



CULTIVATING VOCATIONS

Nolan Catholic High School helps students listen for God's call

By Christina Benavides

When he left Nolan Catholic High School for college, cross-country runner Joshua Keifer didn't expect to miss a closeness to the sacraments he'd previously had in his schooling. But soon, he found himself craving that quiet space with God, a habit of heart he said took root long before he noticed it.

"It was those little things that I just

took for granted while I was in high school that I feel were really grounding me," Keifer said. "I always used to say the things that grounded me were my sports and my friends, but really it was closeness to the sacraments, and that's something that you can only get at a Catholic school."

Opportunities to go to the chapel and sit in Adoration for the last 10 minutes of class; attend Mass in the middle of the week; pray the Angelus in the middle of the day; join a morning prayer session

before school — "At one point, I realized how much I craved that," the seminarian said.

Keifer's experience reflects a broader reality at Nolan, where students are immersed in a culture that provides them a foundation to listen for God's call without reservation. The school, which has shaped its students into community and religious leaders for 63 years, has an even "bigger presence of the sacraments" today, said school chaplain Father Brett Metzler.

◀ Nolan Catholic High School students pray a Rosary to commemorate the feast day for Our Lady of Victory/Our Lady of the Rosary, the patroness of the school, Oct. 7. (NTC/Richard Rodriguez)



Father Brett Metzler flips a coin before the Nolan Catholic Vikings game during Catholic Bowl V on Sept. 12 at Choctaw Stadium in Arlington. (courtesy photo/Nolan Catholic, Alexandria Mechalske)

With regular access to Mass and confession, plus all-day Friday Adoration, students are encouraged to take their faith seriously, which “always comes with a deeper sense of joy, deeper sense of community, deeper sense of safety, like they feel they belong to a family,” said Fr. Metzler.

Dedicated faculty are instrumental in helping students further their relationships with God, Fr. Metzler added. After all, faith formation at Nolan doesn’t end in the chapel; it’s woven through the rhythms of student life, from the football field to theology class.

“There are tons of groups that provide ministry to students,” he said. “Football has a Bible study; soccer has a Bible study; basketball has a Bible study. They all have their own prayer groups and practices that the coaches have set up. Things are blossoming on their own which I think is a fruit of the sacraments and the fruit of being in Catholic soil.”

A FOUNDATION

Keifer was in his senior year of studying computer science and kinesiology/exercise science at College of Charleston in South Carolina when he heard God’s call to the priesthood. After graduating with both degrees, the 22-year-old returned to his native Fort Worth and entered the seminary.

Keifer said he holds gratitude for his time at Nolan as well as his K-8 education at St. John the Apostle Catholic School in North Richland Hills.

“It’s something that as a student, you take for granted,” he said.

Many students may not actively notice the lifelong impact of such a rich Catholic education.

“Some of this is just going to go over

your head, and that’s okay,” he recalled telling junior high kids preparing to enter Nolan. “It’s the fact that you’re here and in this environment that is cultivating you, even though you don’t even realize it, even though you’re not thinking about it.”

While in college, Keifer missed listening to Scripture regularly and breaking for prayer throughout the school day. Those moments are impactful because “once you leave the Catholic school system you end up in a secular world that tells you that prayer doesn’t work and that reading Scripture is a waste of your time. But no, those things are what ground us, and our faith is really what makes us more alive,” he said.

CULTURE OF FAITH

When Fr. Metzler arrived at Nolan as its chaplain, the first thing he noticed was just how busy students were, juggling advanced coursework and various extracurriculars.

“I realized that if I’m going to do ministry, I need to go to the things they’re doing. So whenever I can, I will go where they are, whether it’s football, volleyball, theater. If I can, I will. That’s kind of my motto,” he said.

Family support, he emphasized, is just as essential.

“Nolan students are sent by families who also form their kids to love faith, right? So it’s a compounding addition to

the school’s life of joy,” he said.

The priest makes a point to minister to the student’s strongest faith supporters: their parents.

“I’ve done more things for the parents to build up the community,” Fr. Metzler said.

He enjoys connecting with Nolan dads during a monthly Black Coffee Brotherhood group, where “we have time for Adoration and pray with Scripture” and also celebrates the monthly Mother’s Mass, which is followed by donuts and chats with Nolan moms.

“More and more are showing up,” Fr. Metzler said. “Just getting parents to come and pray for their kids who are at the school.”

PRAY FOR VOCATIONS

This year, Fr. Metzler accompanied 37 young men to the October *Come and See* weekend retreat held at St. Joseph Seminary College in Louisiana, where Keifer now studies. Six participants were Nolan students.

“It’s so exciting,” Keifer said, remarking on the students’ presence. “Just seeing high schoolers that are willing to say yes, maybe this is something that I’m called to. This is something you should honestly discern first, especially as men.”

Keifer recalls praying for vocations when he was at Nolan, but it was always “we’re praying for somebody else. We’re doing this for another group of people that are going to do this,” he said. “It never really dawned on me that in doing that, I was inadvertently praying for myself, which I find funny, but also very beautiful.” 🇺🇸

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