

In Celebration & Community

Saint Thomas Educational Foundation

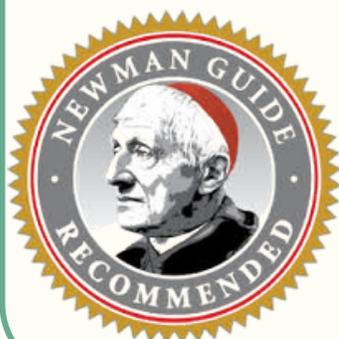
While the winter felt long and dark, the Saint Thomas community found warmth in the light of shared celebrations and meaningful gatherings. Our school was alive with moments that brought us together – opportunities to rejoice, serve, and enjoy one another's company. In the spirit of the Easter and spring seasons of renewal and rebirth, we are pleased to share inspiring stories of how our Christ-centered mission is alive and well thanks to your support of the Foundation.



We are Award Winning!



As we enter our 101st year, our most notable cause for celebration is that we have received the Cardinal Newman Award, a national recognition of excellence in Catholic identity and academics. This honor is a special affirmation of who we are, who we strive to be, and reflects our shared commitment to keeping Christ at the center of all we do. We are one of only 37 schools nationally and one of only two in Michigan to receive this distinction!



"Newman Guide Recommended Elementary and Secondary Schools are committed to upholding the standards of faithful Catholic education. The Cardinal Newman Society's policy and curriculum standards, to which these schools attest, are derived from guidance provided by Church councils, popes, Vatican congregations, bishop conferences, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and other Church documents. A Newman Guide Recommended School strives for the very best of Catholic education. By affirming its commitment to the established standards, a Newman Guide School stands as an exemplar of faithful Catholic education for other schools nationwide."

Your commitment to the Foundation directly strengthens our mission to equip our teachers and students with a dynamic, Christ-centered education. Receiving an award that honors this mission and identity is a meaningful reminder that your generosity is making a difference each day. Whether you have been part of Saint Thomas for many years or are newly connected, we are grateful to share the joy of this recognition with you. We invite you to continue being part of something award-winning – through your prayers, involvement, or continued partnership.

With gratitude,

In this issue...

- Take a look back in time – Saint Thomas students stay connected to soldiers and sailors during WWII
- Catholic Schools Week
- "Together We All Win" basketball game



There is much to celebrate. And even more to look forward to.

A Community Connected by Faith

Memories of *Prop Wash*, from the Home Front

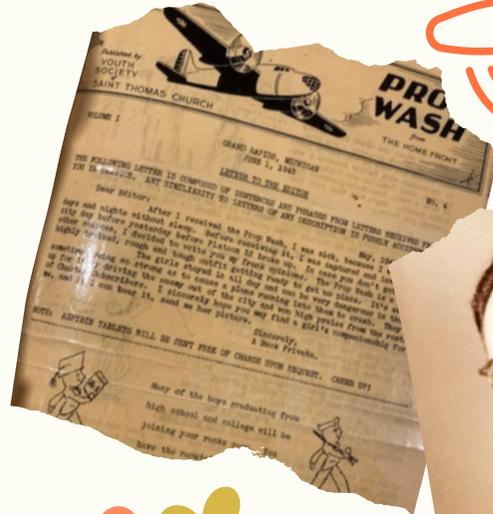
There are not many of us who remember the dark days of World War II. During that time, a remarkable group of Saint Thomas young adults found a powerful way for soldiers and sailors serving overseas to stay connected with their parish community. Twice each month, those students produced and mailed a newsletter filled with local news, encouragement, and lighthearted updates from home. They called it *Prop Wash* – a name inspired by the mighty gusts of wind that sweep back from an airplane's propellers as it prepares for take off. The first issue, dated April 1, 1943, was mailed to 68 Saint Thomas soldiers and sailors stationed afar.

Their effort was characteristic of the times. Father Raymond Sweeney, (not yet Monsignor) in "loyal cooperation," wholeheartedly supported this project and helped guide its success. The stories themselves were a comforting bridge to home. Father Sweeney contributed cheerful updates of his own. In the June 1, 1943 issue, he wrote "Hello Soldiers and Sailors! It's been a wet week but have hopes. Lot of goings on with graduation on deck..." He went on to report on graduations and proudly noted that Saint Thomas took second place behind Saint James in the Parochial School City Track Meet.

Letters back from abroad affirmed just how much *Prop Wash* mattered. "You probably will never know what a welcome breath from home *Prop Wash* is," wrote Lt. George J. Brogger. From Germany, Ed O'Connor shared, "I received the May 9 issue of *Prop Wash* and enjoyed every word. Keep up the good work and know I'll be looking forward to the next issue." As the war dragged on, the students remained steadfast. Through ink and paper, faith and friendship, they made certain their soldiers and sailors would never feel forgotten.

In May 1945, the last issue of *Prop Wash* contained a message from Father Sweeney. "Hello Everybody, it's a different tune we sing these days – it's peace. No doubt you're singing it too. Through jubilant celebrations, peace was announced at 6:04PM and at 6:10PM, people came pouring into church to give thanks to our Lord. We have a lot to be thankful for and those thanks will be enhanced when you arrive safely home..."

*regretfully, two servicemen from the Saint Thomas Parish did not make it home.



Fr. Raymond Sweeney



Prop Wash Staff:

- Editor in Chief - Rita Anne Hallacy - pictured above
- Assistant Editor - Nancy Donnelly - pictured above
- Art Editors - Rod Schmidt & Bob Fron
- Sports Editor - David Howe
- Literary Editor - Peggy Hallacy
- Five dedicated reporters who ran "here and there." Bill Mullen pictured above was one of the reporters



If you are interested in reading *Prop Wash* and the letters home, send an email to betsyedgerton@stthomasgr.org.

Catholic Schools Week 2026

This year's Catholic Schools Week (CSW) was an exciting and joyful celebration of community. The week launched with a "Be the Change" campaign, where students eagerly collected quarters, dimes, nickels, and pennies for a local charity, showing that even small acts can make a big difference when we all work together. Chapel guests shared their vocations and life journeys, Red Glasses were awarded highlighting individuals who live boldly, love big, and pass it along. Students participated in an all school Rosary, lifting members of this community up in prayer. And, the weeklong celebration was topped off with the Ready, Set, Glow family dance – a night made for memories.



From WWII to now, we proudly celebrate our nation and those who serve. During CSW, Saint Thomas parent and retired Lt. Col. in the Air Force Dr. Parini gave an inspiring Chapel talk.



A highlight of CSW was the 8th grade versus Saint Thomas staff game! The 8th graders put up a valiant effort, but there was no stopping the staff – especially when the new rookie (Fr. Stephen) was draining threes!

Together We All Win! February 22, 2026



For the 10th year, the Saint Thomas Educational Foundation partnered with our School Boosters to host one of the most fun events of the season: our annual basketball game; the matchup between Saint Thomas teachers, staff, and board members vs. Area 11 Special Olympians. The bleachers were packed with fans, the enthusiasm was raucous, and the gym echoed with cheers from start to finish.



Area 11 once again clinched the win in thrilling fashion. We are grateful to the volunteers who made this event possible and to the many fans who showed up. It was a day filled with joy, sportsmanship, and a true sense of community. Because of generous donor support, more than \$1200 was raised for dynamic academics and athletics for students of all abilities.

shared belief turns faith into collective strength, fostering love, service, and connection.

Honor your father & mother

Ephesians 6:2



The children of Bob and Ardelle VanBragt have always known how blessed they were to have such incredible parents. This year they chose to honor them by establishing the Robert and Ardelle VanBragt scholarship with the Educational Foundation.

Bob and Ardelle have been familiar faces around Saint Thomas Parish and School for more than 60 years. They proudly acknowledge their Catholic faith and the role the Saint Thomas community has played in the success of their life together. They lived the Catholic faith and incorporated daily prayer, parental blessings and tithing into their loving home. They sent their four children to Saint Thomas and Catholic Central. They have been active in choir, ushering, mentoring and teaching.



In establishing the VanBragt Scholarship, the hope is their legacy will continue in the hearts and minds of Saint Thomas families for generations to come.



Ways to Give

Cash or Check

made out to the Saint Thomas Education Foundation.

Use donation slip at the bottom of this page and return in the enclosed envelope or mail to 1449 Wilcox Park Dr SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

Online Donations

via the QR code at the bottom of the page or the Parish Soft website link:
<https://membership.faihdirect.net/givenow/MI1135/44637>

Join the 1925 Society today! Named for the year in which Saint Thomas opened, the 1925 Society honors supporters who contribute \$1,925 or more over the course of a single calendar year.



Please accept the enclosed gift of:

\$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 \$1,000 \$2,500 \$5,000 Other _____

Please direct this gift to:

Where needed Education Foundation Endowment Friendship Fund Other _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State & Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

I have included the Education Foundation in my estate plans.

I would like to learn more about including the Education Foundation in my estate plans.

Thank You!



Cut along the line above and return in enclosed envelope OR scan the QR code to donate online!
Gifts to the Saint Thomas Educational Foundation, a 501 (c)(3), are tax deductible.