

Divine Mercy Academy



Family Handbook

2023-2024

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Prepare for life with seriousness and diligence. Always remember that only if one builds, as Saint Paul says, on the foundation which is Jesus Christ, will one be able to construct something really great and lasting. With the liveliness that is characteristic of your age, with the generous enthusiasm of your young hearts, walk towards Christ. He alone is the solution to all your problems. He alone is the way, the truth, and the life; He alone is the real salvation of the world; He alone is the hope of mankind.

Pope St. John Paul II

Speech to Children, Guadalajara, Mexico

Dear Parents and Students,

Welcome to Divine Mercy Academy! It is an honor to begin this unique partnership with you as we strive to educate our children in a truly Catholic and Classical manner. When we began this journey in 2019, we spent a considerable amount of time refining a mission statement. I think it would be prudent for us to walk through this together as we start off.

The mission of Divine Mercy Academy is to partner with parents in their role as primary educators to help students to flourish as disciples of Jesus Christ. Through a Catholic liberal arts education, we foster a love for truth, beauty, and goodness. Under the patronage of Our Lady, we aim to form Saints and Scholars to live freely and joyfully in accordance with the truth revealed by God through nature and the Catholic Church.

Pope St. John Paul II brought the message of Divine Mercy to the world through his teaching and in the way he lived his life. In his encyclical on Divine Mercy, he states, "The Message of Divine Mercy has always been near and dear to me... which I took with me to the See of Peter and which, in a sense, forms the image of this Pontificate."

Pope St. John Paul II describes Divine Mercy as the answer to the world's problems and the message of the third millennium. Not only did he beatify and canonize Sr. Maria Faustina Kowalska, the nun associated with the message, he also established Divine Mercy Sunday (the feast day associated with the message) as a feast day for the entire Church. On that day, Pope John Paul II declared, "This is the happiest day of my life." Over and over again, Pope John Paul II communicated the need for us to turn to the mercy of God as the answer to the problems of our times. Remarkably, Pope John Paul II died on the Vigil of Divine Mercy Sunday (the evening before the feast day).

We have named ourselves Divine Mercy Academy, as we seek to manifest Pope St. John Paul II's message about the answer to the problems of today.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in paragraphs 2223, 2225, 2226, and 2228 states, "Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by *creating a home* where tenderness, forgiveness,

respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for *education in the virtues*. This requires an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery - the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the "material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones"... Through the grace of the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the responsibility and privilege of *evangelizing their children*. Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the "first heralds" for their children. They should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church. *Education in the faith* by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God. The parish is the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents...As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to *choose a school for them* which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental. As far as possible parents have the duty of choosing schools that will best help them in their task as Christian educators."

Divine Mercy Academy will not take on the "grave primary duty" of parents to educate and train their children in the Catholic faith, but we will assist parents in their task as Christian educators by providing a spiritually nourishing and intellectually challenging environment that will correspond to the convictions of parents whose primary goal is to prepare their children for eternal life in heaven.

The aim of Catholic Liberal Education is Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, which are called the "Transcendentals". These transcendentals are the ultimate desires of man. They transcend all space and time, pointing toward the objective Truth that is God.

Our focus is in forming faithful young adults, instilled with wisdom and virtue. Wisdom empowers a person "to judge and order all things in accordance with divine norms and with a connaturality that flows from a loving union with God." So while knowledge and understanding enable a person to know and to penetrate the divine truths, wisdom moves us to "fall in love" with them. We want our children to "fall in love" with Jesus Christ. Moreover, we are inculcating virtue. CCC 1803 states, "A virtue is an habitual and firm disposition to do good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the

good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions. The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God.” We want our children to fall in love with God and to be like Him. The natural extension of this relationship with God is to then witness to others about God by word and action. Pope Benedict XVI says, “The proclamation of the Gospel remains the primary service that the Church owes to humanity, to offer the salvation of Christ to the man of our time, who is in many ways humiliated and oppressed, and to orientate in a Christian way cultural, social, and ethical transformations that are unfolding in the world.”¹ Additionally, he exhorts us to “[h]elp each other to live and to grow in the Christian faith so as to be valiant witnesses of the Lord. Be united, but not closed. Be humble, but not fearful. Be simple, but not naive. Be thoughtful, but not complicated. Enter into dialogue with others, but be yourselves.”²

We seek to partner with parents in creating disciples of Jesus Christ – by educating students in the Truth and providing an environment where the Truth can be freely lived out. Our chosen instrument in this is a Classical Liberal Arts Education. But do we really know what we mean when we say ‘classical education’? Most of us have not been classically educated, so do we really know what it is? Could we explain it or defend it well to someone else? We want to avoid descriptions which imply that we simply teach Latin in addition to other courses... So what should we say? It’s important that we all understand the how and why... We need to understand the very real way in which all of the hard work over the past several years has brought us to a place where we can offer this best sort of schooling – classical.

According to Aristotle, you know what something is when you know its four causes: the material cause, the efficient cause, the formal cause, and the final cause. The formal cause is the thing’s shape or soul. The material cause is what it is made of. The efficient cause is who or what makes it, and the final cause is what its purpose is. Let’s now apply this to classical education.

Let’s begin with the material cause – the child itself. Our aim is the proper formation of the child, plain and simple. Next is the efficient cause – the tutor. While curricula and texts are important, it is really the tutor who brings these things to life in the mind of the child. The tutor leads their students in their pursuit of wisdom and virtue. It is

¹ Pope Benedict XVI Links Evangelization and True Peace, Vatican City, October 7, 2007

² Pope Benedict XVI, Genoa, Italy, May 18, 2008

therefore vitally important that our tutors be devout, orthodox Catholics who are striving to be saints.

The formal cause is the goal of the tutor with the instruction – the desired end of a child fully formed in accordance with their capacity, body and soul – filled with virtue and armed with true wisdom.

The tools of this process will be the great works of literature and truths spoken by the best minds of Western Civilization. They will know how to think, and what (the right thing is) to do.

One of the tools in this process is Latin. Latin teaches our students mental discipline. It's rigorous and systematic. Latin was the language of the Christian faith for over a thousand years, and possesses a critical place in classical education.

The final cause is simply to develop children of God, who will know, love, and serve God in this life, and become saints, happy with Him in eternity.

In summary, classical education begins with a child (material cause), who is taught by a tutor (efficient cause), to think and speak well via studying Latin, great books... the liberal arts (formal cause), for the greater glory of God (final cause)!

It is my hope that each of us will continue to grow in our understanding and appreciation of Catholic Liberal education during this academic year. As we work to bring these beautiful subjects alive for your children, rest assured that we will be doing everything we can to achieve that final cause.

Jesus we trust in you!

Deo gratias,

Ali H. Ghaffari
Board President
Divine Mercy Academy

TRUTH ~ BEAUTY ~ GOODNESS

2023-2024 HANDBOOK

*“Be not conformed to this world,
but be transformed by the renewal of your mind
that you may discern what is the will of God,
what is good, pleasing and perfect.”*

Romans 12:2

The Mission and Philosophy of Divine Mercy Academy

The Mission of Divine Mercy Academy

The mission of Divine Mercy Academy is to partner with parents in their role as primary educators to help students to flourish as disciples of Jesus Christ. Through a Catholic liberal arts education, we foster a love for truth, beauty, and goodness. Under the patronage of Our Lady, we aim to form Saints and Scholars to live freely and joyfully in accordance with the truth revealed by God through nature and the Catholic Church.

The Vision of Divine Mercy Academy

Divine Mercy Academy contributes to a renaissance of the Catholic intellectual tradition and a renewal of the Catholic Church with on-fire, faithful families, strengthening our Church and Nation as a whole.

School Philosophy

We believe that Divine Mercy Academy students are entitled to an excellent academic education provided in a caring atmosphere with Christian values. To assist us in meeting this goal, we must have a strong Catholic Identity, varying educational techniques, and active parental support. We strongly encourage parents to become involved in the life of the school, just as the school seeks to support the life of the family.

Catholic Identity

The student’s growth in faith is the central purpose for Divine Mercy Academy. Students are challenged to achieve their highest potential. They are encouraged to live their faith in word and deed in their church and larger community.

Board of Directors and Tutors

Divine Mercy Academy Board Members and tutors are required to witness by their public behavior, actions, and words a life consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church. They also recognize the importance of a classical liberal arts education, and advocate the Catholic position that the parents are the primary educator of the child.

Catholic Culture Association

The Divine Mercy Academy Catholic Cultural Association (DMA CCA) is composed of dedicated parents and tutors who work together to enrich the Catholic culture of the broader school community. It does this inwardly, by being a vehicle for service and fundraising for the school and outwardly, by providing opportunities for family faith formation and community building. In doing this, the DMA CCA provides an example for our students that together we can make a difference for good in our community.

The DMA CCA operates in an atmosphere of trust and cooperation with the school in consideration of respect of the distinctive qualities, talents, abilities, and needs of each person. CCA members should feel empowered through the organization to articulate questions, concerns, or issues with the school from its members to the headmaster and, if needed, to the DMA Board through its own President, who sits as its representative, on the Board.

“That they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” John 17:21

Students

Divine Mercy Academy aims at inspiring its students to become faithful, virtuous, and intelligent disciples of Jesus Christ, who seek to embrace the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. Such a goal is essential to a school that models itself in the Catholic tradition, for catholicity involves the response of wonder at the recognition that all that is true, good, or beautiful is of God and, indeed, is a manifestation of one or another aspect of God’s nature. The integration of faith, virtue, and reason that we seek to achieve in our school’s curriculum finds its attestation – so we prayerfully hope – in the lives of our students. With respect to faith, we seek to set before students the Tradition in the embrace of which they may journey toward their ultimate end—Beatitude with God. With respect to intellectual virtue, far more important than students merely fostering

intellectual ability is promoting the desire to understand, a willingness to face challenging questions, and a tenacious diligence in the pursuit of learning. With respect to moral virtue, we encourage students to acquire the Cardinal Virtues, enlivened by the Theological Virtues, through engagement in co-curricular activities, charitable acts of mercy, and in the pursuit of the common good in the public square. Divine Mercy Academy aims to introduce young men and women to the Great Conversation, a conversation informed by familiarity with the great ideas and the perennial debates that swirl about them. Our graduates will have begun the intellectual journey in which they gain insight into first principles, learn how to express themselves logically and eloquently, and acquire an integrated body of knowledge. They will therefore be preparing a solid foundation upon which to build their lives and go into the world pursuing faithfully, boldly, and charitably vocations that serve Christ and His Church.

Parents

Parents, the primary educators of their children, establish a partnership with Divine Mercy Academy when they choose our institution. This choice implies that parents trust and support the school in her mission, goals, curriculum, and forms of teaching and discipline. When issues arise, parents are expected to seek resolution of them in orderly, charitable ways, collaborating with the school's administration and faculty. Only when parents and the school truly work as a team can the formation of young men and women be successful. Parents typically contribute to this formation at home, where they can make their homes to be environments supportive of the habits of faith, sound moral character, and intellectual culture. Parents who send their children to school are not absolved from their responsibility to teach their children the Faith:

Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God.³

³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2226. 13 Educating Young People in Justice and Peace (Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2012).

Likewise, it is expected that parents oversee the academic progress of their children by offering assistance to them in school studies, organization, and general habits of personal and academic responsibility. Of great importance, too, is parental attendance at school events and volunteering to work at school activities. Parents contribute to their child's formation at school when they assume that the faculty and administration will act in good faith and when they initiate communication about their own particular needs and concerns — and rightly hold the school accountable for a timely, appropriate response. We are obliged to provide such a response, for we realize that parents remain the primary educators of their children and have the moral duty to guide their children towards responsible adulthood. **These commitments are reflected in the family-school agreement, which is included at the end of this Handbook. All families are expected to sign the agreement and return it to the school.**

Faculty

The ultimate aim of the educational vision set forth in this document demands that Divine Mercy Academy recruit and continuously form a faculty that fully embraces and bears witness to the unity of faith and reason, the Catholic understanding of the human person, to the authentic character of a liberal education, and to the school's particular mission. At all levels, members of such a faculty should be committed to the intellectual life in its fullest meaning with an enduring sense of wonder about God and His creation and with a habitual desire for the attainment of wisdom — that is, the intellectual, emotional, and artistic maturation of the human person. They must have a Catholic mind and heart and a desire to cultivate Catholicity in the school's students. As Pope Benedict XVI writes:

Education is the most interesting and difficult adventure in life. Educating—from the Latin *educere*—means leading young people to move beyond themselves and introducing them to reality, towards a fullness that leads to growth. This process is fostered by the encounter of two freedoms, that of adults and that of the young. It calls for responsibility on the part of the learners, who must be open to being led to the knowledge of reality, and on the part of educators, who must be ready to give of themselves. For this reason, today more than ever we need authentic witnesses, and not simply people who parcel out rules and facts; we need witnesses capable of seeing farther than others because their life is so much broader. A witness is someone who first lives the life that he proposes to others.

Tutors at Divine Mercy Academy endeavor to invite students into a world of mature faith, conversation, and behavior, a world that should daily be obvious to our students as they observe their tutors engaged in an ongoing pursuit of wisdom, marked by an integration of faith and reason to which the students are also summoned. The integration sought should not be that of an individual tutor, but of a fellowship of tutors in mutual communication and collaboration, for together we see farther than we do alone. The success of our school requires that the members of the faculty broaden their lives to each other, and that they seek the unity of a shared educational pursuit characterized by charity. To confirm these ends, tutors at Divine Mercy Academy are expected to sign a witness statement that is on file with the school.

General Information

Accreditation and Certification

Divine Mercy Academy is certified by the State of Maryland. The formal accreditation process is currently in progress. The classroom tutors are degreed in accordance with the Maryland Department of Education regulations. The Student-Tutor ratio is approximately 5.5:1.

Family–School Agreement

As the primary educators of their children, parents/guardians freely make the choice of a Catholic education for their sons/daughters. Registration and acceptance at Divine Mercy Academy, and signing of appropriate documents required by the school, including the family-school agreement included with this Handbook, constitutes an agreement by the parent/guardian to accept and abide by the rules and regulations of the institution and to support its philosophy of education.

Enrollment at Divine Mercy Academy

All families must sign an Enrollment Contract for the school year. This contract includes, but is not limited to, the recognition that the school must develop a working budget and parental obligation to pay tuition for the full academic year is unconditional. No portion of such fees, paid or outstanding, will be refunded or canceled. In the case of absence, withdrawal, or dismissal of children from the school, any and all of the tuition and fees are immediately due and payable.

Tuition

Please refer to the school's website for current tuition rates. Family discounts are available for multiple children of the same family enrolled during the same school year. A limited amount of financial assistance is available to families each year. See Tuition Assistance below. Tuition is paid through TADS.

Tuition Assistance

Parents should first apply for financial assistance through TADS. The DMA Head of Admissions utilizes the TADS system to determine awards for families.

A referral program is offered to current families who refer new families to Divine Mercy Academy. A \$500 tuition credit may be awarded if an existing family refers a new family that enrolls children at DMA. The credit is applied once the new family submits their signed contract. In the event of a financial assistance grant, the grant is awarded in lieu of additional discounts.

Withdrawal of Students

Families withdrawing students from Divine Mercy Academy should notify the school in writing as soon as possible. Once all financial obligations are met and a Release of Records form is received from the new school, official school records will be sent directly to the new school.

Parent Communication

Open communication between parents and school is always crucial to the success of the whole organization. You are welcome to contact the tutor whenever you have a question or concern about your child's education. Conferences with tutors are scheduled throughout the year, but additional arrangements may also be made as the needs arise.

In the event there is a concern involving your child, Divine Mercy Academy Policies, or procedures, the appropriate chain of command is:

1. Discuss the issue with the tutor concerned.
2. If you have approached the tutor and if problems persist, make an appointment with the Headmaster to discuss the problem.

3. The parent/guardian has the right to bring an issue not satisfactorily settled with the Headmaster to any member of the Governance Committee of the Board, where it will be discussed and a final decision rendered.

Student Information

It is very important that we have accurate addresses and phone numbers and emergency numbers. If you move or change your phone number, please let the office know immediately. If you will be out of town you must write a note and share a copy with the office and your child's tutor(s) indicating who is in charge of your child in case an emergency should occur.

School Directory

A school directory, listing all DMA students/families, is included on our EDUCATE communication site and will have families' names, addresses and phone numbers. If you do not want to be included, please indicate this within that system.

School Property

Divine Mercy Academy reserves the right to search student items brought onto school property. This includes, but is not limited to, the physical objects brought into school as well as any digital materials that may exist on an electronic device.

Smoking Policy

Smoking is not permitted on school grounds or in the school. "Smoking" includes, but is not limited to, cigarettes, electronic cigarettes, vapes, and any nicotine or tobacco product.

Cell Phones and other Electronic Devices

Please do not send your children to school with electronic devices (including headphones, apple watches, kindles, etc.) . If needed, the school office phone is available for students during these hours. If a cell phone or other electronic device is used, seen, or heard during school hours, it will be confiscated. It will be released to a parent or legal guardian.

Lunch and Snack

We provide a time for morning snack break. Children should come to school each day with a healthy lunch and snack, as well as milk, water or juice from home. DMA does

not provide microwaves to heat lunches. Parents are discouraged from delivering restaurant lunches for their children. Presently, snack and lunch take place within the classrooms though, when the weather and schedule permits, students may occasionally eat outside. Nut allergies restrictions will be promulgated as they impact us. The DMA school day runs from 8:00 until 3:20, please pack a healthy lunch and snack accordingly.

Recess Guidelines

Children go outside for recess daily. Please be sure your child is dressed appropriately for the weather. No child may be excused from recess without a daily written excuse or phone call from the parent or guardian. Excuses are only accepted for situations such as acute asthma or environmental allergy, fractures, etc. In the cases of extreme weather, recess plans will be changed in accordance with proper judgment.

Early Dismissal

A parent picking up a student early should send an email, a phone call, or a written note to school that morning. The child will be called from the classroom when the parent reports to the office. Please sign out at the front office.

No child, under any circumstance, will be allowed to leave school during the school day with an adult other than a parent or guardian without prior permission from the parent/guardian.

Tardiness

A student is tardy if he/she arrives after 8:00 am.

Dismissal Procedures

Student dismissal will begin promptly at 3:20 pm on regular school days and Noon on early dismissal days. Parents / Guardians are asked to wait in their cars in the carline which forms in the parking lot. Students will be escorted to their vehicles by DMA staff or parent volunteers. Only passenger side doors should be used for student loading. Please wait for the cars in front of you to move before moving forward or pulling out of the car line. Students who are not picked up by 3:30 pm on regular school days or 12:15 pm on early dismissal days will be taken to After Care.

Attendance

If your child is absent from school, a parent must report the absence—please call or email the school office by 9:00am. Whether you call or email when your child is not going to be at school, please leave the following information:

- child's name
- grade/tutor
- reason for absence
- homework plan if applicable

A note from parents to the school is to be sent by parents for each absence. If a student is absent for four consecutive days or more, a doctor's excuse must accompany the student upon return.

Vacations which occur over school days are strongly discouraged. This includes trips over multiple school days as well as extended trips over long weekends. While family celebrations, events, work requirements, etc. do come up, every effort should be made to plan vacations around school days. Students are required to visit each tutor to come up with a plan to make up missed work and to take any assessments that were missed.

Inclement Weather/Snow Day/Emergency Closing Procedures

We follow the Anne Arundel county school closing schedule in the event of inclement weather. The school will send an email and text when school is closing for weather no later than 6:45am. If weather conditions indicate the possibility of an early closing once school is already in session, parents will receive a text and email. If parents cannot arrive at school on time for the early closing, they should have a friend or family member assist them by picking up their child(ren). Stay and Play will not be available on any day school closes early for inclement weather.

Visitors

For the security of our school community, all doors are locked throughout the day. Parents and other visitors must report to the school administrator upon entering the building. When volunteering or visiting during school hours, you will be asked to sign in and out and you will be asked to wear a badge showing that you are a visitor. Parents dropping off a lunch, or other items, are to leave the item with office personnel who will deliver them.

Emergency Drills

To ensure orderly and safe evacuation of the school in emergency situations, we will regularly hold drills in accordance with Maryland State Law. Students will be taught how to evacuate safely in the event of fire, to shelter in place during a lockdown, and how to protect themselves during a weather emergency.

Health

An Annual Student Health Survey form is required for each student for updating the student's health file with current and pertinent information (updated at least every three years, or with a vaccine change, whichever is less). In the event of a serious accident during school hours, we will attempt to notify parents before any medical care is given. If an accident occurs during a field trip, the nearest medical care facility will be utilized.

According to the Maryland Department of Education a student should be temporarily excluded from school for:

- A temperature of 100 or higher – before returning to school, the child must go 24 hours without a fever without the use of fever reducing medication
- Most inflammatory eye conditions, such as pink eye
- Rashes or eczema that is known to be contagious or infectious
- Head cold of any consequence, especially with a persistent cough and excessive drainage
- Sore or inflamed throat -- if strep throat is diagnosed, the student needs to be on medication for at least 24 hours before returning to school
- Discharge from the ears
- Body lice or head lice
- Diarrhea

If your child is sent home ill with a possible contagious condition during the day, he/she will not be permitted to return to school that same day. Students who were sent home, or have been absent during the school day, may not participate in extracurricular events that day or evening. A fever should be gone for at least 24 hours (without the use of fever reducing medicine) before returning to school. Children who vomit at school must go home and remain home for 24 hours.

Medication Policy

All medication is kept in a locked medicine cabinet.

1. The school administration will administer all medications if at all possible, otherwise a parent will be called to administer the medication. Students are not permitted to medicate themselves at any time, with the exception of students who are authorized by their doctor to self-administer inhalers or Epi-pens (see allergy alerts).

2. All prescription medication to be administered during school hours must be in the original prescription container marked with the student's name, the name of the medication, the accurate dosage, and when it is to be administered. Any dosage changes must have a doctor's written statement (which may be faxed to the school) or a new original prescription container. All prescriptions must be current within the year.

3. All prescription medication, including inhalers that are administered on a regular basis, must have a completed "Prescribed Medication Permission Form" on file. This form can be obtained from the school office.

4. Medications, such as antibiotics, that are ordered to be given 3-4 times a day which necessitate a dose to be given during school hours, please request an extra bottle from the pharmacist so just the amount of medication needed at school can be sent in to avoid having the student carry the medication back and forth each day. Please communicate and arrange this with the front office as soon as possible.

5. Non-prescription medications to be given must also be in the original container (please, no baggies) with written authorization from a parent/guardian/medical professional detailing when the medication is to be given and the reason for giving it.

6. If it becomes necessary to give a student medication that is not kept at school, a parent/guardian may come to school and administer the medication. Please inform the office beforehand.

Allergy Alerts

It is the parent's responsibility to alert the school staff to allergies. Once informed, the school staff will take the necessary time to understand the child's allergies and will develop a plan that both reasonably protects the child and creates the least restrictive environment for the other children in the classroom and school. If a student carries an EPIPEN or inhaler with him/her, the physician's order must state this requirement.

Providing treats in school

Because we may have children with allergies, parents must first contact the tutor to inquire if treats are acceptable in class. The tutor will then take appropriate steps to ensure the safety and participation of everyone.

Curriculum

Divine Mercy Academy provides a liberal arts education for children in a Christ centered environment. Using the classical method, the order to our world is stressed in everything we do and throughout all the subjects our students study. Our children learn *how* to learn, acquiring the tools of learning which make this possible. Respecting the classical trivium, we strive to feed the soul as well as the intellect. Children respond beautifully to this approach to learning, quickly becoming people who love to learn. Divine Mercy Academy takes seriously our call to form “saints and scholars.”

Schedule:

See Appendix

Assessment

We will assess children on their growth in both character and academics. Report cards may use a variation of the grading scale as deemed appropriate by the classroom tutor. Grading in Kindergarten, First and Second Grade depends upon intellectual development and ability, growth in knowledge and skills, neatness, completion of work, and on task time. Grading in Third through Eighth Grade depends upon: assessments, quizzes, class participation, homework/daily work, projects/reports. We will assess children’s growth in character by measuring their behavior according to the Salesian Way.

Field Trips

All field trips are academic and/or spiritual in nature, and are aligned with grade level curriculum. A signed permission slip must be filled out for a student to participate in a field trip. Tutors and Administration have the right to prohibit a student from participating in a field trip when circumstances warrant. Parents are asked not to bring others along, including siblings, when they are chaperoning.

Homework

Homework is an essential part of the learning process. A certain amount of homework is necessary to reinforce what is taught at school. The student who successfully learns the process of completing homework also is mastering self-discipline, independence, initiative and responsibility. If minimum work requirements cannot be met, students will be placed on academic probation and placed on a program to assist them.

The purpose of homework is to foster habits of independent work-study, to reinforce learning that has taken place at school, and to relate school learning to out-of-school interests. Parents are asked to foster an atmosphere conducive to doing homework and stress the importance of the responsible completion of homework to the student. Homework includes written and/or study work, projects, and purposeful reading. Students at all grade levels are expected to complete homework assignments and turn them in on time. Assignments missed because of excused absences must be completed in the same amount of days that the student is absent.

Lower Grammar Stage (K-2)

Because the stages of the Trivium are aligned to a child's natural development, we believe that homework during the Grammar Stage should be minimal. The amount of concentration and effort expended during the school day should be such that the ability of students to learn material should be exhausted in school. Tutors are encouraged, however, to assign parent-child reading, narrations by the child to the parent, and other assignments that will bring parents and children together around learning. Minimal spelling, math, reading, memorization, etc., may be given as well. Work will be appropriate for the age and ability of each child.

Upper Grammar Stage (3-5)

In this stage, children continue in the Grammar Stage though some homework may be assigned to fostering a sense of responsibility and discipline. Homework assignments need not be lengthy, but should become slightly more structured. Tutors may assign tasks such as independent reading with brief narrations, practicing spelling and vocabulary, completing math exercises, observation in nature, and engaging in short-term projects to assist in the development of time management and organization.

Logic Stage (grades 6-8)

Beginning in the sixth grade, the child transitions to the logic stage of learning. Homework assignments, while not lengthy, should increase during this period. Students should be working

with math and reading on a daily basis. Independent, long-term projects allow students the opportunity to learn to manage time and prioritize tasks. These skills reinforce the learning that occurs during the school day, and serve to prepare the student for high school. Homework may include poetry recitation and practice, copy work, spelling sentences, math problems, fact study, reading a chapter, etc.

Tutors will:

- Check assignment book each day in class
- Provide assignments relevant to class work
- Use assigned homework as an assessment tool
- Consider the age and capabilities of the student when preparing assignments
- Consider the time required to complete an assignment

Parents will:

- Check assignment book each day at home
- Provide adequate time and a suitable place for the student to complete homework
- Be available for questions, but remember that homework is the child's responsibility
- Contact the tutor when their child consistently has difficulty completing assignments

Students will:

- Clarify homework instructions with the tutor
- Take home materials needed to complete assignment
- Budget time
- Return all completed work to the tutor by due date

Homework Assignment

- For Kindergarten, the tutor will communicate assignments to parents through homework journals, handouts or electronic means.
- Students in all grades will use the provided assignment notebook

Make-Up Work

Students who have an excused absence have the same amount of time missed to make-up missed work. Example: If a student was ill two days, then they have two days, upon return to school, to complete and turn in missed assignments/activities.

Homework may be requested before 9:30 a.m. on the day of the absence. Homework will be placed in the school front office to be picked up.

Physical Education

Students attend P.E. each week. Participation is expected except when a child has a note from a doctor releasing him/her from gym class. A doctor's note is required indicating the appropriate level of P.E. activity if a student has sustained a fracture or injury. If a student has worn a cast or a splint, a doctor's note is required to resume PE activity.

Promotion and Retention

Students who have successfully completed grade requirements will be promoted to the next grade. However, a tutor/administrator may decide it is in the child's best interest due to academic or emotional immaturity to retain that student in his/her current grade level. Parents will be notified by the beginning of the third trimester if a student is in jeopardy of being retained.

Kindergarten-1

A decision to retain a student in the Kindergarten program shall be based on the progress of the child, especially with regards to the level of maturity attained and the ability to handle the academic program of the next grade. This decision will be a consultative one involving the tutor, parents, and administration.

Grades 2-4

Inability to read causes more children to experience failure or lack of progress in school than any other single factor. The foundation in reading is laid in the primary grades, especially the first two grades. Hence, in the primary grades, promotion is to be determined mainly by the student's progress in reading. It is important to determine the overall ability of the student.

Grades 5-8

Students in grades 5-8 are required to pass all core classes. Promotion to the next grade also demands that students maintain a general average of 70% or above.

Reports to Parents

Reports of your child's progress will be made during the year. Report cards are sent home at the conclusion of each trimester. A mandatory Parent/Tutor Conference is scheduled in the fall and additional conferences will be provided upon request throughout the year.

If a tutor observes that a child is having difficulty with classroom work, parents will be notified by phone or in writing and an appointment may be made to discuss the child's progress. Report Cards and notes home are tools to communicate how your student is progressing in school.

Discipline

Discipline Policy:

The goal is to form disciples of Christ by encouraging virtuous living and clear expectations of behavior and the consequences for not following them. We hold up the Salesian Way as our code of conduct. (See appendices)

The following have been determined by administration, faculty, and staff to be the non-negotiable essential requirements of a well-mannered DMA student:

1. Walk in the hallways.
2. Listen while others are talking.
3. Keep your hands, feet, and objects to yourself.
4. Do not threaten another with physical violence or verbal abuse (includes name calling, humiliation, gossip, bad language).
5. Be honest. Do not steal or cheat.
6. Greet adults and each other with courtesy. Stand up when an adult enters a classroom and greets the class.
7. Be in full uniform each day.
8. Electronic devices are not allowed at school unless specifically requested by the tutor.
9. Participate in class and follow tutor assignments.
10. Take care of books and school property. Do not cause vandalism or damage.

A Behavior Incident Report will be emailed and sent home with any student who gets three misbehavior incidents in one week (from any tutor, in any class).

Any family whose student either 1) threatens physical violence or verbal abuse or 2) cheats or steals will get an immediate phone call from the tutor or member of the Leadership Team.

In the case of physical violence, the student accused will not be allowed back in school until the parent conference takes place.

The consequence for premeditated intent to harm with physical violence:

1st offense – one day suspension, write out plan for improvement, letter of apology

2nd offense – asked to leave school, must pay balance of full year tuition

The consequence for verbal abuse:

1st offense: one day in-school suspension, letter of apology, write out plan for improvement

2nd offense: two day in-school suspension

3rd offense: asked to leave school, must pay balance of full year tuition

Vandalism and deliberate damage to property must be replaced at the expense of the parents. In addition, there will be in-school community service hours.

The Administration reserves the right to limit all school-related extracurricular activity participation based on a student's conduct and/or effort grade.

Harassment and Intimidation

Harassment or intimidation shall include, but not be limited to, verbal or physical threats, offensive or threatening communications, gossip, unwanted or offensive contact, obscene or threatening gestures, or other form of willful conduct intended to place someone in fear or in physical danger. Students making such threats in any form face detention, suspension, and/or expulsion.

School Policy also strictly prohibits any form of sexual harassment, which shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

- inappropriate or unwanted physical contact (e.g. grabbing or touching a person's private areas);
- inappropriate physical gestures (e.g. rude hand gestures or exposing private areas of the body);

- inappropriate language or suggestions of a sexual nature; and derogatory and/or offensive jokes and comments

Bullying

Bullying is a form of violence that hurts others and it is strictly prohibited at Divine Mercy Academy. Parents and tutors should be alert to bullying at school or during school-sponsored activities where a student or group of students intentionally and repeatedly uses their power to hurt other individuals or groups. Bullies' power can come from their physical strength, age, financial status, popularity, social status, technological skills, or by association.

Cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying occurs when any person is tormented, threatened, harassed, humiliated, embarrassed or otherwise targeted by another individual or group using the Internet, interactive and digital technologies or cell phones. We reserve the right to discipline students for actions taken off-campus if actions are intended to have an effect on another student or they adversely affect the safety and well-being of a student while in school.

Reporting Harassment or Bullying

Any occurrence of bullying or harassment should immediately be reported to a student's tutor and / or the administration. The Head Tutor will investigate the incident and take appropriate disciplinary action, if necessary.

Public Displays of Affection/ Romance at School

While at school, at school sponsored events, or when representing the school in any capacity, students are not permitted to engage in public displays of romantic affection with other students which include, but are not limited to, holding hands, kissing, sitting on laps, embracing, or other romantic gestures. The final discretion of what is developmentally appropriate or otherwise rests with the school.

School Uniforms

School uniforms are designed to take the pressure off competition and economic status for students. Uniforms encourage a neat, consistent appearance and assist students as they concentrate on their studies. The uniform code is strictly enforced by the school

faculty and administration. All uniforms should be clean, pressed and free of holes. Shoes and socks must be worn at all times.

1. All Grade levels:

a. All students shall wear a DMA uniform (or after-school activity specific dress) from the moment they step onto campus until when they depart.

b. All students will wear a DMA Royal Blue collared shirt with the logo on the left breast.

This shirt shall be ordered from Land's End.

c. Before November 1st and on or after April 1st, boys shall wear non-pleated khaki shorts with a brown belt and white crew socks. Younger boys who may have trouble with a belt are excused from this requirement. During these times, girls shall wear Khaki skirts (with black bike shorts) with white crew socks.

d. Between November 1st and March 31st, boys shall wear non-pleated light khaki pants with a brown belt to complement their shoes. Girls shall wear black leggings with calf-length black socks such that no skin is showing. All skirt hems must fall at or below the knee.

e. A white undershirt may be worn under the uniform shirt.

f. A navy v-neck pullover with the DMA logo may be worn during cooler weather.

With the tutor's permission, a grey fleece jacket with the DMA logo may also be worn in the classroom during cooler weather. The Fleece shall not be wrapped around the waist, but rather hung on the back of a chair.

Once you have the jacket in hand, bring it to Propst and Sons in Pasadena to have them embroider it with the DMA logo.

g. Hair should be clean and not be a cause of distraction and prevent learning. It should be pulled out of the face. All accessories, including girls' hair bands/ties and barrettes, should be conservative and complement the uniform (Royal Blue or White).

h. No make-up or face glitter is to be worn by students at any time. No fingernail polish or lip gloss will be allowed. A basic chapstick is permitted for personal use only.

i. For the 2023-2024 school year, all students will wear white socks and brown dress shoes. This includes the brown Bucks and Mocs and includes other brands and styles of brown dress shoes.

DMA Physical Education 2022-2023 *Sportswear*

DMA PE Uniforms can be ordered from Land's End

1. Children must have their own non-scuff (light colored soles) tennis shoes to change into on PE days. Tennis shoes should be in good condition, no light-up or neon colored shoes. Solid neutral colors are preferred.

DMA Uniform Locker

The DMA Uniform Locker has an inventory of new and used uniform items that have been donated or unclaimed from the lost and found. If your child needs a uniform item that is in stock, you can buy that item at a discounted price, receive it within a day or two, and the proceeds go directly to DMA.

The administration reserves the right to determine the definition of appropriate school dress. Parents may be called to bring a change of clothes for students who are inappropriately dressed. The children generally go outside, even when the weather is cold. During these times, it is necessary for them to have hats, gloves, scarves, etc.

Occasionally DMA allows students to have “Dress Down Days” where they may dress out of uniform. Children may wear jeans, khakis or other clean, casual type slacks with appropriate tops. T-shirts, sweatshirts, etc. may be worn, but they must be appropriate to the Catholic environment of DMA. It is permissible for girls to wear a casual skirt on “out of uniform” days, as long as the skirt follows the guidelines for uniform skirts and the hem touches the top of the knee or longer.

Requirements for All Grades

Hair must be clean and neat

No dyed or spiked hair

No bizarre cuts or designs

Hair accessories should be simple; no scarves or dangling headbands may be worn

For boys, hair should be cut above the eyebrows and around the ears; hair should not fall over the collar

Jewelry

For safety reasons no dangling earrings will be permitted.

No bracelets or necklaces (aside from a miraculous medal on a chain) may be worn. For boys, other than a Christian medal on a chain, and/or a watch no jewelry is permitted.

DMA Physical Education 2022-2023 *Sportswear*

1. Students will need to wear their DMA PE uniform on their PE days.
2. The PE uniform consists of blue shorts and a gray t-shirt with logos. Gray sweatpants and sweatshirts with logos are to be worn in winter. All PE items should be purchased through Land's End.
3. Children must have their own non-scuff (light colored soles) tennis shoes to change into on PE days. Tennis shoes should be in good condition, no light-up or neon colored shoes. Solid neutral colors are preferred.
4. Children need to be dressed in a complete PE uniform on PE days. No mixing pieces from regular uniform in with PE uniform.

Warn my children to avoid the precipices of pride and haughtiness and to walk in the pleasant meadows of modesty; not to be dazzled by the sight of gold; not to lament that they do not possess what they erroneously admire in others; not to think more of themselves for gaudy trappings, nor less for the want of them; neither to deform the beauty that nature has given them by neglect, nor to try to heighten it by artifice; to put virtue in the first place, learning in the second; and in their studies to esteem most whatever may teach them piety towards God, charity to all, and Christian humility themselves.

These, I consider the real and genuine fruits of learning, and I would maintain that those who give themselves to study with such intent will easily attain their end and become perfect.

Saint Thomas More to his children's tutors

Faculty and Staff

Patrick Sullivan, M.A.

Headmaster

Patrick earned his bachelor's degree from Loyola University Maryland with a double major in Elementary Education and Theology; from there he went on to earn a Master's degree in Theology, with a specialization in Catechesis from the University of Notre Dame. Prior to Divine Mercy Academy, he worked for ten years at Gonzaga College High School in Washington, DC and is currently finishing a post-graduate certificate program in Catholic school leadership through Villanova.

Raised in an Irish-Catholic home, Patrick learned early on the importance of great stories, rich songs, devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and, of course, the joy of vibrant family life. Hailing from Long Island, he also learned that the best pizza and bagels can only be found back home. Today, Patrick is an avid long distance runner and competitive marathoner. When not at school or out running, he loves spending time with his wife and daughters - usually reading plenty of books, playing with Lego, and watching the NY Mets.

A lover of the saints, Patrick is particularly moved by the examples of everyday holiness found in the lives of men and women like Pier Giorgio Frassati, Zelig and Louis Martin, Karol and Emilia Wojtyla, and, of course, St. Joseph. As G. K. Chesterton said, "The most extraordinary thing in the world is an ordinary man and an ordinary woman and their ordinary children." Patrick is thrilled to be a part of this extraordinary Divine Mercy family.

Jacqueline Dolch

Office Administrator

Jacqueline Dolch is a Maryland native and mother to three children aged 13, 12, and three. She has been married to her husband, Michael, for 16 years. She and her husband lived in the Greenville, SC area for 13 years where they enjoyed a rich, authentically Catholic parish and school. She volunteered in a variety of positions at both their parish and school until she was hired as the school secretary in 2017. The Dolch family relocated to Pasadena at the end of 2019 to be near family and enrolled in Divine Mercy Academy for the 2021-2022 academic year. After working in corporate America for over a year, she is excited to be back working in Catholic education. In her free time, she enjoys volunteering, baking, and gardening.

Claire Horvath

Finance

Claire Horvath has been married for 40 years. She is the mother of 4 and Nana to 10! She and her husband Dave have run a successful small business for 30 years. Their girls grew up working in the store and now one of their daughters has taken the reins.

The Horvath family moved to Pasadena in 2001 and joined St. Jane Frances Parish where they jumped in to help where they could. In 2011, Claire was asked to change her status at church from volunteer to employee and took on the position of Youth Minister. During her 8 years in this role, she helped build a dynamic youth program for both high school and middle school youth as well as an Altar Server program for the church. Highlights for her were the week long "Work Camps" with the older youth.

Claire was asked to move from Youth Ministry to Administrator of Family Formation at the parish in 2019 when that position became available. She spent a year and a half working to solidify the family formation programs as well as working with all who wanted to receive sacraments. Claire joined DMA in 2021.

Megan McHale, M.Ed.

Humanities Tutor - Kindergarten

Megan McHale grew up in Pittsburgh, PA and holds a master's degree in Special Education from Duquesne University. After moving to Maryland in 2005, she spent four years as a Special Education tutor in Howard County, instructing elementary schoolchildren with various disabilities and supporting their needs in general education classrooms. Megan and her husband have four boys. She homeschooled for eight years, has taught classes for several Catholic homeschool cooperatives, and is a Level 1 catechist in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program. In all settings, she seeks to motivate and engage her students in learning new skills by drawing upon their individual strengths and interests. In addition to her background in education, Megan also has a great love for the arts. She studied ballet from the age of 10 through college and still relishes the thrill of stepping inside a theater to attend a musical or dance performance. She is excited to be at Divine Mercy Academy where she can freely pursue truth, goodness, and beauty!

Cathy Sitzwohl

Tutor Aide

Cathy started her career out of Loyola College in 1987 as a Systems Analyst before pursuing a certificate in Early Childhood Education. Teaching in the public school system did not last long before she became an Administrative Assistant for Software Consortium. Cathy gave up that job after eight years to raise her two children, which included homeschooling them through eighth grade. She is very involved in several ministries at her parish, St. John the Evangelist, including a Spiritual Bouquet Ministry for the clergy, the Seven Sisters Apostolate, the Mental Health Companions and the Catholic Daughters of the Americas. She loves to travel and pilgrimage to new places and points out that her favorite pilgrimage was to the Holy Land in the Fall of 2022. She has been married to her husband, Mark, for 21 years and with her children going to school in opposite directions of their home in Millersville, Cathy is a firm believer in doing God's will and what friends told her years ago, that it takes a village to raise a child. She is excited to be able to share that which is true, beautiful and good with the children at DMA, where she substituted in prior years.

Igaitte Schilke, M.Ed.

Humanities Tutor - 1st Grade (Lead)

Igaitte is excited to be a member of a truly authentic Catholic school! Igaitte received a bachelor's degree in psychology from Regis College and earned a masters degree in education from Old Dominion University. She has been working in the education field for over 15 years, ten of those years in first grade in both the public school and private school system.

Igaitte has a true passion for working with our youngest learners! Helping each child progress in all areas of their development is a challenge that she is honored to accept daily - she strives to create a community of believers and learners. Born and raised in Saudi Arabia, Igaitte's family attended mass in the persecuted church. The devotion her parents and parish demonstrated led her to become a believer who, through the years, became bolder and more passionate about living and sharing God's Word with others. Igaitte has been married to her highschool sweetheart for 30 years. After a whirlwind of twenty years as a Marine Corps wife, she and her family moved to Annapolis. She has two amazing children, grown and married and a grandson on the way. In her spare time you can find her watering her garden, walking her golden retriever Clarence, reading or tailgating at Navy games.

Anne Marie Kubik, RN

Humanities Tutor - 1st Grade

Anne Marie Kubik graduated from Villanova University in 1999 with a BS in nursing. Upon graduation she was commissioned as an officer in the Army Nurse Corp. She served honorably for six years specializing in OB/GYN with various assignments in HI, CA, and VA. She volunteered as an instructor for Sacrament prep/Faith Formation for two years while on Active Duty. She entered civilian life in Maryland as a postpartum nurse and lactation consultant at Saint Agnes Hospital. She volunteered for seven years performing Ultrasounds and teaching parenting classes at the Severna Park/Annapolis/Bowie Pregnancy Clinic. She has been married for 16 years and has 4 children whom she homeschooled using a classical Catholic curriculum for the last nine years. She is excited to join the staff at Divine Mercy Academy and share in their vision of making saints. When not in the classroom, you can find her on a hiking trail enjoying God's creation.

Lisa O'Keefe

Humanities Tutor - 2nd Grade

Mrs. O'Keefe graduated cum laude from Vanderbilt University in 1998, dual majoring elementary education (K-8) and special education (Birth-21). She then taught in the Tucson Arizona public school system from 1998-2001. After marrying and starting a family, she chose to stay home and homeschool for 10 years. She and her family moved to Maryland in 2004, where she came into the Catholic faith during Easter of 2005 at St. John the Evangelist in Severna Park. Since then, she has instructed in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and taught preschool through third grade classes. An avid hockey fan, when she is not spending time with her husband and four children, she is cheering for the "Caps", reading, doing puzzles, organizing things and people, and traveling to new locations.

Debra Kampsen

Nature Studies Tutor and 2nd Grade Tutor Assistant

Debra comes to us from the St. Thomas Aquinas Tutorial, where she taught fourth grade for four years and is a longtime enthusiast and advocate for Catholic classical education. A homeschooling mom of four grown children, she was at the beginning of the homeschool movement in Europe while living in Germany as a military spouse. She found inspiration from the likes of Charlotte Mason, Dorothy Sayers and Mortimer Adler.

While homeschooling her own children, Debra also worked with the Stuttgart area homeschooling co-op where she developed a love and expertise in the instruction of classical literature and poetry.

She has a background in music and studied under classical pianist Vasilios Boobas. Debra has also worked professionally as music director in Annapolis, where she also currently teaches piano lessons in her private home studio.

Cheryl Shoots, M. Ed.

Humanities Tutor - 3rd Grade

Cheryl has been in the educational field for over 40 years. She holds a Bachelor of Education degree with a combined focus in special and elementary education along with graduate work at the University of Maryland focusing on Human Development. Her teaching background includes classroom teaching from PK-8th gr, resource teaching at the elementary and high school level, homeschooling, and working as a tutor consultant. She has taught parenting classes and truly enjoys working with parents of her students. As a member of a grant writing team, she was able to partner with Johns-Hopkins Applied Physics Lab to research and develop a program to assist elementary school tutors with their “math phobia!” This opportunity paired very well with a passion of Cheryl’s (although the students were much older!) - to make sure that every student in her classroom comes to realize what a gift they are to all and what their God-given gifts are that they are called to share with others.

Cheryl and her husband, Craig, have 4 children and 4 beautiful grandchildren. They have lived in various places over the years, but have been very happy being Maryland residents for 40+ years.

Eileen Chey

Humanities Tutor - 4th Grade

Eileen Chey holds a Bachelors degree in Studio Arts from William Paterson University in Wayne, New Jersey. She has worked with children for more than ten years as caretaker and camp counselor, but also directed the K-8 summer program at Oak Knoll School (NJ). She taught third grade in a private school (Koinonia Academy) for two years and volunteered in young adult ministry events for the Archdiocese

of Newark, where she met her husband Sam. She volunteered in his parish ministry programs, accompanying the youth group on mission trips and to conferences before they were married in 2009. Eileen homeschooled her older two children for two years, working with a Montessori-focused co-op. Sam and Eileen decided to leave their lake town life so her husband could pursue an opportunity to work in ministry with the Archdiocese of Baltimore. She was grateful to find Divine Mercy Academy and is enjoying teaching and praying with the children and connecting with their families.

Rina Brown

Humanities Tutor - 5th Grade

Rina, born and raised in Ohio, has been married for 30 years, and has two wonderful children, and a feisty poodle. She graduated from Youngstown State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in mathematics and worked in the actuarial field as a pension consultant. She then moved to Europe, for an exciting 3 ½ year adventure, where she traveled extensively and taught conversational English.

She started her journey in classical education over ten years ago and continues to hone her skills by participating in various learning opportunities. She loves the freedom of Catholic liberal education and the honor it pays to God's creation by respecting each student's mind, body, and soul.

Rina enjoys volunteering as a Master Gardener, hiking and walking with her family, reading, working on art projects and trying new recipes. You might also see her and her husband riding their tandem bike on the B & A trail! She also enjoys traveling with her family to the beautiful U.S. national parks.

She loves working together with DMA parents to help their children grow in faith, virtue, and wisdom.

Susan Lawson

Tutor Aide

Susan grew up in the Catskill mountains of New York and earned her Bachelor's degree from Fordham University with a double major in History and Theology and a minor in Italian language. She had a focus in Medieval history and the early 20 th Century Catholic immigrant church in America. She continues to have a passion for learning history from all eras and travel to areas of historical significance.

Susan has been a devoted wife to her Naval Aviator husband, LCDR Christopher Lawson and full-time mother to their four sons, Dimitri, Andrew, Daniel, and Patrick. Having moved from coast to coast every few years, the Lawsons are fortunate to have been homesteaded in Maryland for the past 8 years. They are parishioners at Our Lady of the Fields in Millersville, MD. Raised in a devout Irish-Italian Catholic household, Susan has a special devotion to numerous saints and the Blessed Mother. Her parents instilled in her a love of the traditions of the Church and sacred music and art. She was fortunate enough to grow up near the place where St. Kateri Tekakwitha was born and the Jesuit Saints Goupil, Jogues, and LaLande were martyred. As a teen, she made several pilgrimages there, and now enjoys taking her children to the shrine in Auriesville, NY and teaching them about the saints. While at Fordham University, she attended Mass at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel on Arthur Avenue and joined the choir, singing at the Italian High Mass every Sunday. She also, as her senior thesis, wrote the 100 th Anniversary Parish History of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and its impact on the Italian-Americans in the Bronx.

While new to Divine Mercy Academy, Susan has been heavily involved in Classical education for over 10 years. In both Corpus Christi, TX and Crownsville, MD, her children have been enrolled in Classical Christian schools where she has volunteered hundreds of hours, providing assistance to her children's tutors, planning special events, cooking for the Greek and Roman festivals and Cowboy feasts, and guest lecturing history classes. Susan is thrilled to have her children attend a Classical Catholic school and be able to work at her children's school.

Jack Grimes

Humanities Tutor - 6th Grade

Jack Grimes has been serving Divine Mercy Academy since 2019. Jack earned a bachelor's degree in Philosophy and Political Science from Tufts University. He worked several years as Senior Legislative Aide for a State Assemblyman in New Jersey. After beginning graduate studies in Theology at Seton

Hall, he discovered a passion and talent for teaching, which he put to use as a volunteer catechist and later as a full-time academic mentor for BrainStorm Tutoring. For more than five years with BrainStorm, Jack worked with hundreds of students to prepare for all sections of the SAT and ACT, as well as improve in their high school Math and Humanities courses. Jack continues to offer tutoring privately through St. Catherine Test Prep. Formerly, Jack was the Director of Math Content Development for the Classic Learning Test, a new college entrance and high school assessment exam. Jack also teaches Geometry at Israel Henry Beren High School, the secondary school for Ner Israel Rabbinical College in Pikesville, and he was a founding faculty member for Chesterton Academy of Annapolis. Raised as a nominal Lutheran, Jack experienced a profound Evangelical conversion to love for Christ at the end of high school. Fervent pursuit of understanding the faith in college led to his reception into the Catholic Church on Divine Mercy Sunday a few years after graduation. Jack enjoys steering students towards reflection on the reality behind the grammar, reading, and math they are studying. As a tutor he loves to encourage thought about invisible nouns and intangible verbs, the power of questions and distinctions, and the elegance of equations so that his students have a chance to ponder the nature of truth, goodness, and beauty.

Kathy Kirby

Humanities Tutor - 7th Grade

Kathy Kirby obtained a BA in Political Science from Loyola College, Baltimore, after spending many childhood years with her family living in West Germany. She was both an active and reserve US Army officer before she and her husband Larry began raising their family, primarily in Severna Park, minus a 4-year assignment in Germany and 6 months in New Jersey. They have been married for 33 years and have seven children, ages 32-14, and one beloved daughter-in-law. Kathy and Larry completed 24 years of homeschooling their children (all through 8th grade) in June 2023 and co-founded the St. John Paul II Academic Co-operative as well as St. Thomas Aquinas Hybrid Tutorial (Millersville) somewhere in-between. Kathy taught 7th grade Humanities for six years before spending Fall 2023 traveling with Youngest Child. She loves to promote Eucharistic Adoration and hopes to encourage awareness and wonder of God's Presence in her students. 2 Corinthians 3:18: *"And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit."*

Jeanette Cohn

Humanities Tutor - 8th Grade

Jeanette Cohn has been teaching for 36 wonderful years. She began her professional career in the medical field working as a private duty nurse. She became involved with homebound children and felt the call to teach. In 1985, she earned her bachelor's degree at USF in Exceptional Education with a minor in Early Childhood Development. She was employed in public and private school systems for 13 years working mostly with special needs children between 6 months and 12 years old. In 1998, she answered the call to home school her 7 children and continued in the vocation for 21 years. During those 21 years she mentored parents in formational education and tutored children in various facets, including homeschool tutorials and private tutoring, mainly in the areas of reading, writing and Literature. Her educational philosophy encompasses a strong passion to embrace each child as being uniquely, beautifully created and, thus, should be taught as such. Igniting their love for learning, she approaches her instruction on the specific formation of each child engrossing him/her in engaging conversation, implementing memorization, while fostering a desire to explore every aspect of learning. She is looking forward to working at Divine Mercy Academy cooperating in the mission of helping each child become what God intended.

Liz Chapman

Middle School Science and Math Tutor

Liz Chapman did not take a traditional path to becoming a tutor. Graduating from Gordon College with a double major in Political Science and Journalism she made her way to Washington, DC after graduation and started working for Senator Santorum (R-PA). Her husband, Tim Chapman, also worked on Capitol Hill. Starting out answering phones, giving tours, and talking with constituents she loved the fast paced atmosphere of Capitol Hill. Liz soon became personal writer and speech writer for the Senator. After several years with the Senator she was ready for a change and moved to K St. and worked for Williams and Jensen, PLLC handling events, political fundraisers, and working with clients

on ethics. During this time, Liz and Tim started a family. After finding out she was pregnant with her third child, Liz decided to stop working and stay at home. She quickly found that she loved being home with her children and started homeschooling. She spent all of her free time researching curriculum, different educational methods, and the best books to read. At this point, she started tutoring at a local classical conversations community on Capitol Hill. She taught 4 to 6 year-olds in science, history, math, art, music, latin, and grammar. Her children loved the repetition and recitation of the classical method when paired with reading rich classics.

At the same time, Tim and Liz were also looking for a church home on Capitol Hill and while Liz was raised Presbyterian and Tim was raised Anglican, they fell in love with St. Peters on Capitol Hill. In 2012, they converted to the Catholic faith. This further enriched their homeschooling as they began living through the liturgical year together as a family. In 2017, after outgrowing their townhouse on Capitol Hill due to the birth of a fourth child, they moved to Davidsonville, MD. Last June, a friend mentioned Divine Mercy Academy and after touring they were sold. Liz was also looking to dive more into teaching and didn't hesitate when they offered her a job as first grade tutor. She truly loves being a tutor and opening up her student's eyes to the joys of the classics, grammar, Latin, math, history, and science and her faith is constantly deepening as she learns from her students and their families.

Laura Pontzer, Ph.D.

Middle School Math Tutor

Laura Pontzer has been married for 25 years and is blessed to be the mother of six children. She has been homeschooling since 2004 and has enjoyed learning alongside her kids. Raised in Maryland, she attended Connecticut College where she studied Chemistry and Math as an undergraduate. She continued her education at Johns Hopkins University where she earned a master's and a doctorate degree in bioorganic chemistry. She is trained in Level I Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and cherishes her time spent in the atrium. Several of her children attended St. Thomas Aquinas Tutorial where she has enjoyed tutoring for the past five years in both science and math. She loves Catholic classical education and was a founding board member of Chesterton Academy of Annapolis where she has served for the past four years. Her passion is assisting her students in finding Truth while reaching their individual God-given potential. Outside the classroom she enjoys running, hiking, and spending time with her family, including her golden retriever. She is grateful for the opportunity to join DMA and excited to teach Algebra I this year.

Christine Butrim, M.Ed.

Tutor Trainer

Christine received her undergraduate and graduate degrees in Special Education from the University of Maryland, College Park. She has taught in a variety of settings including public school, private parochial school and home school co-ops and tutorials. She is skilled at integrating curriculum and inspiring wonder in her students. Beyond her own classroom, she has experience developing educational support plans for students with learning challenges. Christine and her husband have been married since 1989 and have two adult children. She has lived in the area for over 20 years.

Mary Etta Jeske

Sacred Art Tutor

Mary Etta Jeske is a mother of three children and has been married for 31 years. She has home-schooled her children for nine years, and enjoys teaching Art History, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, and Classical Fine Art. Mary Etta has been a classical fine artist and an art tutor since 1993. A business major in college, she additionally attended four years at The Mitchell School of Classical Fine Arts and is certified to teach level 1 in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. She served for many years as an office manager for the Allview Center for Family Enrichment, where she presently volunteers and teaches an art/home arts girls' club.

Catherina Marshall, M. DMT.

Physical Education and Dance Tutor

Catherina is excited to continue to be part of the DMA team as a tutor of physical education and dance. A native of Peru with French ancestry, she brings to the position a lot of creativity plus a rich cultural background and a lifelong passion for human expression through movement.

As a child and a youth, Catherina studied ballet and performed at the Municipal Ballet of the cosmopolitan city of Lima during the school year while attending a renowned British academy (San Silvestre School). She spent her summers on her family's remote dairy farm in the Andean highlands where she helped to teach catechism to children. Later she obtained a social anthropology degree from the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru in 2006 and studied dance in Sao Paolo, Brazil. Catherina earned a Master's degree in Dance Movement Therapy from the University of Barcelona, Spain, in 2008.

Returning to Lima, Catherina started her own independent dance movement therapy practice where she focused on special needs children. There she found ways to enrich her work by incorporating her Catholic faith into the methodology. In 2013, she married and moved to the United States. Catherina is the mother of Sofia and Teresita and enjoys tremendously dancing with her husband and daughters. Inspired by them as well as by last years' experience of teaching PE and dance at DMA, she is in the process of putting together a prayerful methodology for teaching classical barre with the goal of building up a dance crew for the school.

Kelly O'Connor

Ward Music, Band and Orchestra Tutor

Kelly O'Connor, mother of seven children aged 21-6, holds 15 years of homeschooling experience, including three homeschool cooperatives. She has worked as a parish music director for three years, and served on liturgical teams across 10 parishes.

A Michigan native and Marine Corps spouse of 24 years, Kelly and her husband have lived in 13 different duty stations. Her extensive travel has given her an appreciation for multiple cultures and diversity in a growing world. A parental advocate for special-needs children, she is experienced in accommodating students that require more tailored care for success. She studied Instrumental and Choral Music Education at Central Michigan University, and is passionate about Biblical theology, History, Literature, Jazz and Classical music.

As a tutor of History, Religion and Band, Kelly will strive to connect students with God's Master Story for salvation, and inspire them to see His hand throughout all of human history. A convert herself to Catholicism, she brings a strong empathy for children as they begin to choose and embrace the Faith for themselves.

Monica Ruppert

Latin Tutor

Monica Ruppert holds a BA in Music Education from The University of Notre Dame of Maryland. She is a veteran homeschooler of her 10 children and is distinctly dedicated to family-centered education. She believes Divine Mercy Academy will support families as essential building blocks of an ardent Catholic community on the front lines of The New Evangelization. Monica will implement the Ward Method of music education at Divine Mercy, a classical program rooted in and directed toward Gregorian Chant, in which every child learns the art of singing, sight-reading, composing and conducting. After 25 years of teaching her own children as well as many others in co-ops, tutorials, and various other unique settings, Monica is excited to share her zeal for the catholic liberal arts the full-day setting of Divine Mercy Academy. With her natural talent for teaching children and her joyful confidence in classroom management, Monica is ever grateful each Monday for another week of sharing and discovering the revelations of God with her students.

Laurena Sarver, M.Ed.

Reading Specialist

My family has been my primary focus through the years, but I have also been blessed with opportunities to always continue to keep my hand in teaching as well. I have been married for almost 32 years to Lewis, who is a Montgomery County police officer. We have been active members of our parish. We have four children who have had the opportunity to attend Catholic schools. All four graduated from OLPH School. Our son attended Cardinal Gibbons and graduated from Mt. St. Joe's, our daughters graduated from Mt. De Sales Academy. Three of our children have graduated from

college, two are married and we are going to be grandparents in January! Our youngest will graduate from Franciscan University in May 2022.

My career in education began in a Catholic school where I taught second grade for two and a half years, and then third grade for half a year as a long-term substitute in the Washington Archdiocese. My love for teaching reading began in college. I graduated from Towson State University with a degree in Early Childhood Education. I earned my Master's Degree in Reading Education from Bowie State University. I am certified in Orton-Gillingham and have used this approach to reading instruction as a private academic tutor for over 20 years. I enjoy working in a variety of settings so I also work part-time as a reading specialist. Being able to help struggling learners has become a passion of mine, and being able to do this in a faith-based setting is ideal for me. The opportunity to bring my faith into teaching reading is the best!

In my free time, I love spending time with my family and friends, going to the beach, walking, going to Christian music concerts, learning more about my Catholic faith, and volunteering at church and in my community.

Ester Sesmero, Ph.D.

Campus Ministry

Dr. Ester Sesmero was born in Spain. Right before she started college she heard the call from the Lord to consecrate her life to Him. In 2005 she joined the Secular Institute of the Crusaders of Mary while studying for her Bachelor's degree in Chemistry at the Autonoma University of Madrid. The Crusaders of Mary is a community of lay consecrated women who are passionate about the education of the youth. At Autonoma University of Madrid, she was heavily involved in campus ministry and through that experience of witnessing her faith in a secular environment, she learned what it meant to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. She arrived to the U.S. in 2011 and studied for her doctorate in Chemistry at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC).

Since Fall 2011, Ester has taught the Confirmation group (7th and 8th grade) at St. Peter's on Capitol Hill and ministered to the youth attending the Youth Conferences at Franciscan University of Steubenville. During her time at UMBC, she started and led the Women's group of the Catholic Retrievers (UMBC Campus Ministry). This women's group is a community of women who support each other in their faith journey and the desire of to grow closer to Jesus and bring others to Him. Ester

graduated with her Ph.D. on May 2017. From Fall 2017 to Spring 2019, she taught at Catholic University of America, Community College of Baltimore County, George Washington University and Montgomery College.

Ester is grateful for the opportunity to join Divine Mercy Academy. She is excited to teach our students to think critically, ask good questions and be in wonder and awe at gift of Creation. Her teaching philosophy is: "I believe in you, you are going to be able to do it, and I am here to help you!"

Schedule

8:00 - Morning Bell

8:02 - Prayer and Announcements

8:30 - Holy Mass

Logic Cohort (6-8)

9:23	Warning Bell
9:25 - 10:10	1st Period
10:12 - 10:57	2nd Period
10:59 - 11:44	3rd Period
11:48 - 12:08	Lunch
12:10 - 12:35	Recess
12:40 - 1:00	Rosary
1:02 - 1:47	4th Period
1:49 - 3:05	5th Period
3:05 - 3:08	Homeroom
3:10	Begin Chaplet
3:20	Pick-Up

Upper Grammar (3-5)

9:23	Warning Bell
9:25 - 10:10	1st Period
10:12 - 10:52	2nd Period
10:54 - 11:15	3rd Period
11:18 - 11:38	Lunch
11:40 - 12:05	Recess
12:15 - 12:55	4th Period
1:00 - 1:50	5th Period
1:55 - 2:40	6th Period
2:40 - 3:00	Rosary
3:05 - 3:08	Homeroom
3:10	Begin Chaplet
3:20	Pick-Up

Lower Grammar (K-2)

9:23	Warning Bell
9:25 - 10:20	1st Period
10:25 - 11:15	2nd Period
11:20 - 12:05	3rd Period
12:10 - 12:30	Lunch
12:35 - 1:00	Recess
1:05 - 1:45	4th Period
1:47 - 2:27	5th Period
2:29 - 3:08	6th Period
3:08	Dismissal
3:10	Begin Chaplet
3:20	Pick-Up

Acknowledgment Page

I have read and agreed to the guidelines in the Parent/Student Handbook.

Parent Signature

Student Signature

Date _____

Please sign this handbook acknowledgement form and return it to the Divine Mercy Academy office. Retain the handbook at home for your reference throughout the year.

Divine Mercy Academy Family Agreement

The mission of Divine Mercy Academy is to partner with parents in their role as primary educators to help students to flourish as disciples of Jesus Christ. Through a Catholic liberal arts education, we foster a love for truth, beauty, and goodness. Under the patronage of Our Lady, we aim to form Saints and Scholars to live freely and joyfully in accordance with the truth revealed by God through nature and the Catholic Church.

Divine Mercy Academy is open to families of all backgrounds who sincerely seek the true, the good, and the beautiful. As our patron, Pope St. John Paul II said, “Jesus Christ is the answer to which every human life is the question.” As a place to search for, and hopefully find, Truth Himself, Divine Mercy Academy welcomes all those genuinely searching for God, regardless of their religious tradition.

By signing this family agreement, the parents/legal guardians acknowledge that they have been informed and understand that their children will be educated in the Catholic faith and that the school seeks to partner with them as the primary educators of their children. The parents/legal guardians understand that, as partners in the school’s stated mission, they are expected to cooperate fully in it and to foster their children’s commitment as well. As such, parents and their students agree to live their lives in a way consistent with Christian discipleship and that supports, rather than opposes, the mission of the school. Failure to abide by the terms of this agreement may be grounds for dismissal from the school.

As parents/guardians, we ask that Divine Mercy Academy partner with us in the education of our children. We understand and agree with the school’s mission and purpose and will cooperate with school policies and with all school personnel. We pledge to cooperate fully with the school in forming our children to know, love, and serve God. We understand that failure to abide by this agreement may be grounds for dismissal from the school.

_____ Date _____
 Printed Name and Signature of Mother/Guardian

_____ Date _____
 Printed Name and Signature of Father/Guardian

Printed Name(s) of each child: _____

Divine Mercy Academy accepts your request to partner with you in the education of your children according to the school’s mission. We pledge our best effort to form your children in accordance with our school mission and purpose.

_____ Date _____
 Printed Name and Signature of Headmaster