) Sullivan

Class of 1973
Mary McNett Lenehan
Emmett Linder

Class of 1974
Lisa Jufiar

Class of 1975
Maria Matelli Rhodes

Class of 1976
Michael Hinderschied
Arthur Lopez
Tom Tognietti

Class of 1977
Bill Hinderschied
Melissa Annette Mairose
Sandra Holladay Metz

Class of 1980
Robert (Bobby) Kimball

Class of 1982
Carlos Arista
Alex Martinez

Class of 1985
Roman Gonzales
Veronica Hernandez Hansen
Victor Worden

Class of 1986
Bryan DaSilva

Class of 1987
Jennifer Kim Ayala
Lorena Veliz Hyman

Class of 1988
Joshua Forrest
Jennifer Denneh Leggett Swart

Class of 1989
Heather St. John Haran

Class of 1999
Korina Magana Gonzalez

Class of 1999
Alexis Brisson

Class of 2001
Elise Sherman Padilla

Class of 2003
Caitlin Bullman

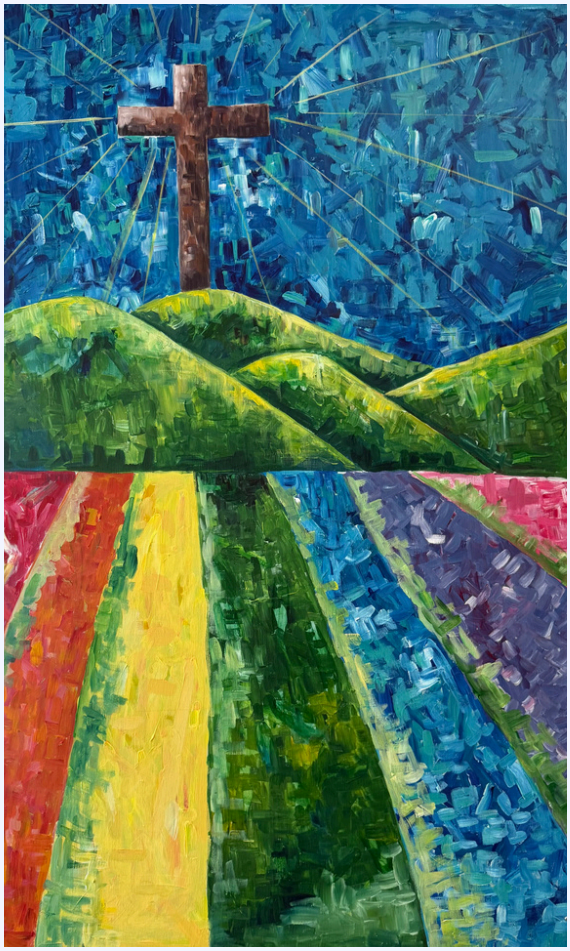
Class of 2005
Xavier Mottu

Email corrections or additions to mdsalumni@mdsschool.com

Faith-Art around the School

One Body, Many Parts: Make Your Mark

Our new Make Your Mark mural is a colorful celebration of creativity, collaboration, and community here at Madonna del Sasso!



When Mr. Evans introduced this year's theme, “One Body, Many Parts,” I was inspired to create something that would bring our entire school together. The idea was simple: every student, from preschool through 8th grade, along with our faculty, would have the opportunity to leave their mark on one large piece of art.

The mural features the beautiful fields and rolling hills of the Salinas Valley, with a cross overlooking the landscape. Each participant added several colorful paint marks, and together, those individual contributions became one masterpiece.

Mr. Johnny immediately jumped on board, finding a large wooden panel for our project and helping install the finished mural outside the art room.

One of my favorite parts of the day is hearing students proudly tell their parents and grandparents, “I painted that!” as they walk by.

That's what makes this mural so special. It's a reminder that each of us has something unique to contribute, and when we come together, we can create something beautiful. Every mark matters, just as every member of our school community matters.

“Ms. Jess” (Jessica Ansberry), Art Teacher

Stay Connected...

Please email any questions, article ideas, milestones, and suggestions of people to interview to: mdsalumni@mdsschool.com