

# The Crusader Chronicle

**EMPOWERED**

Living

Learning

Community



# Empowered Living Unchanging Principles

Sarah Bowler, Head of School

The new year has arrived, and with it comes an avalanche of advice on social media about self-improvement—changing our routines, enhancing our physical selves, and setting goals to become brand-new people. Amid this buzz, I’ve been reflecting on the wisdom of former President Jimmy Carter, who quoted his high school teacher: “We must adjust to changing times and still hold to unchanging principles.” As we consider the aspirations for a fresh start, this quote serves as a timeless reminder to stay grounded in core values while embracing the possibilities of growth. This balance is at the heart of empowered living—our theme for this school year.

Empowered living calls us to navigate the school year with courage, love, and wisdom. These qualities are not fleeting; they are rooted in enduring truths. As we reflect on our guiding scripture, 2 Timothy 1:7, we are reminded that God has given us a spirit not of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind. These gifts equip us to thrive in an ever-changing educational environment without losing sight of what truly matters.

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**“Empowered living is not about perfection; it is about intentionality.”**

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Holding to unchanging principles means staying true to the values that define our school community. WCS embraces the belief that everyone has a God-given purpose explored through learning about Christ’s life and character in the effort to build and develop a personal faith and relationship with Him to further the restoration of God’s world. With this understanding, we prioritize nurturing the whole child with an emphasis on pursuing lifelong learning, maintaining healthy and balanced lives, and living in community with empathy and compassion. These principles guide our daily decisions, shape our interactions, and create an environment where students and staff can flourish. They are the foundation upon which we build resilient learners who can adapt to the world without being swept away by its challenges.

For students, adjusting to changing times may mean learning to use their voices to advocate for themselves and others while respecting diverse perspectives. It may involve tackling new challenges in the classroom or discovering innovative ways to solve problems. For educators, it could mean exploring cutting-edge teaching methods while maintaining high expectations and nurturing meaningful connections with students. For families, it might require adapting to new routines and school policies while reinforcing the values that unite and sustain us as a community.

Empowered living is not about perfection; it is about intentionality. It is about making thoughtful choices as a school family in a rapidly changing world while remaining anchored in truth. This balance—between change and constancy, between the present and the eternal—is at the heart of empowered living. As we move forward together, may we embrace opportunities for growth while holding fast to the truth of God’s Word and the strength it provides. By doing so, we live out the mission of WCS: to educate, nurture, and empower our students to transform the world for God’s glory.



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**“...stay grounded in core values while embracing the possibilities of growth.”**

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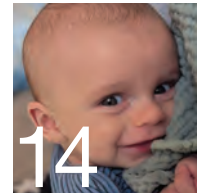
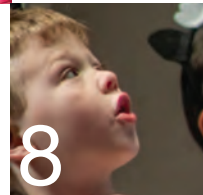
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**ON THE COVER**  
Kindergarten scientist, Domenic, explores flowers so he can draw his observations.

# The Crusader Chronicle

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# HOMECOMING 2024



Homecoming 2024 launched on Thursday, September 26, with an alumni reception at the Whitinsville Golf Club, followed by a concert in the Nehemiah Center. Friday was buzzing with energy after the pep rally and athletic events. On Saturday, it was great to see so many people join us for carnival games, food, and fun! Thank you so much to everyone who joined us for Homecoming and to those who supported Giving Day. Thanks to the generosity of our community, we exceeded our goal of \$75,000 for the WCS Fund!



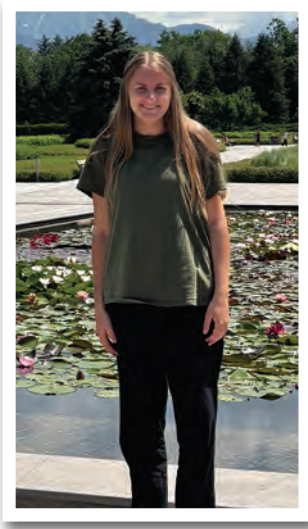
GIVING DAY  
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# Serving God's World



**K**atie Sprunger (Class of 2020) spent six weeks in Central Asia earlier this year volunteering at a kids camp in a rural mountain village, doing photography projects for a cherry farm, and assisting with PE classes at an international school. Katie visited food markets where sheep heads, dried kiwi, and canned horse meat are sold.

"It was interesting exploring areas that had recently become independent from the Soviet Union, as some areas were very developed and others lacked dental care or amenities that are often

taken for granted in America," said Katie. "There were gas pipes raised along the roads, homes were surrounded by walls, and often strangers were very reserved until a friendship was built, and then they would be extremely hospitable by welcoming guests to their home with an abundance of food and gifts."

The areas she explored felt like a mix of Asia and Europe with Russian influence visible in neo-byzantine architecture designs. Some unique experiences included staying in a room with fuzzy

walls, seeing a live sheep be transported on a motorcycle, a taxi driver using Google translate to tell her friend "if you get married you will get 2 million cattle," and learning a new game where participants bob for cucumbers and then shove their face in a bowl of flour filled with candy. Through involvement with an English club, she became friends with many locals who introduced her to the culture and traditions.

"Many of my friends are Muslim. While hiking or meeting over tea, we had conversations comparing Islam and Christianity that enriched my understanding and allowed me to answer questions that curious friends had. The parts of Central Asia I visited are full of beautiful people, landscapes, and artwork."

Katie looks back at her time feeling extremely grateful to explore another part of the world and to grow in cross-cultural environments.



**"...feeling extremely grateful to explore another part of the world..."**





# 5 year Strategic Plan

Erika Johnson, Board of Trustees President

This fall, Whitinsville Christian School has embarked on an exciting and purposeful journey: the development of our next five-year strategic plan. Guided by a vision to honor God and serve our students, this collaborative effort brings together the faculty, staff, and Board of Trustees to dream, pray, and discern where WCS is heading in the coming years.

The strategic plan is built around four key components:

- 1. Equipping for a Lifetime of Purpose:** At WCS, we are deeply committed to preparing students not just for academic success, but for meaningful, Christ-centered lives. This pillar ensures that our students are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and spiritual foundation they need to navigate the complexities of the world, while living out their faith. As part of this goal, we will explore more opportunities to educate children in nature.
- 2. Fostering Community Connections:** Relationships are at the heart of what makes WCS unique. This initiative focuses on strengthening bonds within our school community and beyond, forging deeper connections with families, alumni, local churches, and the wider community to create a network of support and collaboration. We are committed to increasing communications from the Board of Trustees, and we are excited to begin our 100th anniversary celebration.
- 3. Fortifying the Mission:** Our calling is to glorify God through Christ-centered education, and this pillar underscores the importance of staying true to that purpose. By safeguarding the distinctiveness of a WCS education, we aim to remain faithful to our calling, while adapting to the needs of an ever-changing world. Creating our five-year strategic financial plan helps guide us as we balance the needs of school with shifts in the financial climate.
- 4. Operational Excellence:** Excellence in all we do is vital to sustaining and growing our impact. This component ensures that our campus facilities, resources, and operations are maintained and improved to support the mission of WCS effectively. We are creating a comprehensive facilities maintenance plan, work that is essential to being good stewards of our resources.

You will hear more about our Strategic Plan initiatives as we outline campus improvement projects that will preserve the beauty of our facilities while ensuring they continue to serve the needs of our students and staff. These initiatives are not just about bricks and mortar, but about creating an environment where learning and growth can flourish.

Reflecting on this process, we draw strength and inspiration from the unwavering support of our donors, both new and long-standing. As President of the Board of Trustees, I want to reiterate my deepest gratitude to each and every supporter, donor, and volunteer at WCS. Your generosity is a testament to your love for Whitinsville Christian School and your belief in its mission to provide Christ-centered education that prepares students for lives of service. Your support is the lifeblood of our school, enabling us to nurture not just academic excellence but also spiritual growth in every student who walks through our doors.

The work we undertake as a school is more than planning; it is an act of faith, a commitment to the next generation, and a reflection of God's calling. As we move forward with this strategic plan, we invite our entire community to join us in prayer and partnership. Together, we can ensure that WCS continues to thrive as a beacon of hope and learning, equipping students to impact the world for Christ.



# Empowered Outdoor Living

Outdoor Ed has been a hit with students since it launched in 2019. Initially a class for our third and fourth graders, WCS has now expanded outdoor learning for students in middle school and kindergarten.

Why outdoor learning? At Whitinsville Christian School, we believe that children learn best through play and connection to nature as part of God's creation.

**Bonnie (Cooper) Shearer (Class of 2005)**, one of our Kindergarten Aides, tells a story of the lessons learned outdoors. "After the first snowfall of the year, kindergarten students went to Outdoor Ed and discovered that a giant snowball from the day before had hardened overnight with the cold temperatures. One student had an idea that it would be neat to move the snowball. Pushing on it did nothing, so in talking to a friend, they came up with the idea of pulling it with a rope. After locating a rope, their next step was to find a new partner, a student they knew was good with rope and knots. They made a loop and put it around the snowball and started pulling. Some friends came to help pull the rope, and others pushed at the snowball with sticks. This didn't work, so they kept thinking. Nobody cried with disappointment, they just carefully removed the rope from the snowball. Then some kids tried to push/pry the bottom of the

snowball with big sticks. This also didn't work, so some kids wandered off to take a break from the snowball and slide down the hill a few times. Word had traveled to other kids that they were trying to move the snowball, and another group of kids came along and worked together pulling, pushing, and prying with big sticks. They observed that the bottom of the snowball seemed to be the part that was stuck. Some kids from the first group came over to watch/help. Finally one kid spoke up, got the other kids to stop poking/prying for a minute so he would get his face down really close and feel around with his hands. He put his head up and authoritatively declared that it was stuck to the ground with ice and that's why they couldn't move it. The other kids agreed with his assessment and continued to poke at it with sticks anyways because it was fun. Then the whistle blew for the end of class.



There was so much communication, negotiating, teamworking, problem-solving, persistence, etc. It was completely student led. The relaxed outdoor atmosphere and lack of teacher direction meant that there was no stress, no anxiety, which freed up their brains to problem-solve and practice communicating with each other with real time feedback (other kid doesn't know what I mean so I need to explain again more clearly).

At the end of the day the snowball did not move an inch, but nobody was really disappointed because they all had fun working on it together, and they knew it might be there next time to try again."

These communication, teamwork, and problem solving skills are the soft skills that are foundational for students to learn more academic subjects like reading and writing. What are we exploring next year? Outdoor Preschool! Students will spend time in the classroom, and will be outdoors two mornings per week from 7:30 – 11:30 a.m. Preschool is the best time to focus on building this hands-on soft skill foundation to set them up to thrive in a traditional classroom environment.







# Merry and Bright







Our tree lighting event featured a story with Mrs. Bowler, cookie decorating, crafts, and of course hot cocoa!

Students caroled, decorated, designed Christmas cards, donated to the Oliva Fund at the Tree of Life ceremony, listened to stories, supported the Blackstone Valley Festival of Trees, told the nativity story, and gave us a beautiful Christmas concert.





# LITTLE WOMEN

Heather Rufo, Director

Like many of you, *Little Women* has been a cherished story for me since I was a little girl. Growing up much like Jo—as the second oldest in a large family (six sisters and two brothers, to be exact)—I felt a deep connection to her character. Like Jo, I also moved to New York to pursue my career, mine as an actress. Much like the March family, my sisters and I each had our favorite “sister,” and for us, that was my sweet sister, Kimberly. In a manner similar to Beth, Kimberly was sweet, kind, gentle, generous, an accomplished pianist, and she too passed away far too young. So, you see, this story is very close to my heart.

Now, as an adult, *Little Women* speaks to me even more deeply. In this play, Act 1 opens at Christmastime, setting the stage for themes of love, sacrifice, and faith. The March sisters are experiencing a Christmas without their father, who is serving in the Civil War, and without the gifts or comforts they would wish for. Encouraged by Marmee, they decide to give up their Christmas breakfast to help a family in need. This act of generosity reflects their spirit of Christmas: to love the Lord with all their hearts and to love their neighbors as themselves.

On stage, we watch each sister’s journey of growth as Jo wrestles with her temper, Amy with vanity, Meg with material desires, and Beth with her shy, self-sacrificing nature. Through Marmee’s loving guidance, they grow in humility, patience, and kindness, moving closer to embodying Christ’s love. Together, they experience joys, heartaches, and struggles, learning to cherish family and support each other through life’s challenges.





# The Power of Consistency

A spirit of giving and getting involved has made it possible for Whitinsville Christian to be approaching 100 years of Christian education, in partnership with families. From building projects to lunch service, and everything in between, we rely on dedicated volunteers to increase the amount of work possible to achieve.

**E**d Bakker has been a fixture at the clock and scoreboard table for the past forty-four years. “My own kids attended WCS, before there was a high school here,” said Ed. “When my daughter began playing basketball and volleyball, I started operating the clock. I quickly noticed you really have to focus on other areas of the game; you can’t just watch your own kid play.”



*Kris VandenAkker coaching with Ed at the table on the far left.*

When Ed began, teams were playing in the Krull Memorial Auditorium and the scoreboard table was literally a table. “The scoring table changed to a platform, then the larger ‘monster’ built by then – Athletic Director, Len Krygsman.” Ed’s work extended to before and after the game as well, setting up chairs and cleaning up after the games. When Ed faced health issues, including a heart attack, and considered stepping away from his role, Len encouraged him to stay with a promise he wouldn’t have to set up chairs. “Len even offered to get a wheelchair for me. I declined the wheelchair, but I couldn’t say no to the calling.”

The next incentive to stay in the game was the new Nehemiah Gymnasium. “Of course I wanted to serve in the new gym, so I told Brady I would stay for one more year.” **Brady Bajema (Class of 2006)** was serving as the Athletic Director and Boys Varsity Basketball Head Coach. “Eddie and the table crew are WCS legends!” said Brady. “Forty-four years behind the clock has to be a Massa-



*Ed Baker catching up with the referee before the game.*

chusetts record. They are part of the experience and tradition of a WCS basketball game. Their commitment to WCS basketball is something that I admire greatly and will remember forever. I’m so thankful for Eddie and our table crew.”

Over the years, this table crew has included Jim and Lois Hassey, Glen Bloem, Scott Freitas, and Greg Massotti sharing countless memories and experiences. The consistency and reliability Ed brings to his role have not gone unnoticed. Referees frequently comment on how much they appreciate working at WCS. “A ref or a coach will walk in and say, ‘You’re still here?’ They know they can trust our group to do things the right way, and need no explanations for working the board.” This reliability also eases the burden on **Kurt Savage (Class of 1998)**, WCS Athletic Director, who knows the clock and scoreboard are in expert hands. “Eddie has been a reliable member of the basketball table for years,” said Kurt. “His passion and dedication to the WCS athletics program is a testament to his commitment not only to WCS, but to our coaches and athletes as well. He goes above and beyond every game and volunteers to help pick up chairs and pack up the gym. He truly demonstrates service with a heart.”

With all of the changes Ed has seen over the years, one thing remains the same. “Our kids and our crowds are respected by referees and by the visiting teams. I’m thankful for the community here, the coaches and players, and the people I’ve worked with along the way. One of the times I thought about giving it up, Len said, ‘There is no mention of retirement in the Bible.’ I’ll keep going as long as I enjoy it and remain in good health.”



*Ed Baker, Scott Freitas, Mike Curry, opponent’s rep, and Greg Massotti.*





# The Power of a Pie

It's easy to savor a tradition as sweet as the Annual Dutch Apple Pie event! So much more than a fundraiser, this event brings our community together to share in the work, in addition to sharing the pies with others through the Paying it Forward with Pies program. We are incredibly grateful to our Apple Pie Committee, chaired by Alisa Dertien, and all of the volunteers who make this event possible.



Our Apple Pie Committee: *Elizabeth (Anderson) Deters (Class of 1997), Erika (Anderson) Johnson (Class of 1996), Miranda Osterman, Alisa Dertien, and Jill Migliozi*



## NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY

Congratulations to the newest members of the John T. Bajema Chapter of the National Honor Society!

Pictured left to right: Matthew Wren, Maxwell DeFrancisco, Mark Yarger, Micah Deters, Madison Amati, Eli Focht, Eli Fortna, Faith Najem, Noah Garrant, Brinley Gonnevill, Matthew Dudley, and Jack Hutchinson.



# NEW FACES AT WCS



**Michele Blackburn**  
**ES Aide/Enrollment**



**Kayla Colucci**  
**HS Admin Assistant**



**Justin Conrad**  
**Facilities**



**Sandra DiGregorio**  
**HS Faculty**



**Charlie Kim**  
**HS Faculty**



**Beth Larkin**  
**ES Aide**



**Brendan Loflin**  
**MS Faculty**



**Jonathan O'Hazo**  
**MS Faculty**



**Alisa Parker**  
**ES Faculty**



**Kay Pereira**  
**SAS HS Para**



**Patricia Pishock**  
**SAS HS Para**



**Jenna Sarosi**  
**ES Aide**



**Hunter Yourk**  
**MS Faculty**



After numerous rocket launches and exponentially more “Dad Jokes,” Mike Craig will be retiring at the end of this school year. We’d love to have you share your stories, or favorite jokes, with [advancement@whitinsvillechristian.org](mailto:advancement@whitinsvillechristian.org) for our next issue!



## ENGAGEMENTS



**Michael MacGillivray (Class of 2020)** and Anna Lanser got engaged in August and are planning a 2025 wedding.



**Sam Gulinello (Class of 2017)** and Erin Haines are engaged and planning a 2025 summer wedding.

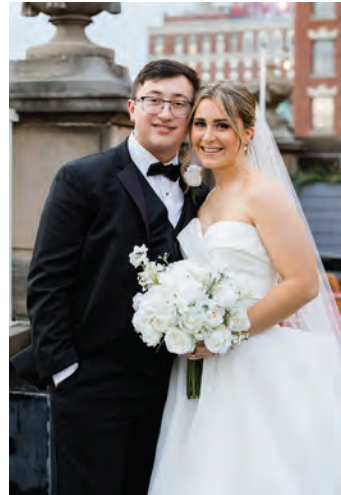


**Kateri Hart (Class of 2019)** and David Durning got engaged in December at Old Sturbridge Village.

## WEDDINGS



**Christian Swaim and Michaela Cannistraci (both Class of 2019)** were married on Sept. 14, 2024.



**Fiona Shaw and Dayne Stafford (both Class of 2021)** were married on Dec. 29, 2024.

## NEW ARRIVALS



**Matthew & Kathryn (Skudera) Haddad (both Class of 2006)** welcomed their son, Luke Wayne Haddad, on June 9, 2024.



**Matt (Class of 2002) and Laura Skudera** welcomed Henry John on Sept. 4, 2024.



**Joshua Casey (Class of 2016)** and his wife, Alexa, welcomed Chloe Lynn on Feb. 11, 2025.



**David (Class of 2003) and Samara Jellesma** welcomed Jackson and Logan on Nov. 8, 2024. Their 18 month old daughter Avery is excited to have two new little brothers to look after!

## CONDOLENCES

**Arthur Wynja (Class of 1963)** passed away on February 23, 2025. Art served multiple terms on the Board as part of the Building Committee during the construction of the current building, as well as four additions.

**Edward DeHaan (Class of 1956)** passed away on Nov. 27, 2024, in Sutton, MA.

**Arthur Haagsma (Class of 1956)** of Annandale, VA, passed away on Dec. 30, 2024.

**Theona (DeJong) Taylor (Class of 1954)**, lifelong resident of Whitinsville passed away on Nov. 27, 2024.

**Arthur Hoogendyk (Class of 1944)**, lifelong resident of Whitinsville and a member of the Pleasant Street Christian Reformed Church, passed away on Dec. 22, 2024.

**Gladys (VandenAkker) Nydam (Class of 1943)** passed away on Sept. 30, 2024. Gladys was a charter member of Fairlawn Christian Reformed Church.



Please scan this QR code to share your news with us and keep your contact information up-to-date. Thank you and we look forward to hearing from you!



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### **Jim and Jean Nydam Scholarship**

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### **Ronald D. Russo Scholarship for the Applied Arts**

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Kenneth and Deborah True  
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### **Bernard "Bernie" Van Spyker's 100 Birthday**

John Poat

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Asher Bell, Hayden Plourde, Kate Crowley, Chloe Richey, Meadow O'Connell, and Ally Weedon  
Peter and Audrey Johnson



**Art Wynja**

Scott and Ruth Gibbons

**The Cardinal Family**

Gregory Johnson

**Patty and Ron Johnson's  
Wedding Anniversary**

Michael and Katherine Boyer

**Ron and Roxie Plantinga's  
60th Wedding Anniversary**

Glen and Helena Bloem\*

**Parents of Graduates of the  
Classes of 2000 and 2003**

Alan and Elizabeth Bol

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**MEMORIAL GIFTS  
WERE GIVEN ON  
BEHALF OF:****Jack Alexander**

Brian and Becky McCourt  
Leo and Mary Wiersma  
Joe and Kim Wilkinson  
Mark and Karen Wilkinson

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\* An asterisk denotes members of the 1928 Society.

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Membership in the 1928 Society is for alumni, parents, and friends who want to make a significant Kingdom investment in WCS students through an annual leadership gift to the WCS Fund. These gifts ensure that our students are fully outfitted with the key tools of educational excellence for Christ-like service in God's world.

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For more information about joining the 1928 Society, please contact the Advancement Office [advancement@whitinsvillechristian.org](mailto:advancement@whitinsvillechristian.org) (508) 372-3261





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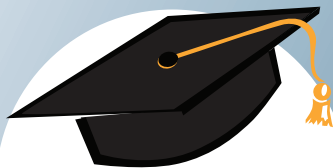
## UPCOMING EVENTS



**39th Annual  
Spring Auction  
March 28**  
Pleasant Valley  
Country Club



**WCHS Drama Club  
presents *Mary Poppins*  
April 10-12**  
Nehemiah Center



**Graduation  
May 30**  
Nehemiah  
Gymnasium



**WCS at the WooSox  
June 7**  
Polar Park



**Annual Golf Outing  
June 9**  
Shining Rock  
Golf Club

Please visit [whitinsvillechristian.org](http://whitinsvillechristian.org) for more information and for our full schedule of events.