



Sunflowers

Vol. 3 No. 1 Winter 2001

Sunflowers

is a periodic publication of the St. Herman of Alaska Christian School educational ministry. Our goal is to promote and restore the right orientation to education through the revelation of Scripture, tradition, teachings of the Holy Fathers, and practical experience. There is no subscription rate; donations are gladly accepted.

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“...the spirit of faith and piety of the parents should be regarded as the most powerful means for the preservation, upbringing and strengthening of the life of grace in children.”
--St. Theophan the Recluse

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From the desk of the Headmaster...

The Weight Bearing Pillars of Education: the Church, the Home, the School

The winds of varied influences batter against the house of the souls of children today. Three weight bearing pillars have been given which support the whole education of a child in Christ: **the Church, the Home and the School.**

Education doesn't manufacture a product. It brings forth the gifts that God conceived in us. As St. Basil the Great states: *"The love of God is not something we learn from another...we possess the power to love."* Education helps to deliver the result, not create it. It helps to unmask temptation and delusion and instructs us in the Way of Life. Our labors to educate children help deliver to them the God-intended provisions for the unique journey of their lives with Christ, their pilgrimage, their contribution, their sacrifice.

The **pillar of the Church** is fundamental and profound. Baptism turns our world upside down and establishes us on a new foundation. The conversation between Nicodemus and the Lord concerning our rebirth is the story of our birth as citizens of Heaven. When we are baptized into Christ, we become part of His Body, the Church, and are planted on the ground of being with angels and saints. We are given a new life in a Holy City where we are restored. This is the inn to which the Samaritan delivered his charge, wounded and robbed, to be cared for and restored. He becomes for us the Lord of the city, the caretaker of the inn, the Illuminator and Way-shower.

(continued next page)



Our life in Christ is a living faith, a revelation from God, delivered to us by the Son of God Himself. The Divine Services express the ineffable wonder of living in the fearsome, awesome presence of the Living God. The prayers of the Hours and the celebration of the Feasts lead us into understanding the life of Christ. The Gospel is preached and the heart and mind are given wings to soar to the throne of God. We learn to reach for the hem of the Lord's garment. Mysteries are pondered as we are fed on the Manna of the Lord's Supper, washed by His Mercy and uplifted by His Divine Light. Behold the work of God, the Image that He sealed upon us. The victory of His Incarnation begins again the work He started at the creation of mankind. Therefore, we must teach and encourage the children to breathe deeply of the air of the Church, to stand boldly upon its foundation, clad with the full armour of Christ.

The Church is the most massive of the three pillars, but near it is **the pillar of the family**, the Little Church. What happens behind the closed doors of the home is so close to the heart of the child. Love God and love your neighbor. The love of God is nourished while standing before the icons during morning and evening prayers. Fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters are the first neighbors we are required to love. The exalted life of Heaven dwells within this cave of Bethlehem. The children's future loves and desires are formed here.

The **third pillar is the School** which bridges the home and the Church, a servant to both. During the Turkish enslavement of Greece, St. Cosmos Aiotola, an apostle and martyr from Mt. Athos,

sacrificed everything to establish schools all over Greece. Ignorance, he feared, was a greater yoke of enslavement than political totalitarianism. St. Cosmos claimed that schools would build the church and fill the monasteries.

The school is a training camp for the soldiers of Christ to enter into human society and make a difference. They have to learn to think, to discern, to speak intelligently and convincingly in the context of the world, in the language that non-Christians can also understand. Just as a brain surgeon's training must be thorough, so too our children must know their faith thoroughly and possess a right understanding of the world. We should all be concerned about our schools, not only because of Columbine-type tragedies, but because of the more insidious precursors of this type of bloodshed -- apostasy, ignorance and coldness towards God and neighbor.

We should keep in mind these three pillars of education - **The Church, the Home, the School** - in order to fulfill our Lord's command *to suffer the little children to come unto Me*. Parents, godparents and pastors need to labor to be sure all three pillars are in place, holding up the edifice. Life in the Church should be full. Life at home should draw upon the grace of the Church. And the school should be the servant of the family and the Church in preparing the right understanding of how to walk in the Truth in the midst of the world, how to live fully for God in the context of the world, how to give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is His. Christian children must be prepared to be both witnesses and apologists, defenders and promoters, students and teachers, obedient yet unbending in the faith. The particular gifts, implanted by Christ in their souls and brought forth by the Church, Home, and School, can then radiate and touch the souls of others in their particular walk of life.

Fr. Patrick Tishel



The Children's Garden

The primary goal for children ages 4 - 6 is to guide them on their

Christian walk, leading them to a deeper understanding of Christ's commandments and the Christian virtues as we encourage their application on a daily basis in the classroom.

The Children's Garden can be helpful to parents during their child's transition from the safety and security of home life to the warmth and soul-saving experience of life in a Christian school.

We start the school day by gathering with the all the classes for morning prayers, Epistle and Gospel readings of the day, and a lively homily by Headmaster, Fr. Patrick Tishel. Religious Studies covers a major part of the school day and is based on the teachings of the Old & New Testaments through reading, crafts, and simple reenactments. These studies are further enriched by the many living examples of the lives of the Saints in selected stories which nourish the body and soul. Each child discovers the beauty of God's creation as we bring nature's seasons into our classroom, praising Him through seasonal songs, stories, poems and crafts.



Children's Garden children at play

Cooking projects, water color painting, Kindermusik, field trips, and the celebration of all major Feast days and Divine Services round out our busy weeks. Through all our activities, the genuine, God-given "love of learning" that is within children is honored. Basic "academics" such as counting, language arts, history and nature studies, are easily woven into a natural and Godly setting. Along the way, the children discover (often for the first time in their young lives outside home) the Christian virtues (1) of loving their classmates in word and deed, (2) of obedience to their teachers, and (3) of simply being and working within a Christian community.

Mr. Hans von Eicken



"The safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts."

— C.S. Lewis (1898-1963)

"Beauty Will Save the World" (Dostoevsky)

The world of a child in the 21st century is often the world of chaotic movement, constant sound, unearthly color - all saturated with the rush of speed. One of the goals at St. Herman's School is to create a world in which children experience movement with a purpose, sound as the result of thought, and color that reflects the natural world which God has created. All of this is then permeated with light, warmth, and love. This is the environment for which we strive when our students enter the classroom each morning.

— Dianne Mira
Instructor, Grades 1-3

*"It is good to be children sometimes,
And never better than at Christmas,
When its mighty Founder
was a child Himself."*

— Charles Dickens

CREATIVE WRITING AND LITERATURE

The goal of this class is to help the children learn to love writing and reading, thus giving them access to the joys and benefits of a life time's exploration in the world of letters.

Our creative writing exercises offer the students the chance to experiment with a variety of voices, both in prose and poetry. My hope is that all will take from the class a deep familiarity with their own interior landscapes, and a readiness to bring forth the treasures found there. In the course of each year the students also memorize psalms and poetry, thus receiving the imprint of strong and beautiful writing on their souls.

Once a month the class reads a book and each student writes a report. We have a lively discussion after they share their reports and later I edit the finished work with each child. Our reading list covers a variety of literary offerings, most notably classics and historical fiction, which we coordinate with subjects covered in other classes.

Throughout the year the students learn to edit their best pieces, some of which appear in the school's literary journal, "Illuminations". The older students act as editors, choosing which poetry, prose, photographs and drawings will appear in the journal.

It is a profound blessing to see the children unfold and blossom as they learn how to write. Their exuberance as they share their work, and as they learn to appreciate and encourage each other, is like a laughing spring wind dancing along the edges of a mountain forest.

Mrs. Anna Elizabeth Higgins

"At another time she asked,

"What is a soul?"

'No one knows,' I replied, 'but we know it is not the body, and is that part of us which thinks and loves and hopes.. and is invisible....'

'But if I write what my soul thinks,' she said, 'then it will be visible, and the words will be its body.'"

Annie Sullivan to Helen Keller, 1891



Helen Keller with First Lady Mrs. Coolidge reading her lips



Students Play in the Fall Leaves

Out of the Mouths Of Alumni: Two Testimonies from the Class of 2000

My first year at St. Herman's school was probably the toughest year I've experienced in my school career. I suffered from extreme sixth grade blues. The symptoms of this terrible disease, which I've discovered to be prevalent among middle schoolers everywhere, were: insecurity, dissatisfaction, attitude malfunctions, and insufficient awareness of personal and social boundaries. These symptoms were magnified by my change of environment from a secular private school to St. Herman's school. My high-spirited and somewhat overactive character felt claustrophobic in such a small and unfamiliar setting. I was used to looking out fifteen-foot windows and seeing a huge playground and a large field, complete with trees and a pond. This new school didn't have windows, and being in the city, I wouldn't have wanted to see out even if I had been given the option. Though I had been raised in the church community with my new classmates, I felt I didn't fit in, and wasn't sure I even wanted to bother trying. I just wanted to wake up one morning and discover that the hardships with my former school had changed and, most of all, that the churning that I felt inside would somehow disappear, and I would be back to my old comfortable self in my old comfortable school.

How could I have guessed that three years later, at my eighth-grade graduation ceremony, I would be trying desperately to steady my voice as I attempted to convey the gratitude I felt in a closing speech. I talked about all the changes that had taken place within me those three years, all the experiences that had helped to mold the girl I had become. I talked about how I had been forced to rely on a stronger relationship with God than I ever had before. I talked about how my teachers had helped to root me in my Orthodox faith, preparing

me for whatever unknown I was about to face in high school. I talked about how everyone in the school had let me change, and had not eternally written me off as a bad egg on account of my shaky beginning. I talked about the deep friendships I had formed, and looking over at my three best friends and only classmates, I could say nothing more. Right then, all I wanted was the year I had wasted on the sixth grade blues.

My career at St. Herman's started with tears because I didn't want to be there, and ended with tears because I didn't want to leave. All I could manage for a closing remark was, "St. Herman's was the best thing that happened to me-- Thank you, all of you."

Marianna Stell
Class of 2000



Marianna as Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*
(*A Tribute to the Bard*, June 2000)

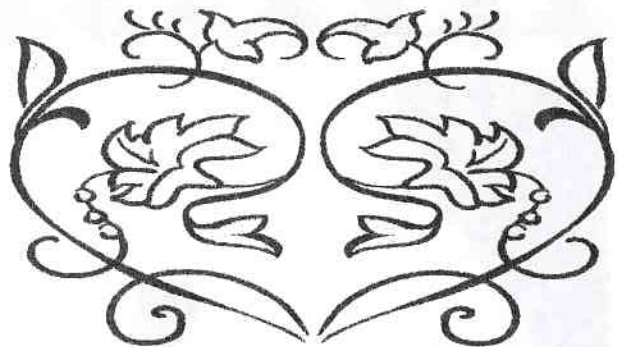
I attended St. Herman of Alaska Christian School for all of my elementary school years. I started at St. Herman's with a Kindergarten class of four friends in 1991 when the school first opened. I graduated in June of 2000, also with a class of four even better friends. The years I spent at St. Herman's were incredibly beneficial in shaping me as an Orthodox Christian and in preparing me both academically and spiritually for the world outside the warm and sheltered atmosphere of St. Herman's. Although I was not always thrilled to be in such a small environment and often longed for a school with more students, more sports, more activities, when the time came for 8th grade graduation I would have traded anything for one more year. I finally realized how incredibly blessed I was to attend St. Herman's. I knew I would never again find a place which had such a home-like familiarity and warmth.

Upon leaving St. Herman's at graduation, I was given a chance to put my faith and academic skills to the test when I started high school at Lexington Christian Academy. Although a Christian school, LCA has already challenged my Orthodox worldview, but I feel really strengthened by nine years of religious instruction, Church history and apologetics. As a college preparatory school, it has also challenged me academically and I attribute my success to the methods St. Herman's used in making me really think. The Orthodox world view at the base of the St. Herman's curriculum shaped my mind to argue for what I believe. Now as a sophomore, I continue to see the impact that a St. Herman's School education has had on my life and I am very thankful. I greatly miss my many teachers and classmates.

Stephanie Kon

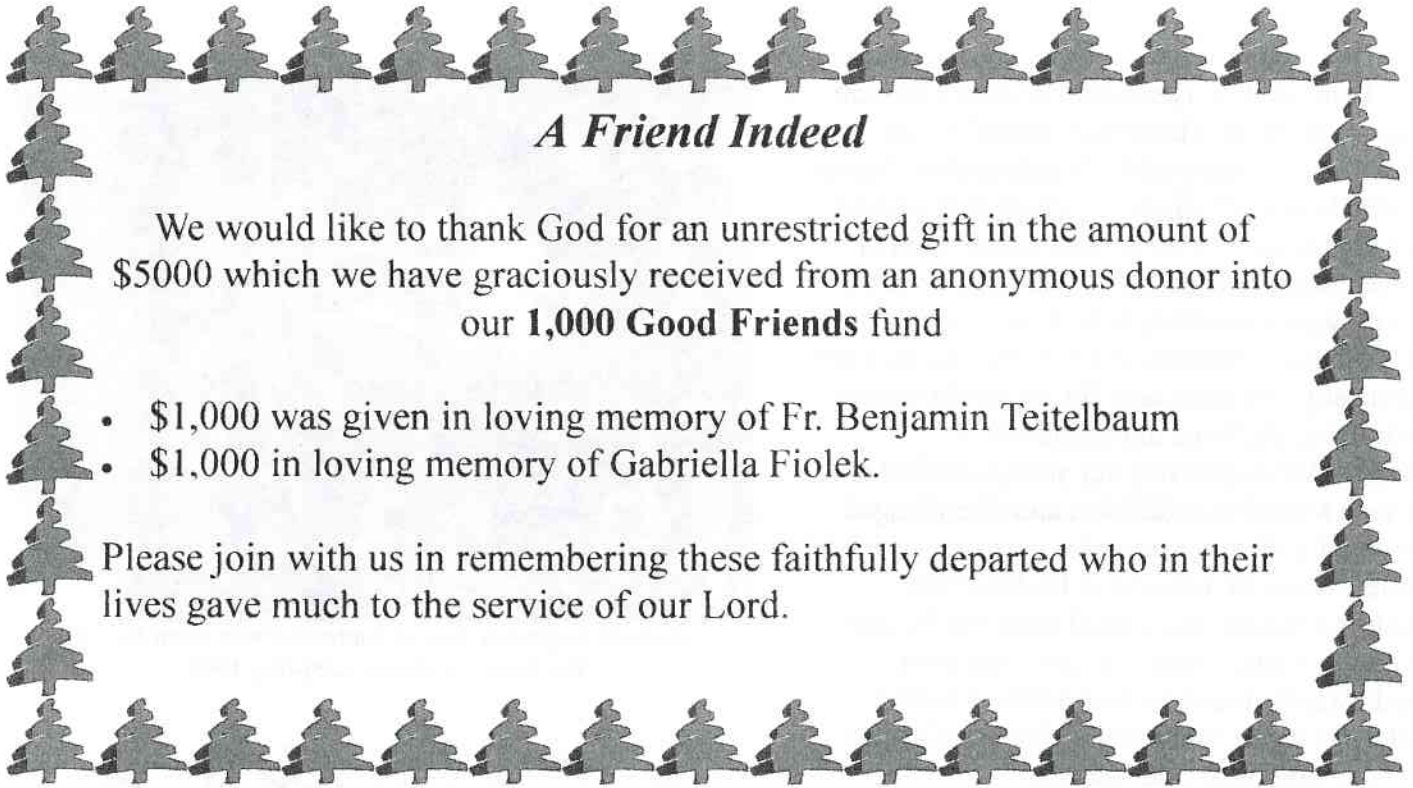


Alumnus Stephanie Kon at Codman Farm Barn Dance
Ten Year Celebration, Spring 2001



St. Herman's Alumni & Friends at Tenth
Anniversary Picnic





A Friend Indeed

We would like to thank God for an unrestricted gift in the amount of \$5000 which we have graciously received from an anonymous donor into our **1,000 Good Friends** fund

- \$1,000 was given in loving memory of Fr. Benjamin Teitelbaum
- \$1,000 in loving memory of Gabriella Fiolek.

Please join with us in remembering these faithfully departed who in their lives gave much to the service of our Lord.



All School Photograph in the Park
(Spring 2001)