

Catholic School and PSR Pastor Resource

Opportunities for Deeper Interaction with an Educational Community

The Department for Catholic Education of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois offers the following suggestions to assist Pastors in discussing specific ways that they can partner with parish school leadership teams in forging an intentionally Catholic school culture. There may be other celebrations and events that would also strengthen Catholic identity in your parish school. We have created the following list of possible celebrations and blessings as a helpful resource that we hope may inspire all our school communities to foster a vibrant Catholic faith life among parents, students, families, faculty, and staff.

GENERAL OPPORTUNITIES

- Offer a blessing for new drivers
- Celebrate the patronal Feast Day of your parish or school
(**please see final section of this document for additional suggestions**)
- Lead prayer before athletic events (St. Sebastian, Patron Saint of Athletes)
- Discuss with your Principal what opportunities students have for engaging in *lectio divina*
- Celebrate *Quinceañera*
- Develop rituals for welcoming new students and families, as well as for saying goodbye to families that leave during the school year
- Bless students on their birthday
- Bless students who become big brothers or big sisters
- Schedule students for Adoration regularly (e.g. First Friday Devotions)
- Talk to your Principal about a plan to name classrooms for different saints
- Schedule students for Reconciliation during Advent and Lent at a minimum
- Train students to be servers for weekday and weekend liturgies
- Train older students as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion for school and parish liturgies
- For Parish Schools of Religion events: offer a dinner that starts an hour before PSR begins. Parents will then not have to rush to prepare something at home and they can come to the parish center and eat with their children and other PSR families. The parents have a chance to talk with each other and their pastor.
- Give vocations talks during the school year to small groups or individual classes (e.g. have a mini Andrew Dinner during lunch with select students regularly)
- Share your parish bulletin column in the school newsletter
- Speak to all classes before receiving Reconciliation, Confirmation, or First Holy Communion and help with their preparation
- Meet with parents to discuss sacramental preparation and family catechesis
- Participate in a retreat day with older students

- Offer local mission programs during student breaks
- Create prayer groups for parents
- Create junior high small/prayer groups
- Create high school small groups modeled on FOCUS bible studies, or other models such as Alpha
- Host junior high retreats with the National Evangelization Team (NET Ministries)
- Host high school retreats through NET and FOCUS models
(**please see final section of this document for additional suggestions**)
- Create small groups for faith sharing with the school faculty
- Support Catholic Athletes for Christ
- Celebrate a saint feast day in classrooms or as a school monthly
- Name a patron saint for classrooms and celebrate with each class on that saint's feast day
- Have a school-wide assembly/send-off for students who are receiving their Sacraments of Initiation

MONTH-to-MONTH OPPORTUNITIES

August - Back to School

- Blessing of backpacks
- Back to school socials
- Parish ministry fair as part of the welcome to families starting the school year
- Celebrate the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (August 15)
(**please see final section of this document for additional suggestions**)

September - Catechetical Sunday

- Start planning for Catholic Schools Week, focusing on events that are scholastic and Catholic
(**please see final section of this document for additional suggestions**)
- Blessing and Commissioning for Catholic school teachers on Catechetical Sunday
- World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation (September 1)
- Sunday after Labor Day - World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly
- Nativity of Mary and the Blessing of Seeds (September 8)
- Feast of Ss. Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, Archangels (September 29)

October - Respect Life Month/Holy Rosary

- Plan developed by Pastor and Principal on how to highlight All Saints Day
(**please see final section of this document for additional suggestions**)
- First Sunday - Respect Life Sunday
- Last Sunday - World Mission Sunday

- Patron Saint of Missionaries, St. Thérèse of Lisieux (October 1)
- Mission Mass at the Cathedral Church
- Pet Blessing for Memorial of St. Francis of Assisi (October 4)
- Harvest Blessing

November - All Saints

- All Saints Day and All Souls Day
- Black Catholic History Month (Ven. Augustine Tolton)
- Thanksgiving blessing
- Global Celebration of Youth and Young Adults (Christ the King Sunday)

December - Advent/Christmas Season

- Blessing of Advent Wreaths and Nativity scenes
- Immaculate Conception (December 8)
- Blessing of Families (Feast of the Holy Family Sunday after Christmas)
- International Day of Persons with Disabilities (December 3)

January - Word Incarnate

- Epiphany House Blessing
- Start of Ordinary Time (Proclamation of the Kingdom)
- Sunday of the Word of God (Third Sunday in Ordinary Time)
- Catholic Schools Week
- National Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of the Unborn (January 22)

February - Vocations

- World Day for Consecrated Life (Sunday following February 2)
- National Marriage Week (February 7-14)
- World Marriage Day (Second Sunday in February)
- Candlemas and *Shining the Light of Christ in Our Schools* (February 2)
(**please see final section of this document for additional suggestions**)
- St. Blaise Blessing (February 3)

March - Lent

- Solemnity of St. Joseph, Husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary (March 19)
- Stations of the Cross

April - Easter and the Paschal Mystery

- Blessing of Easter Baskets
- Farm Blessing
- Prom Blessing
- St. George, patron saint of Scouting (April 23)
- Illinois March for Life in Springfield

May – Mary the Mother of God

- May Crowning
- Mother’s Day blessing
- Blessing for graduates
- Blessing for final exams
- National Day of Prayer (1st Thursday in May)

June

- Blessing for travel and vacation
- Blessing for mission trips (departing and returning)
- Father’s Day blessing
- Corpus Christi

July

- Religious Freedom Week (June 22-29)

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR KEY OPPORTUNITIES

- *Celebrations of Patronal Feasts* – Some parishes have different patron saints for the parish than for the school. If that is true for you, and only one or the other is celebrated for a major event in your community each year, talk to your Head of School about how the parish and school community can come together for that event, or consider an event for each patron saint over the course of the school year.
- *High School Retreats through NET and FOCUS model* – If you would like more information or help establishing small group discussions for Junior High or High School students, or for implementing a NET or FOCUS models, please contact members of the Department for Catholic Education for some helpful resources and suggestions.
- *Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary* – Talk to your Principal about the possibility of having a “start of school” Mass that includes a “blessing of backpacks,” to engage families in the Catholic culture of the school from the outset. Having teachers, older students, and staff members present, serving as ushers, readers, etc. can be a great way to reinforce that parish and school are a whole community of faith and learning.
- *Planning for Catholic Schools Week* – Have a conversation with your Principal about planning events in this week that are Catholic and scholastic. There is a tendency for these events to become merely “fun at school” (e.g., Crazy Hat Day) and important opportunities can be missed to celebrate our Catholic identity. For example, you might consider an International Day that focuses on “Eucharistic Miracles around the Globe,” “Marian Apparitions around the World,” or “Saints and Martyrs the World Over.” Partner with the Principal to ask if the parents

and faculty chosen to plan Catholic Schools Week events are invested deeply in the formation of missionary disciples of Christ.

- ***All Saints Day*** – Talk to your school’s leadership team about ways that All Saints Day can be a primary focus, while Halloween celebrations are emphasized to a lesser extent in October. This conversation could also be a good time to discuss what costumes and characters may be more or less appropriate to promote in a Catholic School environment. Superheroes may be more fitting than Zombie and Dracula motifs. The discussion, wherever it leads your community, provides a setting to reflect on what it means to have a Catholic cultural ethos distinct from the dominant secular culture, or that of public or other private schools.
- ***Candlemas*** – Ask your Principal about having Religion lessons leading up the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord that help students understand that Jesus is the light of the world. Plan ways to celebrate with blessed candles and exercises that will engage families at home. Discuss how your school can take part in *Shining the Light of Christ in Our Schools*.