



Lent

During Lent, our student ambassadors delivered assemblies to all year groups with the scriptural themes of temptation and forgiveness. Student ambassadors wrote and delivered the assemblies which included their chosen charity drives, in line with the Catholic pillar of Lent -Almsgiving, and the Catholic Social Teaching of Servanthood.

This year, the students chose to support the CAFOD Big Lent Walk and run an Easter raffle. The Big Lent Walk was a resounding success which generated huge interest, where staff and students across all year groups were actively involved in fundraising. Parents, staff, students and external supporters were able to support the cause by sponsoring walkers through the CAFOD QR code. Collectively, students raised over £200.

Additionally, Sam, now in year 9 completed his Lenten charity walk over the same weekend. Sam kindly donated some of his fundraising to our CAFOD Big Lent Walk campaign. Sam joined his Mum and friends to walk over 22km across the North Downs for the Heart of Kent Walking Festival, Rail Ramble.

Our student ambassador team have taken over entirely the process of planning and delivering the assemblies and organising the fundraising events. Greater student ambassador involvement has led to wider student awareness and participation in these events, and in full circle, a further increase to students wanting to join the ambassadors team. Ambassadors are keen to report back to the student body their collective successes, giving them all a voice in our SJF community. Student ambassadors have commented that "My favourite bit is sharing the activities we're doing.", while another noted "What we have to say is important, and people listen.". Others have commented on the importance of helping those in need in our world, and how vital it is that we work together for the common good. As one student noted, "Everyone can do something."

Mission Statement:

'St. John Fisher Catholic Comprehensive School inspires students, spiritually and educationally forming them through Faith so that they can achieve their aspirations and contribute to their community.'

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Year 10 Residential Retreat

Fourteen Year 10 students visited the St Cassian's, De La Salle Retreat Centre for four days, accompanied by Mrs Drain and Mr O'Connell (a long serving member of staff who recently returned to our RE dept to support us). We were joined by St Simon Stock School who brought twelve Year 10 students and were accompanied by their Chaplain and their parish Deacon. The Year 10 programme led by the Lasallian youth leaders was themed 'Awareness and Belonging'. This included workshops, large and small group sessions, plus prayer and reflections, affirmations and a final closing liturgy. Students were led through drama, discussion, meditation, craft, dance, sport, a quiz and even a fashion show!

As with the Year 11 retreats, this retreat supported well-being, and by going on a physical journey it created a distance to a space to pause and reflect, helping students process their thoughts and emotions outside the expectations of the classroom. It helped them to get to know and understand themselves better, to increase their self-esteem and confidence. They were supported to make new friends with students from the other schools and discuss their faith beyond their friendship groups. It also helped them to both appreciate and increase their awareness of the place of God in our world and in their lives; in celebrating our faith together.

The night prayer sessions were truly humbling and profound, where the tangible presence of the Holy Spirit was at work. Mr O'Connell was able to share with the students his gratitude for their spiritual support and the work of the Lasallians, having been on retreat to the same venue over 48 years ago. By the end of the retreat, students were confidently able to discuss their faith and more assured in their abilities to go and speak with others about it. Living as a community in solidarity meant that in expressing fellowship, they were enabled to go into the world to model that experience, in evangelisation.

Students remarked that the highlights of the retreat were small group discussion and activities, and the outdoor activities and space. Their top take-aways were:

"To always be yourself and to live in the now."

"Learning to be more independent and socialising with other people."

"To be grateful and to live in the moment, to not waste time."

"To free myself a bit and relax."

"To enjoy and spend time with loved ones, appreciate my family, listen to God and take responsibility."

"To always make time to reflect on God and always try to read the scriptures."

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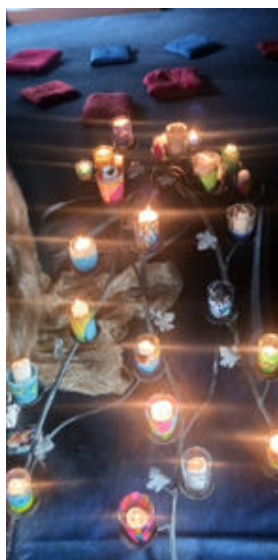


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Lent Masses with confession

We celebrated four Lent Masses this year, one each Friday morning in the run-up to Easter. It was a joy to welcome local clergy from the Rochester and Chatham parishes, staff, students and governors.

Students from our Prayer Ambassador group took responsibility for leading the readings, and additional students wrote and read their own prayer intentions for the prayers of the faithful. To further enhance the liturgy, singers from various year groups joined to sing the response to the Psalm, the Gospel Acclamation and lead us in an opening and closing hymn. Following the Masses, all parties were able to take the opportunity of individual Confession. This included any staff or students who were not able to attend the Mass.

We are delighted to see attendance numbers growing and students taking more active roles in planning and leading at Mass, providing more opportunity for personal formation. Please remember that all parents/carers are warmly invited to attend these Masses.

It is clear that students enjoy and appreciate the Masses, commenting on the importance of praising God together and feeling a part of our community and the service. One commented that "I can give glory to God in many ways through my gifts, I want to give back what is right," while another added that "These Masses make such a different start to the day, especially on a Friday when we're all tired and lack patience." Mass offers a valuable time for prayer and reflection, as one student said, while another simply summed it up: Mass "reminds me of why I'm here and sends me out with joy."

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