

## HSP's Hidden Curriculum: the Intangible Value of a Holy Spirit Prep Education, Part 2 of 5

by Tommy Curtin

Dear Parents,

As I returned to HSP after our Christmas break, I was greeted by our larger than life Nativity scene, this time with the Baby Jesus included. We hear a lot these days about how hard it can be to keep Christ in Christmas. But with such a vivid reminder at the heart of the Upper School campus, it actually takes some doing around here to forget the season's true meaning.

My last letter to you introduced the idea of HSP's Hidden Curriculum, those lessons our students learn more through osmosis than active study. In this letter, I will focus on the intangible value of HSP's Catholic identity.

Every parent knows that our children (though they might to argue the contrary) experience our love more by the time we give them than by the money we spend on them. Kids know intuitively that time is a parent's scarcest commodity and, therefore, the most valuable. It's not enough to tell our kids we love them; we must show them and use a language they understand to do so. That language is time. In the same way, it's not enough just to tell students their faith is important. Schools must show them faith matters by giving precious time to its cultivation.

Maintaining a strong Catholic identity – Catholic culture is probably a more apt phrase for what HSP provides – begins with offering students compelling Theology courses. I'm very proud of the school's Theology courses and the devoted faculty who teach them. But Catholic identity must extend beyond mere coursework, the curriculum of the classroom. If it doesn't, our students will begin to think of their faith in a limited, compartmentalized way, as simply one of many disciplines, like math or art. However, our faith is not one subject among many, it is *the* subject that contextualizes and imparts meaning to all others. A successful Catholic school, one that produces graduates who remain committed to their faith in college, marriage, and parenthood, must set religious faith apart by fostering a thoroughly Catholic culture.

HSP fosters Catholic culture intentionally by promoting what I call the three S's: Sacraments, Service, and Sincerity. It takes real time to do justice to each of these pillars, and HSP gives that time. As a result, the value of each becomes understood by students, consciously or not.

### **Sacraments**

Students in the Upper School celebrate Mass as a community every week. Students might not always appreciate the reason why, and they might even grumble about it. But they realize their school has elevated Eucharistic worship by giving it so much time. Holy Mass will stand out years later as something people of faith make time for. That's the hidden curriculum. Another sacrament we set aside time for is reconciliation. We take a break from class three times in the year for all Upper School students to attend a penance service in Holy Spirit Catholic Church. These give students an opportunity to pause, reflect, and receive God's forgiveness at the start of the year, during Advent, and during Lent. The majority of students take advantage of this, but all students learn the lessons of the hidden curriculum. *You're never too busy to let God love you.* Finally, HSP has received a special permission from the Archbishop to confirm students during their sophomore year. This allows us to connect the curriculum of the classroom with the hidden curriculum. We make sure students receiving the sacrament of Confirmation really understand what they are doing and the

responsibility it entails. Confirmation at HSP also represents a lovely bookend for the sacramental preparation that begins at the Lower School with 2<sup>nd</sup> grade First Communion.

### **Service**

Our school mission, *ministrare non ministrari*, illustrates the emphasis HSP places on service. But many schools promote service and even have service requirements. What makes HSP different? It is one thing to say we should give back to our community. It is quite another to proclaim the truth that every human person is made in the image and likeness of God and is entitled by justice to receive our love. Yet that is the lesson the hidden curriculum teaches through HSP's service clubs and apostolates. We have chosen to organize our school-sponsored service groups around the corporal works of mercy to ensure that our students' understanding of service goes beyond philanthropy. The word *philanthropy* comes from Greek roots that mean "love of humanity." Christianity is not about loving humanity though; it is about loving *human persons*, one at a time as children of God. So, whether our students are traveling to Appalachia to build houses that shelter the homeless, to Atlanta Food Bank to feed the hungry, or to a local nursing home to visit the sick, HSP students are coming face to face with human persons in need and are learning to love them as Christ does.

### **Sincerity**

Actions are so important in building trust with young men and women. A school can have all the sacraments and service in the world, but if the grownups don't practice what they preach to the students, the seeds of faith will ultimately bear forth the fruit of cynicism. The truth of the faith resonates so deeply with our students because they see their teachers living it every day. All students go on retreat every year and, when these occur, their teachers kneel beside them in prayer and many offer personal reflections. Teachers run every service club and apostolate, giving time and talent that goes well beyond the parameters of the subjects they teach. Students who make time for daily Mass during lunch will usually see a few teachers already in St. Joseph's Oratory when they arrive. The example set by our teachers helps our students visualize what their own faith can look like when they grow up.

As I conclude this rather lengthy letter, I can look out my window to see the giant Nativity being taken down to return next Advent. It's another great example of HSP's hidden curriculum. There is much more I could share about how HSP's Catholic culture builds true faith in our students. Please feel free to reach out to me if you'd enjoy a longer conversation about one of my favorite topics.

My next letter will address the hidden impact of peers.

Yours in Catholic Education,  
Tommy