



# The Minstrel

NEWSLETTER OF GREGORY THE GREAT ACADEMY

Feast of St. John Bosco, January 31, 2022

Dear Friend,

St. John Bosco was a joyful man, a joyful priest, a joyful teacher, and a joyful saint. Even though his life was difficult, devoted as he was to rescuing hungry and harangued kids off the street to join him and his wandering oratory, filling whatever spaces they could find not only with the sound of their communal prayer but also the sound of their laughter and boyish shouting, if John Bosco was anything, he was happy.

I love the photograph of him amidst his ragtag gang of souls given to him by God. There he is, one of the faces in the scruffy crowd, smirking with pleasure in spite of



the wildly improbable mission he happily undertook to make poor boys happy on earth so that they could be happy in heaven. It reminds me of how I sometimes feel working and walking with our boys, for our mission is the same as Don Bosco's: to make boys happy and holy. *And when we make the boys happy, they tend to spread that happiness around.*



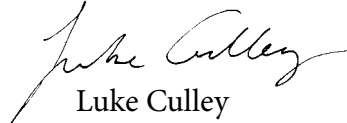
Luke Culley  
Headmaster

Right before the Christmas break, our juggling troupe performs a Christmas-themed play for the community after a solemn Lessons and Carols ceremony in the chapel. This year, they retold the story of the three kings (*which members of the St. Nicholas Guild can check out—see back page for details*). After the show, I received an email from a single mother who, having moved to Scranton and heard about the event, came with her children. She wrote:

We have not put down roots and the holidays are hard to find belonging and hope and to feel the Christmas spirit. We found it tonight at St. Gregory's. The beauty of the boys' singing and the powerful readings, and then the joy of the juggling show! I can only say thank you from my heart. Sometimes I think we don't realize how much of an impact we have on another person's life, and I just wanted to let you know of the powerful impact and blessing the evening was to me and to my sons tonight. This was our Christmas blessing. Truly it was. Please thank the boys for us and tell them to keep up the good work of bringing joy to others.

Reminders like that are a blessing. And so we begin a blessed New Year with our students, ready to learn *and share* the art of happiness and holiness, living a life of joyful simplicity, doing those things that are so fundamentally good that most of the world has forgotten about them—things like books, songs, stars, farm chores, rugby in the snow, and juggling. I thank you for the happiness you have given us, that you have given these boys. It is a happiness that only a joyful education can provide and you have provided that education and that joy by your generosity.

In Christ,



Luke Culley



## Don Bosco's Dog

One of the things that must have confirmed Don Bosco in his ministry of picking up poor boys off the streets to give them a Catholic education was that he was picked on by powerful men in Italy's anticlerical government. Some even feared that the ragamuffin priest was training a secret revolutionary militia for the pope.

These misgivings manifested themselves in assassination efforts against Don Bosco. From back-alley stabbing attempts to phony deathbed calls that resulted in ambush, Don Bosco narrowly escaped with his life on several occasions. His tremendous strength came to his aid certainly, but there was another that came to his aid as well.

By some circumstance that can only be marveled at, an enormous dog often appeared to protect the saint from murderers. The animal appeared so frequently to defend or guard Don Bosco, that he was given a name, Grigio—meaning the Gray One—for besides being a gray wolfhound, he would emerge from gray fog and shadow whenever he was required, like an avenging ghost—or, perhaps, an avenging angel—and disappear as suddenly and as mysteriously as he appeared when the coast was clear.



While Don Bosco was not mustering a military force for the Church, he was raising an army of souls to fight for the Faith, and this is a part of our mission as well. You are a part of our spiritual corps, and we think of you, our loyal defenders, with the same wonder and gratitude that St. John Bosco and his boys regarded Grigio, that Hound of Heaven, who stood fiercely by so that those who undertake the work of God may do so fearlessly.

## Senior Seminar with Dr. Lefler

As a theology professor at a nearby Jesuit university, I have always been grateful for the part the Academy has played in my life and my family's life since our arrival in the area fourteen years ago.

In the first seven or eight years after we moved up this way from DC, I had the great privilege and pleasure, once or twice a year, of leading an evening seminar for the seniors, in which we discussed a Flannery O'Connor story, or a film. Then, in the midst of the school's quixotic four-year Pocono sojourn, I was offered the extraordinary

opportunity to teach a year-long senior theology seminar at the Academy – and so I embarked on a novel and rather more sustained intellectual adventure with the boys.

We began our course with a close reading of the first nine books of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, worked our way through St. Gregory the Great's *Life of Benedict*, followed by St. Benedict's *Rule*, and then turned in the dead of winter to J. R. R. Tolkien's masterpiece, *The Lord of the Rings*. It took us more than two months to get to Mordor and back, and then we just had time to squeeze in a few more discussions of St. Bonaventure's *Life of Francis*. I wasn't sure how to teach high school boys, as this was really all-new to me. Ah, well! Something about these texts and these boys seemed to converge, or at least to begin to converge, fruitfully... and so....

And so, I have done it all over again, three more times

now, including this year—pretty much the same old wine (in the same old wineskins.) And I'm still not sure how to teach high school boys. I must say, though, that I enjoy trying. — Nathan Lefler





## Reading Room Renovation Completed

Thank you to Director of Operations, Michael Miller and his Sophomore Carpentry Guild for the successful completion of the Reading Room renovation. This room off the academic hall has been used for years as a study and teaching space but, over the last two years, work has been underway to make it more beautiful and noble. These efforts included restoring the original hardwood floor, installing a coffered ceiling, reclaiming the grand transom windows, and constructing built-in bookshelves that mimic the triple Roman archway in our chapel, symbolically uniting the ends of our spiritual and intellectual pursuits at the Academy. The Reading Room is marvelously changed with these updates and will serve as a magnificent area for our students to pursue their studies and enjoy each other's company.





# Become a Member of the St. Nicholas Guild!

Gregory the Great Academy is proud to announce the launch of the St. Nicholas Guild, a new club for generous benefactors who pledge a monthly gift.

This group of donors is providing a vital gift to our mission through a dependable stream of support which will help strengthen our school and preserve the Catholic formation that is so needed in our world and our Church.



For as little as \$10 a month, you can join the St. Nicholas Guild as well. By joining today, you will gain access to a variety of exciting exclusive content from our school including:

- A lively podcast about literature, poetry, liturgy, and life
- Exclusive articles
- Music and juggling performed by our students
- Recorded lectures and courses on classical works like *Hamlet*
- News and updates
- And much more!



Members also receive a welcome package which includes a lambswool scarf woven in the official tartan of the St. Nicholas Guild so that you may display your community membership with pride.

Join the St. Nicholas Guild TODAY and enjoy the offerings we look forward to sharing with you that reflect the Catholic tradition that makes Gregory the Great Academy the good, true, and beautiful place that it is. Thank you, and welcome to the Guild!

To join the Guild, visit  
[gregorythegreatacademy.org/saintnicholasguild](http://gregorythegreatacademy.org/saintnicholasguild)  
or fill out the St. Nicholas Guild section of the enclosed reply card.