



SAINT CATHERINE CENTER FOR
Special Needs

*"They Have Gifts to Give Us":
Mass Celebrating People with Special Needs*

Sunday, November 7th, was a special day for six young people from the Diocese as they celebrated their first sacraments at the annual Mass Celebrating People with Special Needs, hosted by Saint Catherine Center.

[View photos](#)

Melissa LaFontant, a Saint Catherine Academy student, received First Holy Communion along with Raquel Baer from St. Peter's Church in Danbury. Raquel also received the sacrament of Confirmation. Four other young people were confirmed: Michael Rodriguez, and Amber and Ariel Elias from The Cathedral Parish in Bridgeport; and Jose Mendoza from St. George Church in Bridgeport.

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano, Bishop of Bridgeport, presided at the joyful occasion at Holy Cross Church in Fairfield. Father Alexis Moronta, IVE, pastor of St. George Church in Bridgeport, served as concelebrant.

Bishop Caggiano spoke of the meaning of Confirmation. "What God is confirming is how much He loves these young people, how much they are dear to Him, that they are worth everything to Him. And His love will care for them, guide them, and protect them, as His love does for us. It's a beautiful message."

In his homily, Bishop Caggiano reflected on the day's Gospel about the widow who gives her last coins as an offering, in contrast to the entitled behavior of the Pharisees (Mark 12:38-44). "Who in the end is really poor?" he asked. "Because these young people are here not simply because they are cherished by God and us, but because they have gifts to give to us and our community that perhaps you and I don't have: an innocence of heart, a generosity of spirit, a deep sense of gratitude for the little things that are done for them. And how often you and I, who have other gifts and



talents, forget their gifts... as if we have a particular place that is greater than someone else.”

The Bishop concluded, “This celebration gives us hope and courage to go out into the world—which basically sees things like the Pharisees did—and teach them a better way. These young people will be the ones to teach that world the better way.”

Families enjoyed a reception together afterward.

The annual Mass Celebrating People with Special Needs is part of the Center’s mission to provide community outreach and support for parishes and families of children with disabilities.



Hands-on Experience for Occupational Therapy Students



Putting on his socks and shoes is Luke’s last step to being able to dress himself independently. “Sock on,” Julianna Vultaggio prompted Luke, using a short directive that is familiar to him. Success, after a few prompts, brings smiles to everyone’s faces.

Julianna is one of eight graduate students in the Occupational Therapy program at Sacred Heart University (SHU) who have had a unique hands-on opportunity this fall to develop their skills while learning how to assist Academy students with activities of daily living.

Most Academy students spend at least an hour each week in occupational therapy as part of their Individual Education Plans. Ordinary daily activities, such as dressing, showering, writing, or setting a table depend on skills such as sequencing, hand-eye coordination, and in-hand manipulation. Occupational therapy assists in developing these skills.

The SHU students have spent much of their time at the Academy observing the Center’s professional therapists in action. Before assisting Luke, SHU students had observed Cindy Kydes, COTA, who verbally prompted Luke to put on his socks and shoes.



As part of their five-week fieldwork placements, the SHU students develop activities for specific students and accompany them through the activity, honing techniques



and building rapport with the students. Hot chocolate is one of Connor's favorite treats, so as part of her plan Krista Evans had him cut out photos of the steps. In the kitchen Connor followed the sequence he had created and made them each a cup of hot chocolate. "I was impressed with his focus in carrying out a task," Krista said. "Throughout the day we built a rapport."

Academy students benefit from both the activities and the presence of the young adults in the classroom. Erin Sweeney and Krista assisted Philip through the steps to peel and slice apples. In another session, they prompted him to write his name and address. They appreciated Philip's humor and enthusiasm, and he relished spending time with them. "Besides the skills that the OT students are helping with, our students really enjoy the socializing and being with others closer to their age," said Sr. Cheryl Driscoll.



Other important lessons have been noted by the OT students from their time at the Academy. "I was reminded that each student possesses strengths that may be overlooked. It's important to see their unique abilities and how we can learn from them. For instance, in Ms. Lara's classroom each week, Melissa's smile reminded *me* to smile even when I was feeling stressed," said Erin.



All of the SHU students commented on the dedication of Saint Catherine staff. "They provide a safe, motivating, and happy environment," Julianna said. "It shows in the students' progress and excitement to be at school. The students are kind to each other, cheering each other on whenever they can. It's heartwarming."

"I felt welcomed the moment I came here," added Krista. "It's been an experience that strengthened my clinical skills and passion for Occupational Therapy."



"There is nothing compared to actually meeting and interacting with people in-person," said Joan Sauvigne-Kirsch Ed.D., OTR/L, who supervises the SHU students. "We are so fortunate to have a great collaboration with Saint Catherine Academy. It is truly a special place." In the spring, OT students will work in the Adult Program.

#Giving Tuesday is November 30

"Everyone has something to give, and every act of generosity counts." This Giving Tuesday slogan reflects Saint Catherine Center's core values, as well as our hopes for participation in the annual day of giving on November 30.

This will be the second year the Center is participating in the event. The day will kick off a month of "joy and gratitude" for the many acts of kindness we experience here every day, and for the generosity of our friends and families, whose financial support is so important to our day-to-day operations.

Please look for our Facebook posts beginning this week, and our emails on Giving Tuesday. Every gift, of any amount, makes a difference. Your support is greatly appreciated!

(And if you don't want to wait until November 30, feel free to make an [online gift](#) now!)

#GIVING TUESDAY™

Halloween Galleries!



Big Hair (Philip), Bad Hair (Mr. Stan), Wonder Woman (Kari), and a witch on wheels (Jacki) were among the many strange characters trick-or-treating at the Center this year.



Click on the photos above to view some fun Halloween photos from the [Adult Program](#) and the [Academy](#).



SAVE THE DATE

Annual Christmas Pageant

Thursday, December 23, 2021

10 a.m.

Saint Catherine Center

Details to come



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