

For family, friends, & alumni of Cistercian Preparatory School

CISTERCIAN IRVING TEXASONTINUUM

Fall 2023

The Stations of the Cross Tradition

LEGACIES OF
COMMUNION AND STEWARDSHIP
ON THE CISTERCIAN GROUNDS

Annual Report
2022–2023 School Year

➡ Some were pushed
others pulled ➡
...All were formed ⬆

FORMATION BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

*Enkindling Character and Leadership through
Athletics, the Arts, Technology and Faith*

Where are Cistercian students formed? *Sometimes outside.*



Premier 3.1-Mile Cross-Country Trail Coming Fall 2024

Please consider a tax-deductible gift or pledge by making a gift online at
<https://cistercian.org/FormationCampaign>

To learn more, contact Erin Hart, Director of Development,
at 469-499-5406 or ehart@cistercian.org



CISTERCIAN PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Rev. Paul McCormick
Headmaster

Fr. Lawrence Brophy '01
Head of Middle School

Greg Novinski '82
Assistant Headmaster
Head of Upper School

Fr. Ambrose Strong
Dean of Students

Fr. Anthony Bigney
Director of Admissions

Chris Blackwell
Director of
College Counseling

Erin Hart
Director of Development
and Alumni Relations

Jack Dorn '05
Director of Athletics
and Physical Education

Peter Thompson '13
President, Cistercian
Alumni Association

School Board

Rt. Rev. Peter Verhalen '73
Rev. Lawrence Brophy '01
Rev. Thomas Esposito
Rev. Paul McCormick
Dr. Adebola Adesanya
Mr. Victor Arias
Ms. Kathleen M. Muldoon
Mr. Dan Odom
Mrs. Joan D. Raff
Mr. J. Mark Roppolo '88
Mr. Peter P. Smith '74
Mrs. Gloria Tarpley
Mr. Jere W. Thompson, Jr. '74
Dr. Matthew Wilson

CONTINUUM

Erin Hart
Publisher

Brigitte Gimenez
Editor

Jim Reisch
Photography Editor

FigDesign
Layout

Published each spring and fall
by Cistercian Preparatory School

3660 Cistercian Road
Irving, TX 75039

469-499-5400
www.cistercian.org

Cistercian Preparatory School was founded with the aim of preparing talented boys for the colleges of their choice by challenging their minds with excellent academic programs, molding their character through the values of Catholic education, and offering them guidance with both understanding and discipline. Cistercian Preparatory School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, nationality, or ethnic origin in the administration of its admission and education policies, financial aid programs, athletic programs, and other activities.

Letter from the Headmaster

Highlighting Often Overlooked Treasures

*We adore You, O Christ,
and we praise You.
Because, by Your holy cross,
You have redeemed the world.*

Our feature article tells the wonderful story of Cistercian's Stations of the Cross Trail. Written by alumnus **Joseph Watt '17**, the piece highlights this often overlooked, sacred space on campus,



Fr. Paul McCormick

The trail's history is included, as well as recent improvements (part of our current Capital Campaign) that will ensure it is accessible and sustainable for years to come.

Another highly valued but often overlooked treasure at Cistercian is the number of students who have thrived during their years here in every way, except perhaps for GPA. Our second

feature article shares the accounts of just a handful of these students who might have found the all-honors curriculum challenging, but who nonetheless proved essential in making the School such a special place and are now making an impressive impact in the larger world as alums.

“Afterthoughts” offers a pleasant touch of humor from alumnus and current teacher **Patrick Spence '08**, who shares his curious experiences teaching Form I for the very first time.

On our back cover—a space long reserved for Fr. Roch's unique spiritual wisdom—one will find a poignant column from Fr. Thomas, who seamlessly and skillfully carries on this tradition in the same spirit of his beloved mentor and predecessor.

Finally, the 2022-23 *Annual Report* recognizes the generous and loving support this past year from the Cistercian community. Such generosity is yet another often overlooked treasure that is a sign of God's provident care as we labor together to form and educate future generations of amazing young men in the Cistercian Tradition.

Enjoy!

In this issue

Volume 50, Number 2



The Stations of the Cross Tradition LEGACIES OF COMMUNION AND STEWARDSHIP ON THE CISTERCIAN GROUNDS

Joseph Watt '17

10



Some were pushed others pulled ...All were formed

How the
Cistercian
experience
enabled
different paths
to success

Bob Greenfield

44



Departments

News & Notes	4
Annual Report of Giving	19
Class Notes	50
Afterthoughts	59
Unsolicited Life Advice from Fr. Roch	60
Fr. Thomas Esposito	60

Cover photo by Jim Reisch

News & Notes

New faces on campus

Charles Welde joined the Cistercian coaching staff with a wealth of experience. Born in Virginia, Welde went to high school in southern California and earned both his undergraduate and master's degrees from the University of Oklahoma. He has taught and coached at the high school and college levels and was general manager of a professional indoor football team. Welde is the offensive coordinator for Hawks football, an assistant track coach for both upper and middle school, and teaches Form III Health.

A part-time baseball coach at Cistercian last year, Ricky Barrett was happy to join the full-time coaching staff. "Following Coach Gray's retirement, I was lucky to be chosen to take over the baseball program," said Barrett. He is also an assistant coach in football and middle school basketball. With a bachelor's in kinesiology from Tarleton State University, Barrett was previously head baseball coach at De Leon High School. "Cistercian has been a huge blessing in my life, and I look forward to growing closer with this community and leading the Hawk's baseball program for years to come," said Barrett.

Adam Brooks, a Michigan native, came to Dallas after four years of teaching to complete his master's degree at the University of Dallas. Prior to Cistercian, he taught English for two

years at Nolan Catholic. Brooks aims to introduce students to the great genres of classical literature: epic, comedy, and tragedy. He hopes students will be able to appreciate and build competency in both the art and science of English. He is also teaching English Lab. "It has been a joy to be welcomed into the Cistercian community and to learn each day about our wonderful students," said Brooks.

After graduating from the University of North Texas with a BA in theater, Breianna Barrington worked with many theaters in the DFW area as a technical artist. Costume design is her main interest, but she is also a carpenter, set dresser, and prop master. At Cistercian, she is teaching a technical theatre elective about behind-the-scenes aspects that go into creating a theatrical performance. She also assists Tasia Magill with the School's productions.

Darren Drago joined Cistercian as assistant varsity football coach, varsity track coach, and director of strength and conditioning. For the last 20 years, Drago has worked at the collegiate level at Stephen F. Austin, LSU, and UTSA. He has coached on both the offensive and defensive sides of the football. Drago earned his undergraduate and graduate degrees from Northwestern State University. "I have a passion for developing athletes, but more than that, I have a responsibility to help develop future great husbands and dads," said Drago.



Helping others in Sierra Leone

Last summer, **Will Brittian '24** joined alumnus **Tom Lewis '73** and Dr. Cathy Schanzer for a mission trip with Southern Eye Institute to Serabu, Sierra Leone. The Southern Eye Clinic, founded in 2006 by Lewis and Schanzer, provides care to thousands of people each year. Will played soccer with locals, taught computer lab, and even assisted in the operating theater with post-op care for patients. To learn more about the Southern Eye Institute's mission, visit <https://southerneyeinstitute.net/our-mission/>.

New plant manager is a monk

With the departure last summer of Cistercian's longtime plant manager, Fr. Christopher Kalan stepped up in a big way by taking on that role in addition to his teaching duties. Kevin Davidson, Joe Farley, and Angel Hernandez have also joined the maintenance department.



New faces on campus (l-r): Adam Brooks, Kevin Davidson, Ricky Barrett, Breianna Barrington, Charles Welde, and Darren Drago



Maintenance Department (l-r): Angel Hernandez, Kevin Davidson, Henry Van, Fr. Christopher, Jack Sims, and Joe Farley

Capital Campaign funds at work!

Gym's lower level is complete

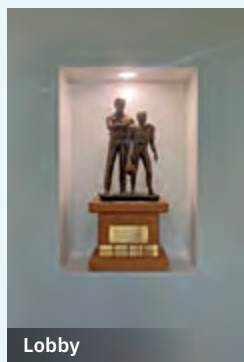
As students returned to campus this fall, the lower gym renovations were almost complete. The locker rooms, weight room, team room, equipment storage, trainer's space and a suite of offices for the coaches were all new. On August 18, the new Hawk logo was revealed before the Booster Club Kickoff Dinner. Due to excessive heat, the scrimmage was delayed, so the community headed to the air-conditioning and got their first glances into the new space with the new logo. This renovation was the first project in the *Formation Beyond the Classroom Capital Campaign*.



Weight Room



Weight Room



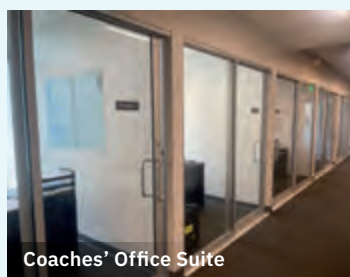
Lobby



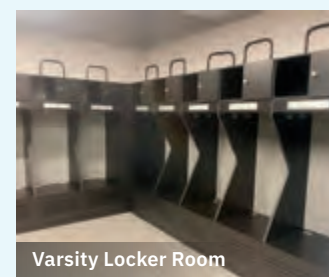
Trainer's Room



Team Room



Coaches' Office Suite



Varsity Locker Room

The Store is open, shiny and new

The Store has a new home where the senior overhang used to be outside of the college counseling office. Another wonderful result of the *Formation Beyond the Classroom Capital Campaign*, this space is beautiful and functional with room to display Hawks merchandise and plenty of storage for extra inventory.



News & Notes

Beautiful art for the Cistercian Library

Thanks to the generosity of a current family, the library is now home to *Laterna Magica* by Reinhard Ziegler. With antique books, journals, almanacs, and hymnals collaged onto copper plates, all elements form this single, unique work of art. The “slide projector” of the 15th century, one of its earliest recorded uses was by Jesuit priests who painted religious scenes on glass slides to be viewed in a darkened room. The slides were stored in slotted wooden boxes for safekeeping. This piece features the “Gardener of Peace” prayer which



Erin Hart

appears across twelve collaged copper panels. Students can lift and display one panel at a time to see a daily devotional in twelve parts. To see more about Ziegler, visit <https://www.reinhardziegler.com/>.

Youth Missions to Costa Rica resume

The Diocese of Dallas resumed its annual Youth Mission to Costa Rica in 2023. Our students and their fellow missionaries from other area schools spent eight days living and working in the diocese of San Isidro de el General, Costa Rica, attending Mass in Spanish in their cathedral, visiting local schools, and helping rural chapels and their associated communities with minor renovations and building.



Cash Lechler '25, Santiago Barajas '24, Jacob Brown '24, Ariel Santiago '25, and Nam Ha '24 take an afternoon break at a scenic spot on the Pacific coast to enjoy traditional Costa Rican cuisine.

Speaker addresses Christocentric manhood

As part of Cistercian's ongoing program of formation, Paul J. Kim, an acclaimed international Catholic speaker, musician, and comedian, spoke with the Upper School before Thanksgiving about striving to live a Christocentric, authentic manhood in today's culture. He offered a special presentation for parents as well. Learn more about Paul at [PJKmusic.com](https://www.PJKmusic.com).



Hungarian exchange students at Cistercian

In August and September, Cistercian hosted two exchange students from the Szent Imre Cistercian high school in Budapest, Hungary. Marci Poszgai and Balasz Csiki benefited immensely from their five-week experience of cultural and linguistic immersion. They were hosted by several Cistercian families, treated to Cowboys games, rodeos, and great Tex-Mex food, and—best of all—embraced by their new Dallas classmates in Cistercian's Class of 2024.



Junior World Affairs Council members Rithvik Gabri '24, Owen Forsthoffer '24, Keegan Cobleigh '24, and Owen Putnam '24 attend an event with Colin Allred.

Federal judge visits campus

Sixth Circuit Judge Amul Thapar, who lives in the Cincinnati area, visited Cistercian and shared his story with juniors and seniors.



Judge Thapar's name was on the short list for an appointment to the U.S. Supreme Court, and he is one of the most high-profile federal judges in the nation.

He also has a wonderful story about his conversion to Catholicism. His visit was made possible by Ellen and **Steve Rasch '80**.

Freshmen mix service and fun

The annual Freshman Mixer Luau took place in August, three weeks after the devastating wildfires in Maui. The freshman class held a donation drive in conjunction with the event for the Maui Strong Fund with the Hawaii Community Foundation, raising \$3,627 and increasing awareness of the tragedy.



Mike Wang '93

Quiz Bowl News

Cistercian's Upper School Quiz Bowl team competed in their first tournament of the year in Shreveport. Cistercian A (**Byron Duhé '25, Drew Durgin '26, Ryan Fang '24**), Cistercian B (**John Paul Jacob '24, Neel Perumandla '24, Rafael Ramirez '24, Joe Schulz '26**) and Cistercian C (**Tristan Gruchet '26, Christian Oh '26, Rishabh Rengarajan '25, Bennett Tschoepe '26**) finished tied for first place. The only team to defeat a Cistercian team at the tournament was another Cistercian team, and all three teams qualified for both national high school tournaments. Individual awards went to Fang (first), Oh (second), Jacob (fourth), Tschoepe (sixth), and Ramirez (eighth).



Home for honey bees

Last summer, the family of **Will Oliver '27** offered the Abbey four beehives. Fr. Raphael and Fr. Ambrose suited up one night in late July to transport the bees to their new home. With Mr. Tim Oliver's ongoing help and the further generosity of the Chans (**Rico '23**), the abbey apiary has grown to seven hives. "We had our first honey harvest in November, extracting six gallons. We've hosted two hive workdays for students, and I plan to incorporate apiculture into my farming elective in the spring," said Fr. Raphael. "It's been a beautiful and even spiritual hobby. Watching the bees work together is a lesson in itself." A quote from L. L. Langstroth (father of American beekeeping) deeply resonates, "... the many wonders of the economy of the honey-bee will not only excite a wider interest in its culture, but [also] lead those who observe them to adore the wisdom of Him who gave them such admirable instincts." (from his book *The Hive and the Honey Bee*, 1853)



News & Notes

Faculty in-service about ADHD

In August, Alice Ann Holland, PhD, ABPP presented to faculty and staff on Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).



Dr. Holland, a pediatric neuropsychologist, provided education on the signs and symptoms,

the latest neurological findings, difficulties the disorder presents in learning, and helpful teaching methods in the classroom. She also discussed current research and, as technology is improving, the far-reaching impact ADHD can have on a student's life. Dr. Holland is the sister of **Steve Spurgin '06**.

Marking milestones one year at a time...

10 years

Fr. Raphael

15 years

Fr. Ambrose Fr. Augustine
André Bruce Erin Hart Jack Sims

25 years

Patrick Mehen

30 years

Mark Gray
(came back from retirement for three months to coach football)

45 years

Roberto Munguia Fr. Gregory

55 years

Bob Haaser

ACCIS 360 College Counseling Review

The Association of College Counselors at Independent Schools (ACCIS) was asked to provide a "360 Review" of our college counseling program. Four college counselors with significant experience in independent schools and college admissions offices met with multiple constituencies to evaluate our approach to college admissions. They also contacted multiple college admissions offices to collect opinions about Cistercian and our applicants and evaluated survey data from alumni and alumni parents for a recent perspective of people going through this process.

Based upon their commendations and recommendations, the School has implemented changes to help our students shine even more brightly. Specifically:

- Honors courses have been reclassified as "Advanced Honors" to better communicate the depth, pace, and knowledge expected within these courses.
- Course names were retitled to better convey material taught (i.e., Euclidian Geometry and Principles of American Government).
- Course weighting went from 0.6 to a full 1.0 bump for Advanced Honors courses adding an approximate .91 bump to a student's unweighted GPA.
- AP exam scores were highlighted in the school profile to communicate how well Cistercian students perform though not taking AP classes.
- College admissions officers will be utilized to communicate to parents and students the changing admissions landscape, combat misinformation, and help convey a consistent message.
- A subcommittee will work with alumni and parents to explore a shadowing program to introduce students to career fields.
- Admissions counselors from Johns Hopkins University and Trinity University provided our faculty with guidance on what colleges are looking for in letters of recommendation.

The School will continue to evaluate its college admissions program to ensure that we do everything possible to help our students remain competitive in a constantly evolving admissions landscape. •



Jim Reisch

Fall middle school production of Fiddler on the Roof Jr.



The Dot Race tradition continues with Fr. Anthony and his Form II boys.

Competitive admissions for Class of 2023

University of Notre Dame

graduate. This statistic

Map of the United States showing the number of colleges by state. The states are colored teal, and the number of colleges is indicated by a white circle with a black number inside. Gray states have no number.

State	Number of Colleges
California	1
Colorado	2
Connecticut	3
Delaware	1
District of Columbia	1
Florida	0
Georgia	0
Idaho	0
Illinois	1
Indiana	5
Iowa	1
Kansas	0
Kentucky	0
Louisiana	0
Maine	1
Maryland	2
Massachusetts	1
Michigan	0
Minnesota	0
Mississippi	0
Missouri	2
Montana	0
Nebraska	0
Nevada	0
New Hampshire	0
New Jersey	1
New Mexico	0
New York	1
North Carolina	2
North Dakota	0
Ohio	0
Oklahoma	4
Oregon	0
Pennsylvania	1
Rhode Island	0
South Carolina	2
South Dakota	0
Tennessee	2
Texas	16
Utah	0
Vermont	0
Virginia	0
Washington	0
West Virginia	0
Wisconsin	0
Wyoming	0



**Walking the
Stations of the
Cross Trail**

Cistercian Preparatory School fosters a strong sense of community among its students. It begins within the Form. Together, the boys will face rigorous coursework, athletic challenges, and all the struggles of adolescence throughout their eight years. The Form becomes a ceaseless source of encouragement. It acts as a proving ground for all sorts of endeavors. It provides the foundation for a lifelong brotherhood.

The students are also connected to a larger faith community through the study of salvation history and prayer. An abundance of spiritual guidance is made available to the boys by both the faculty and the Abbey, ensuring that their successes and struggles remain framed by their faith.

A demanding curriculum, a close-knit support network, and stalwart faith formation are each traits of the School, but none of them are irreplacable. These characteristics are, of course, shared by many other institutions. The experience of Cistercian students, though, is made unique by their environment.

The Abbey and School together bear the legacies of their Hungarian founders, who in

The Stations of the Cross Tradition

LEGACIES OF COMMUNION STEWARDSHIP ON THE CISTERCIAN GROUNDS

Joseph Watt '17

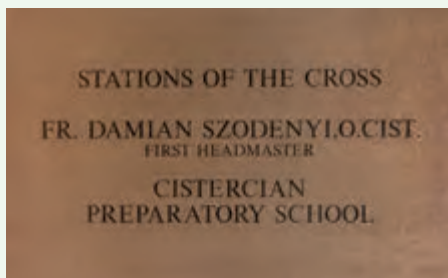
Principal photography
Jim Reisch

the 1950s carried the centuries-old tradition of Cistercian education from the Abbey of Zirc to Dallas. Their vocation, to educate young men, has been carried on by generations of younger monks who call the Abbey home.

Although it is positioned between Las Colinas and Dallas, the property feels like a place of refuge from the urban bustle. The grounds of the campus contain many gems, and among them are thirty-five acres of woods, which lie nestled just east of the Abbey Church. Over a mile of trails wind through these woods. At the heart is an inner loop, which is dedicated to the prayer of the Stations of the Cross. Fifteen stops are positioned at intervals around the trail, each dedicated to an event from Christ's Passion and Resurrection.

Since 2011, the trail has been well-trodden and maintained by the students and faculty. "I see the trail as being one of the defining features on campus," Fr. Abbot Peter Verhalen '73 remarked. Its utility extends beyond the Stations, and its history runs deep.





The first iteration of the Stations of Cross on the abbey grounds began with Fr. Damian Szödényi. He was the first dean of men at the University of Dallas and became the first headmaster at Cistercian Preparatory School in 1962.

Upon his retirement, Fr. Damian started going down into the basement of the Abbey. There, he fashioned a studio, and despite having no formal training, he began to draw, paint, and sculpt beautiful pieces. One of his favorite mediums was bronze. Fr. Damian would first form the images in clay and then cast them in bronze. His castings would primarily depict scenes from church history.

At one point, he became inspired by Pope John Paul the Great, who had a particular love for the Stations of the Cross. Fr. Damian decided to cast a set of stations reliefs, which can be found today in the abbey courtyard along the southeast wall of the church. These reliefs deviate slightly from the traditional stations. Most notably, Fr. Damian included a fifteenth station to commemorate the Resurrection, and each subsequent version of the stations on campus has followed suit.

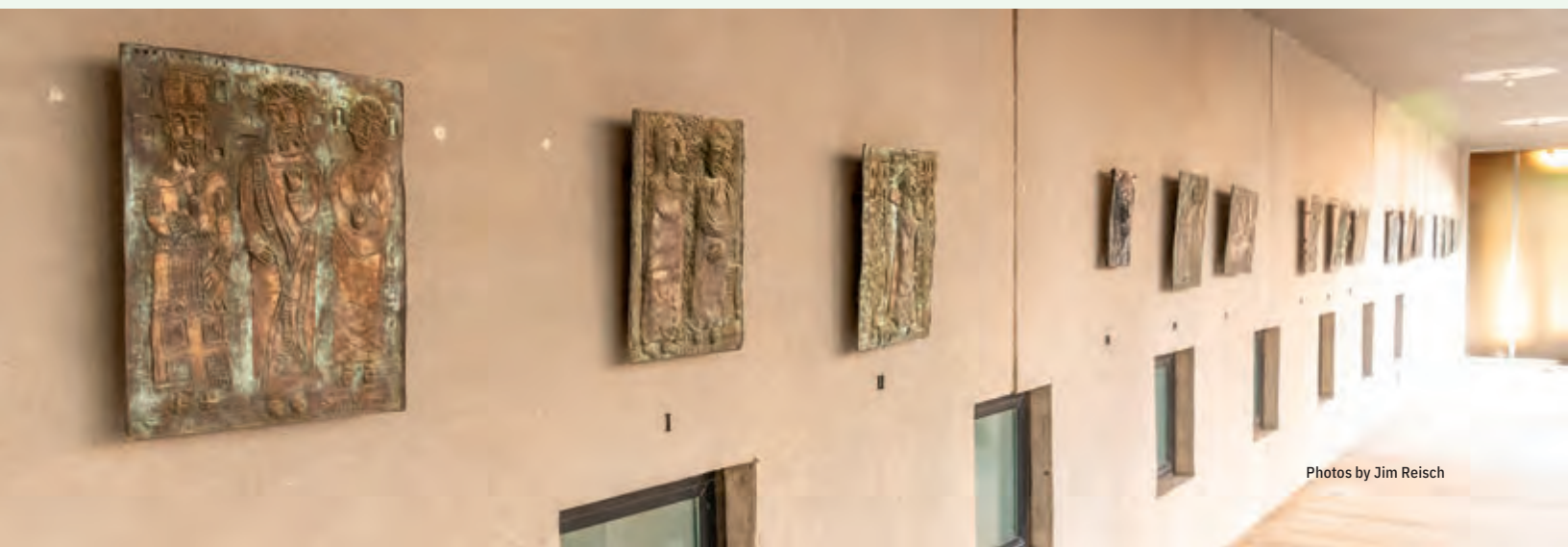
In 2006, the idea for a walkable



stations trail was conceived by two young novices, Br. Abraham Frei and his brother, Br. Nathaniel Frei. "I credit them with the inspiration," said

Fr. Paul McCormick. "They were very creative, they designed the stained glass in the school chapel. They had the idea that we needed a trail, a real stations trail, and so they got out their machetes and just started cutting." Along the way, the brothers nailed station markers to the trees, and so their efforts laid the groundwork for the trail becoming a permanent fixture on the abbey grounds.

Although this first trail was difficult to access, difficult to follow, and easy to lose, the idea gained enough traction that others began to take an interest. The cross-country team found the trail conveniently intertwined with their own routes through the woods and began to use it as a training ground. In 2007, a young alum and former cross-country team member, Steven Reinemund '99, began making a yearly contribution for the upkeep of the trail until its first renovation in 2011.



Each Form IV class takes on a service project in the spring. The students usually endeavor to maintain or improve the grounds in some way, and the project is primarily intended to prepare the boys to receive the sacrament of confirmation. It also ties each class to the campus in a special way as they make the transition from middle to high school and is an opportunity for the boys to work alongside and bond with their fathers.

In 2011, Dr. Tom Pruitt's Form was in need of such a project. He and Mr. Peter Saliga had long discussed the possibility of bolstering the trail in some way, but the timing had never quite worked out for Saliga's senior Form. For Pruitt's eighth graders, the stars aligned. He first enlisted the help of Mr. Charlie Dorsey, father of Chase '08 and Mark '15. "I talked to Charlie, and he jumped on the idea," Dr. Pruitt recalled. "He was intrigued, because he'd had a similar idea for that land."

An engineer by trade, Dorsey took point in preparing for the day of construction. "Charlie was totally incredible with this project. He made it happen. He laid out the outline for where the Stations would



Charlie Dorsey was instrumental in developing the original trail.

go, he spaced them out and figured out how long the trail was going to be," said Pruitt.

Dorsey also sourced the cedar posts which would bear the stations plaques. A few years prior, a freeze had killed a number of cedar trees at the Boy Scouts of America's Camp Wisdom in Dallas, so he and his sons made their way down to the camp hoping to secure some of the excess lumber. Initially, the director of the camp declined their request. After hearing about their plans for the wood, though, the director reconsidered. "I asked him if he knew about the Stations of the Cross," Dorsey said, "and he

was like 'Oh my gosh, take all that you want. Go pick out whatever you want. I'll tell you where the big ones are.'"

Providentially, the director was a practicing Catholic. "In fact," he'd offered, "I've got a couple of guys who can come help you haul them if you need help."

On the day of the project, the fathers and sons of the Class of 2015 arrived early in the morning. "Almost every boy and his dad were out there," recalled Pruitt. "The weather was perfect, and so we just had a gorgeous day." Fr. Anthony Bigney, a spiritual advisor to many of the 2015 boys throughout middle school, said the opening prayer and lent a hand throughout



Class of '15 installing posts in 2011



End of work day for the original trail in 2011

the day. Head of Upper School Mr. Greg Novinski '82 worked alongside his son Andrew '15.

Looking to divide and conquer, the boys and their fathers were organized into several groups. A brigade of wheelbarrows brought fresh mulch and materials from the head of the trail back into the woods. One group dug holes in order to cement the cedar posts into the ground. Others wielded saws, hoes and machetes to clear and widen the path. Some assembled the benches that would

accompany each station. By 5:00 that evening, the group was putting the finishing touches on their work.

A panel commemorating Fr. Aloysius Kimecz, who had passed away the previous December, was installed on an additional cedar post near the beginning of the trail.

"We did the entire thing in one day," mused Pruitt. "It was quite a work of beauty, and it really set a tone for all of high school. It showed us that we can do great things."

"Dr. Pruitt taught that confirmation goes hand in hand with

acts of service, particularly with manual labor as an act of love," said Christopher Wainerdi '15.

Their confirmation project was not the only mark the Class of 2015 would leave on the campus. The St. Michael statue, which decorates the courtyard, and the welded Cistercian crest at the entrance gate are among their contributions.

These labors of love became hallmarks of Dr. Pruitt's class, both within the school community and within the families of the boys. "He always wanted to add things to our experience. For instance, he wanted to have a yearly moms' appreciation weekend, where we would all get together and make our mothers dinner and wait on them. It spoke to our manlier side, to work the trail that way, but I think it grew out of a love and appreciation for the parents of the Form, starting with the mothers, and then ending with the fathers by building the trail with them," said Wainerdi.

It became a tradition, then, for every Fourth Form class and their fathers to re-mulch the trail, in preparation for both confirmation and Easter. This opportunity to take ownership of the grounds ties the boys to the place in a unique way.



Dedication of the original trail in 2011





The original bridge was an Eagle Scout project by Christian Potter '13.



Bridge dedication with the Stone family and Christian Potter '13

A fork lies in the trail between the ninth and tenth stations. To the left lies the route back to the head of the trail, through the remaining stations. To the right, the path leads just a few yards deeper into the woods, into a clearing atop a knoll.

"From there you can look down over a lot of the land that Cistercian owns and see a pretty nice view, and we decided that Fr. Peter needed a bench right there," said Pruitt. "With him being such an avid birdwatcher, we wanted him to have a nice spot to look over campus." Fr. Peter's Bench, known by its installers as the "FPB," was at first a wooden bench like the others around the trail. Later, in honor of all of the Cistercian headmasters, the wooden bench was replaced with a solid stone one, complete with a plaque inscribed with each headmaster's name.

Once the construction of the trail was finished, there was still something missing. A small, often muddy ditch separated the head of the trail from the upper driveway. The following year, for his Eagle Scout project, Christian Potter '13 designed and constructed a small wooden bridge to solve the problem and dedicated his endeavor to the memory of classmate Colin Stone. A tree in honor of Colin stands tall and strong next to the current bridge.



Cistercian is in the midst of a capital campaign called *Formation Beyond the Classroom: Enkindling Character and Leadership through Athletics, the Arts, Technology and Faith*. As part of the faith portion of the campaign, the renovation of the Stations of the Cross Trail was one of the first projects completed. Fr. Peter reached out to David Hocker '96, the founder of Hocker Design, to design and implement the renovation of the trail. That choice was especially fitting since Hocker is responsible for much of the beautiful landscaping around campus.

Together with project coordinator Biff Sturgess, Hocker was point on the engineering and construction of an updated trail. "We wanted to solidify the trail as a more durable element on campus," Sturgess remarked, "and we wanted to bring forth the natural beauty of the space."

The renovation and landscaping are truly robust. The path itself has been widened and reinforced. To keep the foundation durable, a layer of concrete road base underlies fresh mulch, and the width of the trail itself has been expanded to eight feet. An additional four feet of buffer on each side of the trail is adorned with native wildflowers and vegetation.

For durability, the marker posts at each station will be made of board-formed concrete so as to maintain a natural appearance, and a variety of trees will be planted

at each marker. Each will also be accompanied by a limestone bench in place of the previous wooden ones. The Fr. Aloysius Kimecz memorial plaque will be remounted near the first station.

A large gathering space has been constructed at the head of the trail. Its gravel base and stone seating areas match those found in the School's courtyard and in front of the Abbey Church.

Their design is in keeping with Fr. Peter's wishes for the trail. "We wanted the trail to be rooted in the local environment. The natural beauty of the trail and gathering space will contribute to a readiness to pray," said Fr. Peter.

In the hours before the 2023 Cistercian Homecoming Dance, the sophomore class posed for what will surely be the first of many Form photos in that gathering space. "We used the new bridge and that space," said Dillon Pitts '26. "It's nice, because you can see both the beginning and the end of the trail, with the Form enclosed in the middle."



Tim Parker '90, the Director of Facilities at Cistercian and Form Master to the recently graduated Class of 2023, has a particular love for the trail and has been one of its most frequent travelers since 2011.

"I appreciate it for various reasons. Although we're on the Monastery's property, it's ours too," remarked Parker. "These spaces remind us of the intimate connection between the Abbey and the School."

The architecture and landscaping of the School are both modest and utilitarian, and these characteristics will be mirrored by the landscaping of the renovated trail. They do not



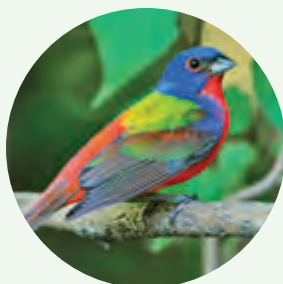
Class of '20 praying the Stations

detract from the beauty of their surroundings, but instead highlight them. “Planted around the trail is some native red oak, lots of native trees, and wildflowers,” Parker said.

Within these trees will nest dozens of species of birds. Parker is a self-admitted “bird nerd” and is the instructor of the beloved birdwatching elective. His students often explore the trail in search of their quarries. Yellow-rumped Warblers, Cedar Waxwings, and Great Blue Herons are some favorites of the birdwatching students, but most coveted is a glimpse of the vibrant Painted Bunting.

One of Parker’s birdwatching

students, Sam Clay ’19, took such a keen interest in the elective that he was inspired to take his love for birding beyond the classroom. Clay wanted a project that would both reflect his passion for wildlife and also shine a spotlight on the allure of the campus. Over the course of his junior year, in a truly ambitious endeavor, Clay identified, photographed, and painted to scale 119 distinct species of birds. He observed many of the species in the woods surrounding the trail. “It gives anyone who walks it the chance to explore the natural beauty that Cistercian offers,” Clay said. “I’m glad it’s becoming a more prevalent part of the campus.” Clay is now pursuing his passion professionally as a wildlife technician at Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge in California.



Painted Bunting photo taken on campus by Sam Clay '19



Class of '20 —end of work day in 2016





Class of '24—end of work day in 2020



Class of '25—end of work day in 2021



Class of '26—
end of work day
in 2022



Class of '26 Homecoming photo at the new bridge

Fire on the Trail

Although it is a permanent fixture on campus, the very existence of the trail was threatened, along with much of the grounds, in the summer of 2022. Mr. Tim Parker '90, Director of Facilities, was in his office when he was interrupted by a panicked staff member and was beckoned outside. "I couldn't believe my eyes," he said. "There was a big black cloud over much of the property." The woods through which the trail runs had caught fire.

A fire in the woods amidst a dry Texas summer is not to be taken lightly, and the joint efforts of the Dallas and Irving Fire Departments along with departments from surrounding cities were required to contain the blaze. The fire devoured some of the cedar posts and a portion of the cross-country trail, but disaster was avoided.

"It was scary," remarked Fr. Paul. "Luckily, the wind didn't blow our way."





These sixty years of Stations of the Cross tradition carry with them a permanent legacy. It is a legacy of communion, which extends from the Abbey's Hungarian founders, through Fr. Damian, through the Frei brothers, and through the Class of 2015, to all who have shared in the merits of the trail.

It is a legacy of stewardship.

All those who have participated in the trail's development and upkeep have concretely invested themselves in caring for the grounds that help make Cistercian so unique.

Through acres of woods and through decades of memory, the trail has wound its way into the hearts of the Cistercian community and become an indispensable asset in the lives of its members. •

**Improved
Stations of
the Cross
Trail with
Fr. Peter and
Fr. Matthew**

Bob Greenfield

➡ Some were pushed
others pulled ➡
...All were formed ⬆



National Geographic Explorer Andrés Ruzo '05
studies the Amazon's Boiling River

Devlin Gandy

It's easy at Closing Ceremonies to lose sight of what the entire student body achieved the previous school year. Let's face it: getting through another academic year at Cistercian is an achievement in itself.

Certainly, the Book Awards and Headmaster's Pins are well deserved. Beyond the relatively few recipients of

such awards, however, exists a large cohort of classmates whose talents and gifts combine to create a vibrant and thriving campus life. They publish each issue of *The Informer*. They make BraveArt happen. They give their all on the playing field or court. Or on the theater stage. They contribute to *Reflections*, the literary magazine. And

the list goes on and on. They and all their classmates make Cistercian what it is.

What they share—the academically honored and the sometimes ‘under-the-radar’ contributors—is the formation, the enkindling, the molding of boys into young men that Cistercian bestows on all its students.

The vignettes that follow recount the stories of a few students and what they've gone on to achieve.

They persevered at Cistercian. They were resilient. And, each in their own way has excelled. Looking back now, years after graduation, they realize how Cistercian shaped them for a life well lived. To paraphrase how one put it: “We may have thought we weren’t learning, but we were.” Another spoke of the constant pressure he felt, much like the pressure that forms a diamond from a chunk of carbon. And another: “My GPA does not define me.” All were grateful.

Cole Gimenez '17

Unlike his valedictorian brother, Cole was more interested in athletics than academics.

“Math and science didn’t come naturally to me,” he said. “And, I’ll admit that I could have been a little lazy about academics because I was more interested in the Friday night game, not the Thursday test. Since I wasn’t getting the kinds of grades my older brother got, I could have felt as if I was being dismissed as the academic star’s little brother, but that was far from what happened.”

His classmates, the faculty and the coaches didn’t let it happen. “We had a great class. We cheered each other on. If someone got a 4.0, we told him how amazing that was. We all knew our strengths and weaknesses. My strengths were in sports, not academics, but that was okay. I never felt shunned or belittled. We had an incredible class.” And an incredible Form Master, according to Cole.

“Fr. Joseph was like our father away from home. He was there for us during the worst times of our lives and the best. He pushed us, he frustrated us, he made us mad, but looking back, it was well worth it because he gave purpose to it all. He’ll be a big part of our lives for the rest of our lives.”

The faculty pulled him along too. “I remember a meeting with my English teacher, Mrs. Greenfield, during my freshman year. I was having a tough time of it and she never gave up on me. We sat down and talked and she said: ‘We are going to get through this. You’re going to be just fine. I know you’ve got it in you.’ And in math class, I was doing terribly, getting Cs and Ds. I thought I didn’t understand anything about calculus, but when I got to college, I got an A in my first-year calculus class. It was the easiest math



class I ever took. You don’t realize until you look back on it how well prepared we were for college.”

Despite how well prepared he was, Cole’s journey after graduation from Cistercian was not without its ups and downs. Cole’s dream school had always been The University of Texas. He claims to bleed burnt orange. When he wasn’t admitted, he didn’t give up his dream. He went to the University of Alabama for his first year and aced it with a 4.0. “It came easy to me and my classmates,”

he said. “I realized that even those of us who didn’t have a great GPA at Cistercian, that was because we were comparing our GPAs to our classmates, and every class at Cistercian is an all-star class academically.”

With his sights still set on UT, Cole turned to Cistercian for guidance. Peter Saliga, his old college counselor, looked over his essay for UT. “He called me at 4 or 5 p.m., long after school had been let out, and we talked for an hour or more. He basically told me to start over, but that my ideas were good. I needed to restructure the essay. He spent so much time with me. But that’s the Cistercian faculty. They’ll give you the shirts off their backs to help you.”

He got into his dream school where he achieved a near-4.0 over the rest of his college career before receiving a scholarship to Baylor Law. He may extend his law school experience another year for specialized studies, possibly in mergers and acquisitions or real estate law.

“My brother was a math and science kind of guy, and I was an athlete. We were both so different, but Cistercian was the perfect fit for both of us,” Cole said. “You don’t have to be a certain kind of kid. Cistercian gets all different kinds and gels them together in a class. You butt heads and argue, but you’re a brotherhood, a family. If you buy in and trust, you’ll succeed.”

Andrés Ruzo '05

You would think that only in Iceland—not in Irving, Texas—would the ancient Icelandic Sagas have a profound effect on anyone's life. But that's what happened to Andrés Ruzo, National Geographic Explorer, Explorers Club EC50 Fellow, TED Talks Main Stage Speaker, TED Books author, and currently, a PhD candidate in geology at SMU.

"Looking back on my time at Cistercian, the single class that I am most grateful for was Mr. Nied's Icelandic Saga elective. Professionally, I would go on to specialize in geothermal science, which eventually took me to work in Iceland," he said. "Being exposed to the sagas in high school proved unbelievably meaningful and useful. It gave me a richer context to the places I would visit. I would often consult both geologic maps and my saga notes from high school simultaneously. Most importantly though, it gave me the opportunity to connect with people. Many would proudly share their personal connections to the sagas, adding their own personal stories as if these stories were modern follow-up chapters of their own 'living history.' I specialize in field science, and a big part of this is connecting with people in order to build collaboration and facilitate logistics."

While attending Cistercian, Andrés shuttled between Peru, Nicaragua, and Texas—but he never quite felt at home in Texas. His grades placed him in the middle of his class year after year. Though he was passionate about science and nature, he found it difficult to connect with these in his classes. "Cistercian was a struggle, and I contemplated leaving almost every year," he said. "I stayed because of Fr.



Andrés Ruzo

Paul. A good Form Master can really change your life, and I feel blessed to have been in his class. Unlike many adults who would just bark orders, Fr. Paul always gave us a voice. He would listen to us and help us solve the problem at hand. It was empowering and something I remain deeply grateful for."

Andrés also credits the way the arts and humanities were taught, as well as the forests around Cistercian, for convincing him to stay. He was inspired by the setting, being surrounded by nature. "When I thought

about leaving Cistercian and toured other schools," he said, "I always felt that something was missing—it was the forest. The forests around Cistercian were a refuge and a place to escape, a place of peace and connection; it was something I did not want to give up."

Cistercian's forests would also leave an important mark on his world view. Since 2012, Andrés has worked in education—from teaching, to writing textbooks and curriculum, and even taking students and teachers to the Amazon's Boiling River or Iceland's volcanoes. He is currently working on sustainability education initiatives for the United Nation's COP28 Climate Change Conference taking place later this year. One of Andrés's key advocacy points for post-COVID school reform is the incorporation of native wild spaces into school campuses. "Schools have playgrounds, why can't they also have wild spaces?" he asked. "Natural spaces provide a ton of benefits to the local environment and the school community. They can serve students in many ways too—from outdoor classrooms and school research sites, to mental health and wellness spaces. This is what Cistercian's wild spaces did for me, and it is a setup that I think could benefit students everywhere."

Fr. Francis Gruber '01

While a student at Cistercian, Fr. Francis Gruber was sometimes distracted from what was being taught in the classroom by seemingly bigger questions, such as the meaning of life and death and reality. Still, he says, Cistercian lit the 'pilot light' of his intellectual passion that now burns brightly.

"I was something of a late bloomer, I suppose," Fr. Francis said. "I loved Cistercian and think that I was especially thriving on the more social and communal level, perhaps at times to the detriment of my grades. Nevertheless, I was quite involved in the life of the School. I took part in athletics, the *Informer*, the Art Club, and BraveArt, for example. Looking back, I see my neglected grades as more of a reflection of having the bigger questions of life on my mind."

Two tragedies, one when he was a freshman and another



Fr. Francis Gruber

his junior year, had a profound effect on Fr. Francis and on the entire school. "The deaths of classmate Brian Price and Coach Hillary spurred me to search for what matters in life: friendship, community service, faith. At the time, I didn't think I could find the answers I was searching for in academics, and my grades rightly reflected that. But I was still searching in my own way: writing and recording music, producing art. I wasn't idle. In some way, I had always planned to turn on the jets for academic life in college."

At Cistercian and later in college, community service and a love of the environment were major preoccupations. He tutored younger students during his high school years and in college. His Cistercian senior project involved volunteering with terminally ill children at a Ronald MacDonald House. He remembers serving meals at Austin Street Shelter in Dallas and realizing that a kind word and a smile meant as much to the poor as the food he served.

He began to connect that experience with how often the poor were mentioned in the Gospels. Spending an alternative spring break with Tim Parker in Big Bend National Park opened his eyes to the environment and enkindled his love of it.

Eventually, he did turn on the academic jets at Texas A&M and the University of Chicago where he studied philosophy and the humanities, respectively. Between his BA and MA degrees, he spent two years teaching in the inner city of Houston as part of Teach For America, something he refers to as “one of my proudest accomplishments.” Now, after entering the monastery and being ordained, he’s working on his doctorate in philosophy at the Gregorian University in Rome.

“I suppose that a love of learning was always latent in me at the prep school,” Fr. Francis said. “In a way, it’s paradoxical that I admired the academic passion of teachers

such as Mr. Saliga even though I didn’t have an ‘A’ in his class. And yet, there were bright moments such as my report on Robert Burns’ poem ‘To a Mouse’ for Mrs. Medaille during my sophomore year. I found myself going out on a limb by giving my own personal interpretation, and that really excited me. That was something of a harbinger of things to come because here I am now working on my PhD and offering my own interpretations of these very difficult philosophers. So, somewhere along the way I began to realize that academics—philosophy and literature—could be a way to explore those deeper questions of life that I was in search of; that they too offered a way for me to deepen my inner life.”

Once he completes his studies in Rome, he’ll be back at the prep school where his pilot light was first lit. When he returns though, he’ll be one of many who will be doing the lighting.

Ron Hammond ’11

Among the vast tidbits of profound esoterica that Cistercian imparted over eight years to Ron Hammond was: “Life isn’t all rainbows and sunshine. Sometimes, it’s sink or swim, but if you start to sink, at least at Cistercian, they are there to help you keep your head above water.”

And keep his head up he did. “Looking back at my time as a Hawk, I realize that my GPA doesn’t define me,” he said. “When you’re young, sometimes it’s hard to look past the trees. I had to have the mentality that I was going to work and I was going to survive Cistercian (*he laughs at this point*). But it was tough.”

If he was looking for a cushier existence than Cistercian, he certainly didn’t find it in the rough-and-tumble world of Washington, D.C. politics and public policy. After stints at Creighton University and the University of San Diego, he took off a semester and went to work on the campaigns for several Texas state senators. That semester was extended when he moved to Washington as an analyst on the staffs of Congressmen Pete Olson (TX-22) and Warren Davidson (OH-8), who had replaced John Boehner, former Speaker of the House. “I had some big shoes to fill,” Ron admitted.

He enrolled at Georgetown University and attended night classes to get his degree. “I had to transfer my way up to Georgetown, but I wasn’t going to let that stop me. Spent a lot of late nights studying, but Cistercian instilled that in me too.”

Then, the big leap. “Cryptocurrency and digital assets were just becoming mainstream at the time, and someone on the Congressman’s staff had to head up that issue,” he said. “They turned to me and asked if I knew anything about crypto. As a 24-year-old staffer, I said I didn’t know much, but I could learn.” That he did and a few months later he



organized a roundtable of more than 50 CEOs, start-up crypto companies, and members of congress from both sides of the aisle on legislation to establish the regulatory framework for the crypto industry. He then authored the first bipartisan legislation for crypto, the Token Taxonomy Act.

In addition to handling financial services and cryptocurrency issues for Rep. Davidson, Ron added education and healthcare policy to his repertoire. For education, he spearheaded a successful Congressional effort to reverse

the rejection of grants for low-income high school students by the Department of Education over minor formatting issues. He also handled healthcare issues when the repeal of Obamacare was being considered by Congress.

Next, he made another jump, this time from legislative policy analysis and congressional staffer to lobbying and advocacy. Attracted by the speed and innovation of the digital asset sector, he decided to fully commit to creating a regulatory framework for digital assets. He likened the fast-paced environment of Washington at that time to “trying to drink from a streaming fire hose.” He’s now the Director of Governmental Affairs for the Blockchain Association, the largest trade association in the crypto industry. He’s been quoted in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Associated Press* and *Bloomberg*, written for *Consensus Magazine*, *The Hill* and *Blockworks*, and has done numerous TV and podcast interviews with media outlets like Coindesk TV and the Paul Barron Show.

It all started at Cistercian. “They really get the best out of you,” Ron said. “You learn from your classmates who are smarter and you listen to the monks who are just so wise. My experience at Cistercian really broadened my view of people. They do a really good job of blending all of society’s economic classes in the same classroom. Mr. Saliga, our Form Master, and Father Paul—they watched over us, and when we were having trouble, they made sure it worked out.”

Luc Chandou '00

Admittedly, he didn't get in the first or second time he applied to Cistercian, but he kept trying. Now he's grateful Cistercian eventually chose him. Otherwise, he might not be jumping out of airplanes these days.

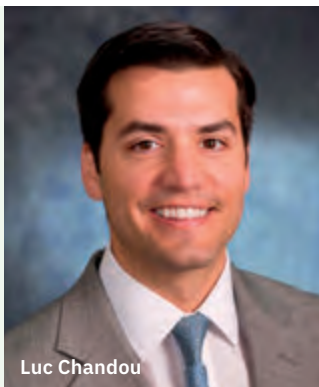
Lt Col Luc Chandou, Combat Rescue Officer in the Alaska Air National Guard, wonders if he would have had the confidence to do what he's been doing for the last 23 years had it not been for his years at Cistercian.

"Even as a mediocre or underperforming student, Cistercian still instilled in me a baseline in education that carried me forward," he said. "I don't think I would have had the confidence to tackle the Air Force Academy or Columbia Business School without the foundation Cistercian gave me."

Even though he was an academic leader in the two parochial schools he attended prior to Cistercian, Luc had a rude awakening soon after becoming a Hawk in Form III.

"I was pretty confident coming to Cistercian, but I have this vivid memory of the first quiz or test I had after the start of my first year," he said. "I totally flunked it. I was shocked. I was embarrassed. I don't know if I hadn't prepared for it or what, but that experience influenced the rest of my academic career."

And that influence stood him in good stead through the Air Force Academy, followed by active duty, and eventually



an advanced degree from Columbia's Business School. After active duty, he tested well on the GMAT for medical school and the LSAT for law school, but in the end, he settled on business school instead. "Medical school matched my interest. I had medical training in the Air Force," Luc said. "But eventually I just decided that I wanted to do something different. I've often wondered whether it was the education Cistercian gave me or the ability to learn that the School instilled in me—or both—that led to my success."

Luc speaks of Cistercian as an extension of his family. "My values were born of my family but reinforced by CPS. I watched my father—an immigrant, a naturalized US citizen, and an entrepreneurial businessman—and I felt that the monks, lay teachers and coaches at Cistercian gave me that same kind of presence. As students, we felt that same fatherly love day in and day out during those formative years of our lives. We saw that notion of self-sacrifice, of excellence, of love—it was all very tangible every day. It made me the teammate—the person—I am today."

And being part of a self-sacrificing team is what Luc's life after Cistercian has been about. The Air Force Pararescue creed is: "It is my duty as a Pararescueman to save life and to aid the injured. I will be prepared at all times to perform my assigned duties, quickly and efficiently, placing these duties before personal desires and comforts. These things we do, That Others May Live."

Johnny Garnett '13

Johnny Garnett felt the pressure—'appropriate pressure,' he says—every day at Cistercian. Now, 10 years later, he can appreciate it.

"When you're in the moment, it's hard to appreciate the brilliance that surrounds you at Cistercian, the brilliance of the faculty, the leadership of the School, your classmates," he recalls. "Looking back on it now, I never felt 'smart' at Cistercian. It was a constant grind, and each day I had to keep coming back for more, over and over again."

Athletics and the strength of his determination helped him cope with the pressure. And the example of the monks and faculty showed him his path. "The grade on my first test at Cistercian was 42. And I studied. I took notes. I thought I was prepared. It was a rude awakening for a 12-year-old Second Former," he said. "I was humbled. It became something of a crossroads for me. I could have said to myself that I did the best I could and accept that it wasn't going to get any better than that and maybe I should go to another school. Or, I could work really hard, buckle down and do my best. That's the path I chose. I had to work hard, but that's a value in



itself, I think."

That path took him to Texas A&M University where he had received a Terry Scholarship for academic achievement and service. Later, as a senior, he received the Buck Weirus Award given to 50 graduating seniors who stood out for their service and contributions to student life. Now at Bank of America, Johnny was recently promoted to relationship manager serving high-tech startups and other corporate clients in Austin.

He says that the daily pressure he felt at Cistercian "set him up for success" at college and in his professional career. "At A&M there were a lot of kids from the top 10 percent of their graduating classes, and these kids were getting rocked by our freshman classes," he explained. "I had already been exposed to much of that material at Cistercian and that helped; it grounded me. I was glad I had earned my stripes in middle school before anything went on my transcript at A&M."

Johnny was the second of four Garnett boys to attend Cistercian. He had a sense of what to expect before he took that first test.

"I knew I was in a good situation," he said. "I had the attitude that I did not want to waste this golden opportunity.

The families of Cistercian students come from the whole spectrum of society. Some have certain advantages that others don't, but all of us students had the same amount of time. We all had the same number of hours in the day, and I decided that I wanted to use my time to prove myself and give back to others."

Liam Flanigan '10

The feeling that he was fighting against the current, or "swimming upstream" as he put it, dogged Liam Flanigan at Cistercian. Not until later, at the University of Arkansas and while he studied for his master's in business administration at the University of Texas, did he have his 'light bulb' moments.

"Later, when I found the right classes and subjects to study, I started to develop and I realized I could stand out academically. It just took me a little longer," he said. "And now, when I look back, I really value the holistic experience I had at Cistercian; the way they form kids in a well-rounded manner, physically, mentally and spiritually."

While at Cistercian, Liam had friends who were considering Texas Christian University and he thought he might go there too, but a tour of UA's Fayetteville campus turned his head. "It just clicked for me at Arkansas. I had an awesome experience there. It was a great four years. I immersed myself in the business school," he said.

With a few internships focused on marketing under his belt and a BA in business, he found himself climbing

The monks, of course, were an inspiration. "All we had to do was look around at the monks to see men who have dedicated their whole lives to serving others," he said. "They are the backbone of Cistercian and a major factor in how the School keeps churning out guys who are grounded in humility."



the proverbial ladder in the marketing departments of Capital One and later PepsiCo Corporation's Frito-Lay subsidiary. Now he's the global brand director for Doritos.

"It was in my first marketing classes when the light bulbs started to go off," he said. "I realized that I had formed the habits that allowed me to learn and study and excel. I just hadn't been this inspired by a particular subject yet. Success breeds success, and my confidence started to build and I went from being at the bottom of the class to the top. It

was a complete flip-flop for me."

Sports, the faculty and his parents kept Liam on an even keel at Cistercian. "Athletics was one of my pillars," he said. "The memories of those bus rides to the games, the locker room chats, facing adversity together as a team—it all built that feeling of a brotherhood, and it was a real release from the struggles."

"Of course, I think of the time the teachers invested in me outside of the classroom when I struggled, and I know now that I couldn't have done it without the care and attention they gave me. And my parents did a good job helping me keep everything in perspective. Cistercian is a unique place, and you have to keep that in mind." •

Trusting the process

The journey from childhood to young adult is strewn with struggles of one kind or another. Of course, the academic rigor of Cistercian presents its own set of difficulties for many students and their parents. Often, parents who have walked alongside more than one son through the halls of the School are better able to trust in the process.

"We were fortunate that our youngest son was the one who struggled somewhat," said Kent Clay, the father of four graduates. "By the time the youngest got to Cistercian, we had gained a sense of perspective from our other sons and could trust in the process." And despite his struggles with math and science, Sam Clay '19

went on to graduate from college with an honors degree in biology.

"I wouldn't change a thing about Cistercian," said Jacquie O'Toole, mother of Jack O'Toole '16 and Dan O'Toole '23. "We really believe the School wants what's best for the boys."

In middle school, Dan didn't make the grades that his older brother did, but he persevered, and his GPA climbed in high school. "The Form Master system is the key," O'Toole said. "The boys love their Form Masters and the Form Masters get to know the whole kid, not just how they do in one subject. The bonds the boys make with each other is unlike any school in the area."

The faculty—both monks and lay teachers—leaves its mark on every student.

"The monks set an example of respect, truthfulness and kindness," O'Toole said. "The boys definitely know right from wrong, and they are very compassionate when someone is wronged. The boys look at the monks, especially the younger monks because they are closer in age, and they see that these men have given their lives to the School and Monastery."

Life Lessons

"Every boy at Cistercian, not just those that may struggle a bit, has to develop resilience," Clay explained. "If they don't have it when they go there, they are going to develop it. And that's valuable. They learn how to cope, and that's a life lesson that pays off in so many ways." •

Class Reunions & Alumni Gatherings



Class of '73



Class of '83



Class of '89



Class of '90



Class of '99 and '00 on campus

Class Reunions & Alumni Gatherings



Class of '00



Class of '08



Class of '09



Class of '03



Class of '13



Class of '13



Class of '18



Hikesgiving—Classes of 2022 and 2030



Class of '20

Austin Gathering in April



Fall Sports

Hawks fight adversity

Facing uncertainty after the departure of James Burk in late July, longtime head varsity football coach, the Hawks turned to a familiar face in André Bruce to guide them through the season that lay ahead. The Hawks were tasked with learning a new offensive and defensive system, and they knew there would be obstacles to overcome. With steady leadership from captains **John Peterman '25**, **Jacob Brown '24** and **Charlie Humphreys '24**, the team fought hard for every game and finished the season with a 39-8 win over Greenhill for a homecoming victory. Career-best nights from **Nick Schieferdecker '24** (18/25, 317 yards, four touchdowns passing), **Grant Nevitt '24** (six catches, 139 yards, two touchdowns) and **Aidan Smith '24** (five catches, 94 yards, one touchdown) were definitely homecoming highlights.

The Hawks' ability to overcome was on display time and time again as was their work ethic and determination. The team dealt with numerous injuries throughout the season and moved forward with three different quarterbacks. Schieferdecker, Brown, and **Stuart Walton '25** stepped in at quarterback at different times to lead the team both on and off the field. Defensively, the team was led by **Ryan Spurl '24**, **Jacob Liu '26** and **Dean Nevitt '26**.

The future of the Hawks football program is bright with impressive performances by our middle school and junior varsity teams throughout the season. The foundation and standard set forth by this group of athletes and the coaching staff provides a tremendous platform on which future Cistercian Hawks will stand.

Cross-country running strong

With a faster start than previous seasons, **Keegan Cobleigh '24** led a young cross-country team to a first-place finish at The Buff with his time of 18:45 followed by **David Fernandes '25** with 19:10. On a course familiar to the team, **Will Oliver '27**, **Ian Tran '27**, and **Rishi Gopal '27** finished with sub-20-minute times to help the Hawks

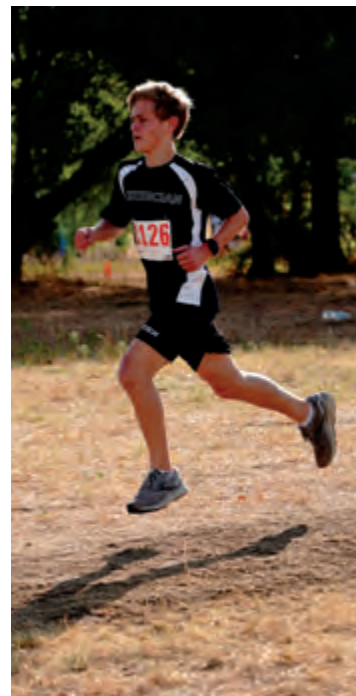
come away with the win.

In the following weeks, the team finished second in two of their three meets, the first at Southwest Christian School and the second back at The Buff, where **Marc Maalouf '25** ran 18:25 and secured his spot in the top four on the team. At Southwest Christian School, the boys finished second with nine of ten Hawks setting personal best times! Cobleigh finished in 17:32, Oliver in 18:05, and Fernandes in 18:22. **Seamus Slaughter '27** and **Carter Ivory '27** finished in 21:32, while **Liam Devlin '27** came in with 22:01. Tran, Gopal, **AJ Schroeder '27**, and **Owen Putnam '24** also posted best personal times to round out the team.

With the approach of the North Zone and SPC competitions, the boys realized that their competitive strategy would need to change. They had been competing against the clock and one another; now they would focus on individuals from rival schools they needed to beat to be successful. Their strategy served them well.

After finishing fifth in the North Zone meet with 3A and 4A competitors, the Hawks were ready for their final and most important meet—the SPC Championship. Cobleigh led the team by outrunning individuals he had not beaten all season to finish seventh and medal. Fernandes and Oliver finished in the top 20, which in the past was recognized as All-Conference. Overall, the team finished fourth in a very competitive field at the SPC Championship.

The Hawks know what it takes to compete as a top-level team, and they expect to have their best finish in 2024. •



Not in High Form

**A first-year First-Form teacher reflects
on his time with the least of these little ones**

When Fr. Paul asked me about teaching First-Form English, I said it was a great idea and we should keep doing it. It didn't occur to me that he was asking if I wanted to teach it, because of the things that would happen when I was put in charge of First Formers.



Patrick Spence '08

Without getting into the details of a few substitutions over the years, I was, in fact, pretty low on the learning curve for First-Form classroom management or ambience-generation, whatever you prefer to call it.

I had some success bribing the boys with fountain pens. These are, to ballpoint pens, what stick shifts are to automatics—perfectly safe once you get used to them, but there are going to be accidents. I have a soda-sized bottle of ink in my office, and I have spilled it on myself while giving students refills. So what? I can live a full life covered in blue splotches.

Fr. Anthony, for obscure reasons, bans fountain pens in his class. “I know they won’t get better without practice, but not every day has to be an ink disaster.”

Anyway, eventually I settled into teaching First Form and began delivering the kind of stable, routine excellence for which I’m known, right up until Open House, when I overstimulated B-side in front of a bunch of parents who now probably think that English class is just cheering, yelling, and handing chairs around.

These setbacks happen reliably every time I think I’ve dialed in the formula for a perfect English class. Pumpkin spice isn’t the only thing that goeth before the fall.

If you’re imagining that chaos only happens to incompetents like me, let me add that Mrs. Medaille, one of the most competent people in the world, holds the record for most student teeth lost in an English class—six or seven, and for statistical reasons I doubt that *all* of them were nonviolent.

Michael Humphries, another seasoned leader of First Formers, was at one point asked, “Do you still want my homework even though it has turtle pee on it?” The turtle’s owner is a lawyer now. No word on what opportunities the turtle is pursuing. Another student turned in a page torn out of his math textbook, thinking it was a giant workbook.

Fr. Philip’s First Formers each chipped in a few Pokémon cards to make Mr. Humphries a deck so that he could play against them. He lost a lot, because the cards in his deck weren’t that great.

*“Do you still want
my homework
even though it has
turtle pee on it?”*

I ask Fr. Matthew, the current First-Form Form Master, how his boys are doing, and he reaches down into his recycling bin for a beautiful paper football, illustrated front and back with Lionel Messi in the blue and white stripes of Argentina. “Fr. Anthony has confiscated thirty of these,” he sighs. I’m so taken by it that I ask for another and get a bonus football with Cristiano Ronaldo.

“That, in my mind,” says Fr. Matthew, “is what it means to be a ten-year-old boy—amusing yourself for hours on end with a paper football. I have to keep them in line, but privately I laugh.” During dismissal, a scaled-up version of the game is played with a huge paper ball that several of the boys remake every day.

At least one copy of this *Continuum* will be made into a football, or else a hat, and kicked or worn by First Formers. Later on, the boys who made the footballs and hats will write for *The Informer*, and their articles will become hats and footballs for future First Formers. Later they’ll send their marriage and birth announcements back to the *Continuum*. Really, it’s all the *Continuum*.

Fr. Anthony, who has the Second Formers now and whose seniors graduated in 2022, has had occasion to think about this. “In some ways, there’s much more similarity between a high-school senior and an incoming Firstie than you might imagine. They’re both needy in different ways. The juniors and sophomores kind of feel above that; the sophomore is pretty well settled, he knows where he is and where he’ll be next year. There’s nothing new in the world to a high-school sophomore. But Form I and Form VIII are both liminal states. There’s a vulnerability. In both of those classrooms at five-minute break, you’re going to see somebody in a headlock and somebody freaking out about next period’s assignments. The silliness is not too far different.”

“Verily, I say to you” (I’m quoting someone else now), “except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.” That line in Matthew has me worried that the kingdom of heaven will be kind of a rowdy place, but the seniors have made it their own.

I was a student here for eight years, and I’m in my eighth year on the faculty. I’m teaching First Formers for the first time, but I’m also having some kind of senior year myself. What will happen when I cross the equator and I’ve been a Cistercian teacher longer than a Cistercian student? Maybe I’ll know what to do in a room full of rowdy First Formers, like Dr. Pruit.

I’ll never get another first year with these boys. But my office is right across the hall from where they’ll sit as seniors. I have a bowl of candy and a huge bottle of fountain-pen ink. They’ll come back to me. •

January 27
**Jim & Lynn Moroney
Award Dinner**

January 27 and
February 3
Admissions Testing

May 31
Golf Tournament

June 1–2
Reunions Weekend

Unsolicited Life Advice from Fr. Roch

A year on from Fr. Roch's peaceful passing, I have the honor of succeeding him as the last-page *Continuum* columnist. I briefly pondered how Fr. Roch might have found inspiration



Fr. Thomas Esposito

to discuss the topics treated in the main articles of this issue. Then I quickly realized that he rarely, if ever, tied his column to any other part of the issue—it was never the Hungarian way to conform to someone else's expectations.

But Fr. Roch often grounded his reflections in biblical wisdom before offering an in-your-face existential exhortation to holiness (again, the Hungarian way), and I will do the same, though with some connection to the main articles and in a decidedly non-Hungarian form of written English.

A curious pattern emerges in the book of Genesis: a younger brother bears the covenantal favor of the Lord rather than an elder brother, who received the family inheritance according to the law of primogeniture. Abel's sacrifice is preferred to Cain's (Gen. 4); Isaac is the son of the promise, not Ishmael (Gen. 16–21); Jacob receives the blessing, not Esau (Gen. 25–27); Joseph, the eleventh of 12 sons, is his father's favorite (Gen. 37); and Ephraim is acknowledged over Manasseh (Gen. 48). The reason for this oddly insistent pattern seems to be that God does not conform to established human customs (this does not, of course, mean that God must be Hungarian); other criteria are in play in giving and receiving the covenantal relationship.

This pattern reappears when Samuel is sent to anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be king (1 Samuel 16). Samuel thinks that the handsome eldest son, Eliab, is surely the next messiah, but the Lord does not agree: "God does not see as mortals see, who only note the appearance. The Lord looks into the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). After reviewing seven sons, Samuel waits for the youngest, David, to come in from the field. The youthful

afterthought of his father becomes the chosen instrument of God for Israel and the ancestor of Christ the king.

This biblical parallel is not meant to demean those who excelled in academics and/or sports during their Cistercian careers. Valedictorians, to be sure, have earned that distinction and the accompanying admiration of their class. But "valedictorian" is simply the word designating the person (or persons, as has happened regularly in recent years) who gives a goodbye speech at commencement. "In other words" (as Fr. Roch loved to begin sentences), they already have their reward. The insufficiency of living for such a limited goal as the best high school grades or the portrait closest to the school seal on the official class poster is hopefully obvious to all alumni. Success, from the perspective of monks both Hungarian and American, is measured by the way your life has enkindled and enlightened others.

I will let Fr. Roch speak to this final point. During my years of study in Rome, he and I maintained a steady email correspondence; it is a treasured repository of his encouragement, tenacity, and charity. In a message from April of 2009, he confided to me his awareness that his human accomplishments could not be the ultimate standard of his life, however tempted he was to see in those accomplishments the sign of a successful life: "Now that I am getting nearer to the end of my years, my obsession to leave something permanent on earth is growing. I try to laugh it off. I know that all my published stuff will become obsolete in a decade or so, and the only lasting mark a person can make is on human souls whom you helped get closer to God."

He then offered some trademark unsolicited life advice that I will happily share here: "You could train yourself to look at your gifts and even at your 'majestic' self as borrowed stuff that you are to return with interest, accepting, rejoicing in them as signs of God's trust in you, a trust you don't want to abuse by expropriating what belongs to God."

What Fr. Roch hints at here, I think, is the need to desire and live for the only valedictory address worth hearing—the one we hope to receive from the Lord at the end of our lives: "Well done, my good and faithful servant [...] Come, share your Master's joy" (Matthew 25:21). •