

## WELCOME TO ST. HELENA CATHOLIC SCHOOL

We're glad you're interested in our school. After you get to know us, we think you'll be glad too! We are a very friendly community, hard-working, and dedicated to the education of the children entrusted to us.

The school was founded over forty years ago by the parishioners of St. Helena Catholic Church to serve to the children and families of the upper Napa Valley. Today, the school attracts families ranging from Lake County to the City of Napa, as well as from Yountville, Calistoga, and St. Helena in between.

What makes this school so special? What draws so many families to travel the distance?

Some people like its small size. The maximum enrollment is 135, so staff members are able to develop close and caring relationships with each child.

Some like its emphasis on family. Parents, and even grandparents sometimes, are welcome to participate in the education of the children.

Others appreciate that, unique among elementary schools in this area, we regularly undertake and satisfy the rigorous accreditation process prescribed by WASC—the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

Moreover, everyone is impressed with the dedication of the staff to the children. Teachers and aides take personal interest in the children. Every day they radiate warm, heartfelt devotion with genuine spirit.

And that of course is what makes this school special: that Spirit.

Energized by the Spirit, the Christian perspective permeates the entire school. So though the curriculum of math, English, history, science, and so on, may look familiar—the education we offer is not. There are also deeper lessons to learn. For example, at St. Helena Catholic School children are taught the value of forgiveness, a mature and emotionally liberating attitude towards playmates today—and for their whole lives! St. Helena Catholic School teaches respect for proper authority. And by offering frequent opportunities to help those less fortunate than themselves, St. Helena Catholic School reminds children to use their resources in the service of others. Invaluable themes like these, woven through the curriculum, characterize a premier educational opportunity at this very special school as unique as your own child.

Probably, you already perceive the perspective at St. Helena Catholic School is somewhat unconventional. And while much of our American tradition suggests mankind's noblest ideals and we honor it proudly (for example, the children assemble each morning for a prayer and the pledge of allegiance), we also recognize that today's prevailing values too often encourage—even among children—coarseness, conformity, and acquisitiveness.

At St. Helena Catholic School we reject those values. We trust you do too. With our alternative education, encouraging our students to think creatively, we challenge them to aspire instead to a lofty credo that includes a concern for the less fortunate; a respect for authority and for life; a sense of community and of courtesy; a sound personal discipline; a well-developed conscience; an attitude of optimism not resignation; and a love for God and neighbor.

Combine that unique perspective with a solid foundation of traditional subjects like math, reading, and science, as well as music, computers, and religion; and offered by a faculty that genuinely cares . . . and you have a rare child, well-prepared for tomorrow, with a powerful education unlike any other in this area.

Our graduates routinely succeed in their academic endeavors beyond St. Helena Catholic School—at Justin-Siena High School in Napa, for example, and at Cardinal Newman High School or Ursuline High School in Santa Rosa, as well as at local public high schools. Our graduates attend distinguished colleges as well: various campuses of the University of California and of the California State University, of course, as well as universities like Redlands, Boston College, Loyola Marymount, Georgetown, Gonzaga, USF, and Santa Clara among others.

But much as we rejoice in our graduates' academic prowess, like you parents we reserve our highest plaudits for those who demonstrate what can't be measured on test scores: fundamental human values inspired by our unique Christian perspective—love of God and neighbor, respect for life, forgiveness, and service for others.

Aiming as high as we do, the goal is difficult to achieve. That is why our school is a parish, i.e. a local community, effort. It is not a public school subsidized by the government, nor is it a private school where your tuition pays for the entire education. By no means is this school only for the wealthy. Our very diverse school families collectively pay tuition that covers about half the school's expenses. (If tuition is a problem for a family, we try to make accommodations; no one should hesitate to ask.) The parish community contributes to the school about a third of its budget. The balance comes from gifts from patrons, and from fundraising by the parents and friends of the school. By pulling together, and by managing our expenditures most stringently, we are able to offer an educational program that clearly succeeds impressively even without the financial resources available to other institutions.

There is ever so much more to St. Helena Catholic School than we can describe here. There are sports teams, special events, spiritual opportunities; there are academic contests with other schools, responsible mentoring of younger pupils by older students, an acclaimed choir; there are spontaneous acts of charity by our students for children in more deprived schools, and on field trips there are repeated compliments from bus drivers, ushers, docents—who serve children from hundreds of schools—that the children from St. Helena Catholic School are among the best-behaved and the happiest that they ever see.

So come see for yourself. Make an appointment to visit a classroom. You won't see in one visit the lifetime of learning that the children experience . . . but we think, when you consider the big picture, you'll want your child to be a part of the special community that is St. Helena Catholic School.

## ST. HELENA CATHOLIC SCHOOL . . . . . FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*Q: How is St. Helena Catholic School different?*

A: In some ways we're not. For example, our curriculum—math, language, social sciences, physical sciences, etc.—follows (or exceeds) the standards established by the Department of Education of the state of California.

But we also participate in the rich spiritual tradition of Catholic schools across the country in our emphasis on service for others, concern for the less fortunate, formation of character and conscience, respect for life, strong academics, and constructive self-discipline. Ancient, yet vibrant and contemporary; personally profound, yet socially relevant—the Roman Catholic culture nurtures the best spirit of humanity (including your child!) with the ideals of love of God and neighbor, forgiveness, sacrifice, character, morality, and service. These themes complement and indeed elevate the study of topics like arithmetic and geography. We believe the traditional academic disciplines are conscientiously studied in order to help understand, appreciate, and articulate the place of the spirit in the world.

Also, only St. Helena Catholic School in this area is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

*Q: What is the Western Association of Schools and Colleges?*

A: The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) is a non-profit accrediting organization serving public and private schools that periodically undergo a voluntary rigorous self-evaluation, under the supervision of a visiting WASC professional team, covering all aspects of the school, including the students, the staff, the curriculum, and the school's very philosophy. St. Helena Catholic School consistently earns the highest possible accreditation, a compliment to every part of the school community.

*Q: What does an education at St. Helena Catholic School cost?*

A: Curiously, quality need not be expensive. An education at St. Helena Catholic School costs far less than most other grade school educations. For example, the state of California spends an average of over \$8,000 per pupil. The cost of educating a child at St. Helena Catholic School is closer to \$6,000 per pupil. The school operates highly efficiently.

*Q: Where does the money to support the St. Helena Catholic School come from?*

A: Unlike government schools, St. Helena Catholic School receives no subsidy from the state of California. Students' families pay tuition, which covers about half of the cost of the education. Fundraising, from groups like the Parents Club and the Alumni Club, contributes a portion. And the parish community of St. Helena believes in the school and gives it a significant sum each month—because the school really is, in more than one way, a school you can believe in.

*Q: Is the education at St. Helena Catholic School worth it?*

A: Hundreds of families in this area, and millions across the nation who participate in schools like ours, think so. Like you, we are anxious that your children, our students, possess the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive and prosper in a competitive world. But we cannot ignore the wisdom of the ages reminding us that concern for others is superior to the consumer mentality, that forgiveness trumps revenge, and that love surpasses all things. With a well-developed perspective animated by the venerable and vital Roman Catholic tradition, your child has not only knowledge and skills with math and language—important as they are—but also the character and individuality to embrace virtue instead of vice, hope instead of resignation, and optimism instead of despair.

We definitely think, in the long run, it's worth it.

*Q: How are parents involved in St. Helena Catholic School?*

A: The Catholic school intends to serve not only the child but the entire family. The parents are an essential component of a St. Helena Catholic School community that includes not only the children but the parish as well. Parental understanding of the school's philosophy is very important. Parental involvement can be as simple as supporting a teacher who challenges your child to grow, whether academically, socially, or responsibly. There are also numerous opportunities for involvement in the Parents Club, the School Board, and in the classrooms themselves.

Of course, without fundraisers to augment tuition the school could not function, and year after year parents traditionally, unselfishly, rise to the occasion.

The school also provides the opportunity for parents to raise their children in the company of other families who share their basic values during the children's formative years. The school provides the opportunity for parents to build a social network, which, though diverse perhaps economically, politically, or racially, nonetheless shares the unique perspective of the Christian tradition.

*Q: Are you strict enforcing rules for the children?*

A: We work hard with parents and the school board to establish clear, reasonable guidelines that permit the educational enterprise to prosper. They are never arbitrary or capricious. Yet the school is small enough to allow some flexibility. In fact, of course, the rules are liberating, and students who learn to work within society's guidelines—albeit with an independent perspective solidly grounded in a supportive community—have learned a valuable lesson indeed.

*Q: What is the curriculum?*

A: The curriculum at St. Helena Catholic School meets or exceeds the education standards established by the State of California. The curriculum is supplemented by religion class, which is offered by no other school in this area and makes our school truly unique.

*Q: How much religion is taught?*

A: All the children have regular religion class, more frequently in the lower grades and more deeply in the upper grades. Over nine years they learn the vocabulary of the Christian religion—terms like “apostle,” “baptism,” and “cathedral.” They acquire a

familiarity with the bible, knowledge indispensable for any educated person, religious or not. They are encouraged to develop their own spiritual natures by prayer, and they learn techniques that have offered consolation to the faithful for centuries, simple practices like the rosary, genuflection, and the Stations of the Cross. (At St. Helena Catholic School, Christmas, Easter, and St. Patrick's Day are more than just holidays: they really mean something to us.)

Also, in religion class the children are taught that they, and their classmates, are each intrinsically valuable: fundamentally free, intellectually capable, and essentially social creatures who mutually benefit from association in groups like the church, and who have reciprocal responsibilities to be of service to one another. Church members, in general, make very solid citizens.

The religion curriculum is well-organized and very age-appropriate. For many children it's their favorite subject. Ask to see the religion curriculum outline. We think you'll be impressed.

*Q: How do you manage to exceed state standards?*

A: Our staff is very hard working. Also, many classes are taught by teachers specializing in that field. For example, with a dedicated teacher, P.E. is more than kickball or just another recess. With a science teacher and laboratory classroom, experiments beyond the scope of a standard curriculum can be offered. Music and computer education also have specialized instructors who prepare a rich curriculum particularly tailored to the students' needs and abilities.

*Q: Do you have a policy regarding TV?*

A: The statistics are familiar. Nationwide kids average three hours or more before a TV daily. While parents are the ultimate arbiters of their children's screen habits, the St. Helena Catholic School Parent-Student Handbook offers helpful guidelines regarding TV, movies, and video games.

The Handbook is a valuable reference for parents. It contains important information about our school's philosophy, learning expectations, various policies (e.g. regarding attendance, discipline, dress code), parent organizations, and much more.

*Q: Why is there a uniform requirement?*

A: When undertaking a serious endeavor, most people perform better when attired appropriately. Whereas adults' jobs vary, the children's "job" is to study at school, and dressing up reminds them subtly that the endeavor is serious and requires their special effort. The uniform also symbolizes a unity of purpose in this particular scholastic community.

In fact, we are used to adults wearing uniforms too. For example, police officers and fire personnel, as well as members of sports teams, wear uniforms, symbols of their common purpose.

Q: *What about field trips?*

A: Field trips are undertaken when appropriate and affordable, but not just for the sake of a day off school. Most learning occurs at school with the instructors encouraging students to explore, inquire, memorize, and study—individually, and in groups when appropriate.

Q: *What do parents in your school community think about St. Helena Catholic School?*

A: A parent survey in April 2005 elicited comments on a variety of topics.

Regarding graduates' preparation for high school: "I feel my daughter was very well prepared for high school. She knew about responsibility and was prepared for the amount of homework she gets in high school." "They felt they were very prepared."

Regarding what they like best about the school: "The smallness of the school. The family feeling of the school." "The commitment of the staff and administration to the students." "The moral values that are promoted will help each child build a strong base to deal with all of life's obstacles." "Caring, dedicated teachers and staff." "The small size, religious enrichment." "That some of the teachers really care about the children; especially Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_. When my daughter graduated, Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_ helped her to get in the classes she needed to be in for high school." "Small classes. Administration is very dedicated as well as staff . . ."

Regarding why you send your child to our school: More than two out of three respondents listed "religious atmosphere and education," "academic excellence," and "discipline."

Regarding what specifically defines this school as Catholic: "The way the mission statement isn't just a bunch of words—but actually lived through teachers, staff, students, and their families."