Welcome Our New StMS Teachers

Our school welcomed one new teacher at the end of last year and four new teachers this year! Dr. Laurene Madern, Mrs. Heidi Lawrence, Ms. Alisha Conrad, Ms. Stacy Corcoran, and Ms. Michelle Giannini have joined our community and are joyfully sharing their talents with our students and families. They each have shared a bit about themselves here, and they look forward to meeting more of our families.

Mrs. Heidi Lawrence – Grade 5 Language Arts, Literature, Social Studies

I’m very happy to be a part of the St. Michael School community, and I’m really looking forward to guiding my students through an exciting fifth grade year!

I have been teaching for 13 years, most recently for four years at Mills Park Elementary in Cary. My family and I moved here from Denver, Colo., but I’ve lived in California, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Ohio, Illinois and even The Netherlands.

I have taught many grade levels from primary to intermediate grades and middle school math. I am originally from the suburbs of Washington, D.C. I graduated from The Ohio State University, earning an undergraduate degree in Landscape Architecture. My master's degree is from Syracuse University in Elementary Education.

Most recently, I participated in a Digital Educator Program in Colorado. I actively engage in professional development, such as attending the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) conferences, Duke’s Technology Conference, and N.C. State's Education Start-up Conference. I continue to pursue post-graduate work, and was recently a part of the Teacher Leader Corps in the Wake County School System.

My free time is spent with my husband, our two children, and Reese – our Shih Tzu. We love going to the beach and skiing.
Ms. Alisha Conrad – Grade 7-8 Science

I am so excited to be joining the St. Michael family this year as the Grade 7 and 8 science teacher.

My roots are of the Catholic faith, having attended Catholic school for grades K - 6 in my native Northeast Ohio. I graduated from Ohio University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Middle Childhood Education with a concentration in Mathematics and Science (Grades 4 - 9). I also have endorsements in Reading (Grades K - 12) and Language Arts (Grades 4 - 6).

After graduating, I felt called to teach in North Carolina. This will be my fifth year teaching middle school science, which I enjoy so very much. I am looking forward to a fun and rewarding school year, and having the privilege of working closely with each of my students and their families.

Ms. Stacy Corcoran – Grade 5 Math, Science, Religion

I am very excited and blessed to have the opportunity to teach Grade 5 math, science, and religion here at St. Michael School. I recently moved here from Highland, New York, and I already feel like St. Michael School is “home.” I graduated from the State University of New York (SUNY), College at Oneonta in May 2012 with my undergraduate degree in Elementary Education. I am currently working towards my master's degree in Educational Technology through SUNY Oneonta. I have substitute teaching experience in each of the elementary grades and I’ve spent the last two years teaching Grade 5 in a Catholic school in Poughkeepsie, New York.

Math is my favorite subject, and I am looking forward to sharing my love for math with all of my students. I can be reached throughout the school day by email and I am usually available until 4 p.m. to offer further assistance.

Ms. Michelle Giannini – Grade 6-8 Drama

I am very grateful to have the opportunity to teach middle school drama at St. Michael School this year! I was raised in the Diocese of Raleigh, having attended Our Lady of Lourdes and The Franciscan School for middle school and Cardinal Gibbons for high school. After graduating from Gibbons in 2006, I attended UNC-Chapel Hill where I studied elementary education and dramatic art, and graduated in 2010. For the past five years I have been teaching drama and music at The Franciscan School and Cardinal Gibbons High School.

In addition to teaching drama at St. Michael this year, I also teach drama at Cardinal Gibbons High School, and coordinate the Gibbons’ Middle School Performing Arts Program, a program which places performing arts educators, hired by Gibbons, in our Diocesan Middle Schools in order to introduce all of our students to the performing arts and prepare them for high school programs. Drama, dance, band, and choir teachers now teach in five of our local schools, and the program continues to expand. I am incredibly excited to be teaching at St. Michael as part of this program!
I am also currently pursuing a Master in School Administration degree from UNC-Chapel Hill. I also am artistic director of the Cardinal Gibbons Summer Spotlight Musical Theater Camps for elementary and middle school-aged children.

I look forward to a wonderful year, and am excited to work with the students and their families to continue developing the Performing Arts Program at St. Michael!

In my free time I can be found visiting with my family and friends. I have one older brother and sister-in-law who live in New York, and my parents live in Florida. I enjoy any outdoor activity, especially, running, hiking, camping, and playing sports like basketball and golf. I also like to read and create arts and crafts.

Dr. Laurene Madern – Grade 7-8 Language Arts, Literature

A few months ago I was given a wonderful opportunity to join the staff at St. Michael the Archangel School. What a blessing this has been for me. I am not new to North Carolina. I moved here a little over 24 years ago from the New York area. I was a Senior Administrator with the Wake County Public School system, and I have also been a part of the Johnston County Schools and the Wayne County Schools. I am a graduate of the University of Massachusetts, Cambridge College and Liberty University. I hold undergraduate degrees in English and sociology, a master’s degree in Education and a doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction. I started my teaching career in a Catholic school in Chelsea, Massachusetts and during my career have had the opportunity to serve students in gifted programs (K-12), English/ELA (7-12), and social studies (7-12). I hold teaching certifications in 10 different areas. I am also on staff with the University of Phoenix where I teach an online course entitled ‘Critical Thinking’. I am a lifelong learner and try to communicate my love for learning to my students daily.

Thank You, Mrs. Burton

Administrative Assistant Mary Alice Burton Retires after 15 Years

Since before St. Michael School opened its doors, Mary Alice Burton was a woman everyone knew. For 15 years she “just figured it out” and “got it done.” As school secretary and administrative assistant to the principal, she literally and figuratively held the keys to not only the school building but to the hearts of countless school families.

A quiet and unassuming woman, she never sought the spotlight or any recognition. When she announced her retirement this summer, she wanted no fanfare. Faculty and staff honored her at a luncheon before the school year began, and she agreed to reminisce just a bit for this issue of The Messenger.

The Burtons moved to the area in 1978, when the youngest of their three children was only a first grader. Mary Alice worked for the State of North Carolina’s Department of Agriculture, first at a downtown office and later on the grounds of the N.C. State Fair.
Her husband, Richard, worked for CCS Fundraising, a company that provides church management software, and then joined the staff at St. Michael Church as a development director.

“Richard started the monthly new parishioner gatherings, and one day I accompanied him. He wanted me to meet Carolyn Wheelock, who had been hired to be the principal of the new St. Michael School,” said Mary Alice.

After spending some time with Mary Alice, Mrs. Wheelock knew she would be a great school secretary.

“I had a good job for the State, and I didn't know anything about school administration,” said Mary Alice, “but I decided it would be great to help start the school, so I accepted the job offer.”

For a long time, Mary Alice and Mrs. Wheelock were the only two school employees. They relied heavily on parent and parish volunteers as they opened the doors in 2000 with about 200 Kindergarten through Grade 5 students.

The years flew by but brought many memorable moments and countless friendships.

“I’m so grateful for all the wonderful people I’ve worked with over the years. I’ve made friends I’ll have forever, and many special memories of my time at this school,” she said.

Although she is looking forward to some serious gardening and decorating projects, she’ll spend time with her grandchildren and promises to keep in touch with friends at school. She will also help out in the office at New Life Camp, which her son and daughter-in-law operate.

The entire St. Michael community will miss seeing her daily, but wishes her a wonderful retirement and thanks her immensely for giving so much of herself to make St. Michael School a reality.
Students Excel at National History Day Contest

By Mr. Paul Gauthier, Grade 6-8 Social Studies Teacher

This past June, Molly McGowan and Rebecca Wicklin, 2015 graduates of St. Michael School, represented our school in a competition with nearly 3,000 other middle and high school students from around the world at the University of Maryland in College Park in the 2015 Kenneth E. Behring National History Day Contest. This was a competition between the top entries of the more than 600,000 students that competed in the National History Day Contest from regional and state competitions. Contestants represented all 50 states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico and international schools in Central America, China, Korea, and South Asia.

St. Michael Catholic School has been sponsoring an NHD team for the past three years. Students competing in NHD independently researched a topic based upon the 2015 theme of “Leadership and Legacy in History,” then presented their findings in one of several categories. Rebecca and Molly defended their museum exhibit and thesis on "Patsy Mink - A Key Player in the Fight for Title IX" first at the North Carolina competition, where they placed second, and then at the Nationals, where they finished in the top 25% of approximately 120 exhibits.

Bearing Witness to Catholic and Jewish Relations

By Mrs. Ginny Cline, Media Specialist

This past summer I was fortunate to be one of 40 Catholic teachers invited to attend The Eileen Ludwig Greenland National Bearing Witness Summer Institute. The Institute was created in 1995 by the Anti-Defamation League’s Washington, D.C. Regional Office and the Archdiocese of Washington. The mission of Bearing Witness is to train Catholic school teachers to help foster a better relationship within the Catholic and Jewish communities. This six-day, highly intensive program teaches Catholic educators about the relationship between the Catholic Church and Jewish communities, and provides educational materials on the Holocaust for middle and high school students nationwide. Since its creation in 1995 more than 280,000 Catholic school students have been educated about the changing relations between the two religious groups through the 1,900 educators who have attended the Summer Institute.
After a week attending the Bearing Witness Summer Institute (BWSI) I came away with a better appreciation for my students. There was so much to learn in such a short period of time. I better appreciate the amount of time my students sit each day learning. We spent several days sitting and listening to fascinating lectures and presentations from some of the great experts in Jewish and Catholic relations.

Visits to the US Holocaust Museum and Memorial (USHMM), The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), the Israeli and German Embassy, as well as thought-provoking lectures and dialogues between such interesting people as Father McManus, Rabbi Sandmel, Cardinal Wuerl, Rabbi Shankman, and David C. Friedman filled our days.

Finally, the enormity of *Nostra Aetate* (The Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions of the Second Vatican Council promulgated on October 28, 1965, by Pope Paul VI) and what it means for Catholic and Jewish relations for the future left me humbled. The responsibility I feel towards teaching my students more about the Jewish and Catholic relationship in the 21st century is daunting. How do I share all that I have learned? How do I reach and teach my students about the issues of anti-Semitism, Judaism, and the Holocaust in a relevant manner?

What touched me the most about the Institute is the visit to the exhibit at the USHMM called “Some Were Neighbors.” I think about my middle school students and remember that for most of them, the single most important influence in their lives, at this age, is their friendships with their middle school peers. The “Some Were Neighbors” exhibit honestly portrays just how friends and neighbors treated their fellow friends and neighbors who were considered racially inferior (because of religion, ethnicity, sexuality, etc.), and thus enemies, of the Third Reich. The questions and conversations that can come out of such an exhibit are ripe for the middle school student as they face peer pressure, bullying, and consumerism. I plan to reach my students with some of the questions that arise from the “Some Were Neighbors” exhibit. How would you react if you saw your friend or neighbor being bullied? What do you do when you see an injustice perpetrated against a friend or neighbor? What is more important: family and friends; or having all that you could want of clothing, technology, house, car, etc.? Most of us probably think that we would do the right and moral thing and stand up for justice, but as the “Some Were Neighbors” exhibit shows, it is not always easy to do the right thing.

I am so thankful for the opportunity to attend the Bearing Witness Institute. The lessons, activities, conversations, and lectures have given me much to think about for years to come. I look forward to imparting what I have learned at the Bearing Witness Institute with my current and future students.