

Nativity BVM School
1046 Beach Blvd.
Biloxi, MS. 39530

August 15, 2017

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Can you believe that we began school exactly one week ago today? What an incredibly smooth beginning! We have found the theme, Called..., to be very meaningful for our students and staff members. This month we are focusing on **Called...to serve**.

One of the people whom you usually see around our school, especially at these beginning school events, is **Father Dennis**. Most of you have heard that he had a heart attack and triple bypass surgery at the end of July. He is progressing as his doctors have anticipated and he is recuperating at the Nativity Rectory. He sends his love and best wishes to us as we begin our school year. Let's continue to surround him with prayers, good wishes and notes of support as he continues to heal.

We are so pleased to see familiar faces as well as new faces around our school. You may have noticed a few more children too. Yes, our enrollment has again had a slight increase! The children, overall, have settled into a good routine and are ready to go each and every morning. Their enthusiasm is certainly catchy!

Several **staff members** are new to our school, or new to their position. Joining our school as a Kindergarten assistant is Mrs. Bonnie Fountain. She and her husband have a son enrolled in our prek program. Teaching first grade this year is Mrs. Naomi Foster and teaching second grade is Mrs. Hayley Langford. Both are returning teachers, but in different grades. Assisting in our third grade class is Mrs. Caitlin Guitierrez. She and her husband recently moved here from Ohio. Mrs. Sara Michel is the assistant in grade 4. Mrs. Michel and her husband have two children enrolled in our school. Mrs. Nikol Michailos is our fifth grade teacher and she and her husband have two children who attend our school. She is new to the grade, but not to our school. Mrs. Zina Puzz is with us this year as our Explore teacher (Gifted Program) and will also teach art to grades 3-6 several times each month. Our school choir will be directed this year by Mr. Terry Maddox, who is also the music director at Nativity Cathedral. Mr. Terry will also teach music several times each month to our Kindergarten through Grade 6 students. We are pleased to say that our long time choir director, Mrs. Nanette Burke, will continue to work with the choir. Finally, Mrs. Kim Audo will be our in-school tutor this year.

Prior to the beginning of school, our **Nativity School Choir** was invited to sing two selections at the Diocesan Opening of School Mass. The children who were able to attend sang so beautifully and really touched the hearts of everyone present.

This Thursday, **August 17th**, is our **School Information Night**. This will be a time for you, as parents/guardians, to come to school and learn about what is planned for your child. We will **begin in the gym at 6:00 p.m.** Following some brief remarks, you will have an opportunity to visit your child's classroom for a 20 minute presentation. Each teacher will repeat the presentation to allow for families with more than one child. **Because this event is a time for adults to meet together, we ask that children not attend if at all possible.**

Communication is so important to the success of our school and our school year. We have many ways that we communicate with you – our monthly newsletter, our website, our closed family Facebook page, emails, text messages and signs on the signboard. If ever you would like to ask a question or speak with me about something, please do not hesitate to call the school or email me at mmike@nativitybvm.org. I promise that I will answer your email, however, you need to know that I typically check emails the first thing in the morning (yes, 4:00 a.m.!), and again, after school. Sometimes, I check emails at other times but these are my typical times. PLEASE don't ever hesitate to call or email me...I am here to help you in any way possible. I am not on Facebook so if you post something, I will not be able to respond to your question or concern. Remember, I am CALLED...to serve!

In addition to our regular classroom work, we are proud to have programs to respond to children with a variety of needs. Our school is the **only** Catholic School in our Diocese with **special education program**. Children in this program are able to receive the assistance that they need to learn more successfully through working with Mrs. Patti Thompson. Children qualify for this program through testing and an IEP (Individualized Education Program) process. **The Explore Program**, under the guidance of Mrs. Zina Puzs, is an opportunity for children in grades 3 through 6 to learn and “explore” their world in a variety of ways. Children qualify for this gifted program by achieving a score of 120 or higher on an IQ test, by participating in a recognized gifted program in another school or by scoring at or above the 90th percentile on one of the main sections of a standardized test.. Students in 2nd grade will have an opportunity to be exposed to some “Explore” experiences during the second semester.

We are pleased to announce that our school was one of 12 in the state to be selected to participate in the **Mississippi Alliance for Arts Education Artist in Residency** program. Our fourth, fifth and sixth graders will have an opportunity to work with a professional artist in an area of their curriculum. The residency is for five sessions.

Many have been asking about how Nativity BVM Students will observe or participate in the **Solar Eclipse Event** that is just days away. After careful consideration and much discussion with other Catholic school principals, we have decided that our Nativity Students will observe the eclipse **only from the indoors**. Although safety glasses and other visual aids are available, there is no guarantee that these would protect the viewer's eyesight completely. Classroom teachers will be helping children learn about the eclipse in the next few days and all students will have an opportunity to **view the eclipse via live streaming. If any family would like to have their child view the eclipse with them, we are asking that children be checked out of school for the remainder of the day between noon and 12:30. They will not be considered absent for the afternoon since they are participating in an educational activity.**

The **Mulch Project** is halfway completed! I have never in my life been so amazed at the turnout of people to help as I was this past Friday. In one half hour, 11 tons of mulch was spread! We will have another “mulch party” this Friday beginning at about 5:30 p.m. As many of you know, a project like this is very expensive but so necessary in providing a safe play area for the children. We were able to pay for this project using funds from several sources: A donation in memory of Mr. Billy Lyons; a donation in memory of a former student, Joshua Bozeman; income from three matured savings bonds and funds from our BP Oil Spill Settlement. Again, thank you for whatever part you

played in this project! We hope to see you this coming **Friday (August 18th)** to help complete the project!

Families who are new to the school are invited to attend a Spaghetti Dinner, held in their honor, on Thursday, **August 24th at 6:00 p.m.** in our school cafeteria. Our School Advisory Council members, our NPA leaders and our faculty/staff will be on hand to welcome you, once again, to our Nativity School family!

Finally, you may have seen/heard the news piece on WLOX last evening regarding textbook funding for non-public schools. At about 7:50 a.m yesterday morning,., our Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Mike Ladner shared the following with principals: **“Due to recent budget reductions, the MS. Dept of Ed will not appropriate textbook funds to State-accredited non-public schools for the 2017-2018 school year.** State-accredited non-public schools may still have access to all carryover funds from previous fiscal years. This reduction only affects new allocations for textbook purchases for the 2017-2018 school year. The MDE is working diligently to restore funding for textbook purchases for the State-accredited, Non-public schools for the 2018-2019 school year.” Needless to say this was shocking news to receive after being in school for nearly a week! What does this mean for the children of our school? Fortunately, the bulk of our textbook/consumable book order was placed in April and the materials were received by the end of May. However, a small order (about \$800) was placed on July 2nd and we were expecting those books at any time and we were anticipating their arrival at any time. I will have to order those books now directly from the vendors and they will be paid for with school funds. If you feel so-inclined, you may wish to contact your state representative to express concern regarding this funding cut.

Whew! I am sorry to be so wordy but there is so much to share with you! Again, please know how happy I am to be here with you at Nativity School. Please don't ever hesitate to call or email and let me know how I can help you or help your child.

May God continue to bless each one of us as we answer our CALL...to serve!