"You missed it"

No one likes to hear those words – especially when what you miss is a perfect, everyday example of what makes St. Mary’s Mission School special.

As students start their day with breakfast, Principal Mike Hougen notices a few fifth graders helping a much younger student. They sat together, they talked, and when they were done, they left their table spotless.

"Those students are being family to each other," Hougen says, "we work to instill in them a sense of service to others."

Ultimately, Hougen says they want that sense of service to grow with them, to prepare them to be leaders in their tribal community.

According to Full of Fair Hope by Owen Lindblad, OSB, "Catholic influence at Red Lake began in 1855 with Father Francis Xavier Pierz… When Pierz volunteered for Minnesota missionary work among the Ojibwe, he was placed, by Bishop Joseph Cretin of St. Paul, in charge of all the mission territory in northern Minnesota… He was well-loved by the Indians wherever he went… Through a personal invitation extended by the chief of the village of Red Lake, Pierz was asked to erect a mission in that place."

"The team is motivated to meet each of the young people (Continued on Page 2)
St. Mary's Mission school continued from page 1

where they are” says Hougen. Class sizes are limited to 15, so teachers can get to know their students and respond to their unique needs – especially after the challenges posed by Covid-19. Without formal classroom instructions for 18 months, there is learning loss that needs to be addressed.

“Our teachers are used to educating the individual child,” Hougen says, “We are asking them to lean into that.”
In his fifth year as principal, Hougen has seen the school positively evolve. Adding a full-time guidance counselor and a math interventionist clearly benefits the growing middle school grades. Hougen says middle school is an area that has generated increasing transfer requests.

“Our kids come with unique challenges and a sincere will to learn.” Hougen says, “We strive to make sure they get the best, because they deserve the best. Financial support helps provide for these needs.”

Generous support also makes it possible to provide services despite financial challenges. For example, last summer, 50-70 young people participated in St. Mary’s Summer Adventure program, even though the expected government funding did not come through.

The program provided a daily meal and unique opportunities, like STEM Camp through the University of Notre Dame’s Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) program.

St. Mary’s seeks all available opportunities to strengthen its offerings, such as joining with seven other reservation schools to create the American Indian Catholic Schools Network. The schools share ideas and resources, and explore mutually beneficial grant opportunities.
A note from Bishop Richard E. Pates, Apostolic Administrator

Dear Friends in Christ—

My name is Bishop Richard Pates, and I am currently the Apostolic Administrator for the Diocese of Crookston until the installation of Bishop Andrew Cozzens. While I am filling the leadership role in this diocese, I have had the opportunity to meet with Fr. Jerry Rogers and Fr. John Christianson, co-pastors of the Red Lake parish and school, and witness the incredible work they are doing there.

I am deeply impressed with the work and ministry at the Mission. Your commitment to the Mission is especially important now as Fr. Jerry’s health has been a challenge in the past year. Fr. John Christianson has joined him in this very special ministry. I have personally seen how much good work is done at Red Lake.

Moving forward we continue to need your generous financial support to make the good things happen. Thank you for all you have done in the past to keep our Mission school a safe, vibrant, and excellent institution of learning for our Native children. Enjoy the impact report and God bless you!

Sincerely, in the peace of Christ,

+ Richard E. Pates
Apostolic Administrator

Fr. John Christianson
Co-pastor at the Mission

Deb Smith living her destiny as a teacher

Fourth grade teacher Deb Smith knew, even as a child growing up in Ohio, that she would someday teach at a reservation school. She spent her early career working in camps in Ohio. She sought a change that brought her to Minnesota to work in the Boundary Waters. She pursued an education degree remotely and earned a degree from Bemidji State University.

After her first teaching position in Cass Lake, Smith joined the staff at St. Mary’s Mission School where she is glad to have joined an organization that aligns with her faith. While most of the students are not Catholic, Smith is able to share her relationship with Christ and let them know that when things are hard, they are not alone.

In addition, she prepares them to learn and successfully interact with their classmates whether they are studying academics or simply sharing personal stories.

“I see them grow as human beings,” Smith says, “I see the love we immerse them in, help them build relationships, which is a life skill they need.”
Staff & Enrollment

119 student’s pre-k to 8th grade
10 classroom teachers
  1 principal
2 math and reading specialists
  1 school secretary
  1 housekeeper
  1 maintenance person
  1 school counselor
1 social services professional
1 special education teacher
  (from public schools)
1 food service provider
1 physical education teacher