



Pope Francis' Prayer Intention for January

Evangelization – Young People

That young people, especially in Latin America, follow the example of Mary and respond to the call of the Lord to communicate the joy of the Gospel to the world.



Catholic Schools

Learn. Serve. Lead. Succeed.

Catholic Schools Week gives us all an opportunity to reflect on what Catholic schools mean to our families, our community, and our world. We renew our fervor for making our school top-notch and authentically Catholic! Ms. Nancy Hecker, HTS 4th Grade teacher, shares why she chose to teach in a Catholic school:

Throughout my educational and professional career, I have worked in and observed a variety of schools and classrooms. In every setting I have witnessed schools and teachers striving to enhance the academic skills of all students so they can perform to the best of their abilities. This goal is admirable and essential for the well-being of children and society.

What makes a Catholic School unique, special, and an ideal setting for children, is the focus on spiritual growth. Our spirit is what makes us human and connects us to each other. Catholic Schools help youth nurture their relationship with God, which ripples into all aspects of life. This foundation builds compassion: compassion for self, for others, and for all of creation. Compassion builds confidence, kindness, and a sense of social justice. These are the qualities that bring the Kingdom of God.

The suffering in the world can be overwhelming and heartbreaking, however, when I think about the future I am filled with hope. On a daily basis I am blessed to see youth turn self-doubt into mental fortitude because they know God is with them. I see youth help each other with Jesus as their role model. I see youth diplomatically navigate social conflict because we are all called to love our neighbor. These are the skills and qualities that can transform society into loving communities of belonging.



WE ALL HAVE A **VOCATION**



In February, HTS 3rd – 8th graders will take part in a **vocation panel** featuring guest speakers Sister Marganne, Father Tom, and our own Ms. Nancy. The speakers are excited about sharing their journey with our students and hearing what questions the students have for them.



A vocation story -- Meet Mattie Ward, a new member of the HTS Advisory Council and member of the **Order of Franciscan Seculars!**

Each of us is called by God to live a particular way of life ... a vocation ... either as a husband or wife, diocesan priest, religious priest, brother or sister, or as a single person. Those who do not feel called to specific dedication to the Church either as a priest or religious but feel called to a deeper relationship with God and His Church can explore that call as a member of a Third Order. Third Orders, or lay orders, are usually composed of married or single men and women who chose to live “in the world,” but not of it. There are many of these – for example, Third Order of St. Augustine, Oblates of St. Benedict, Third Order Carmelites, Third Order Franciscans. Following is a very brief history of the Order of Franciscan Seculars.

Over 800 years ago, in the year 1182 to be exact, Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone, was born to Pietro and Pica di Bernadone. Although his mother called him John, his father, a wealthy cloth merchant, changed his name to Francesco (Francis) when he returned home from a business trip to France. Pietro had always hoped that his son would follow in his footsteps ... but God had other plans!

Saint Francis was a young man of his times. He enjoyed being with his friends. Although he had spent some time working in his father’s shop, he really wanted to be a troubadour (musician) but in 1202 when the war between Assisi and neighboring Perugia broke out, he dreamed of

being a knight. Dressed in the finest “knight clothes” money could buy, he went off to fight. Shortly thereafter he was captured, taken prisoner and spent a year in prison. While in prison, he had a great deal of time to reflect on the direction of his life and it was during his imprisonment that he first heard God’s call to leave behind the life he had known. When he returned home, he was not the same young man who had left to fight.

As time passed, while he was at prayer in the little Church of San Damiano, Francis heard a voice from the crucifix speak to him – *Francis, go and repair my house, which you see is falling down.* Taking these words literally, Francis went about gathering stones to repair the Church of San Damiano. Although those who watched him do this did not understand what he was doing or why, they were impressed with his enthusiasm and many came to help him. During this time, Francis was spending a lot of time in prayer and listening to God’s direction. By the example of his life, many young men came to join him. Eventually, the band of brothers became an Order of the Church, known as the Order of Friars Minor, with a Rule approved by Pope Honorius III in the year 1223.

Men and women with families observed Francis’ way of life and asked him how they could follow him. From that question, **the Order of Secular Franciscans was born in**

1221 and continues to this day. I have been a Professed member of the Order of Franciscan Seculars since 1992 and, together with Deacon Warren Leonard, OFS, who was professed in 2016 and Fr. John Wilz, OFS, of blessed memory, who was professed in 1988, am a member of St. Bonaventure Fraternity, which meets at the **Poor Clare Monastery in Langhorne** on the third Saturday of each month. **(That’s where our Communion bread comes from!)**

How I came to be a member of the Order is somewhat of a mystery to me even after having celebrated 25 years within it. However, as a member of the Order, together with my sisters and brothers in Fraternity, I strive, however imperfectly, to make a difference! Together, we are inspired through the example of St. Francis to follow the Gospel and to build up the Kingdom of God by fostering a sense of fraternity among all people. We strive to be peacemakers and we focus on building loving relationships in our communities. Through prayer we open ourselves to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and try to be agents of positive change, building a civilization of love and life. Since we treasure all that God has given us as a gift, environmental concerns urge us to care for all God’s creation and practice good stewardship. Secular Franciscans do all of this in our families, work places, parishes, and in the societies in which we live. Our vocation calls us to be the leaven of the world.



**FOCUS on the
SACRAMENTS:
BAPTISM**

The Solemnity of the Baptism of Our Lord in January marks the end of the Christmas season in our Church liturgy. Though Christ did not need to be baptized as he had no sin, he entered the waters of the Jordan River to sanctify the waters of baptism and give them the power to make us children of God. Sacraments do a spiritual good that we cannot see using earthly signs that we can see. It is natural for baptism to use water for cleansing our soul since we use water to wash our hands, bodies, dishes, etc. At Christ’s baptism, he was called a “Beloved Son” of God. At our baptism, we become children of God!