

NATIVITY JESUIT

A C A D E M Y

SPRING 2026



Committed to Serve

Stories of Impact

PLUS:

Students' Reflection of Nativity's Impact
Catholic Herald Teacher of the Year

EDUCATING YOUTH FOR A LIFE OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE

At Nativity Jesuit Academy, *en todo amar y servir* (in all things, to love and to serve) is not simply a theme for the year; it is a call that shapes who we are and who our students are becoming. This edition of our newsletter brings that mission to life through the voices of our community.

In these pages, you will read three student reflections on their experiences with Camp Thunderhead, Graduate Support, and academics. Their stories highlight the true impact of a Nativity education. At Camp, students discover resilience, teamwork, and the confidence that comes from stepping outside their comfort zones. In the classroom, they are challenged to think critically, work diligently, and grow in discipline and curiosity. Together, we form young men and women for lives of leadership and service.

We are also honored to feature a family whose journey reflects authentic parent partnership. When families entrust us with their children and actively engage in our mission, it strengthens our community and reinforces the values we seek to instill.

As we look ahead to Noche de Nativity on Friday, May 1st, we look forward to gathering in celebration of our students and the bright futures before them. Thank you for your continued partnership and for the many ways you help bring our mission to life.

En todo amar y servir,

Vanessa Solis
President, Nativity Jesuit Academy



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

CHAIR
Yamilett Lopez

VICE CHAIR
Dan Nigro

SECRETARY
Irving Ibarra '03

TREASURER
Meghan Dean

PRESIDENT
Vanessa Solis

BOARD MEMBERS
Rev. Richard Abert, S.J.
Mark Herr
Brad Kalscheur
Rev. Mike Marco, S.J.
Maria Monteagudo
Mary Nolte
Victor Perez
Rev. Renzo Rosales, S.J.
Dr. Peter Stanek
Andrew Stith
William Stone
Lora Strigens
Sheila Taphorn

NATIVITY JESUIT ACADEMY
1515 SOUTH 29TH ST.
MILWAUKEE, WI 53215

Cover photo
(From left to right):
Noah 8th grade, Kamila 7th
grade, and Ariel 8th grade.

Nativity Jesuit by the Numbers

WHO WE SERVE

257
Total enrollment
in K4–8th grade

96
High school-aged
alumni through
our Graduate
Support Program

100%
Students
self-identifying
as Latino

100%
Students qualifying
for a Choice voucher

UNIQUE MODEL OF EDUCATION

Extended
school day

Year-round instruction,
including our
Camp Thunderhead
program in the
northwoods of Wisconsin

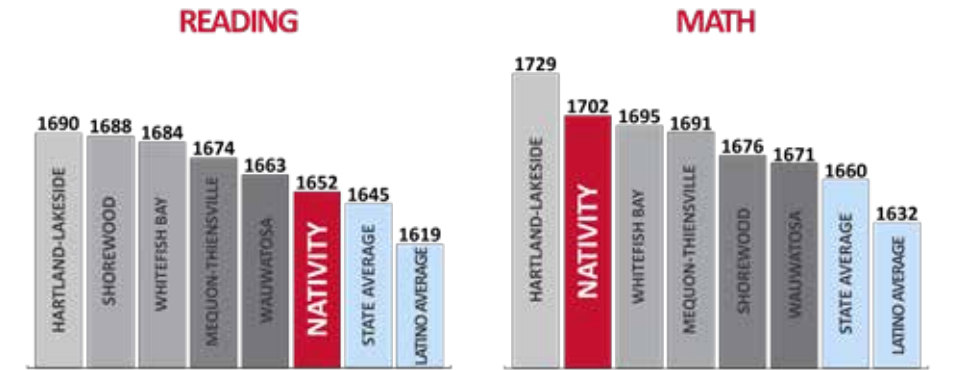
Graduate
support
services

Formation in our
Catholic, Jesuit
tradition to be
“men and women
for others”

PROVEN RESULTS

Thanks to the commitment of the Nativity community, students remain competitive with their peers from the more affluent suburbs of Milwaukee.

Average 8th Grade District Scores on the 2025 Statewide Forward Exam



We Couldn't Do It Without You!

Nativity's unique model of education and proven results are possible because of generous people like you! Thank you for considering support of our current wish list:

- \$80 funds one day of after school snacks and materials
- \$170 funds one month of coffee for faculty and staff
- \$250 funds a replacement Chromebook for one student
- \$300 funds art materials for one class for the year
- \$770 funds one grade of updated religion class textbooks
- \$2,000 funds music classes through the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music

Any amount towards these wish list items is greatly appreciated!

Support today through the enclosed envelope
or at nativityjesuit.org/support

Thank you for making a Nativity education possible!



LEARNING, LEADING, & BECOMING: *Through the Lens of a Student*

Through Nativity's unique model of education, students grow holistically. Whether learning how to study more effectively, stepping outside their comfort zones at Camp Thunderhead, or discovering the importance of serving others, our students develop greater confidence, responsibility, and openness to growth. Guided by the support of their teachers, their families, and the Graduate at Graduation, or Grad at Grad Qualities, (Loving, Committed to Justice, Religious, Open to Growth, and Seeking Intellectual Excellence) they learn to challenge themselves intellectually, embrace new opportunities, and use their gifts to help those around them. Together, these experiences prepare them not only for high school but for the kind of people they hope to become.



Ariel, 8th grade



Nativity has helped me become a better learner and person. In 6th grade, I struggled with assignments in Theology and Social Studies involving memorization. My teacher, Ms. Fonferek, helped me improve my note-taking. Once I learned how to organize information, my grades improved. Going into 8th grade, things started falling into place, making me prepared for high school.

Outside the classroom, Camp Thunderhead pushed me out of my comfort zone. This past summer, our soccer team needed a goalkeeper. No one wanted to do it, so I volunteered. I don't think my 6th-grade self would have done that. I ended up being voted MVP goalkeeper by the camp counselors. That experience taught me to step up, take risks, and adapt to change.

My advice to younger students would be to 'take advantage of every opportunity.' In 6th and 7th grade, I missed opportunities to build community. I plan to take my own advice in high school. I want to get involved, meet new people, and challenge myself. Nativity has helped me grow into someone who is ready for change, even if it's stressful or unexpected. I learned to find solutions, step into leadership, and push myself academically.



Kamila, 7th grade



My experience at Nativity has supported me in growing both independently and intellectually. The core values I've grown in the most are "Open to Growth" and "Seeking Intellectual Excellence."

At Nativity, I have shown I am open to growth in many ways. For example, the summer I attended Camp Thunderhead for the first time was full of growth. Although I felt homesick, I learned to be independent, tried new foods, and participated in activities I never imagined doing.



I have also improved in seeking intellectual excellence. I think I can speak for many students when I say that participating and asking for help in classes can be challenging. In Math class, I did not feel confident participating or asking for help. But now, as a 7th grader, I've challenged myself to embrace my "errors" and "accidents." If I could give my younger self one tip, it would be: "If you don't ask for the help you need, you'll never get to the level you want to be at."

Today, I want to thank my parents. Being at Nativity has pushed me to meet their goals for me and to set my own. I will always cherish the support both my parents and Nativity gave to me.

Noah, 8th grade

Being at Nativity, I've learned that success is not only about personal achievement but about using my God-given talents to serve others. By serving others, following my teachers' examples, and living out the Grad to Grad values, I've grown into someone who is more loving, open to growth, and aware of others' needs.

A teacher who inspires me to keep growing and serving others is Mrs. Earhart. She has set an example for me to follow and persevere as a student. Through teachers like her, Nativity has encouraged me to look beyond myself and understand how even small actions can make a difference.

While growth can be difficult, pushing myself outside of my comfort zone has allowed me to grow and lead by example. Whether it's working with classmates on service projects or helping others in everyday situations, I've learned the importance of showing up with compassion and respect.

These experiences have helped me develop a stronger sense of responsibility toward my community. Because of this, my time at Nativity has inspired me to serve others more intentionally and carry the Grad at Grad values into how I treat people, make decisions, and contribute to my community.



A Nativity Story of Impact: The Villanueva Family



Family.

Family is at the heart of everything for the Villanueva family. It's the guiding value as they work toward a better future for themselves and their community.

Originally from Guadalajara, Mexico, Ana and her husband, Miguel, never planned to move to the United States. But faced with economic uncertainty, they made the difficult decision to leave so their family could have more opportunities for a better life. The transition was not easy. The cold, the language barrier, the unfamiliarity, and the longing for home made the journey challenging.

When it came time to find a school for their oldest children, they hoped for a Catholic education that aligned with their values. Everything changed when they met Cynthia Camarena (P'13, '20, '24) and Silvia Jimenez (P'10, '11, '14), Nativity's school receptionists at the time. The Villanuevas had heard about Nativity through a friend, and from the moment they walked in, they were greeted with such respect and warmth that they felt seen and valued in a way they hadn't since arriving in the U.S.

That moment of hospitality became a turning point. They told themselves, "We want to be part of this mission."

Ana and Miguel began volunteering wherever they could. From chaperoning field trips, helping in classrooms to supporting Camp Thunderhead, they wanted to understand what made the school so special. What they found was a second home where their family's values perfectly aligned with the school's mission.

When Nativity became a co-ed school, Ana and Miguel were initially hesitant about sending their daughters to Camp Thunderhead. Ultimately, they realized they didn't want to limit their daughters' opportunities simply because they were girls. They wanted them to experience the same growth, confidence, and adventure their sons had. Today, Ana and Miguel are the proud parents of four Nativity students and alumni: José '18, Alan '23, Rocío '26, and Diana '30.

Trusting Nativity with her children's education did more than help her kids thrive. It gave Ana the courage to step into a new chapter of her own life. Surrounded by the encouragement of her family, friends, and the Nativity staff, she launched her own business. For the past five years, Ana has successfully run her own bakery, Super Delicias.

The Villanueva's journey reflects the true heart of the Nativity community: it is a place where families are supported, values are strengthened, and futures are built with hope.

We want
to be part
of this
mission.



IGNATION REFLECTION

with Fr. Rick Abert, SJ



Over a year ago at Nativity, we underwent an Ignatian Review. This process is designed to help keep us close to our purpose of serving the “Frontiers of Catholic life” well.

Nativity, alongside Jesuit ministries throughout the world, has long been conscious of the call to action for social justice. This commitment forms the foundation of our involvement in Catholic Social Ministry. As part of that ongoing conversation, it becomes essential that our students recognize their call to service in a world that is increasingly interdependent, yet struggling because it remains divided in so many forms.

Former Jesuit leader Fr. Pedro Arrupe’s spirit and leadership inspire Nativity’s mission to form young people who understand that loving God is inseparable from loving and serving their most vulnerable neighbors.

At Nativity Jesuit Academy, our faculty, staff, students, and board make a concerted effort to live up to our name. Through our studies and our service to others, we strive to “give birth” to the gift of Jesus Christ, helping our students and faculty foster a deepening desire to discern and embrace the call to serve those among us.

Throughout the school year, we have introduced several efforts to nurture this spirit of service. One example is our “buddy system,” in which older students are paired with younger ones to accompany them during important events, such as all-school masses. This simple practice offers both a sense of care and a sense of being cared for.

We are all unfinished projects, committed to helping one another grow. Guided by Ignatian Spirituality, we are called to a “mysticism of love and service lived so as to help shape a better world for all.” This calling shapes the hearts of our

graduates, sending them into the world as people who seek intellectual depth and are grounded in our Jesuit, Catholic identity. They leave as individuals who are loving in nature, committed to reconciliation and justice, open to growth, and dedicated to the shared responsibility of caring for our common home.

Together, as younger and older members of our educational community, we hope to keep walking with the next generation as they deepen their relationship with the Lord and with His people.

Q&A with Catholic Herald’s Teacher of the Year, Martha Perez, K5

Martha’s vocation as an educator is embedded in a deep sense of faith, purpose, and love for her students. This year, the Milwaukee Catholic Herald recognized her as a Teacher of the Year, honoring not only her dedication to academic excellence but also the compassion, humility, and spiritual growth she brings to her work each day. As you read the Q&A below, you will see that her inspiration and dedication stem from her relationship with Jesus, the support of her colleagues, and her unwavering belief in the transformative power of education.



How does your faith influence the way you approach your work in the classroom?

Teaching is both demanding and intellectually rigorous work. It requires dedication, thoughtful analysis, and sustained effort. Despite these challenges, the profession is deeply rewarding. Each day, I have the privilege of witnessing my students grow holistically, making meaningful connections with academic concepts, practicing social skills within the school community, and engaging in prayer through the Examen. Because of this, there is more prayer in my life. My strength and mindset are grounded in the Lord.

Who are the mentors or colleagues who have shaped you, and what have they taught you?

I work with an amazing team of colleagues who consistently support me in the classroom. I am blessed to work alongside our Assistant Principal of Academics, Monique Deshotels, and our K5 Educational Assistant, Karina Maldonado. Together, they embody what it means to “Love and Serve” others at Nativity.

Monique has taught me to be reflective and analytical with my work. Her leadership motivates me to seek intellectual excellence in my teaching pedagogy. She has taught me to continuously provide constructive feedback to my students, hold my students with high expectations, sustain a positive classroom environment, and, most importantly, address the academic needs each student has to be successful.

Karina is an amazing co-worker who teaches me daily about humility and love. The first year working with Karina, I was amazed to see how much love and patience she shows our students each day. She has taught me that love in the classroom has many dimensions. To love a student is to be compassionate, to understand and support students’ emotional needs, to model reflection, and to help them learn to value every person in the room.

What message would you like to share with your students and their families?

My message to parents is “Thank You.” Thank you for working alongside me to help your students grow in my classroom. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with you and the support you constantly give. And to my NJA students, it brings me so much joy to see you grow in wisdom and kindness. In all that you do and everywhere you go, keep your heart open to God.



Spring 2026 Alumni Updates

- **Irving Ibarra '03**, a current board member at Nativity, was recognized in the Catholic Herald in their February issue for his faith, service, and leadership.
- **Eleazar Lopez '97** was named the recipient of the 2025 Jackie Herd-Barber Award from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation. He also currently serves as the Board Chair at Sixteenth Street Community Health Center.
- **Jesus Herrera Briones '24** and **Aldo Villanueva '22** are recipients of the Horizon Caddie Scholarship at Marquette University High School. With support from mentors in the Evans Scholarship Foundation, Aldo has been named an Evans Scholar, giving him the opportunity to attend one of 24 prestigious U.S. universities with fully paid tuition and housing.
- **Michael Perez Cruz '22**, a senior at Dominican High School, recently signed to play baseball at Bryant & Stratton College and received academic and athletic scholarships.
- **Giancarlo Hernandez '20, Tonatiuh Hernandez '20, Dylan Ocampo '14, Carlos Núñez '16, Austin Piszczek '16, Adalberto Carrillo '14, Alexis Sánchez '10, Jose Villanueva '18, and Michael Contreras '18** worked as Camp Thunderhead counselors during the summer of 2025.
- **Austin Piszczek '16, Carlos Núñez '16, Ruben Garcia '09, Dylan Ocampo '14, Irving Ibarra '03, Emmanuel Lopez '17, and José Gonzalez '03** are all serving as mentors to at least one high school student.
- In the summer of 2025, **Alexandra Hernandez Parga '24** and **Edith Carrillo Andrade '24** were the first Nativity alumni to return to Camp Thunderhead as Lobo Leaders, a new initiative in which graduates under 18 years can serve as counselors-in-training.
- **Eliazar Torres '10** served as a coach for girls' volleyball and **Dario Camarena '13** served as a coach for flag football.
- **Milo Joel Castro '25, Carolina Gallegos Coronado '24, Nirel Perea Hernandez '24, Victor Cruz '23, Santiago González Peña '23, Manrique Valladares '23, Haziel Aponte Mejia '22, and Ricardo Cardenas '22** have all achieved a perfect 4.0 GPA or higher in the Fall 2025 high school semester.

Seeking Mentors for the Class of 2026!

The Nativity Jesuit Academy Mentoring Program is seeking dedicated individuals interested in serving as mentors to high-school-aged Nativity graduates. Mentors are community volunteers who accompany Nativity alumni throughout their high school years, offering support and encouragement for their academic and personal goals. Students and mentors participate in monthly meetings, which include a guided conversation over a shared meal, and social events such as a fall cookout and spring bowling night.

Interested in learning more about how to join the next cohort of mentors (or becoming a mentor in the future)? Contact the Graduate Support Office at gradsupport@nativityjesuit.org.

Thank you for supporting our graduates!



2026 Companions Award

Members of the **Lori and David Nicholas Family Foundation** are the recipients of Nativity's 2026 Companions Award!



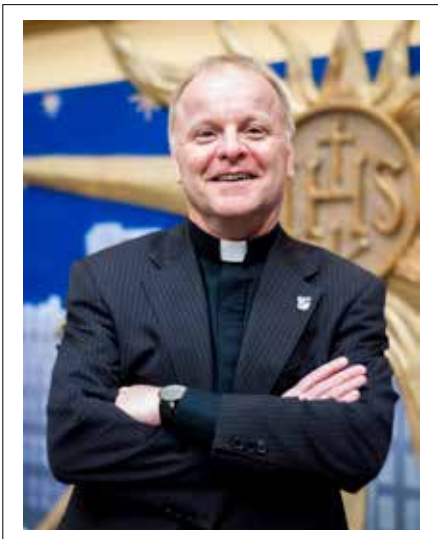
This award is named in honor of the Holy Companions, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Peter Faber, and St. Francis Xavier, whose friendship with God and with one another became the nucleus of the Society of Jesus. Great works rely on the cooperation and support of friends in our mission, and the Nicholas family's partnership has shaped Nativity's students and mission for over a decade.

Lori and David Nicholas' support for Nativity began in 2016, helping advance its mission to expand educational opportunities in Wisconsin. Their generous philanthropy has made a meaningful and lasting impact for Nativity students at both our Milwaukee and Northwoods campuses. We are truly grateful to Lori and David and the entire Nicholas family for their unwavering support and continued commitment to Nativity's unique model of education.

We look forward to celebrating the **Lori and David Nicholas Family Foundation** and their impact on Nativity at Noche de Nativity on May 1st!

2026 St. Ignatius Leadership Award

Also receiving an award at our 2026 Noche de Nativity is **Rev. Michael Marco, S.J.**, known as Father Marco. He is the recipient of the St. Ignatius Leadership Award, which recognizes individuals who have profoundly influenced Nativity's mission and model of education. St. Ignatius of Loyola believed that one's life purpose should be to love and serve others. The annual recipient of this award is someone who embodies the true spirit of Nativity Jesuit Academy.



Father Marco's life and ministry reflect a deep commitment to the young people of our community. As a board member and champion for Nativity, he has advocated for our alumni and their families, ensuring they feel known, supported, and encouraged as they take their next steps at Marquette University High School. He leads his team with intention and care, creating a welcoming community where every Nativity graduate is set up to thrive. We are sincerely grateful for the care, advocacy, and faith-filled example he shares so generously.

We look forward to celebrating **Father Marco** at Noche de Nativity on May 1st!

NATIVITY JESUIT

A C A D E M Y

1515 SOUTH 29TH ST. | MILWAUKEE, WI 53215

NON PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE

PAID
MILWAUKEE, WI
PERMIT NO. 491



UPCOMING EVENTS



NOCHE DE NATIVITY: A NIGHT TO SCHOLARSHIP NATIVITY STUDENTS

Friday, May 1, 2026 at Nativity Jesuit Academy
njadinner26.givesmart.com



GOLF OUTING 2026

Monday, July 27, 2026 at Westmoor Country Club
nativitygolf26.givesmart.com



Stay connected with Nativity Jesuit Academy
by updating your email address at
nativityjesuit.org/email