

Volume 2 Issue 4

Fall 2006



Our Journey Together as Orthodox Christians
In Community

A Community at Work; Saint John's Orthodox Christian School

By Deacon Fred Arvidson

In our last issue we presented the St. James House, one of the core ministries of our cathedral. Also at the core of our community is what we now call St. John's Orthodox Christian School.

It all began as a search for an "alternative to public education" and it remains so today. When we talk about our school we like to reflect our Bishop's definition: "... when we say school we don't mean budgets, curricula and buildings. We mean to build a family, planting seeds of faith and providing a clean environment for innocent children." (Bishop JOSEPH's letter to the community dated April 8, 2003)

In the late 1970's parents in our community were looking for an alternative to the public school system. We formed an "Alternative Education Committee" on which I served as chairman. We reported that the state's correspondence program might be a good place to start. As we gathered for our daily studies, we began to realize that we could not only match the quality of the correspondence school curriculum but we could exceed it. A couple years of those correspondence classes bolstered our confidence that although a school was a huge commitment it was one we believed necessary and from this, St. John's Community School was born. The core objectives have remained constant, as stated in the student handbook: "...to provide an excellent academic educationwithin the safe, nurturing Christian environment of the St. John Cathedral community."

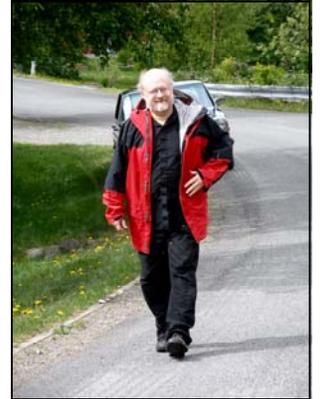
Classes began in 1981 in a building that is now adjacent to the cathedral with Maye Johnson teaching 1st, 2nd & 3rd grades in the lower half of the building. The upper half

was used by older students for their homeschool studies and for worship until the cathedral was built. The following year, Maye had the same students plus two 6th graders. The student body continued to grow and eventually took over the whole building .

Dedication and the giving of oneself is what keeps the school going. Teachers have been drawn mostly from the church community and some, like Chris and Alison Lineer, came to our community specifically to serve the school. Teacher commitments can be measured in decades, not years. Maye Johnson and my wife, Joyce, taught for a combined 29 years, often having their own children as students. Darlene Hunter started her 19th year at St. John's this fall. It was heartwarming to see three girls who earlier attended St. John's, Rebekah Johnson, Ser (Lamb) Jackson and Corinne (Hoyt) Matthews return to teach for at least one year each. The school has at times also hired teachers from outside the parish who were supportive of this ministry.

Through the years, administration has been provided often by clergy. This includes

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Deacon Fred Arvidson



St. John Orthodox Christian School students and staff in Fall, 2005

Community Cooks

Featuring: *Barbara Parker*

By *Maye Johnson*

In 1975 Barbara made her way to Alaska from Colorado and it was suggested to her by friends that she look up Harold Parker. They were married here in our community in 1976 and have raised twin daughters and a son. In 1980 Barbara was instrumental in getting St John's School on its feet. She taught various classes over the years and was also the administrator. Gardening, 13 grandkids, a cabin in the woods and great dedication to the church and community keep Barbara and Harold very busy.

Blackened Salmon

1 to 2 salmon fillets	½ tsp oregano
1 tsp. salt	½ tsp thyme
1 T. paprika	1 tsp. onion powder
1 tsp garlic powder or fresh garlic, chopped	½ tsp basil
1 tsp cayenne pepper	¼ c. butter

Wash and pat dry salmon fillets. Mix all spices together in a small bowl. Rub spices on meat side of fillet. In a large skillet, melt butter. When skillet is hot, place fillet in it, spice-side down. Cook quickly, 2 to 3 minutes. Sprinkle skin side of fillet with spice mixture and turn over in skillet. Cook a few minutes longer, or until done. You may need to use the overhead fan, as the spices may smoke in the hot skillet. Serve.



Barb Parker at their cabin on Katie Lake.

Welcome Home,

our church cookbook,
is available for \$18.00.
Contact Maye Johnson to
order.
tommajej@mtaonline.net
Phone or fax: 907-696-3326

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Outpost of the Kingdom

By *Jennifer Gillquist*

When my younger brother was failing in school, my parents discussed sending him to a Christian school in Anchorage. We were not a church-going family but my parents knew the school did not accept anything below a 'C.' He panicked, no way was he going! I wanted to volunteer to my parents: "I'll go!"

Five years later, as a young adult finding my place amongst the community of St. John's, I fell in love - first with a school. I was introduced to what was then called St. John's Community School. I knew this was what I had secretly wished for myself earlier. When I was not working, I volunteered at the school. This was the place I wanted to spend more time and energy, especially if I had children.

I fell in love a second time, this time with a man who shared my desire for a big family. We married and now have five children. Soon after the birth of Paul, I was back in the school helping out where I could and looked forward to sending our children there. Paul enjoyed seven years at what is now called St. John's Orthodox Christian School with a core class of nine boys. I believe this is what has helped him do so well in public school. Greg and I were apprehensive about sending him "out there" but decided that because of his friends and experience at St. John's, he would be OK.

Catherine starts 6th grade this fall, her last year at St. John's. The dynamics of this smaller core group of one other girl and three boys have provided some trying times for her, yet she says she doesn't want to leave. Her experience there is an example of how a small private school can provide a safe, loving environment so a child can learn. Because of her own personal challenges, the small classroom provided for more individual attention. She might not have done so well academically in public school. The school provides security for her and that has fostered her love for it.

With three more children to send through the school, we are confident that this is the right place for them. Tuition is affordable compared to other private schools, still it digs deep into our pockets each year. We think it is worth it - an investment in our children. Personally, I enjoy seeing my children benefit from something I wish I'd had while growing up.

Reflections from Father Michael Plekon

August 2006

Dear St. John's Friends,

I was honored to be asked to be one of the speakers at the 2006 Eagle River Institute. And what amazing hospitality I received from Fr. Marc, Kh. Betsy and so many others. I felt most welcomed and loved. But this should be no surprise to what is a community of "living icons," the people of St. John Cathedral, centered in the church, in the Eucharist celebrated and received there, the Gospel proclaimed and lived out in your lives, work and in the homes gathered around the cathedral, the school, and the St. James House.

It was a particularly wonderful discovery to learn from your newsletter that Thomas Merton had given retreat talks in the St. James House gathering room back in 1968. He was on his way to Asia, his last journey, as it turned out. During one of my talks I read two quotes about the desire for unity in the Church. These were very personal reflections on the tragedy of division, as well as the hope for communion. One came from Fr. Lev Gillet, a monk of the Western Catholic Church who eventually became a monk of the Eastern Church. The other came from Thomas Merton: "If I can unite in myself the thought and the devotion of Eastern and Western Christendom, the Greek and the Latin Fathers, the Russians with the Spanish mystics, I can prepare in myself the reunion of divided Christians. From that secret and unspoken unity in myself can eventually come a visible and manifest unity of all Christians. If we want to bring together what is divided, we cannot do so by imposing one division upon the other or absorbing one division into the other. But if we do this, the union is not Christian. It is political, and doomed to further conflict. We must contain all divided worlds in ourselves and transcend them in Christ." (*Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 1968)

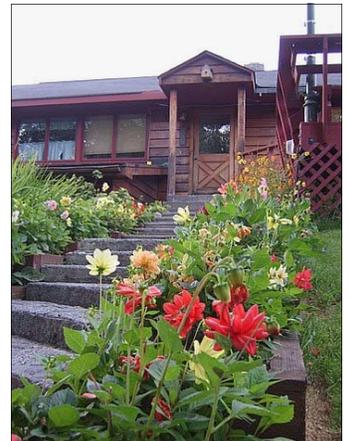
Fr. Merton's journals reveal that he had avidly read numerous Orthodox writers, and was significantly shaped by them and the vision of the Eastern Church. That there is now a vibrant, warm, community of the Orthodox Church where once a small group of sisters sought to live a simpler community life, where Thomas Merton himself taught, while on an important journey in his own spiritual life---none of this is coincidental. Rather it is all providential. And I hope it serves as a sign of the spiritual communion we must recover, the churchly union for which we must pray and work. I have been deeply touched by the spirit and the people of St. John's and I intend to return. But I will pray that your energy and joy continue to grow so that, like the Taize community, you may be, in the words of Pope John XXIII, a "little sign of springtime," when the world of the ecumenical movement and the churches have grown so wintry. (That you are located in Alaska and are for me a sign of spring is also no coincidence or joke!) I hope too that more of the churches, not only the Orthodox but other western communities, might come to know you and find in Eagle River a real house of hospitality, prayer and Christian service.

With love and peace in the Lord,

Fr. Michael Plekon



St. John's Youth Corps workers, Polina Soshnin, Austin Hatcher, John Marc Dunaway, Jeremy Duke and Mary Truelson worked with Khourie Betsy Dunaway to make our community a piece of heaven.



Nineteen Years at School: An Interview with Darlene Hunter

By Maye Johnson

Maye Johnson – Tell me a bit about your childhood and family.

Darlene Hunter – My family moved to Alaska from Pennsylvania when I was three. We lived nine miles south of downtown Anchorage, before it was very populated, on a dirt street where we had a garden and a variety of animals. My brother and five sisters and I were raised in a Christian home where we were taught to give thanks for meals and do bedtime prayers as a family. When I was 10 my parents and several other families started St. John United Methodist Church in South Anchorage. My parents are still very involved in that church. I am thankful for the Christian upbringing my siblings and I had. Since we all live here in Alaska, we still enjoy visiting our parents in our childhood home.

MJ – When did you become Orthodox and when did you move into this community?

DH – I was a friend of Jennifer Stogsdill in high school and college. She and I and some of my other friends used to visit the Dunaways when they lived on Fern St in Anchorage. My sister Bonnie (now Kh. Thekla) married one of the young men (Fr. Paul Jaroslaw). My husband Jeff and I learned about the journey to Orthodoxy through them and others. We moved near the community in the mid-80's and built a duplex with Gary and Donna Young. Jeff and I were part of the group who were chrismated by Metropolitan PHILLIP in 1987. We are only one half mile from the Cathedral and it is a walk I have enjoyed over the 22 years we have lived there, especially after I started working at the school. I like being near my church family. We can help and encourage each other, whether by prayers, bringing meals, giving a ride, cleaning, or a multitude of other helps. I like seeing my students outside of school hours. Our own children have been able to walk to school and their friend's houses.

MJ – Have you always wanted to be a teacher and when did you start?

DH – I knew in high school that I wanted to teach. After college, marriage, jobs in retail and starting my own family, I didn't know if I would ever get to teach. I found myself really enjoying my time as a teacher's aide in my daughter Yevette's class at St. Johns Community School. In 1987 Fr. Paul was the principal and he encouraged me to consider teaching full time. Over the next six years Dianne Cranor (now Kh. Dominica) was my mentor. I got a great deal of support from many parents who helped in the classroom. I have mostly taught first and second grades. I even taught both our sons, Morgan and John, each for two years.

MJ – What is your favorite part about teaching at St John's?

DH – I enjoy teaching in an Orthodox Christian environment. Working with a dedicated and supportive staff who share a common Christian world view is a privilege. We have an excellent curriculum, small classes and close proximity to the Cathedral and the community. But my favorite part is the students. Watching them change over the course of a year or two, it seems a miracle, all the things they learn and all the ways they grow. I learn so much from them, too. There have been so many times when my heart has been touched by an action or some words: hugs, words of endearment, a shy child singing out during church, one child reaching out to another in kindness, a child's insight into something unexpected. I especially love to hear first or second graders recite the Psalms.

MJ – What are some of the challenges for you at school?

DH – The biggest challenge for me right now is teaching a combination class. Even with small class sizes, it is a lot of work. I am looking forward to this year, because it is my second year to teach a combination class without an aide or team teacher and I want to apply some of the things I learned last year. One of the disadvantages of a small school is that sometimes there are only a couple of kids in a certain grade so we have to combine the younger grades. Discussions can be strained and awkward with too few to participate.

MJ - Do you stay in touch with any of your former students?

DH – I have enjoyed watching them grow up and many I keep track of through their parents. I often ask about them, especially if they have moved away. Many have stayed here in the community and have even worked with me at the school as aides or teachers. Several have returned to help for a day or all year. I am grateful for all the students that I have had in my class through the years. Whether they went on to college or went directly into the work force or military, they are all special.

MJ - How long do you see yourself teaching?

DH – Over the years I have thought about getting a different job, taking the year off, or more recently, retiring. Jeff has been very supportive of me working a job I love, even when the pay wasn't very much. So I stayed. I just take it one year at a time. By the grace of God, I will continue teaching as long as I can.



Mrs. Hunter with her 2005-2006 first and second grade students.

Anatoli's Angel

By Jill Boiko

Eighteen years ago, near the end of an emerald-green Alaskan summer, a dark-eyed, curly-haired baby boy lay on the white sheets of a local hospital, struggling for his life. The meningitis which had attacked his body had caused fluid to build up in his brain. His body was surrounded by tubes, electrodes and monitors. His parents and friends took turns keeping vigil by his bedside.

Just a few floors away, I was regaining consciousness; my distorted senses relayed to my brain that I was in a darkly confusing place, which I did not at first realize was the ICU. Later I was told that I had experienced a grand mal seizure after a head injury, and had lost consciousness for a day and a half. For almost three weeks I remained in the hospital due to various complications.

The boy who struggled against meningitis was Andrew, Brenda and Harold Davis' son. He and I both survived our ordeals. After leaving the hospital, however, our recoveries were quite different. I went on with my life, mostly thankful for each moment that was given to me, whatever the circumstance and whatever adventures I might have gotten myself into. Andrew's illness left him permanently disabled. His parents spent many years massaging him, talking to him, stimulating him, and walking with him in his wheelchair. The boy's mother, Brenda, a vibrant, spirited woman, succumbed 12 years ago to a long battle with breast cancer, leaving Harold alone to care for Andrew and his older broth-



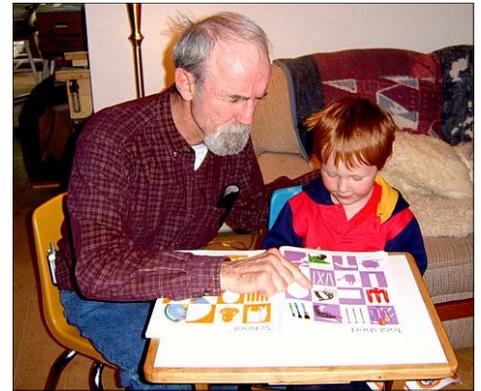
ers.

What impressed me most about the care Harold gave to Andrew over the years, was that he recorded himself reading stories and singing songs, so that his son could listen to the soothing sound of his voice at any time. He poured his life into his son's care, and I'm sure that Andrew is a happier, healthier human being because of it.

As the years passed, Harold became physically unable to lift his son every day and carry him up and down the stairs, so Andrew began living with another family. He now lives with his special education teacher, and Harold cares for him when he is able.

The years passed since I spent time in the hospital, and I enjoyed my growing family of children. I now have four daughters and one son. My fourth child, Anatoli, was diagnosed with mild to moderate autism in February of 2005. When I put up a request at church for volunteers for my son's ABA (intensive home therapy) program, Harold, a retired teacher, surprised me by calling and telling me that he would help. He was our only male volunteer.

There is nothing about the exterior of Harold's house that might indicate to you that an exceptional human being lives there. Only the front of his half of the duplex has siding; the other sides are covered by painted plywood. There is a large porch with a wheelchair ramp built into it, on which Anatoli loves to run up and down. Harold's home is furnished with a small entertainment center containing a television and a sparse collection of books and family photos. Opposite the television stands a threadbare couch. He doesn't even possess a VCR, much less a DVD player or a computer. His life is quiet. He attends church, visits his son, goes to appointments, he checks his mail. He talks quietly. He moves quietly. He is almost invisible among his neighbors, whose lively young children and



Harold Davis with Anatoli

pets roam up and down the road.

Harold has been working with my son for the past 11 months. He has seen Anatoli's progress from single words, echolalia, and almost no attention span, to an ability to work with sounds, words, letters and patterns for almost two hours at a stretch. During every session, Harold and Anatoli walk to the mailbox and

He poured his life into his son's care, and I'm sure that Anatoli is a happier, healthier human being because of it.

back. When we arrive at Harold's house on Friday and Saturday afternoons, my son turns to me and says, dismissively, "Bye, Ma." I smile, because I know that he is imitating the tone and inflection of one of his other speech therapists. Harold and Anatoli visibly enjoy one another's company.

Like Anatoli, there are millions of children around this country who suffer from developmental disabilities, and who could benefit from the time and attention of venerable men and women volunteers like Harold Davis. We all are blessed when we bring the two groups together. Harold (who is, as I mentioned earlier, a retired teacher), has been given another chance to give of his talents for the benefit of a child. I hope that he feels a great sense of achievement, every time he notices a new skill or ability that my son has gained since we started our home program. He deserves it.

Harold has always been Andrew's loving father. Now, he's also Anatoli's angel.

Saint John's School

By Dn. Fred Arvidson

(Continued from page 1)

Fr. Paul Jaroslaw, who eventually moved to Homer to start the All Saints Mission Church; Fr. Mark Cranor, who now runs the St. James Mission in Ft. Collins, Colorado; and currently Deacon Dan Gray. Others also have filled in as was necessary: Barbara Parker - whose twin daughters were in the first graduating class; Judi Hoyt, mother to another of those graduating girls; Maria Smith who also taught at the school; and most re-

pation from the entire parish. Many people pooled their time and effort to make the events a success and to give the school exposure to the Chugiak-Eagle River community at large.

Few would doubt the school has been a significant part of the community of St. John's. The school graduated one high school class in 1987 and the entire parish attended the warm and cozy service held in the cathedral basement. Each of the four young women - Jillian Boiko & Kirstin Reese (Parker), Corinne Matthews (Hoyt), and Kali Macalino (Young) - gave an encouraging speech, expressing tremendous gratitude to the individuals who had volunteered their time and energy for them. The school has adjusted its efforts over the years according to its resources and now focuses on pre-school through sixth grade.

Times have changed, our "baby boom" slowed down and fewer kids from the church have attended the school. But in the long run this may be the school's greatest legacy: families from outside our parish have been quick to realize that there really is something special here. About half the kids that attend St. John's now come from outside the parish. Many of us see the school as an evangelistic opportunity and welcome the chance to give others the experience we have shared. It is truly an example of a community at work together.



Kirstin, Corinne, Kali and Jill in 1987

cently, Chris Lineer and Doreen Dougherty. The school staff has worked for a sacrificial salary, and often the administrators doubled as teachers when staffing was shorthanded.

The school has been called a parent-driven organization and it is definitely so, for it relies heavily on volunteers to help with things like lunch duty, especially after lunch was moved from eating in the classroom to convening in the church basement. Volunteers also help with events such as fundraising, school programs or driving kids to and from field trips, and serving on the school board, to mention a few. Most notably would be K.C. Jones who, long after his children were no longer attending St. John's, continues to volunteer many hours and money to help with needed repairs in the school building. A complete list of volunteers would qualify as a list of "who's who" and the school is thankful for all of them.

Another example of community involvement were school fundraisers, which drew partici-



Mrs. Johnson with her first class in 1981



Margaret's Garden

by Jill Boiko

Put down your burden
In Margaret's garden.

Compost and decay,
Water, seeds and clay--
Add love and hard work,
The earth brings forth fruit:

Broccoli and chives,
Spinach with nine lives,
Onions and cherries,
Sage and strawberries,

Stop and take a seat,
Here out of the heat,

Enjoy the cosmos,
While it blooms, thyme grows;
Peas, corn, tomatoes,
Dill and potatoes,
Carrots, impatiens,
Thrive beside lupine,
Hollyhock, climbing,
Forbids repining.

I left my burden
In Margaret's garden--

But credit, it's true,
Belongs to Chris, too.

Everyone's Home

By Bruce Johnson

Isn't it funny how some things change and some things stay the same? There is a lot of that here around the St. James House (SJH). Technology changes, weather changes, priorities change, and morals have changed. Yet people pretty much stay the same. For example, our goals and weaknesses are the same from generation to generation. We all strive for acceptance wherever we are. Most want to be able to provide for a good family life and have nice things. We all have the same struggles in life. Passions are the same today as they have been forever. However it seems as though morals have gotten watered down these days. Many things accepted today were unheard of only a few years ago. I guess my wife Monica and I had the question inside us: How can we help?

Little did I know that I would be back in the SJH thirty years after I lived here as a single young person. So the question has been asked, how did we decide to take on this task? God spoke! Really, that is what we believe He did. We had just returned from a fabulous vacation in Mexico, got in at 4:30 a.m. on a Sunday morning and were looking forward to a relaxing day of sleeping in, skipping Liturgy and getting prepared for going back to our respective jobs. For some reason, we both woke up at 9:00 a.m. and were compelled to go to Liturgy, even on the short night's sleep.

During the homily Fr. Marc commented that there was a need for someone to step into the host position at the SJH for the coming year. Monica and I looked at each other and we both knew right then why we woke up and came to worship that day. What an overwhelming feeling; we knew what we were supposed to do.

So the question has been asked, how did we decide to take on this task? God spoke! Really, that is what we believe He did.

You see, we were really enjoying our life together, as all our boys were now out of the house and we were foot loose and fancy free. We were done running around from hockey rink to hockey rink; Monica's new business was getting off the ground, and I had a bunch of vacation time built up. We had the opportunity to come and go as we pleased. Life seemed good. However, we recognized how easy it would be, having this newfound freedom, to drift away and become lazy in our spiritual life.

I have always had the desire to oversee the SJH program. That week we contacted Fr. Marc to chat about our situation. From there we looked for the doors to open and if this was meant to be, they would open. Monica and I approach decisions together with that in mind. We head in a direction and if the doors keep opening we keep going through them; when they close, we stop and go another way. Ultimately, we are searching for God's will. As we pursued this, the doors of opportunity did open. I was able to set up a home office to do a lot of my job from the SJH, and Monica put together a capable team at her insurance office. We leased our home to a nice young military couple, and here we are.

Now that we have a year behind us, I'll share a few thoughts about "now and then" at the SJH. One of the biggest differences we faced was the technology of today that can cause a distraction

in this setting. Years ago, when residents came here to stay, our primary focus



Saint James House, August 2006

was what was going on here. We had to save money for a few weeks just to make a long distance phone call; we only talked to our family or very close friends. There was minimal outside distraction.

Now, with cell phones ringing and e-mails flying, it is so easy to be connected to where you came from that it is hard to get the most out of what is available right here. One who comes to stay at the SJH has chosen to participate in a semi-structured environment, to learn more about Orthodoxy and establishing a good foundation to build their future on. Often I would like to throw the cell phones and laptops in Cook Inlet, mine too! Yet this same technology has allowed me to be able to work right here from the SJH. And technology is here to stay, so the key word is "balance," as we strive to find the proper use of these tools.

As Monica and I reflect back on last season, there were some tough times and some great times. Highs and lows in life will always be about and with people. Our goal is to help the residents acquire life skills and to grow in faith as Orthodox Christians, enabling us to handle all situations in a Godly manner. I can't believe how attached we all became in the end. Thirty years ago, the people here became my family and many of us are still connected in a way we cannot explain. As in the past, I know there will always be that same unspoken bond among those who lived and struggled together in the 2005-06 SJH.

Thoughts of starting all over again with a new group caused us a bit of hesitation. You get used to what you know and can expect. But now we are excited to start another season and meet a new group and continue to work on "balance" in our lives. We have learned a lot about ourselves during this process and hope we are a positive influence to those who come.

God has been good to us in allowing us to participate in the SJH program. We are privileged to be here and appreciate all the support we have received. Please feel free to stop in anytime and say "Hi."



Bruce Johnson 1978



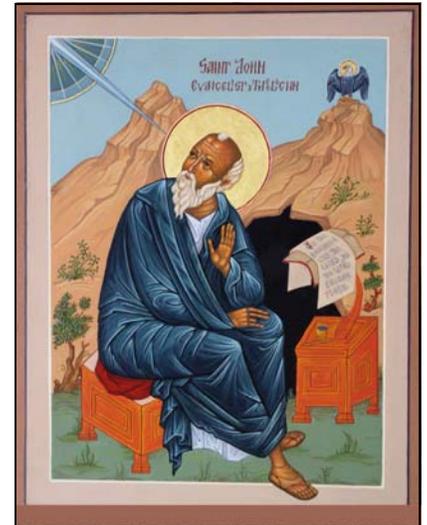
...and 2006.

Saint John the Evangelist: Patron Saint of our Cathedral and School

By Mary Ann Northey

One of the “Sons of Thunder” with his brother James, St. John is also sometimes called “The Beloved,” “The Theologian,” “The Divine,” “St. John the Apostle,” and, in his old age, “The Elder.” His symbol is the eagle, the “mascot” of our community here in Eagle River. Eagles often circle the church and school, and the occasion is thrilling, and personal. Who does not know this great saint? He wrote the fourth Gospel, three letters, and the Book of Revelation. He was with Christ from the beginning of His ministry, present at every notable event: standing at the foot of His cross, the first to run to His grave and believe Him risen, the first to recognize Him on the shore of the Sea of Galilee in His risen body, and the one Christ entrusted with the care of His mother. St. John lived until he was nearly 100 years old and he died near Ephesus. His memory is celebrated on May 8 and Sept. 26 every year.

The words of John 3:16 beat in our hearts from our earliest years: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Let us conclude with 1 John 4:11: “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” With St. John as our patron, may that be the goal of the members of this church, this school and this community, by the grace of God.



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