

Gael Winds

John F. Kennedy Catholic High School Paper

COVID-19 EDITION

Letter from Editor-in-Chief, Michael Oddo

As this school year winds down, it is impossible to ignore the far-reaching effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our communities. Whether you are a student, faculty member, parent, or alumni, the Kennedy Catholic community has faced many challenges, and in some cases, personal tragedy. Yet, as we have proven time and time again, we have the ability to come together in trying times and successfully rise above such obstacles.

We draw strength from our faith and from each other as we resign to work together to bring light into the dark. We must never disavow our call to ache for the poor and disenfranchised, fear for the vulnerable, weep for the ill and infirmed, pray for those who are without hope, and lend kindness to the less fortunate. We are obliged to stand by these cherished values, now more than ever, and it starts with each and

every one of us. Our convictions must be brought out from the darkness and the subtlety of our hearts, into the light of day, and into practice.

Winston Churchill once said that courage was the most important quality of all because it “guarantees all others.” We must have the courage to persevere in the face of uncertainty and not to shrink when faced with hardship. We have proven that we can overcome challenges. We did not let this epidemic prevent us from our quest for learning. We adapted to remote classes and showed our discipline and commitment.

We communicated with each other online. We learned in makeshift workspaces while dealing with our challenges at home. We engaged in smart and responsible social distancing in order to prevent infecting others.

Nevertheless, we never dwelled on the minor inconveniences that were thrust upon us because we knew they were just that, inconveniences. The pale comparison of our “problems”

to the experiences of others illuminated the need for action. By reaching out to help our neighbors, the less fortunate, or others in need during this crisis, we showed our compassion.

Though we were able to communicate electronically, we were deprived of one of the most important aspects of our education, which is basic human personal interaction. Even with all of our technology, there is no substitute for being with someone in person. Whether it is spending time with friends or interacting with our teachers (including the occasional friendly banter), we miss that personal connection.

The turbulent post quarantine world presents many more obstacles, yet a surplus of opportunities. We must not shrink from the challenges before us, but reaffirm our Catholic values in sowing unity and alms in our communities. Despite the challenges we may face, we stand by our convictions of courage and compassion.

Faculty Spotlight: Mr. MacDonald

By Michael Oddo
Editor-in-Chief

This past year, Kennedy welcomed Mr. MacDonald as a faculty member. Mr. MacDonald is now the Director of Campus Ministry and a Theology and English teacher. He earned a bachelor's degree from Vanderbilt University and his master's in education from the University of Notre Dame. As detailed in the following interview, he has a unique perspective on the current crisis, faith, and scholarship.

Gael Winds: How has your Catholic Faith guided you through adversity?

Mr. MacDonald: I'd definitely point to my first few years in high school as the most difficult in terms of adversity. I was facing so many issues in terms of academics, family life, friendships, etc. During my second year of high school, my father passed away as well, and that was the nail in the coffin for me. I felt like my life was spinning out of control! To make matters worse, I also didn't have the most robust faith life. At that point, I was only attending Mass casually and was fairly indifferent towards the Church. It's a great grace though that God can take faith the size of a mustard seed and create

something extraordinary out of our lives. In those moments of adversity, I started to wonder about the "why" of life. What was the purpose? What was truly going to satisfy the longings of my heart?

The beginning of Faith for me was asking these sorts of questions. I knew that something was missing in my life, but I couldn't fully explain it. I remember very specifically a group project that I was working on in English class. The subject was "identity," and each member of our group took turns recording something about ourselves onto a video camera. I spoke into the camera with the words, "I wish I was more religious than I am." This was a tiny amount of faith to be sure, but in the next several years, God would fulfill that desire in more ways than I could imagine. Notably, the suffering that I had experienced in my first years in high school started to turn into healing. My relationships started to restore, I had more confidence in who I was, and I began to understand not *what* would truly satisfy the deepest desires of my heart, but *who*.

Gael Winds: What inspired you to become an educator, and specifically, to join the Kennedy community?

Mr. MacDonald: From an early age I had a sense that the world was ripe for exploring. I loved learning both in and

outside of the classroom. By the time I was in second grade, I had enlisted the help of my classmates in petitioning the governor to encourage healthy dietary habits in the state of New York, and kept a running log of the major stock market indices. As I grew older, I spent quite a lot of time tutoring and working with younger students. Teaching was a natural fit!

After college, I spent several years in Denver, Colorado. I got a taste of teaching there but ultimately felt the Lord calling me back to New York, where I am originally from. Very soon after moving back, I got in touch with Kennedy Catholic and it seemed like a very natural fit from the start. The program of study here combines a robust sense of academic excellence with a program of orthodox Catholic teaching. I couldn't be happier here, and it has been a joy to be involved with such a wonderful student body, faculty, and administration.

Gael Winds: How has remote learning transformed your role as an educator?

Mr. MacDonald: Remote learning has certainly been a unique environment to jump into during the second half of this year! As a teacher, you are constantly juggling – direct instruction, class discussions, assessments, meetings, etc. Some of these lend themselves to remote learning a bit better than

others, but in either case, it's just a matter of being creative. One of the joys of teaching is discovering new methods of delivering content, and technology has already played quite a role in shifting the teaching environment over the past decade. Adaptability has always been a key part of the teaching profession.

In that sense, I wouldn't say that it changed my role as an educator very much. I'm still here to teach, to learn, and to lead students towards that which is true, good, and beautiful. Of course, my preference would be to do so in the physical classroom, and it's not easy to be away for so long, yet this too shall pass. In the meantime, we'll adapt, we'll grow, and we'll learn!

Gael Winds: How has the role of faith developed under the circumstances of self-isolation and quarantine?

Mr. MacDonald: The end of this year has been very interesting. We've been put into a situation that doesn't suit our need for human interaction and relationships. Of course, there are ways to connect through other means – social media, telephone calls, or dare I say, even letter writing. It's apparent though that this is not enough, and that there is something highly disordered about the present situation.

It reminds me of C.S. Lewis' description of hell in *The Great Divorce*. Hell is conceived of as a vast city where everyone simply stays inside their own houses. Streets are empty and stores are left vacant. People stay inside their houses and can have all the commodities they need, yet this accumulation of "things" doesn't truly satisfy. Although it's perhaps not quite as gloomy a situation today, I do think that this sort of dissatisfaction can lead us towards God in an extraordinary way.

Faith is the theological virtue to help us do just that. As a virtue, it must be practiced over and over again in our hearts – Yes God is real. No, I'm not Him. Yes, there is something yet greater to come. Reminding ourselves of these fundamental truths allows us to develop a relationship with God and place our hope in Him. Thus, when we recognize that we are dissatisfied in isolation, we can place our hope in the One who is the source of all communion.

Gael Winds: What are some ways in which Kennedy students can continue to develop their minds and souls?

Mr. MacDonald: Great question! Of course, the first way students can continue to develop their minds is to stay focused on their academic studies. It is very easy when we don't have our typical routines and structures to abandon our long-term goals.

Virtue implores us to do otherwise! This is a great opportunity to practice temperance and prudence. Rest when you ought to take the time to rest and work when you ought to be at work.

I would also use this time to make a particular effort in forming and sustaining relationships with your family. It is true that we are isolated, but often times we are deceived into thinking that we are more isolated than we truly are. You are probably spending a large amount of time in close quarters with your family. Spend that time getting to know them in an intentional way. Share your thoughts, your struggles, your desires, and more importantly, spend time listening!

Lastly, I would emphasize prayer above all else. If you have a habit of prayer, keep it up! If you don't, start with just a few minutes of your time each day. There are a million ways to pray, but you can't do any of them if you don't start. Access to the Sacraments is limited at this time, but I would also encourage students to tune into online Masses, especially on Sundays. It is the difficult reality that we don't perhaps "feel" the same sense of emotion or peace when we are sitting in our living rooms, but love is not just a "feeling," but an "act" of the will. So let us act in accordance with the will of God, and pursue the good, the true, and the beautiful!

In My Room

By Mrs. Normile

Faculty

To Borrow a Line from the Grateful Dead... "What a Long Strange Trip It's Been"

Last summer I took an online course as a requirement. Even though I did not want to sit in a classroom for hours - I dreaded the 'online/distance learning' relationship I would have with an invisible professor and a bunch of invisible classmates... And now I (and my students) have been immersed in an invisible classroom with only a computer screen and a keyboard. Our world has changed and all of us at Kennedy have changed with it to become creative, inquisitive, humble, introspective, appreciative, and, most importantly, prayerful humans.

During the week of March 9, the COVID-19 tiptoed into our lives. We, the teachers and students alike, had this weird, anxious vibration humming through our bones that ominous events were about to hit like a tsunami - and all I could think about was how this giant wave would decimate the once-in-a-lifetime high school experiences our kids would miss... like sports, proms, friendships, dating. Now, as we hopefully begin to emerge back into the world, baby-step by baby-step, this historic pandemic event, coupled with the worldwide awareness and fight

against racism, has already made our students wiser, stronger, healthier, and kinder human beings - WHAT AN EDUCATION!

In our last physical classes at Kennedy, the students filled me in on what they considered the pros and cons of snow-day instructions. They gave me advice and we all agreed that we could do anything for a few weeks... little did we know we would be at it for months.

Kennedy's sophomores met this challenge bravely and, I do believe, we have succeeded famously. Writing up assignments on Canvas was old news, but my heart broke every day while making recordings ... these poor kids had to listen to me drone on with *AHHHs*, *GOT ITs*, *OKs*, *YOU UNDERSTANDs*, interspersed amongst clever anecdotes (at least to me) about Antony, Caesar, the evil Cassius and the ultimate dope, Brutus, as if I knew them personally; very stimulating to the 16-year old brain. But we got into a groove - the first Conference was a failure but we started Conferencing in smaller friend groups so kids would feel more comfortable verbalizing ideas. We moved on to one-on-one Conferences to discuss thesis statements, character analysis, and just other stuff. Emailing became more like texting, which has become the primary mode of communication... for those of

you who may be unaware. Students became more and more comfortable on Canvas' Discussion platform sharing ideas on current events like COVID, the political arena, and the demonstrations. Homework was magically being submitted in a very timely fashion (I do believe I must thank a few Nanas, Nonnas, Abuelas, and Grandmas for sitting at kitchen tables encouraging their sweeties to get the work in on time). Amazing, right!

A great person, I think it was Cinderella, once said "you don't know what you have until it's gone" and, as a seasoned lifer, I can verify this statement. Now I would like to amend that quote to say "I didn't know how much I would miss seeing, speaking, joking, reprimanding, singing, listening to, sharing cookies with, - oh yeah, and teaching - the great kids I have had the privilege to spend my days with at Kennedy Catholic."

I miss seeing the expressions on each student's face which tells me what kind of day they are having. I miss roaming around the classroom speling on about what a character Billy Shakes was, how much I hate Victor Frankenstein's selfishness, and most importantly, understanding the very stimulating concepts of critical analysis and thesis. I miss the entertaining verbal volleys with sophomore sophomores. I miss

the constant complaining that all students physically require... to make it through each day. I miss the faces that crowd the hallways, the pushing and shoving, the comradery, the romances and breakups, the general frustrations, the scowling Mr. Corona charging up the hallway, test anxieties, lost cells and iPad, and the competitiveness which revolves around sports, grades, friendships, crushes, etc. I DO NOT miss LUNCH DUTY.

An event that most sophomores anxiously await every year is the opportunity to climb up the steep steps to the auditorium stage and recite the first 13 lines of Antony's famous "Friends, Romans, countrymen" (III,ii,82) speech. Of course, this experience was not to be had due to the evil Coronavirus (no relation to our own Mr. Anthony Corona). In lieu of this fine event, the sophomores were asked to record themselves - reciting or reading - those powerful lines with the option to dress in a toga, facetime with friends... their choice. As I watched the 150 45-second presentations - I got to see each student in their most comfortable, safe environment - and all I could hear in my head was the Beach Boys song:

"In My Room"
There's a world where I can go
and tell my secrets to
In my room, in my room

In this world I lock out all my
worries and my fears
In my room, in my room
Do my dreaming and my
scheming
Lie awake and pray
Do my crying and my sighing
Laugh at yesterday
Now it's dark and I'm alone
But I won't be afraid
In my room, in my room

Let's all continue to pray to God
that our students and families
will be emancipated from their
rooms and that by September
2020 we will be back in our 'old
new classroom' world.

Faith and Faculty:

Mrs. Ioannou

By Michael Oddo
Editor-in-Chief

Despite the quarantine, the Kennedy faculty remains involved in their communities of faith. One example is Kennedy's Physics teacher, Mrs. Ioannou. She regularly views her local church services at St Basil Academy Chapel, while baking cookies and providing coffee for the clergy. Mrs. Ioannou and her husband helped set up the live stream so that the entire community can join in faith during these times. With the help of more Youtube subscribers, they can reach even more members of their community.

Mrs. I, as she is affectionately referred to, continues to pray for the health of her students, friends, and Kennedy community. She also prays for those who are suffering and vulnerable, and those who are lonely and fearful.

Mrs. I often utilizes Zoom, Duo, and Viber to stay in touch with her friends and family, including her mom and sister who live in Greece. These virtual methods of communication are especially valuable for birthdays, and Mrs. I's yoga classes.

Trials in Faith

By Larry Padilla
Contributor

One of my mom's closest friends tested positive for COVID-19. My mom has known her since they were young as she used to take care of my mom when she was a child and now I consider her my aunt. Even at 70 years old, my aunt looks very healthy for her age. However, when the Coronavirus hit her, she tried to hide it from my mom. When they talked on the phone, she tried to act as if she was fine. Thankfully, she had stayed at home and isolated herself but hadn't disclosed her condition to my mom. When she eventually told my mom that it was getting hard for her to breathe, she came to the conclusion that she had the virus and my mom agreed. The diagnosis was later confirmed. Every day became suspenseful as it became harder for her every

day that passed. Everything reached a breaking point when she had to go to the hospital and she was put on a ventilator. We knew that most people that went on ventilators usually didn't come out alive, but my mom was very hopeful and turned to prayer. My aunt miraculously made it out and is now doing fine. This was a time of prayer and reflection and of hope that was restored.

Interview: Athletic Director, Mr. Tassone

By Michael Oddo
Editor-in-Chief

In the light of the pandemic, senior athletes at Kennedy will miss their final spring season. Kennedy's Athletic Director, Mr. Tassone, explained the reality of our seniors' inability to participate in their final athletic season at Kennedy in an interview with Gael Winds: "The student-athletes have sacrificed their blood, sweat, and tears for Kennedy, and to not be able to participate in their final season is heartbreaking." "Each one of them will always be a Gael, and we thank them for all they have done."

While practices and games have been canceled, some coaches have been meeting with their teams via Zoom. "It's a great way of keeping the players engaged

with each other," Mr. Tassone enthused.

While many gyms and fields remain closed, there are still ways for Kennedy students to remain active. Jogging and bodyweight exercises can be highly effective in staying in shape. Physical Education courses at Kennedy have ensured the continuity of student physical activity through exercise logs. Mr. Tassone also mentioned that "coaches are available to any athlete who needs assistance in putting a good health plan together."

While the prospects of an uninterrupted fall semester at Kennedy is uncertain, Mr. Tassone remains optimistic: "We hope to have our students back on campus soon enough and begin preparation for the Fall 2020 season. We miss them!"

Athlete Spotlight: John McInerney

By Michael Oddo
Editor-in-Chief

The daily routines of Kennedy student-athletes are typically both structured and busy. But as the COVID-19 global pandemic has impacted every aspect of life, our athletes had to adapt. John "Jack" McInerney is a starting attackman on the Men's Varsity Lacrosse Team. Jack, a rising senior, has been a valuable asset to the team as its lead scorer and was excited about another

accomplished season. Last spring, the Men's Varsity Lacrosse Team went on to win the CHSAA A Championship against Monsignor Farrell, for the fifth consecutive time. Jack scored an early two points in a 20-second span in the first half, which propelled the Gaels to a 7-5 victory over Monsignor Farrell. Throughout the academic year, Jack trained for the upcoming season while maintaining Honor Roll and other high academic merits. However, on March 13, Kennedy's spring sports were canceled. Jack remembers the day well: "I was extremely disappointed, but I understood the circumstances. The lost season, though, provided the opportunity to grow mentally and spiritually." Jack has used the time to keep in shape and to refine his stick skills. Every morning, you can find Jack running, doing pushups, squats, and pullups. In between completing homework, Jack focuses on his quickness in interval cardio workouts. Since many fields have been closed in order to enforce social distancing, Jack has used his backyard to practice his lacrosse abilities with his younger brothers.

Sports in the Light of COVID-19

By Brendan Sullivan
Sports Editor

With the cancellation of spring sports and the threat of fall sports being canceled as well, Kennedy Catholic's premier athletes have been working collectively to stay in peak performance. Varsity Football players have been focusing on perfecting their craft and looking to defend their Championship title. Both Varsity Boys and Girls Basketball teams have been participating in team Zoom workouts and individual development drills. The Championship Volleyball program continues to dig deep and focus on individual development in preparation for a season that they know will be their third consecutive season dominating the league. . Members of both Boys and Girls Varsity Soccer teams have been cooperating to make sure they're all staying in shape, while Varsity Boys and Girls Lacrosse have been keeping in touch with their teammates as well. Because all sports seasons are unknown, it's integral for all Kennedy athletes to prepare for their seasons and be welcome to any changes. The focal point for all sports teams across the board has been to prepare each athlete individually for the opportunity to excel in their respective upcoming seasons.

The Class of 2020 Marches Forward

The Class of 2020 has earned over 54.74 million dollars in scholarship money to date.

Kennedy's average SAT scores for the 2020 graduating year are in 9th place, among 51 Westchester schools.

Since the summer of 2019, Kennedy students have earned over 6,000 hours of community service.

Four Kennedy seniors are headed to the University of Notre Dame: Dorrian Cohen, Erin Panker, Lauren Sallay, and Lina Ciamei will attend.

Senior Taran Agnihotri was named a Finalist in the National Merit Scholarship and will continue his education at Georgia Institute of Technology.

President Father Mark Vaillancourt addressed the Kennedy community via Zoom Conference on May 29th. The recording, Spring 2020 Presentation, can be found on the Kennedy website.

Upcoming Events

To honor our seniors, Kennedy will host a Car Parade on June 11th at noon. More information will be made available.

Final exams will take place between the 8th and 12th of June.

On June 10, Kennedy's Junior State of America chapter will be interviewing New York State Supreme Court Justice Lewis Lubell. More information will be made available on how to access the event.

iPad returns will be on June 15, 16, and 17 from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. All people entering the building must be wearing a mask and obey social distancing protocol. The collection will take place in the Commons area.

Catholic Calendar

6/11 - Saint Barnabas, Apostle, Memorial

6/13 - Anthony of Padua, Priest and Doctor of the Church, Memorial

6/14 - Corpus Christi Solemnity

6/19 - Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Solemnity

6/20 - Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary Memorial

6/24 - Nativity of Saint John the Baptist Solemnity

6/29 - Saints Peter and Paul, Apostles, Solemnity

7/3 - Saint Thomas, Apostle, Feast