



As part of Catholic School's Week, SHA sponsored an essay contest for all SHA students. In keeping with the Diocesan-wide school year theme, "Be the Difference" the students were asked to answer the following question: **"How has attending a Catholic school made a difference in your life?"** The following prizes were awarded to the top five finishers in the secondary building: first - \$250, second - \$125, third - \$50, fourth and fifth - \$25 each. Three winning entries from the elementary each received \$25. Listed below are the winning essays from the secondary grades, followed by the winning essays from the elementary.



### **1<sup>st</sup> Place – Grace Reetz, 11<sup>th</sup> grade**

Dear Sacred Heart,

This is either really late or a little too early, but I've been thinking about you a lot recently and I realized I ought to write you a thank you.

Thank you for making me wake up early every morning. As much as I hate to get out of bed you've given me something to depend on. While everything and everyone in my life comes and goes, you have remained constant. Thank you for making me wear khakis and polos day after day. As much as I complained about it in the past, I now realize that life is less about what you're wearing on the outside and more about the person you are becoming on the inside. Thank you for making me into a person I can be proud of. You have led me down a path that has taught me to treat each person I meet with respect and love. And although I fail at this task daily, you

have taught me that I am forgiven and that because of this I have no reason not to forgive those around me. You have taught me about the battle that Jesus Christ fought and won for me and given me a reason to never be afraid. You introduced me to my friends, an act that a simple "thank you" could never repay.

Within your walls, I have sat in wonder at the amazing discoveries of the world that my teachers and textbooks have revealed to me. I have also sat in complete frustration unable to understand the problems you handed me. Thank you for finding the perfect balance between the knowledge you give me and the knowledge you make me work for and not always making things easy, forcing me to push myself. Thank you for allowing me to compete in sports and discover my passions. Thank you for the teams and individuals that I have played with and all the successes we've had. I have spent countless hours within your gym trying to live up to the legacy of those who passed through you before me. Thank you for setting your standards so high. Thank you for giving me countless opportunities to grow as both an athlete and a Christian and making it impossible for me to stop improving.

Thank you for allowing me to be myself and giving me the opportunity to enjoy every amenity you have to offer. Thank you for never saying 'no' but always responding 'why not?' and encouraging me to pursue my interest in all areas.

You have been a part of me all the years of my life. Before you were teaching me these things you were teaching my brothers. I have spent many hours around you, nearly as many as I have in my own house. You have taught me all the lessons of life that I have learned thus far and it's a scary thought that within a few short years I won't be with you anymore. I feel as if I have not taken full advantage of all the opportunities you have given me. Though we will separate soon I know that no matter where I go, you will always be here, remaining constant, with open doors.

So, thank you Sacred Heart not for making a difference, but being the difference in my life. You are truly a gift to me from God.

Yours truly,  
Grace Reetz

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### **2<sup>nd</sup> Place – Brendan Zeien, 10<sup>th</sup> Grade**

Imagine a school where you aren't afraid to express your inner thoughts. A school that allows you to explore the Holy Trinity and all the wonderful mysteries behind His plan. Think about

a school where students encourage one another to develop their full potential. A school like this is hard to find, but this is the one I attend. My Catholic school continually makes a positive difference in my life, allowing me to improve my spiritual conscience, fulfill high academic standards, and unite with others to achieve God's will.

I have had the opportunity to attend a Catholic school ever since kindergarten and I have been thankful for this chance every day. Not only do I see the presence of God's love in every student around me, I also feel God's presence in the teaching staff as well. However, this is just the tip of the iceberg. One privilege I'm especially thankful for while attending Sacred Heart Academy is being able to attend Mass on Thursdays. Because of this opportunity, I feel as if my spiritual connection builds on itself weekly. Furthermore, Father always has a memorable narrative that is focused on students. With an easily understood homily, I can question myself to see if I am following the message. Through continual teachings of priests and teachers, I have created a stronger relationship with the Lord.

A Catholic school helps students grow mentally as well as helping them to develop their spiritual lives. Due to a more academic curriculum, students are required to work harder to receive the higher grade. However, students are not without assistance. Teachers, advisors, tutors and other staff members all help us along the way, using fun and creative methods to make sure we know the material, and it doesn't stop there. Through practice tests and career days, teachers also guide us towards a successful college career. Because of all this encouragement, I have been motivated to work hard and never give up. Not only does this mentality help me inside the classroom, but it also helps in extracurricular activities outside of school as well. This creates a huge difference in my everyday life.

A final difference a Catholic school makes is its incentive to unite and establish God's kingdom on earth. There are several unique ways in which the school accomplishes this. One example is religious retreats. A major retreat I am excited for is the "March for Life". This is an opportunity for thousands of students to travel to Washington D.C. and march for a belief of the Catholic church. This retreat is a major example of unity among individuals. However, there are other smaller actions as well which help establish God's kingdom on earth. Vacation Bible School, classroom discussions, and prayer services are just a few more instances that illustrate how our school helps us unite. By setting up such opportunities, it becomes easier to recognize the light of Christ and follow in His divine footsteps.

A Catholic school is not just a privilege, it is a chance. It is a chance for one to fully develop into the person they want to become. Through all the advantages and opportunities a Catholic school provides, one can see the difference it makes in the lives of its students every day. It is explained quite simply in a quote by David Vitter, "Catholic schools prepare every student to meet the challenges of their future by developing their mind, yes, but also their body, their soul and spirit." I am blessed and proud to be a part of this excellent school, for all of the details add up and make a big difference.

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### **3<sup>rd</sup> Place – Devin Humphreys, 12<sup>th</sup> Grade**

I haven't always gone to a Catholic school; for that matter, I haven't always been Catholic. I received the sacraments of initiation-- Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist in the seventh grade. My path to embracing my faith is certainly not traditional, but I wouldn't have it any other way. God's plan has manifested itself in me in many different ways. Had I not transferred from a public elementary school to a Catholic elementary school, or had any of the circumstances behind that transition been different, I may not be the person I am today.

I attended a public elementary school until the fifth grade. I would have considered myself a Christian, and I did make an attempt in the third grade to read the Bible cover-to-cover. (I gave up in the middle of the Psalms.) However, none of my beliefs were grounded in the profound faith that comes in a close relationship with God, and my relationship with the Lord was, for the sake of brevity, weak. It was then that my parents decided to transfer my sister and me to a Catholic school twenty minutes away from home.

That transfer may have been made for academic reasons and in pursuit of a better education, but at the end of the day, I personally consider it the best decision our family ever made. We have gotten so much more out of attending a Catholic school than any of us ever would have expected. Daily religion classes showed me how the Scriptures I had read connect to Catholic tradition to make up the body of divine revelation, and the logician in me drew the conclusion that this added up to something in which I could put my faith. I was therefore baptized into the Catholic faith in the middle of seventh grade; Confirmation and First Communion soon followed.

The Lord God has a plan for my life. Things had to happen exactly the way that they did in order for me to reach the potential my faith life has always had, and only the Lord can cause everything to fall into place. One of my religion teachers taught me about the Greek word "Paraclete." The

word comes from the roots “para-meaning “side” and “kletos” meaning “to call”; therefore, the word “paraclete” etymologically means “to call at one’s side.” This word is used rather frequently in the gospel of John to describe the Holy Spirit, and I don’t think a single word is more appropriate. I believe that the Paraclete, that is, the Holy Spirit, has been advocating for me my entire life, and that the sacraments, through my reception thereof, have served their purpose by drawing me closer to God. Most significantly, the Holy Spirit guided my family and me, leading us to the Sacred Heart family and the Church as a whole.

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#### **4<sup>th</sup> Place – Hadyn Terwilliger, 11<sup>th</sup> Grade**

I have attended a Catholic school my entire academic career. Throughout my eleven years attending Sacred Heart Academy, I have learned many things and have had amazing experiences. I can honestly say that going to a Catholic school has made a difference in my life. Attending a Catholic school has shaped me into who I am today.

Because I go to a Catholic school, my faith life has prospered. The mere fact that I can speak about my faith openly has made me a stronger Catholic. The weekly Masses also help me strengthen my faith. Recently, I was given an opportunity by the school to get Eucharistic minister training. My teachers encouraged me to pursue the training. This opportunity has helped me to become more involved in the church, which as a young Catholic, is very important. Having religion classes also has given me the opportunity to talk about and explore my faith with my classmates. In my classes, we have gone in depth in many areas from the gospels to the sacraments. Learning these things has helped me understand the Catholic faith more.

One of the biggest reasons a Catholic school has made a difference in my life is the community. Teachers, students, and families are all close to one another and can rely on each other. Recently my mom was diagnosed with colon cancer. This devastated my family and me. My teachers and fellow classmates reached out to me, helped me and gave me advice. They made me feel as comfortable as possible in my difficult situation. I will never forget the support and love I have received from them. I feel that I am cared for at my school and that I’m not just another person. The community feel of Sacred Heart has truly made a difference in my life.

I also believe the small intimate classroom setting has made a difference in my academic life. I have a close relationship with my teachers and I feel comfortable asking them for help.

The teachers care how each individual student performs in their class and has time to attend to each student’s needs. I know each and every one of my teachers wants me to succeed and it inspires me to do my best. Also, getting one on one advising for classes and planning for college has helped me and definitely has made a difference for me.

The constant surrounding of faith, the community, and small classroom setting has all combined to make going to a Catholic school life changing. I cannot and do not want to imagine my life without a Catholic school; it truly has made an unforgettable difference in my life.

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#### **5<sup>th</sup> Place – Molly Yonker, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade**

How has attending a Catholic school made a difference in my life? Ever since my first day of kindergarten, I have had the privilege of attending a Catholic school. It has definitely been a great fit for my sisters and me and it has been very influential in my life. From the small class sizes, to being able to learn more about my faith, I have greatly enjoyed being part of a Catholic school for the past ten years. I know that going to a Catholic school for a K-12 education was a decision that neither myself nor my parents will regret.

In fifth grade, I moved to Mt. Pleasant to go to Sacred Heart Academy because the Catholic school I had currently been going to did not have a high school. The alternative to Sacred Heart was a large Class B high school where the average number of students per grade was roughly 160 students. Currently, the largest class at Sacred Heart has about 40 students. With a grade that small, it is easier to get to know all of your classmates. You are given the opportunity to build relationships with them as well. I personally know all the kids in my class and have gotten to know them better over the past couple of years. One might think that because of these tight-knit classes, transferring students get left out of the group. This is not the case at all. Every class welcomes in new students and immediately tries to get them involved. This was a huge deal for me and I was very grateful for the supportive atmosphere.

Another great part of going to a Catholic school is having the chance to learn more about my faith. The religion classes I have taken have helped me learn more about my faith as well as attending the weekly Mass. Being able to receive the Eucharist twice a week means a lot and I am thankful to have that opportunity.

This winter I worked the rotating homeless shelter through Sacred Heart Parish. I saw many people that barely had

anything but the shirt on their back. It was a very eye-opening experience for my fellow peers and me. It's amazing how we take things as simple as a warm home for granted. I think that I take my Catholic education for granted more than I should. I am truly blessed to be able to afford to go to a Catholic school. I'm taught how to treat others with respect, no matter what they look like or who they are. As Pope John Paul II says, "Catholic education aims not only to communicate facts but also to transmit a coherent, comprehensive vision of life, in the conviction that the truths contained in that vision liberate students in the most profound meaning of human freedom." I think that this sums up a big part of what I have learned at Sacred Heart. I have learned that life should be seen from all viewpoints and everything should be put in perspective. I am very grateful that I attend a Catholic school and I would encourage others to send their children to one, because it truly will make a difference in their life.

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## **ELEMENTARY ESSAYS**

### **3 WINNERS LISTED ALPHABETICALLY**

#### **Jonah Pollatz, 3rd Grade**

The first thing I'm going to be talking about is going to Mass. I learn about God and his people in Mass. For example, one martyr had his fingers bit off for believing in God. So, lesson learned, always believe in God no matter what!

The next thing that has made a difference in my life is learning more important things that public schools don't teach me about Jesus and God and heaven. It also teaches me to preach to others, like I am now.

The third and final thing I'm going to talk about are the virtues. The one virtue I try to do is to show kindness to others. You should try it some time. If we didn't show kindness to others, then the world be a terrible place.

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#### **Nicolette Priest, 4th Grade**

This Catholic school has made a big difference in my life. I used to go to a public school before I came to a Catholic school. They taught you the regular classes there, math, art, writing, reading, but never religion. They never even mentioned Christ.

I moved to Sacred Heart and learned lots of normal studies and lots about Christ, too! I learned many things I didn't know about Christ, and found out about sacraments.

I'm so glad that Sacred Heart has many teachings about the one and only Christ. We go to Mass every Thursday, and learn about Christ. I go to choir, too, in Mass. Now I go Sunday and Thursday!

I feel much joy learning about Christ. It's made a difference. I love Christ, and know about him more than I ever had in a public school! I learned so much at a Catholic school! And I know that I have much more knowledge about Christ coming my way, and coming my way in years to come as I stay in this wonderful Catholic school. Through bumps and rough times and times to come, this Catholic school has taught me that Christ is with me.

Always.

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#### **Isabel Rookard, 3rd Grade**

Going to a Catholic School changed my life a lot. I learned what praying is when I didn't even know who God really was and Jesus. When I was in kindergarten I learned that Jesus isn't just this guy you hear about a lot. He's your best friend forever. Jesus loves you even if you make a big huge sin. I make a lot of sins. I know other people do, too. I go to church every Sunday and Thursday. My teacher and my class pray every day and do prayer requests a lot. Another thing that I like at a Catholic school is I get to get my First Communion, Confirmation and Confession with kids in my class. My teacher told me that just because you're not Catholic doesn't mean you don't believe in God. I think that all the teachers I've had teach a lot of interesting things about Jesus. I've made so many friends here at SHA. I never want to lose my friends ever. I try to be the difference at school and at Girl Scouts by making everyone feel welcome to our school and making new friends.

Following the Girl Scout Promise, "On my honor, I will try: To serve God and my country, to help at all times, and to live by the Girl Scout Law." I feel that attending a Catholic school has encouraged me to live that way: serve God, honor my country and help others. I have been trying to be my best at school to be nice and include everyone at recess and lunch. I will be Catholic for the rest of my life. I encourage lots of people to be nice and not bully anyone. I have tried to have affability, integrity, respect and even more. Going to a Catholic school has told me that you can be like Jesus but you can't be Jesus. That is my goal every day I wake up and get ready to go to school. I noticed that it's not just a school, it's a Catholic school. I have loved going to a Catholic school ever since I came to SHA.