

# THE blarney stone

A PUBLICATION FOR THE COMMUNITY  
OF NOTRE DAME PREPARATORY SCHOOL  
AND MARIST ACADEMY

Notre Dame Preparatory School: 248-373-5300  
Notre Dame Marist Academy-Middle: 248-373-5371  
Notre Dame Marist Academy-Lower: 248-373-2573

## Faith, the arts and NDPMA's mission

While the 1970 musical Jesus Christ Superstar is no doubt in its umpteenth revival on some stage somewhere in the world, the oftentimes uncomfortable alliance between religion and the performing arts seems to be undergoing a real resurgence of late. Even the lights on Broadway in the past three or four years have been shining brightly on plays and musicals that revolve around religion and faith.

From "Leap of Faith" and "The Book of Mormon" to "Sister Act" and recent reincarnations of "Godspell," "Superstar" and "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," stagecraft lately seems to be re-focused on religion and on those who follow it. But not all religion-themed productions have been kind to the faithful, however. In fact, many tend to take a decidedly acerbic and/or humorous approach to their subject matter, if only to provoke.

"Sister Act" and "Leap of Faith" lyricist and director Glenn Slater said in a recent article in Playbill that theatre offers a way to look at religion from a safe remove from our own feelings about it. "It's sometimes easier to criticize religion when the laugh is at the expense of characters on a stage rather than ourselves," he said. "At the same time, it's sometimes easier to feel the draw of religious exaltation through a character's eyes rather than risk it ourselves."

Most high school drama departments, especially religious high schools, don't have quite the same freedom on stage as professional play producers. Above all, they must

ensure their productions are both appropriate for students and consistent with the school's mission.

Notre Dame's own theatre director, Meredith Gifford, a 2002 graduate of NDP, feels very strongly about tying the school's



Notre Dame Prep alum Meredith Gifford ('02) is the school's theatre director.

mission—especially the Christian persons part—into what the students are doing on and off the stage.

The upcoming spring production for the Notre Dame Prep Players is "Rumors," a decidedly dark, but farcical play written by Neil Simon. Gifford says it's not a religious

play at all, but the students so far have really embraced the story. Most of the auditions for the main characters have been completed [at press time] and she says the whole process has been fantastic.

"The play calls for four husband-wife couples," Gifford said. "We only had three high school boys audition so we recruited an 8th grader from our middle school to fill in one of the roles. The kids did an initial read-through where we sit at a table and read the script out loud. They were in tears and falling off their seats with laughter!"

Gifford says the students have a lot of fun and work very hard. But she keeps what's truly important in front of them at all times.

"When you do a show, you really become a family of sorts," she said. "You spend at least 10-15 hours together each week and we work well as a team. But at the core of it all is our Christian faith."

And it's not just the performing arts that get filtered through the school's mission and faith. Notre Dame's visual arts chair Sandy LewAllen also keeps the mission top of mind. She said she believes the visual arts deeply connect to NDPMA's Marist mission in many Christian and charitable ways.

"Our program teaches students tolerance through the understanding and appreciation of art in cultures that are not like our own," LewAllen said. "Also, our students use their artistic gifts and talents to make a positive difference in the world

*Please see MISSION AND THE ARTS, page 3*

**Notre Dame Preparatory School and Marist Academy provides its diverse student body a Catholic and internationally recognized college-preparatory experience of lasting value.**



SCHOOL CFO SAYS HIS MISSION IS TO  
KEEP THE 'MACHINE' GOING (PAGE

# A 'valued' education

2012 graduate Nick Watson recognizes the many values of a Notre Dame education

**N**ick Watson, who graduated from Notre Dame in 2012 and is now a junior at the University of Chicago, said the value NDP placed on real “learning” has been tremendously beneficial for him in college.

He says that while his degree is an important goal and he looks forward to receiving it, the driving factor for him at Chicago is to learn as much as possible. And he credits his high school for much of that mentality.

“I think the mindset of placing an intrinsic value on learning itself is something that comes with growing up,” Watson said. “But I also feel that I started to develop this attitude toward the end of my time at NDP. It’s so easy to get caught up in focusing on the end product, whether it be getting an A in a class, or a degree, or a job. I’ve found that being able to learn something and think about how it applies to your life and how it can make you a better person is much more fulfilling than being driven by an external reward and going through the motions.”

Watson, who was a valedictorian when he graduated from high school, also credits Notre Dame for fine tuning his time-management skills. He played baseball at NDP and juggling that with a heavy load of academics turned out to be fortuitous for him, especially since he also plays ball for Chicago.

“I learned how to push myself academically and explore my extracurricular interests at the same time,” he said. “A large part of my experience at NDP was learning how to balance the time commitments of classes, playing sports, and being actively involved in school clubs.”

Playing college baseball, he said, while still prioritizing school-work came naturally for him thanks to NDP. “In addition, I found that the discussion-based International Baccalaureate classes I took in high school prepared me very well for similar classes in college.”

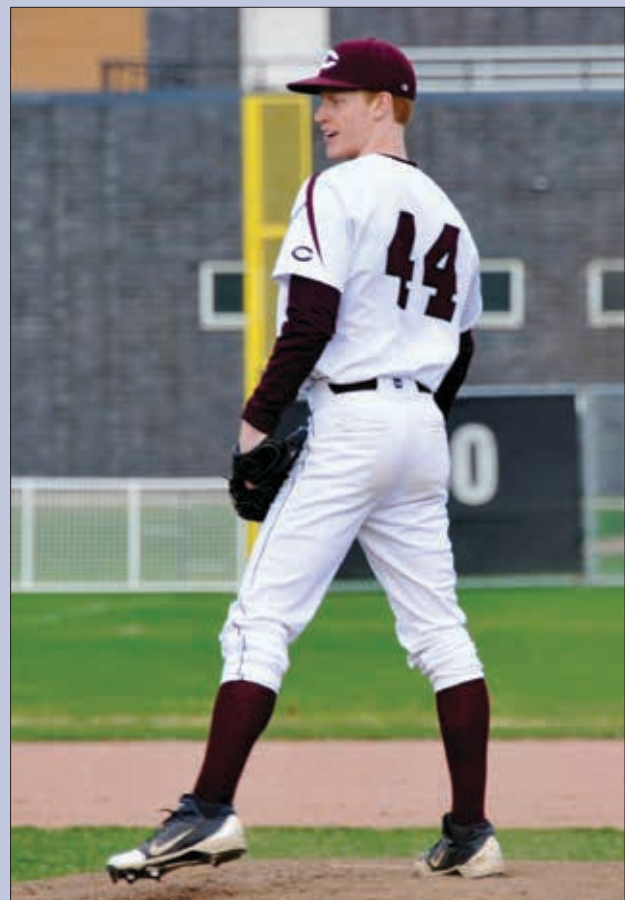
For example, he said, taking Theory of Knowledge, an IB course, with Notre Dame Head of School Fr. Leon Olszamowski, has given him an edge in understanding the philosophical arguments that persist in many of his college classes. “In addition to preparing me for specific class subjects,” Watson said, “the NDP curriculum helped me to develop an analytical framework that also has proved to be invaluable.”

## THE ONION

An internship at satirical publication The Onion during his sophomore year at the University of Chicago also benefited from Watson’s NDP education. He said Notre Dame helped him realize initially how much he enjoyed writing.

“But part of what led me to apply at The Onion in the first place was how much fun I had writing satire for the NDP student newspaper,” Watson said. “As an intern at The Onion, I helped to analyze current events and presented research to the writing team every day.”

As much as he enjoys and excels at writing, however, he’s still got an open mind when it comes to career choice. He says the econ classes at NDP as well as the fact that he enjoys that subject led him to choose economics as a major at Chicago. It also led him to another internship this past summer when he worked at the Kresge Foundation in Troy with its investment team.



Notre Dame Prep alum Nick Watson is a pitcher on the University of Chicago’s baseball team.

## MUSICAL MATH

Watson misses his time at NDP and misses many former classmates and teachers. In fact, he would have liked to bring a few teachers with him to the Windy City.

“There were so many teachers at NDP who I will never be able to thank enough for their influence on me,” he said. “Notre Dame truly has so many exceptional faculty members, and I often wish they could take over some of my college classes. None of my math teachers here have the musical capabilities of Mr. McCaskey, for example, and I’ve yet to have an English teacher command a room like Mr. Butorac.”

## ENSURING THE FUTURE

So, armed with such a great academic arsenal he received from Notre Dame and thankful for the head start it gave him in college, Watson said he wants to make sure others also benefit in the future.

“I feel that it’s important to support NDP after graduating because it helps ensure that the opportunities I was able to take advantage of will be available for future generations of students. I am very grateful for everything that NDP did for me and I look forward to being able to give back.” 🍷

## MISSION AND THE ARTS, from page 1

by participating in outreach programs both locally and globally. Among many initiatives, we have beautified Detroit's blighted Brightmoor neighborhood with painted mural panels and we've painted portraits to brighten the lives of orphans in Haiti and Guatemala."

Pope Francis himself talked of the intertwining of art and one's faith. He is a big fan of stage and screen and counts Italian neorealist cinema as a film genre he really likes—with Federico Fellini's "La Strada" at the top of his list. In an interview given to Jesuit journalists in 2013, Francis said culture figures importantly in his own life and as a portal into Christian thought.

"A Jesuit must be creative," the Jesuit pope told the journalists. For him, he said, art is not mere illustration or aesthetic play, but a humanistic enterprise as important and as fundamental as work or prayer. "Even the forms for expressing truth can be multiform," he said.

Camille Paglia, a sometimes-controversial author and social critic, is not often on the same page as a Roman Catholic pope. But she said in "Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics at Boston University," that great art "can be made out of love for religion as well as rebellion against it. However, a totally secularized society with contempt for religion sinks into materialism and self-absorption and gradually goes slack, without leaving an artistic legacy."

### PONTIAC TO BOSTON AND BACK AGAIN

Gifford is on a second theatre directorship at her alma mater. She started directing at NDP in 2011 and did three shows: "Our Town," "Thoroughly Modern Millie,"

and "All in the Timing." She then left the Detroit area to get a master's degree in theatre education from Emerson College in Boston. Now firmly back in place in Michigan she is looking forward to getting "Rumors" on stage.

As a student at NDP, Gifford said she was in only two plays herself. She was Ado Annie in "Oklahoma" and Adelaide in



Pope Francis has said that culture and the arts offer a portal into Christian thought.

"Guys and Dolls." Now, as theatre director, her primary responsibility every year is the spring play, with choir director Dave Fazzini typically handling the fall musicals. Retired Notre Dame teacher Norm Kotarski handled stage directing for many years at NDP and before that at Notre Dame High School in Harper Woods.

### 'VERY SMART' STUDENTS

Gifford is eager to complement the students at NDP who get involved with the school's theatre productions. "The kids are very smart at Notre Dame," she said. "I always have a difficult decision in choosing what show to do because I want to challenge them. There is a lot of 'fluff' out there for schools to produce and a lot of it is just not right for this school. A celebrated playwright has written each of the plays

I've chosen, so the students are exposed to many different themes and excellent writers.

"The kids also are very talented," Gifford added. "And they really get comedy. Many of them are in choir so I know they can sing, too."

She also stresses character development with her actors. "I try to add exercises on character to the rehearsals to help with this. They usually get it quickly and it turns out great."

For their current production, Gifford says that like most of Neil Simon plays, it's all about timing.

"Blocking the basic movements on stage started in early February and the students who didn't have rehearsals were memorizing on their nights off," she said. "We are also in the process of recruiting our stage crew and designing the show. I do a lot of the designs, too, and right now I'm researching costumes and the appropriate period props."

All in all, Gifford said, putting on a stage play is a big job. Between the students behind the scenes to those in front as well as her parent volunteers, especially Andrea Fredin, who Gifford said has been the parent producer for five or six years, "it's a real labor of love."

"But we respect one another, take pride in the work we do, and maintain the integrity of our show," she said. "Working on a play is a lot of work, whether you are doing lights, running the soundboard, or acting on stage. It takes students who can juggle their usually intense schoolwork with an equally intense rehearsal schedule." 🎭

*The Notre Dame Prep Players production of Neil Simon's "Rumors" is scheduled for March 27-29 in the Notre Dame cafetorium.*

## SMALL NOTRE DAME WORLD

Notre Dame High School meets Notre Dame Prep in Vail, Colorado, as Bill Parish, a 1966 graduate of NDHS in Harper Woods, finds out the person who is attending to his ski injury at a medical clinic is an NDP grad.

Let's let Parish, a professional musician, tell us the story: "The young lady in the picture I am sending you is Chase Rogowski. She is an athletic trainer and medical assistant working at the Steadman



Clinic in Vail, Colorado (where skier Lindsay Vonn gets put back together from time to time).

"I live about 30 miles from Aspen and while skiing in December, I fell and severed a thumb ligament. A few weeks after surgery, Chase was taking out the stitches and I asked her where she was originally from (ski-area populations are very transient) and it came up that she graduated from ND Prep in 2008. What a small world!" 🎭

# On a mission

## Notre Dame Preparatory School and Marist Academy's CFO helps keep school machine moving

**T**he mission of Notre Dame is stamped on just about everything connected with the school—literally and figuratively. Ask any teacher and he or she will tell you they weave the words “. . .with God, we form Christian persons, upright citizens and academic scholars” into everything they do in and around the classroom.

But what of the seemingly countless men and women who work just as hard on campus but do not teach or have regular contact with students. How does the school mission affect what they do on a daily basis? Does it even matter to them?

Well, if you ask Tony Block, Notre Dame's chief financial officer and corporate treasurer, it sure in the heck does.

He says it matters a whole lot!

Sitting in the business office in one of the portable buildings behind the school, Block says that he and his staff recognize the critical importance of the NDPMA mission, and they all have a laser-like focus on it.

“Our office plays a crucial role behind the ‘we’ of the school mission,” Block says. “We do what we do so that teachers, administrators, coaches and counselors can do the great work they do. Our office works to assist the well-being of the whole of the school. Yes, we stay in the background, but we do that in order to keep the ‘machine’ running well all of the time.”

Because Block and his staff operate in the background, and because the machine seems to operate like, well, a well-oiled machine, most in the community have no idea what makes Notre Dame tick.

For Block himself, his responsibilities at NDPMA include overseeing all of the financial aspects of the school. Things like banking, paying bills, collecting tuition, managing budgets, payroll, legal matters and the like. But add to that what his staff does, and you get the bigger picture.

“We also manage the operation of nearly everything on campus,” Block said. “That includes things like the school buildings and grounds, transportation, cafeteria, information technology and special projects. I have a great staff that carries out all of these important responsibilities.” That staff includes Julie Frakes, facilities manager; Kathleen McCaf-

frey, human resources and payroll manager; Karen West, bookkeeper; Larry Jack, transportation coordinator and bookstore manager; and Rick Winiarski, business office assistant.

Block says that besides providing teachers, counselors and coaches with all of the tools they need to do their great work on a daily basis, the business office also must take a long-term view of the operation. “We plan not only for this year and the next, but for many years down the road. We work to be good stewards of the school—financially, legally, operationally—so that the school can continue fulfilling its mission many years into the future.”

Now in his 10th year at NDPMA, Block came to Pontiac after Notre Dame High School in Harper Woods closed. He had been the business manager at NDHS for two years and was the controller for Tree-

tops Resort in Gaylord, Michigan, for 13 years before that. As a former employee and graduate of NDHS (1980), Block knows backwards and forward the Marist mission and philosophy of education, and because of that, he says, the learning curve at Notre Dame in Pontiac was short. “The transition was very smooth,” he said.

Block has two children, Andrew, a Notre Dame grad ('08) and current law student at George Mason University, and Alison, a 2013 graduate of Anchor Bay High School and current English/writing major at Miami University. Block is a former youth hockey coach (11 years) and he and his wife, Maureen, now reside in Chesterfield Township where he brews beer, makes wine and watches the occasional Red Wings game “although I'm not as much of a Wings fanatic as I used to be.” 🍷



Notre Dame Chief Financial Officer and Corporate Treasurer Tony Block with his wife, Maureen, on a recent trip to Washington, D.C.

## Senior one of only 18 in the U.S. chosen for national gymnastics competition



Notre Dame senior Emma McLean, above, earned her way into the prestigious Nastia Liukin Cup event in March in Arlington, Texas, by winning the Chicago Style Invitational held in early February. A University of Michigan-commit, McLean said that throughout the season there are a series of invitationals called the Nastia Liukin Cup Series and in order to qualify to the Nastia Liukin Cup, you must win the whole meet at one of the invitationals.

A total of 36 gymnasts are chosen nationwide for the Cup, 18 junior (15 or younger) and 18 senior (16 or older) participants. McLean qualified as one of the 18 senior gymnasts from the United States for the event.

McLean trains at Stars and Stripes Gymnastics Academy in Clarkston. At the 2014 L10 J.O. National Championships, McLean tied for fifth on floor exercise and was sixth on vault in the Sr. B Division. She was also 16th in the all-around. At the 2014 Region 5 Championships, she tied for first on vault, tied for second on floor exercise, tied for fourth on balance beam and took fourth in the all-around. At the 2014 Michigan State Championships, McLean won the all-around and tied for first on floor exercise in addition to finishing second on balance beam and fourth on vault. 🇺🇸

## Notre Dame 8th-grade racer raises \$4,000 for charity

Logan Wenneshiemer, an 8th grader in Notre Dame's middle school and sprint-car race driver, recently reached the \$4,000 mark in fundraising for Paws and Stripes, a charity that provides service dogs for wounded U.S. military veterans with PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) and traumatic brain injury.

Wenneshiemer chose Paws and Stripes to be his beneficiary for the 2015 racing season.

"We are donating a percentage of race earnings as well as a percentage of our Intense Racing fundraising efforts to Paws and



Stripes," Wenneshiemer said. "We are very passionate about the work they do."

Shawn Bacoccini, director of development for Paws and Stripes, thanked Wenneshiemer for his involvement: "I wanted to reach out and again say thank you for the support that you have given and to compliment you on your 'supreme awesomeness.' There are not many people your age who are making such an effort to make the world a better place. Thank you again for that and keep up the good work."

Wenneshiemer has for years raced with much success on the Mini Sprint circuit, primarily on a track in Jackson, Mich. His car, which in the past has had a Fighting Irish motif and paint job, features a 636cc Suzuki super-bike motorcycle engine that is methanol fuel injected and can hit speeds of up to 140 mph on a 3/8 mile dirt course.

This year, Wenneshiemer races in the POWRi Speedway Motors 600cc Outlaw Micro Series with the first race scheduled for April 10 in Belleville, Illinois. He said the choice of Paws and Stripes as his team's charity sponsor was an easy one to make.

"This organization provides service dogs that come from only local shelters," he said. "They are trained by highly capable service dog personnel who teach the dogs and the veterans as a team. Veterans are never obligated to pay a penny of the program's cost to enroll. The program is funded completely through donations."

Paws and Stripes also is featured in a show on the A&E channel called "Dogs of War," according to Wenneshiemer. 🇺🇸



Notre Dame senior Sarah Mazur is with a resident of the Boulevard Manor nursing home in Detroit. NDP's Campus Ministry department sponsored a service event for students on the Martin Luther King Jr. weekend.

## Notre Dame students work in the community on MLK Jr. 'Day of Service'

On January 19, Notre Dame once again joined the nation in celebrating Martin Luther King Jr. Day, which honors the life and legacy of one of the great figures in modern American history.

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Notre Dame Preparatory School  
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1300 Giddings Road  
Pontiac, MI 48340

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*A world of education*



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King Jr. believed that acts of service were the great equalizer. "Everybody can be great," he said, "because everybody can serve."

Service to the community always has been an important component to the education of Notre Dame students. Simply measure the many community and Christian hours of service spent by NDP seniors alone, and you come up with well more than 10,000!

The weekend before MLK Jr. Day, the Notre Dame students again were serving the community along with more than 400 others involved in the 2015 Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, which was sponsored by the Archdiocese of Detroit's Black Catholic Ministries and Youth Ministry offices. The event kicked off at Sacred Heart Parish on Rivard St. in Detroit.

Della Lawrence, of Notre Dame's campus ministry department, said the NDP students were part of a committed group who brought their own dreams for building the community of Detroit.

"All participants were sent out from Sacred Heart church to local parishes and community agencies to serve in the community for the day," Lawrence said. "Our group went to the Boulevard Manor nursing home on E. Grand Boulevard. The students organized visits with residents, organized bingo and one of our students, Katie Kauffman, even sang for the residents." 

**Juniors from Atlanta and Pontiac get together for leadership summit**

More than 20 juniors from Marist School in Atlanta made the trip up from Georgia in early February to spend the weekend



Notre Dame juniors pose with juniors from the Atlanta-based Marist School after a leadership summit weekend in Pontiac.

with Notre Dame Prep juniors in an important spiritual, learning and fun retreat sponsored by the campus ministry departments of both schools.

In addition to a number of meetings and discussion-group sessions, the juniors also enjoyed a Super Bowl party at the Pontiac campus of Notre Dame.

Marist School, which was founded in 1901, is an independent, Catholic, college-preparatory day school enrolling approximately 1,042 boys and girls in grades seven through 12. It is owned and operated by the Society of Mary (Marists). 