

July/August 2014



the

connecting the community of st. francis xavier catholic church

# Navigator



Nothing says summer more than family gatherings, cookouts on the grill, games in the yard and laughter with friends. This year, Fathers Tony, Thom and Chris invited members of our St. Francis Xavier Parish family to celebrate the season together with a series of Picnics with the Priests.

For five Saturdays this summer, parishioners – especially members of certain ministries and organizations – are invited to enjoy an old-fashioned cookout on the deck of the Randel House. The parish is providing all of the food; parishioners are invited to come over after the 5 p.m. Saturday vigil Mass, get something to eat and linger over great conversation to celebrate the community to which we all belong.

No one is excluded; if you don't belong to these ministries, RSVP and come anyway! Our first picnic welcomed anyone who had attended a Christ Renews His Parish renewal at our parish, and more than 130 people ate and visited on a lively and beautiful June evening. The second picnic June 28 was smaller, welcoming the Knights of Columbus, St. Vincent de Paul Society, Operation HOMES, Respect Life and Battered Women's Shelter parish volunteers.

Three more picnics are planned for July 19, July 26 and Aug. 9. Call parish secretary Rhonda McKinnon at 330-725-4968 or email [rmckinnon@stfrancisxavier.info](mailto:rmckinnon@stfrancisxavier.info) to RSVP. We really hope you will join us!



Saturday Vigil – 5 p.m., Sunday – 8 & 10 a.m., noon & 5:30 p.m.  
Weekdays – 7:30 a.m. Monday through Saturday; 7 p.m. Monday, Thursday & First Friday of the month



# Following God's Plan Father Chris joins SFX Parish staff

By Jennifer Webb

**B**y the time he was 16, Christopher Cox had a 10-year plan for his life.

It did not include the priesthood.

"I wanted to get my MBA," says the newly ordained Father Chris, who joined the St. Francis Xavier Parish pastoral staff in June. "I was going to go into business management somewhere, and someday own my own business."

But something about the priesthood began to nag at him. He grew up attending Mass at St. Justin Martyr Parish in Eastlake, played a lot of travel soccer and wasn't an altar server. In the eighth grade at his parish school, he played Jesus in the youth group's living Stations of the Cross.

"Usually the role of Jesus went to high school kids, but none of them wanted to do it," Father Chris recalls. Afterward, a priest asked him if he'd ever thought about the priesthood. The answer was a resounding "no," but the idea stuck with him throughout high school.

At North High School, the teen threw himself into extracurricular activities, serving as president of the National Honor Society and Spanish club, and playing the role of the "Ranger" mascot at sporting events. "I was dating. Girls became more interested in me, and I was popular in school," he says.

He hit the books hard his senior year, taking classes at Lakeland Community College in Kirtland to meet some college requirements and



Father Chris Cox is getting to know Medina.

save money in college. But the priest's question stayed with him.

"It was hard for me to sleep after he said that," Father Chris says. "That's not what I wanted to hear."

He began to discern another question, which came to him more as a thought, in his own voice, but which he came to understand was God's call: "For me it was a thought: 'Could you really give yourself to a girl you're dating if you have this idea in the back of your head?'"

Feeling the need to satisfy the question, he entered Borromeo Seminary in Wickliffe in the fall of 2006 and remained on the path to priesthood.

"God uses the voices around you of other people to answer your prayers, and he used a priest to get me into the

seminary. Over time, he used many other people," he says.

Like all seminarians, he was enrolled at John Carroll University for his undergraduate work, and he completed a double major in communications and philosophy, with minors in computer science and creative writing. He interned one summer at Charles Schwab; later, he completed a pastoral year at Communion of Saints Parish in Cleveland Heights – where he lived in the same apartment that our former parochial vicar, Father John Lee, now occupies there.

He also had an opportunity to teach eighth-grade PSR and RCIA classes, work with mentally challenged adults, and minister at the Cuyahoga County jail. He served as a transitional deacon at St. John Neumann Parish in Strongsville. Father Chris says he found great joy in serving people. "I knew that was something God had to have planted in me," he says.

He also enjoys exercise, including weightlifting, to maintain his health, and he enjoys watching sports. He is the middle child, with two brothers – one older, one younger.

Father Chris was happy to be assigned to Medina, where Christine Strong, his mother's cousin, is a parishioner and co-leader of the Hospitality Sunday ministry. "It always reminded me of a town you read about in books," he says of Medina. "I've had a very warm welcome. I'm very excited to do ministry here."



# Setting a course for God

**M**ore than 150 children ages 4 to 12 docked at SonTreasure Island the week of June 23 to explore their love for Jesus and uncover God's treasures.

After crossing the dock, VBS students were greeted heartily by Father Thom, dressed in his best island attire and relaxing in a hammock. Each morning, Mickie Getz taught the kids songs, complete with hand motions, before "Deanna" and "Gina" (aka VBS directors Sue Rohe-Brooks and Paulette Kerns) spied everyone through their telescopes and chatted with the parrot perched on a giant ship docked nearby.

Led by a dedicated team of adult volunteers and teen helpers, the students were laughing and singing all week as they discovered through Bible stories, crafts and play how much God loves them.





## Faith compels generosity

**M**ike Fox isn't usually involved in the daily operations of JAF's Therapy in Motion, because he has his own responsibilities with his construction business. But Mike says he saw firsthand the impact of the therapy when his wife, Judy, needed help with a little boy.

"I'd been dealing with a guy who had cheated me out of a lot of money, and I was having a bad day," Mike recalls quietly. "They went around the arena and started to get him off, but he said: 'No, Miss Judy, one more ride.'

"Here, the boy had never talked. I walked outside and looked in the air and said, 'I get it. There's more to life than money.'"

Mike likes to stay in the background and quietly take care of business. But he is passionate about his Christian faith, which he shares with friends in the form of a daily email reflection on Bible verses he selects. That email gets shared with a group of at least 20 men.

He also strongly believes in tithing, giving 10 percent of his income back to God.

"I'm so blessed that I can do that, why wouldn't I do that? We're not given time, so what do I need with \$100,000 in the bank? I don't worry about rainy days," Mike says. "We give all the glory to God. Without Him, I couldn't do anything."

## Horse farm extends

**L**ittle Josh's face lights up when he thinks about Tom, the easygoing chestnut gelding he rides weekly at JAF's Therapy in Motion.

His parents, Bill and Lauren Cloyes of Brunswick, are equally happy that Josh, who turned 6 in June, has been able to develop more muscle control in his head, trunk and hands in his sessions with Tom.

Born with Down syndrome and having suffered a stroke at 9 months, Josh doesn't speak and has trouble using his hands. But at JAF's, he is learning to grip the reins, which strengthens his muscles and prepares him for other kinds of movement. Riding Tom makes the necessary therapy that much more fun.

"It's done a lot with his core and head control," Lauren says. "He does more with his hands here than I can get him to do at home."

JAF's is a labor of love for Judy A. Fox, a 25-year parishioner of St. Francis Xavier.

Judy had horses as pets for a long time before she learned about therapeutic horseback riding. In 1998, her mother-in-law suffered an aneurism and stroke and lost the ability to speak and move very much. She began therapeutic horseback riding through Lodi Community Hospital, and Judy began to volunteer there. She found the work so rewarding that she decided to become a certified instructor.

"When I saw firsthand the impression it made...she was so happy," Judy says. "She had no speech, but she had the biggest grin on her face because she could move again." Even though her mother-in-law had never ridden a horse, Judy says, "she loved it. When she got up on a horse, she lit up."

In 2001, Judy opened JAF's behind her Lafayette Road home and helps about 12 children, who come for private sessions. In addition to herself, her team includes PATH International certified therapeutic riding instructor Bev, licensed physical therapist Theresa Piatt (also an SFX parishioner), and a team of volunteers. Some able-bodied children come for horseback-riding lessons.

SFX parishioner Brian Coughlin says his 13-year-old son Keegan, who has





# God's gifts to disabled children

autism and is nonverbal, loves to ride the horses. Theresa and volunteers encourage Keegan to throw balls into a basketball hoop, toss beanbags and play other coordination games, all from atop a horse. Now that he's a teenager, he's learning to take care of the horses too.

"It's done a world of good for him," says Brian, adding that the weekly physical therapy has helped strengthen Keegan's core muscles. "This (therapy) has gotten him stronger and stronger." Keegan uses a talking device to say "go ride Tom today," Brian says.

The farm is supported largely through an annual horse show at Cleveland Metroparks Lewis Road Show Grounds that draws riders from throughout Northeast Ohio. The ninth annual event, one of a five-show series co-sponsored by the Cuyahoga Farm Bureau Equine Advisory Committee and Angels Haven Horse Rescue, will be Sept. 27 and is open to the public.

Judy draws no salary and relies on class fees, dedicated volunteers and her family's financial resources to keep the farm going. She says she is simply happy to use her God-given gifts and talents to help make a difference for kids who sometimes have trouble learning and communicating with others.

"We have a lot of toys and games so they learn and have fun," she says. "It gives them mobility. It's good for their self-image."

Judy says she is grateful for the opportunity to work with the children. "I want to be the best I can be for the kids. If they leave here with a smile, I've helped them," she says.

When Father Tony Sejba came to bless the farm in late April, he thanked Judy, her husband Mike and all the volunteers for using their gifts and talents to help some of the most vulnerable in our community. "I'm hopeful you continue your work so everyone can realize the gifts of life and community," he told them.

Judy says she is glad to use what she's been given to help others. "It's definitely a gift from God," she says. "I'd never be able to do it on my own."



In April, Father Tony Sejba visited JAF's Therapy in Motion to bless the stables and the ministry to disabled children. Mike and Judy Fox believe in using their God-given time, talent and treasure to make a difference in the world around them.



# School days

## Changes ahead when students return to SFX

By Jennifer Webb

Know, it's still the middle of summer, and the last thing you want to read about is school.

While you're relaxing by the pool and weeding the garden, the staff and teachers have been busy planning for the next academic year. Students returning next month to St. Francis Xavier School will discover a number of changes await them even before the bus arrives on the first day. (The bus itself is a change for most students, as Medina City Schools restores busing for all students this fall after a several-year absence.)



The gym floor was sanded, painted and sealed after last winter's flood.

For starters, a few events – such as curriculum night for parents – will take place Aug. 13, the same day that class lists are posted and five days before students report on Monday, Aug. 18 (yes, a day earlier than Medina public schools; we also end one day later on May 29).

In years past, curriculum night was held during the second week of school, explains Bibiana Seislove, the principal. Now parents will have a chance to learn what their child's teacher plans for the year before classes begin.

The open house and tailgate party remain on the schedule, giving families a chance to reconnect over dinner and games after 5 p.m. Saturday Mass, the weekend before school starts. In recent years, class lists were unveiled at this event.

### Earlier bells

Another big change is to the length of the school day. Due to changes in state law, the school day will start 10 minutes earlier and end 10 minutes later than in years past. Under a bill passed by the Ohio state legislature, schools are required this year to comply with a minimum number of instructional hours instead of days.

Extending the school day by just 20 minutes means SFX can avoid adding about five days to its 2014-2015 calendar to get the necessary hours, explains Mrs. Seislove. This year, students will be permitted into the building at 8:15 a.m., and are expected in their seats by 8:50 a.m.

Lunch periods will begin at 11:05 a.m. and conclude, with the end of middle school recess, at 12:55 p.m.

At 3:05 p.m., teachers will have a 10-minute homeroom, followed by dismissal at 3:15 p.m.

The state also will allow three "blizzard bag" days in place of five calamity days.

### Staff changes

A number of staffing changes occurred at the end of the school year, with the retirements of Assistant to the Principal Judy Podrasky, middle school teacher Mary Ann Mayer, piano teacher Virginia Churgovich and aide Laura Chomanics.

Longtime kindergarten teacher Jane Unsdorfer will follow her students to first grade this year as Pamela Bugner moves to staff a third, third-grade classroom, and Mrs. Farkas will add piano lessons to her part-time job as music teacher. Joyce Dolinar, who spent 13 years as cafeteria monitor, will expand her work in the school and parish offices. Instead, students can look forward to seeing new Assistant to the Principal Susan Herman in the cafeteria (see sidebar).

In her old job as assistant principal at St. Albert the Great School, Mrs. Seislove says, she enjoyed the opportunity to see students in a different setting. "It's a great way to stay connected to the kids," she says. Teachers will get a break from the cafeteria, but will continue to augment parent volunteers on the playground.

### Discipline modifications

Turning her attention to the discipline code, after consulting with teachers, Mrs. Seislove has decided to remove the "strikes" encountered by middle school students. Instead, teachers and staff will issue detentions if warranted. Three dress-code violations will result in a detention.

"To me, a strike was something negative," she says. "I've raised four kids



myself. I know teenagers might smirk at a strike, but if they knew they were looking at a detention, they might reconsider their actions.”

“It’s all about setting expectations. All the teachers need to set expectations for their classroom management.”

### Grade-Point Averages

Students in grades five through eight also can expect to see letter grades – and grade-point averages, for the first time, on semester report cards. In the past, some classes awarded grades of “O” for “outstanding” and “U” for “unsatisfactory.” GPAs simplify the honor and merit roll system, Mrs. Seislove says, so that even students who have one bad quarter can earn a spot on the merit roll. “Students will have an end-of-year average based on their final GPA, more like a high school,” she explains.

### Middle School ‘Focus’

Middle school teachers are excited to implement “Focus” this semester – a daily, 80-minute period in which students in grades six through eight will receive enrichment or intervention, as needed.



During this period, students will have their health, music, art, Spanish, physical education and computer classes, and they can receive extra instruction with teachers, if needed.

Revamping the schedule this way is an idea teachers brought back from a conference they attended last year, Mrs. Seislove explains. “The middle school staff and I spent a lot of time envisioning this. We’re excited about it.”

### Painting the halls

Other changes are more superficial, but nonetheless exciting. For example, the pastel halls are being repainted a calming beige with navy blue accent walls, reminiscent of the school’s navy and gold colors. Wide navy and gold lines (fondly referred to by staff as “racing stripes”) will be painted down one wall of each hallway for added detail.

“I’m really excited about next year,” Mrs. Seislove says. “I had the opportunity to see SFX is a great school, but there’s potential for us to improve and do better. It’s exciting to have my hands in these improvements, and encouraging the teachers to be part of these improvements.”



Sherbet-colored hallways were painted this summer a dignified beige with navy accent walls. Horizontal stripes in the school’s blue and gold colors will be added down one side of each hallway.

## Susan Herman joins school staff as assistant

**S**usan Herman says she is happy to join the SFX School staff as the new assistant to the principal.

Mrs. Herman, who lives in Medina and most recently taught and served as an assistant to the principal at St.



Ambrose School in Brunswick, is

working toward her administrator degree at Ursuline College

in Pepper Pike. She also taught and assisted the principal at St. John Bosco School, in Parma Heights, before it closed.

Despite being happy at in Brunswick, where she grew up, she says she felt “called” to apply for the SFX job. “I felt like this is where I should be,” she says.

The married mother of five children – ages 16, 13, 10, 8 and 3 – says life will be busy as she balances four classes this semester on top of her family, job and four pets, but she feels certain that God has put her on this path for a reason. “I just had to trust,” she says. “Everyone is so friendly and welcoming. You can sense the community.”

Unlike Mrs. Podrasky, she will not be responsible for technology. That role will be filled by 32-year-old Michael Podrasky, her son, who returns to the school from which he graduated to teach computers for all grades and manage technology. He will be the school’s only male faculty member.

Mrs. Podrasky says she looks forward to traveling with her husband, Al, who is retired. “I loved working with the children,” she says. “The faculty and staff are phenomenal, and (I loved) to be in a job where you can integrate your love of God in everything that you do.”

# St. Francis Xavier

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# Calendar of Events

## July 7-14

SFX hosts Operation HOMES  
Randel House

## July 7-10

Edge Camp II

## July 19

Picnic with the Priests (#3),  
with PSR, Edge, CLOW, CYO  
6:15 p.m., Randel House deck  
Call rectory  
(330-725-4968) to RSVP

## July 26

Picnic with the Priests (#4),  
with welcoming, hospitality,  
ushers, new parishioners  
6:15 p.m., Randel House deck

## Aug. 1

First Friday Mass & Adoration  
7 p.m., Church

## Aug. 9

Walk with Mary evening  
of reflection  
4 to 9 p.m., Xavier Room

Picnic with the Priests (#5),  
with Marriage Ministry,  
PreCanas, Young Adults  
6:15 p.m., Randel House deck

## Aug. 15

Assumption of the  
Blessed Virgin Mary,  
a Holy Day of Obligation  
7 p.m. vigil Mass Aug. 14;  
7:30 a.m., noon, 7 p.m.

## Aug. 16

School tailgate party  
& open house  
6 to 9 p.m.

Holy Half-Hour for Life  
8 a.m., Church

## Aug. 18

First day of school,  
grades 1 to 8

## Aug. 27

Ministry Leaders Dinner  
6:30 p.m., Xavier Room

## Sept. 1

Labor Day  
Mass  
9 a.m., Church