

# Seton MAGAZINE

Under the Magisterium of the Catholic Church

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers:

Blessed Advent to you all!

This is such a beautiful season of preparation and anticipation. I hope that all of our Seton families immerse themselves in the many traditions and observances that help us to “keep” Advent.

Every time we are blessed to work with a new featured family, they become my favorite. The Ferreira family is no exception. I invite you to be inspired and encouraged by their story. It truly makes clear the importance of building family and faith together in the homeschool environment.

Speaking of encouragement, Dr. Clark always delivers that. Her article clearly shows her great admiration and love for all of our Seton families. We are so fortunate to have her sharing wisdom with us all.

Also in this issue, look for information about our accreditation process, some changes in the pre-kindergarten curriculum that we are very excited about, and greetings from some of our Seton families as well as our counselors. It's such a joy to share these pages with you.

May I, on behalf of all of the staff here at Seton, wish all of our Seton families the most holy and beautiful Advent season and a joyous Christmastide. We are looking forward to great things in 2018 and we are so grateful to be part of your homeschooling journey.

Blessings,  
Mary Ellen

*Mary Ellen Barrett*



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# We are Called to Lead Our Family Prayerfully

BY DR. MARY KAY CLARK

Shortly after Jesus was born, an angel appeared to Joseph in his sleep, warning him that the Baby Jesus was in grave danger. The angel said that the evil King Herod, fearing that a young boy would someday take over his throne, was sending his soldiers to murder all little boys who were two years old or younger in the land.

To protect Jesus, the angel told Joseph that he must leave Bethlehem in the dark of night. He was told to immediately rise from his bed and take Mary and Jesus to safety in Egypt. Many believe that another angel was sent to Joseph to help him along on the dark journey. The little Holy Family would follow the angel down the unfamiliar path, with just enough light provided by the angel.

Joseph instantaneously responded to Heaven's command to protect his Child. Joseph understood that his Holy Child would sacrifice His life for the salvation of men and women throughout time. Joseph knew that Jesus was destined to open the very gates of Heaven, bringing many people to eternal happiness. Joseph knew that his Holy Child would save men from their sins, and that the love of God would pour forth upon the Earth as a manifestation of His incomprehensible mercy.

Joseph followed the path of sacrifice for His Son. He rose in the middle of the night, helped Mary wrap Baby Jesus in warm clothes, hoisted them upon the back of his donkey, and, pulling them behind him, began the long, cold, and dark journey to a new warm, sunny, and peaceful land promised by the angel.

For several years, Joseph and Mary raised Jesus in safety, in the once foreign land of Egypt, living the quiet life of a carpenter's family. The Holy Family also helped their new neighbors to learn about Revelation. They helped their neighbors to reject the practices of a pagan society. They surely helped other families to learn about God's love for them and His concern for their sufferings.



Through prayer, some parents have come to believe that they must take on the responsibility to protect and to educate their children through Catholic homeschooling. For some, perhaps it seemed like the dark of night when they made that decision. Perhaps they sensed that while Herod tried to take children's lives, modern-day Herods are trying to take their children's souls. But like Saint Joseph, they have responded, in effect: "Not on my watch."

Though their decisions may have been obvious, that doesn't make their decisions any easier. Homeschooling parents often take a path without the help or support of family members or friends, and often without the certainty of a well-traveled route. So these parents pray to their children's guardian angels for help—for the spiritual guidance to make the best decisions for their children. And so, they walk by faith, leading their children along the way.

The Holy Family's Flight to Egypt causes us to reflect on the events of our own homeschooling family, and how we parents should proceed. Whereas the protection of

his family led Saint Joseph away from home, the protection of our own families leads us back home.

St. Joseph, during this Christmas season, help us to realize the importance of being strong and dedicated parents. Help us to affectionately devote our lives to helping our children save their souls by learning the Faith. Help our children to recognize the spiritual value of learning about God's love.

St. Joseph, help our children to realize that by following the teachings of their parents, by being obedient and studying their Catholic home schooling lessons, like the Holy Family, they will be protected from the dangers of our society. St. Joseph, help our children to lead our society as educated, practicing Catholics who want our country to be the Christian nation it is called to be. And to become the men and women that we all are called to be.



**Dr. Mary Kay Clark** has been the Director of Seton Home Study School for more than 30 years. She writes columns for the *Seton Magazine* and is the author of *Catholic Homeschooling: A Handbook for Parents*.

# your Questions ANSWERED

BY DR. MARY KAY CLARK

## **My two boys struggle with keeping up with the Lesson Plans. What can I do to help my boys?**

The Seton Lesson Plans and schedule are only guidelines. We believe children should proceed at the rate that is best for the individual child. Some children learn faster than others in some areas, and should be allowed to do so; some children learn more slowly in certain areas, and should be allowed to do so.

It is important to understand that only the assignments listed on Part B of the Quarter Report Form in the lesson plans are required by Seton. All other assignments and suggestions in the lesson plans, including those listed in Part A, are optional.

Parents can and should tweak the lesson plans in any way they deem necessary to suit the needs of their individual child and

family. It is also important to remember that a home schooled child is never behind nor is he ahead. A home schooled child is exactly where he should be.

## **I am a working home schooling mom. I have two home schooling children, one in Grade 8, one in grade 9. What tips can you give me?**

Consider putting both in the same courses, moving one up if she can do the work, and/or moving the other down, even if she does not need it. They need to be able to help each other in the same courses. Better to have your older one retake some courses to help the younger one, than have either one struggle. Also: Since you need them to work without your help most of the time, consider paying them for doing the assignments as they are scheduled. Pay them enough to keep them going! If they are both doing poorly in one subject area,

see if a college student or a retired teacher whom you know and trust can help out.

Some families have Mom help out a certain time of day, and Dad help out another time of day. Also, Saturdays can be a day for catching up the week's assignments. Some students prefer to work on Saturdays so they have a "free" summer.

## **My daughter has been an A student for this past year. She would like to skip a grade.**

Various problems arise when a student skips a grade level of lessons. Redoing some lessons does not cause problems, but going ahead too quickly can end up hurting a child in a variety of ways. Usually a student is doing very well in only one or two subjects, so we would suggest, for example, when she finishes up one subject early, such



## at Seton 2017-2018

As you may know, one of the advantages of studying with Seton Home Study School is its world-class accreditation recognition.

Hitherto, Seton has been accredited solely by AdvancED, one of the largest educational accreditation agencies in the world.

Because Seton feels so strongly about accreditation and its importance to our

students' future, we are now seeking a second accreditation by the Middle States Association, whose international reputation is frequently associated with first rate schools.

Seton is currently scheduled for its visit by the Middle States external review team on February 20-23, 2017. We humbly ask for your prayers, both for the team and a successful visit that will further Seton's work now and in the years ahead.

May God Bless you and your families!

For further information or questions about Seton's accreditation, please contact [guidance@setonhome.org](mailto:guidance@setonhome.org).



Nicholas Marmalejo, a history major, graduated from Christendom College in 2001. He holds a Virginia Teacher Certification and lives in the Shenandoah Valley with his wife and three children.

as math, that you call and ask us to send the next level book. That way her final grade in one subject is recorded on the report card, and she can start the next grade level in that particular subject. No one is hurt by repeating some lessons, but often students are “hurt” when they struggle with advancing too soon to unfamiliar lessons.

**Does my son need to repeat the first semester which he just finished at another school?**

We suggest an incoming mid-year student to take all the odd-numbered tests for the first semester for cumulative subjects, especially Math and English. In the younger grades, be sure your student has the necessary reading skills. This will show you if your son can start the second semester lessons in some subjects, but perhaps needs to go back and start with first and/or second quarter lessons before attempting Seton’s third quarter. For high school courses, it may be necessary for your son to take a First Semester test, such as in Algebra.

**I work a part-time job. Is it okay for my 6th grader to do the work and follow the directions in the lesson plans without my being present?**

Certainly some subjects your son could do without your being present, such as reading a chapter in his history or science book, and working on the questions at the end of the chapter. When it comes to Religion, English,

and Reading, you want to be sure to spend some time each day to review his work, especially his paragraphs and book reports, and to answer any questions. If he has a difficult time with a subject, such as math or science, you might schedule one or two evenings to help him. You might ask a family member to meet with him once a week to review the difficult material. We have found grandparents to be especially patient and helpful.

**When should I call Seton for help?**

Remember, Seton is here to help you in the great work of educating your children. Please do not hesitate to call or email us for help. Oftentimes, what may seem like a big problem has a simple solution. We’ve been assisting parents for over 30 years. Let us help you.

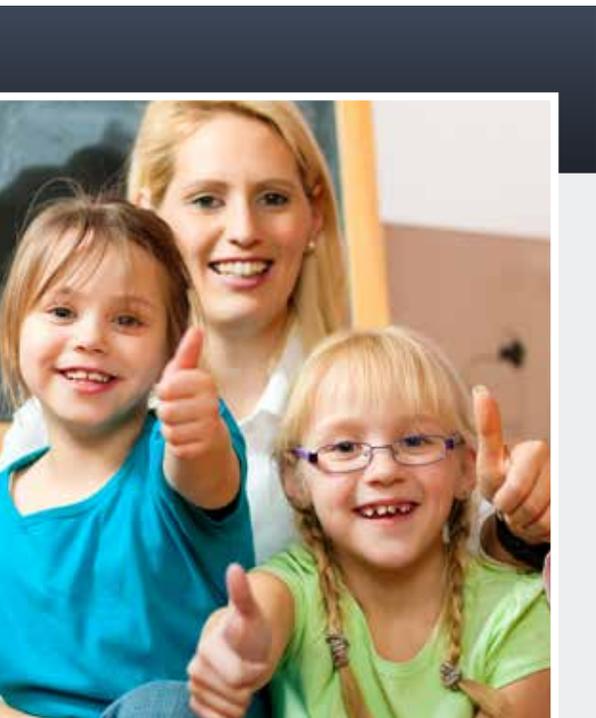
The counseling department is your first line of defense in dealing with any homeschooling troubles. If your question needs to be answered by someone else at Seton, the counselor can transfer your call. Our counseling department is available by phone from 9:00 AM until 5:00 PM ET Monday through Friday. You will find phone numbers and email addresses on the Magazine’s inside front cover.

Questions often can be best answered via email. And if your question requires any research, then we can find the answer and get back to you without you waiting on the phone line.

Seton also offers message boards devoted to various topics. Posting a question on the message board can bring a quick response, often from other parents or students.

**Can you advise me on scheduling our school day?**

Some parents try to adhere very closely to the number of minutes allotted each day for each subject. If your child finishes early, he may read a book, continue the subject with supplemental work, or work more in a major subject such as math, English, reading, or religion. **We do not advise working beyond the stipulated time because the homeschooling day is usually very concentrated. Homeschooling is meant to be a pleasant family experience.**



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The Seton College Partner Program is a way to encourage students to continue their Catholic education by attending solidly Catholic Colleges after high school.



THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE





# The Grace Bestowed on Our Pilgrimage of Faith

BY CATHY FERREIRA

Seton homeschooling has blessed and challenged our family in countless ways. Our children, Tiffany (27), Kurt (25), Damien (11), and Siena (9) have benefited spiritually, academically and also in the extra activities our homeschooling schedule has allowed.

We began homeschooling in 2002 when Kurt and Tiffany were in fourth and sixth grade. Our search for a Catholic curriculum with flexibility began with prayer, and we were blessed to find Seton Home Study School. We wanted a Catholic education that would promote higher education. Upon learning of Seton and the incredible lesson plans offered, our choice was clear. With the benefits of a flexible schedule for daily Mass, meeting family needs and vacationing (my husband Mark's job did not allow for time off in the summer), and the valuable support of Seton's staff, this education plan fit our family well. And, as God wills, we received added blessings we had not anticipated.

Our prayers had led us on a pilgrimage to Mexico City for the canonization of Juan Diego in 2002. This experience deeply impressed our family's faith. Not long after, in the fall of 2003, my

mom was diagnosed with a viral brain infection. Since we did not know how her illness would progress, we decided to pack the school books, music instruments, and office needs and drive the ten hours to be with her to help. Mark had to return to work, but I stayed with Tiffany and Kurt to help for a month. Because of Seton's flexibility, we were able to keep up the children's school work.

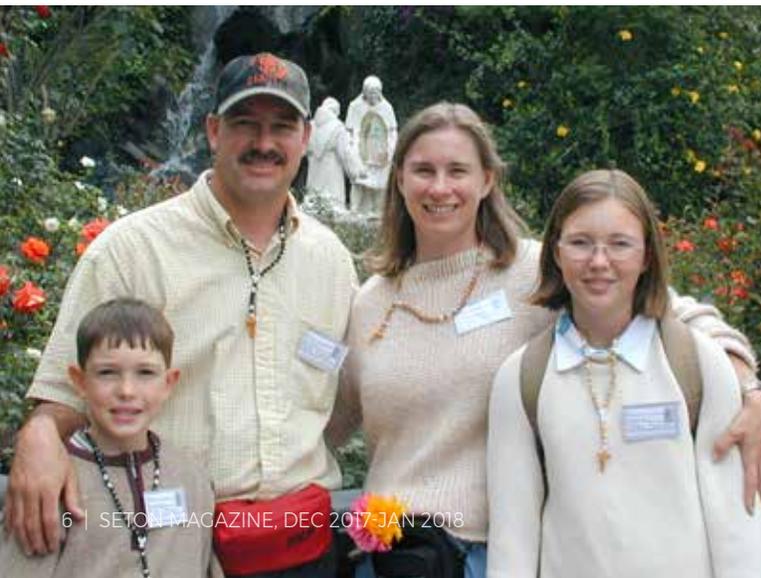
## Flexible Benefits

This was not the only occasion that homeschooling's flexible schedule has provided the opportunity to help the sick. In our parish, our family ministry is with the sick and dying. A dedicated sister, Sister Christina, from the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, has trained me to visit and minister to the people and the children have made cord rosaries, played music and sang with friends at Christmas time.

Since we have been homeschooling, we have met other local homeschooling families and have enjoyed learning and sharing with them. I had several female health issues, and we were medically advised that more children were not an option. When I expressed this to another Mom, who was a nurse, NFP instructor and homeschooler, at a local Walk for Life, she and three other homeschooling Moms started praying, and we were soon expecting our third child, Damien, after fourteen years. In His goodness, God blessed us again with Siena in 2008.

So began the second chapter of our second Seton experience with Damien enrolling in 2011 and Siena in 2013. About this time, our older children's college years progressed with Tiffany graduating in 2012 and Kurt in 2015.

In the fall of 2012, Mark was diagnosed with a high grade cancer and we began another journey. That day, I told Mark, "We are both dying, the only difference is you know what you have. See yourself well, and we will live each day to the fullest with the grace of God."





Once again, we packed our school books and traveled, this time to the major research medical centers. We were told his cancer was rare and there is no precedence for treatment. The only thing the doctors agreed on was this cancer had to be in his bones. It was not. We told every doctor that we believed in the Great Physician and while we greatly appreciated them and their staffs and would pray in thanksgiving for them, we would follow His will.

### A New Direction

Until 2015, Mark's treatment went well and he was able to work. In March 2016, he had a thirteen day hospital stay, acute renal failure, surgeries, and a heart attack in the middle of forty radiation treatments. His cancer had spread significantly. During his radiation treatments, we heard on Catholic radio about a pilgrimage to the Twenty-One California Missions. We felt it would be a good experience for Damien and Siena. We sent photos home to Mark every day and prayed for his healing at every Mission. Once again, our faith was deepened on our pilgrimage.

As we traveled on the bus to the missions, we watched an EWTN miniseries about St. Junipero Serra. The film's director James Kelty was with our group, and after one of our dinners, had a Questions and Answers session. After the Q&A, we spoke with Mr. Kelty, who asked if we would consider Damien being in his next film project about Fr. Vincent Robert Capodanno. Mr. Kelty explained that Damien had a strong resemblance to Fr. Capodanno as a boy.

Shortly after the pilgrimage, we realized Mark could not return to work. We decided it was time to discern our retirement plans of moving to North Carolina. Spending a week in North Carolina for Christmas we found a home and medical care. It was evident God

was confirming our decision as His will. In January, we learned the cancer had spread to the Mark's bones.

In March, Damien played the part of the young Fr. Capodanno in the docudrama *Called and Chosen*. This spring we moved from California to North Carolina, and in July, Kurt and his girlfriend Lindsey were married. In September, we were honored to attend a Mass in Washington, D.C. for the 50th Anniversary of Fr. Capodanno's death.

On our drive home, we were blessed to visit Seton Home Study in Front Royal, Virginia. It was wonderful meeting so many there who have supported us academically and prayerfully throughout the years! We are thankful! With the love of Christ and the grace of God...all is well.

This scripture verse has been a particular source of strength for us over the years.

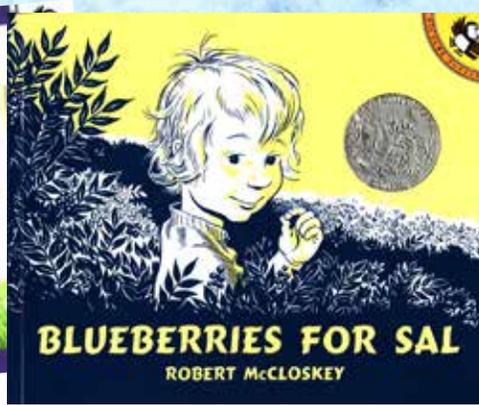
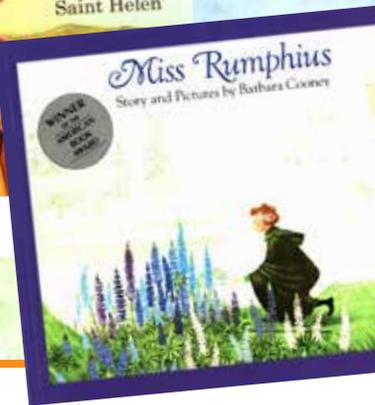
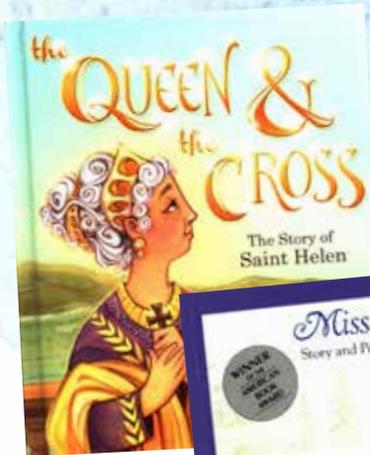
*"Everything indeed is for you, so that the grace bestowed in abundance on more and more people may cause the thanksgiving to overflow for the glory of God. Therefore, we are not discouraged; rather, although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to what is seen but to what is unseen; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal."*

2 Corinthians 4:15-18



# Read-Aloud Books

BY MARY ELLEN BARRETT



As home educating parents, we know that what we do early in our children's development often has long term effects on their ability and desire to learn. When I look back at my own childhood, some of my earliest memories are of being read to by my mom and seeing both she and my father reading themselves. In setting these examples, they formed their children into readers.

The importance of reading aloud to your children is undeniable. It not only builds happy memories of childhood, it has a profound effect on development. Reading aloud has long been linked to emergent literacy ability, which must be developed long before actual phonemic awareness takes place. Toddlers learn quickly that there is a relationship between the printed and the spoken word. They learn to hold a book properly, to track with their eyes the words on the page, and eventually begin to intuit that stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

The importance of these developmental milestones is incalculable to the long term success of an emerging reader. Because of this, Seton has begun including picture books in our Pre-Kindergarten curriculum.

The bonding that occurs between parent and child as they enjoy a book will connect them both profoundly. Most of us have happy memories of being read to as children, and I know few people who don't have a favorite story that was read to them often by a parent or grandparent. When writing this article I asked my children about their own favorite read-aloud books. The answers led to great memories, lots of laughter, and a hunt for some we hadn't visited in a while. *The Little Red Caboose*, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, *The Mitten*, *Curious George*, *Jamie O'Rourke and the Pooka* as well as classics

like *Charlotte's Web*, *Little House on the Prairie* and *A Wrinkle in Time* were discussed and fondly remembered.

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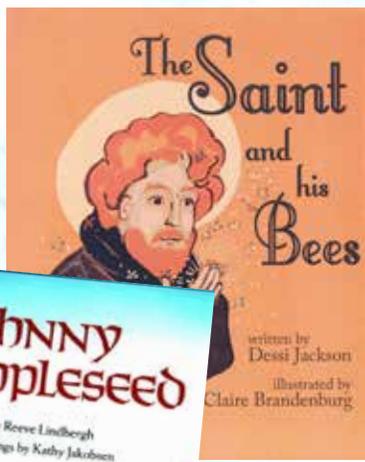
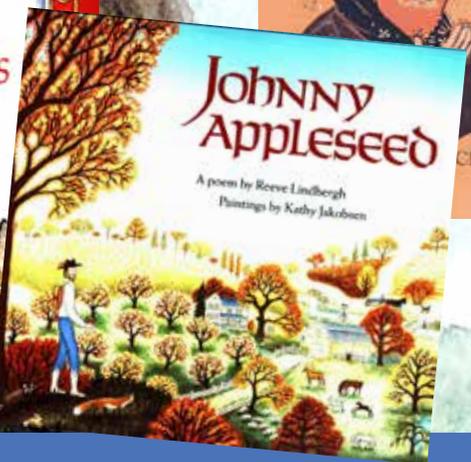
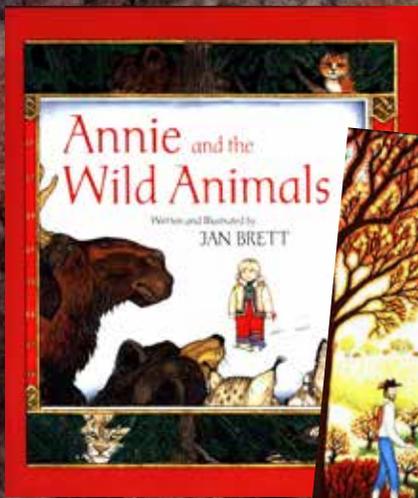
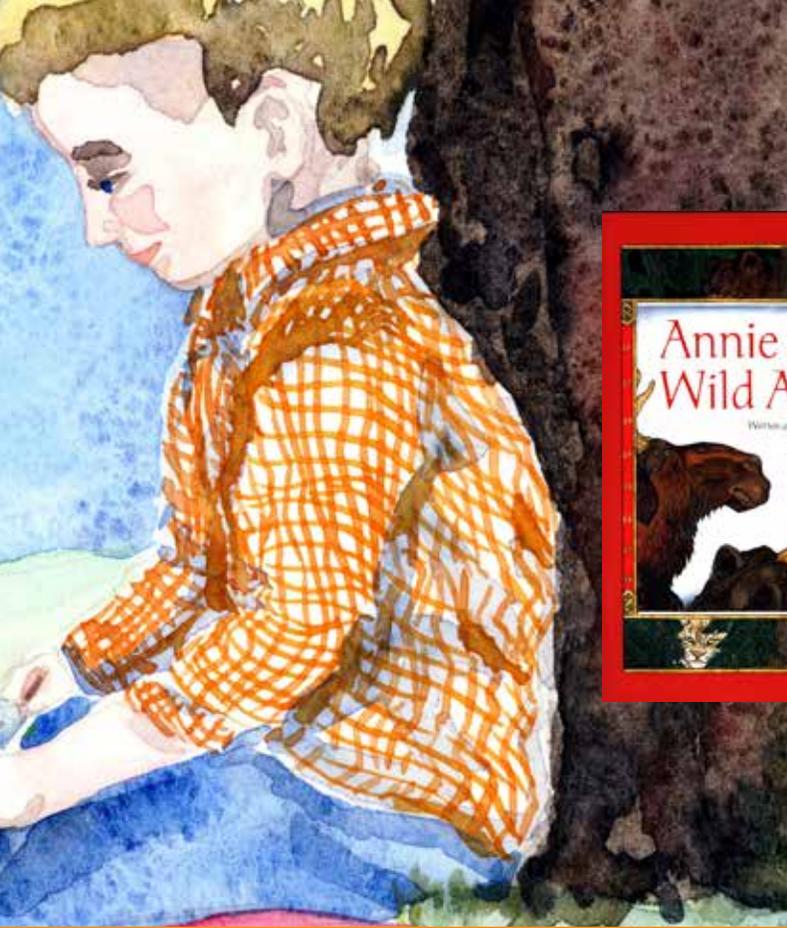
**"Seton has begun including picture books in our Pre-Kindergarten curriculum."**

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When reading aloud becomes part of your family's culture, you are, by default, raising children to whom books are important. When books are important, ideas are important, and suddenly you are raising children who think, process, absorb, and delight in learning, children who will learn very early how to be still and take things in, who develop daily the habit of being quiet and listening carefully.

Homeschooling gives parents of small children wide swaths of time to expose their little ones to the wonder and delight that can be found in picture books. Every childhood should include a little bit of this magic. Kings and queens, knights and maids, dragons and fairies all serve to form young minds, expand the imagination, inspire creativity, and provide hours of entertainment. It's easy to dismiss the genre of picture books as unworthy and childish, but it's extremely unwise. A child fed on well-written, well-illustrated books from the beginning will learn intuitively the difference between good writing and bad, between worthy art and poor art.

"A picture book is a small door to the enormous world of the visual arts, and they're often the first art a young person sees," says Tomie dePaola, children's author.



See these and more read-aloud Books at:  
[Setonbooks.com/read-aloud](http://Setonbooks.com/read-aloud)

In a society where so much of what is ugly is being crammed down our throats as art and defended in the cause of self-expression, exposing children from the time they can sit up to lovely pictures and worthy ideas, is most important. Children who learn to recognize true beauty early on will instinctively shun what is ugly or unnatural.

The books Seton have chosen are by authors like Demi, Gennady Spirin, Marianna Mayer, Tasha Tudor, Ben Hatke, Neal Lozano, Jan Brett, and Barbara Cooney. Authors who elevate their words with beautiful illustrations that draw a child into their world, and allow a child's imaginations to take flight.

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**"The way to read a fairy tale is to throw yourself in."**  
 -W. H. Auden

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We hope that providing books in the pre-kindergarten program will encourage parents to take the time to throw themselves into the stories with their children. Use different voices, make all the noises, and ask, "what do you think will happen next?" Laugh at the funny stuff and express sadness when things go wrong. Bring the story to life, make it part of your family culture that stories must be acted out. It's good training for when children later read Shakespeare since it is my belief that Shakespeare cannot be read like a novel, but rather should always be spoken and emoted. It's the only way to understand and appreciate the nuances that the bard so brilliantly wove into every scene, every stanza, every

moment. Poetry too, should be read aloud whenever possible, and the beginning for little ones is *Mother Goose's Nursery Rhymes* and a beautifully illustrated copy of Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Children's Garden of Verses*.

Included in the stories provided by Seton are two beautiful saint stories. Our greatest responsibility and our greatest privilege as parents is to hand down the Faith, and these stories of great men and women living lives of exemplary holiness can help us. *Saint Felix and the Bees* and *The Queen and the Cross* will start your children learning about the saints. It has been one of my great pleasures to seek out picture books of their patron saints for each of my children and godchildren. A twenty-year collection now occupies a few shelves in our home, and the books are still pulled out quite often. Even the adult children still enjoy listening to these stories.

We are confident that this small addition in our curriculum will reap huge rewards for Seton families. We want very much for you to enjoy these young years of learning and growing with your children and to make beautiful memories of reading books together. We firmly believe that readers are created on the laps of their parents and hope to bring you more opportunities to share the gift of reading with your children in the future.



**Mary Ellen Barrett** is mother of seven children and two in heaven, wife to David and a lifelong New Yorker. She has homeschooled her children for eleven years using Seton and an enormous amount of books. She is editor of the *Seton Magazine* and also a contributor to *The Long Island Catholic*.

# Merry Christmas!

From the Seton Featured Families

We try to make God first at Christmas by making everything else take second place to trying to get to Mass each day over the Christmas season. Next would be Saint Nicholas and the presents, and finally the food. We most especially enjoy the pork pies on Christmas Eve after Mass, my husband's yule log cake decked with meringue mushrooms, and a traditional Irish Fruitcake.

We make our fruitcake a couple of months ahead of Christmas, and painted twice weekly, or whenever we remember, with Irish Whisky to flavour and preserve it. Traditionally, this was an excellent way to preserve food if you did not have refrigeration. Also, in our great-grandparents' day, fruit was the candy of the day, and sometimes was very sparse in winter, so it was a real treat. It's so nice to remember those who went before us, as we bake this unusual and time-consuming confection. The cake is then coated in real marzipan that we make ourselves, and hard royal icing. We don't put all the gross glazed fruit from the store in it. We buy good old dried fruit: cranberries, currants, raisins etc, and soak them in whisky and orange juice. On Christmas Day, it is served with a little nativity scene on top of it, with a sprinkling of icing sugar snow. If you've never appreciated fruitcake, you might never have tried a real, homemade Irish or English one. You can google the recipe, but make sure to include the search terms "traditional English or Irish" inside quotation marks in the search.

**From the Darnowski Family**

*"Guided By Grace"*





Every year, about a week before Christmas my parents take all the grandchildren to the Nutcracker Ballet dressed in their finest. Because of Jude's immune deficiency, all the little cousins wear masks together to be protected from germs so that Jude can go with them and he doesn't feel alone wearing his mask. On Christmas day, after morning Mass we all head to my parents' house. The grandchildren all put on costumes to reenact the Nativity. We have Mary and Joseph and a few extra shepherds and wise men now that there are thirteen grandchildren ages eight and under, but everyone is so excited to kiss the Baby Jesus under the Christmas tree. Then we all pray together and open presents around the tree. We also have birthday cake for Jesus and enjoy spending the day together.

Merry Christmas and prayers for good health and many blessings in the New Year from the Pfaff family!

### From the Pfaff Family

*"No Regrets: Homeschooling for Medical Reasons"*

Traditionally, Christmas Eve day is filled with preparations for our "Feast of the Seven Fishes" (well not always as many as 7, but we try!). This is followed by evening Mass where our kids participate each year in the children's choir. Everyone is dressed in their best and my husband in his Scottish kilt; his kilt is a parish tradition in itself! After a cheerful visit with our parish family at the church we end our "silent night" with an elegant, candlelit dinner filled with toasts and thanksgiving that usually runs late into the night.

### From the Cairnie Family

*"Preparing Our Children for Success with Seton"*



# MERRY CHRISTMAS

AND

# HAPPY NEW YEAR 2018



**H**ow often have you received a request from family members or friends to pray for them and their family? We've all heard those words of petition, "Please pray for me!" The Seton counselors hear them often, and we want you to know that we DO pray for you!

You may be having a difficult time with homeschooling because of a sick child, and must spend a lot of time at doctor appointments. You may be homeschooling from bed due to a difficult pregnancy or illness. You may be a dad who is handling the homeschooling because you've lost your job, and mom must go back to work.

You may be juggling homeschooling and taking care of an elderly parent who's been diagnosed with cancer. Your family may be dealing with the aftermath of one of the recent catastrophic storms, resulting in loss of homes and relocation. You may be new to homeschooling and having a difficult time adjusting. The reasons for homeschooling are endless, as well as the reasons for struggling with homeschooling. We hear you, and we listen!

Please know that no matter what crisis or difficulty you are experiencing in your life, we at Seton will do our best to help you work around the difficulties and homeschool your children to the best of your abilities. That may

# You Are in Our Prayers!



mean getting an extension for this year or tailoring the curriculum to fit your current needs. It may mean a slightly different schedule or homeschooling on the weekends so that grandparents can help out. Whatever works for your student and your family, works!

One of the most important things you are doing for your children is homeschooling them with a good, solid Catholic curriculum in a Catholic environment – your home. One of the most important things we are doing for our families is keeping you in our prayers every day! We pray for you each day at Angelus, at Mass, and in our personal prayers. You are always in our thoughts and prayers. We hear your requests for prayers, and we act on

them. Please contact us when you are having difficulty homeschooling, and please do not hesitate to ask for our prayers! Prayer is so powerful, and we constantly see the miracles brought about by prayer! How wonderful and merciful is our loving God!

May God bless you each day as you endeavor to homeschool. May God grant you the strength and faith to endure each crisis and difficulty that comes your way. May you persevere in all your struggles, knowing God is with you. May you never cease to pray for faith, hope, and love. Please know that you are remembered in our daily prayers in our chapel and we ask you to *pray for Seton!* God be with you!

# We Always Had Christmas Lights

BY JOHN CLARK

Some time back, I read a news report about a man who complained that his neighbor had the gall to continue to display his outdoor Christmas lights several days after December 25th. Though the neighbor was probably planning on taking down his lights very soon anyway, the man nevertheless called the police to complain about his neighbor.

The story, however, does have a happy ending. The police told the man that his neighbor was not violating any laws; turns out, it's America, so there is no law against displaying Christmas lights on your own property. But when the neighbor found out about the phone call, the neighbor informed the man that he would not take down his Christmas lights. Ever.

When I think of this story—in fact, very often when I see Christmas lights—I think of my Dad.

You could say that my father and mother never had much money when we were growing up, but “not much” radically overstates the case. They struggled to keep food on the table, perhaps best illustrated that one particular year, our Christmas dinner entrée was oatmeal. They struggled to keep heating oil in the furnace, perhaps best illustrated that we could often see our breath as we sat in the chilly living room. They struggled to keep us clothed. Clothes shopping for us consisted of going to the third-hand store. (The second-hand store was out of our price range.) The store had a deal: for five dollars, you could buy everything you could fit into a provided paper grocery bag. This was a win-win for us: not only did we get lots of clothes, but when we traveled to our grandparent's house, the paper bags served as luggage.

In retrospect, one of the things that I learned from those years—and I know this statement is anathema to Horatio Alger's telling of American capitalism—intelligence plus hard work does not necessarily equal riches. The truth is that my mother and father are both geniuses and worked plenty hard, not to mention the fact that they are more heroic than I will ever be.

A series of misfortunes, however, led to a lack of fortunes. For instance, my father, a Vietnam veteran, had

chronic back and shoulder problems from being hung up in a tree after parachuting into communist territory. This, and other combat-sustained injuries, affected his ability to work or even enjoy many pain-free moments. His agony sometimes landed him in the hospital. In fact, one of my first memories as a child was that of two paramedics coming to my house for my Dad, carrying him out on a stretcher and driving him away. I was too little to understand what was wrong with him, where he was going, or when he was returning.

Thus, we had very little growing up. At least materially.

But we always had Christmas lights.

Only later in life, as a father myself, have I come to understand how hard those years must have been on my Dad. He loved his wife and his seven boys, and he imagined himself a Scottish prince who wanted his wife and children to live with him in a palace. But, alas, a palace was not to be his. Instead, he would do the next best thing; he would light our little house in tiny Westerville, Ohio, like a palace. And all of the Clark boys could tell you something we learned from our Dad: in a cold and gloomy world: pretty lights penetrate the darkness—kind of like Christianity itself.

Kind of like fatherhood itself.

Thanks, Dad.

And Merry Christmas!

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If you enjoy my writing, you will love my new book: *How To Be A Superman Dad in a Kryptonite World, Even When You Can't Afford A Decent Cape*. It's an anthology of my best columns and blogs over the years. You can order it at Amazon.com, SetonBooks.com, or at Guiding Light Books. If you order a physical copy by December 18th, I'll be happy to autograph it for you (or your Dad).



**John Clark** is a homeschooling father, a speech writer, an online course developer for Seton, and a weekly blogger for The National Catholic Register. His latest book is "How to be a Superman Dad in a Kryptonite World, Even When You Can't Afford a Decent Cape."



BY JOHN REGNIER

# THE NATIVITY SCENE

*What It Is, Where It Came From,  
and Why It Still Matters*

The snow blows fiercely into my face as I hold the plastic angel. Dad tells me to lift it higher, but my siblings disagree. We've been setting up our lawn nativity scene for almost an hour. It started with Dad announcing it was time to put up the manger scene. Collectively, we all groaned, but grudgingly put on our coats and gloves. Dad retrieved the ladder and handed the figures down from their spot in the garage rafters. After they had been collected on the lawn, the arguments began. "Jesus shouldn't be put here, no, Mary can't go there, and who put St. Joseph over there?" We go around and around, but we finally get it up.

We're not the only ones who do this. Christmas rolls around, and suddenly, nativity scenes are everywhere. They're set up outside every Church and in the window of shops. We may not even notice them anymore, they've become such a familiar sight. But where did they come from? Who thought of recreating that holy night in Bethlehem two thousand years ago?

Nativity scenes were inspired by St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis wanted to encourage

the people of his time to turn away from the materialism and greed that festered in their hearts. He wished to spread devotion to the poverty of the Infant Jesus, writing to a friend, "I want to do something that will recall the memory of that Child who was born in Bethlehem, to see with bodily eyes the inconveniences of His infancy."

In the year 1223, St. Francis was traveling to the Italian village of Greccio to celebrate Christmas. Once he arrived, he realized the monastery he had planned to use for Midnight Mass would be too small to host the large number of villagers coming. Francis concluded the Mass must be held outdoors, and that gave him an idea. After receiving permission from Pope Honorius III, he gathered an ox, a donkey, and a manger and found a suitable cave in the hilly countryside. He set up the manger, placed the animals near it, and recreated the Christ Child's birth.

On Christmas Eve, the curious villagers made their way to Francis' cave to see what he had been working on. They were greeted with a sight that astounded them.

Soft candlelight illuminated the simple reenactment of Bethlehem. Francis began Midnight Mass and preached about the simple poverty of the stable in Bethlehem. He became so overwhelmed with love for the Infant, he couldn't even utter the name Jesus, instead calling Him, "the Babe of Bethlehem." He pleaded for the end of the rampant greed in the villagers' lives, especially around Christmas, and pointed to the simple poverty into which the Babe had been born.

The villagers' hearts were powerfully moved. During the sermon, one of the villagers reported he saw "an Infant marvelously beautiful, sleeping in the manger." Once the Mass concluded, Francis stopped his brothers from removing the straw from the manger. Many legends have emerged telling of animals eating the straw and being cured from their diseases.

The villagers circulated the news, and the fame of St. Francis of Assisi's simple nativity scene spread rapidly. Soon, every church in Italy displayed their own living nativity scenes. Christians from around the world



visited these living nativity scenes to pray. The nativity scene became a reminder of the real reason of Christmas.

Eventually, people made statues of the living nativity scenes. The figures were often carved of wood or wax and dressed in colorful clothes. More characters were added, such as Mary, Joseph, and the Three Kings. The scene evolved over the ages, with different countries and cultures adding their own figures and traditions.

In France, painted figurines made of terracotta, called “santons,” are very popular today. Germans developed a tradition, where the baby Jesus is only displayed in the manger after Christmas Eve to draw attention to His holy birth. They prepare mangers for the Infant King and allow children to place a piece of yarn in the manger each time they do something nice. Polish “szopkain” include historical buildings in the background of the nativity scenes. Countries all around the world embraced this holy custom and strove to live the simple poverty of the Infant Jesus.

That surprised me. I had grown up with nativity scenes and never once thought of them as anything other than a decoration. I had always helped set up our lawn nativity sets in our living room, and my siblings and I even had our own personal sets to which our godparents added each Christmas. But, I had been looking at the nativity scene all wrong, and maybe you have too.

Maybe we lose sight of the meaning of Christmas and get caught up in the presents and lights. Perhaps all we can see are the physical things right in front of us, instead of the reason behind them. I had looked at a nativity set and seen it for its material things, a bunch of lovely statues gathered around a baby. I missed the real gift. The nativity scene is not just another pretty thing to look at around Christmastime. It’s supposed to

remind and inspire us to turn away from the greed constantly plaguing our world and to contemplate the amazing love God has for us. The nativity scene is a steady reminder of the real meaning of Christmas in a world trying desperately to forget.

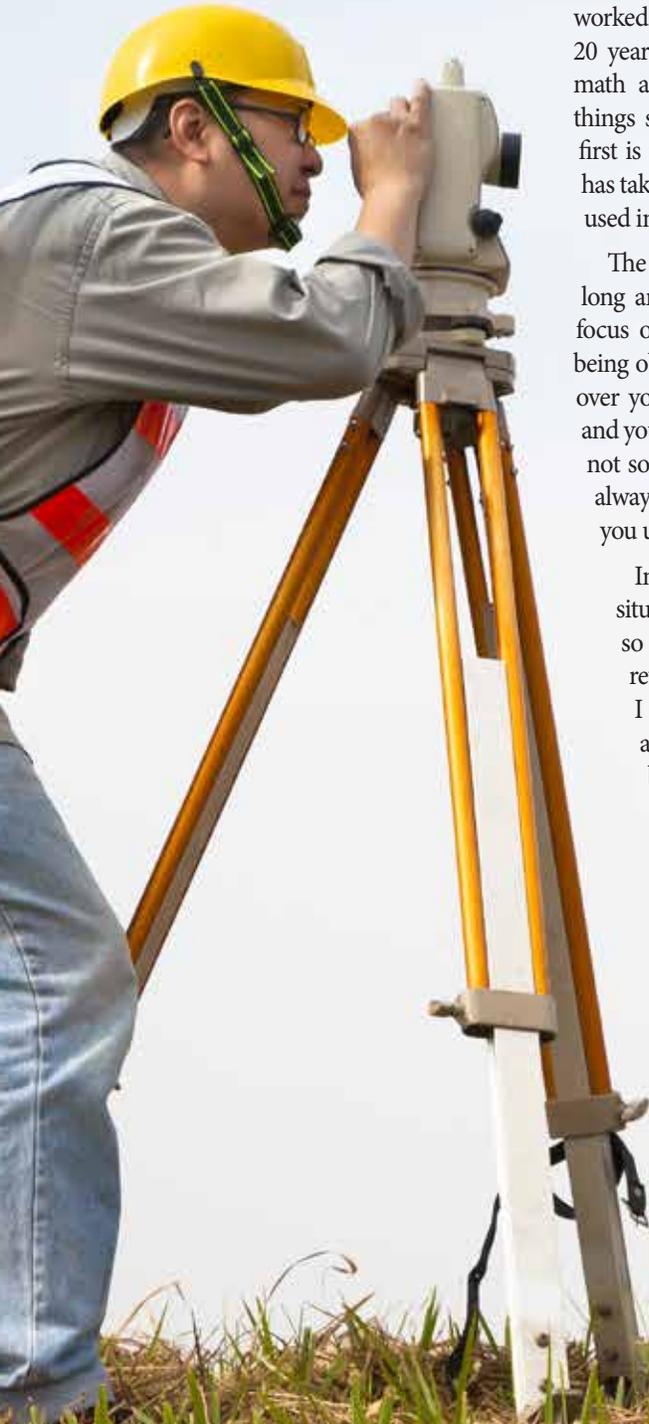
When the nativity sets come out this year, I will pause for a moment and look for the real meaning behind the characters. I will watch the shepherds and imagine their joy as they become the first to worship the Infant King. I will gaze upon the Wise Men as they lay down their pride and bow to someone greater than themselves. I will contemplate Mary and Joseph as they look with incredible love on their precious Son. And I will really see the Babe in the center of it all and think of the unimaginable love He has for me.



**John Regnier** is a 12th grade student in Seton Home Study and has been featured in a Seton Student Profile in the *Bayley Bulletin*, Seton's high school magazine. His essay, *The Basket of Cheer*, was a finalist in the Bulletin's 2016 Basket of Cheer Contest. John is an avid reader and prolific writer, and s smack dab in the middle of seven children. John is very musical and loves to play the piano and sing in the church choir.

# A LIFE WELL LIVED

BY DONALD F. VALAIKE



Although I have lived for 84 years and worked for 66 years in 4 careers, including 20 years helping Seton families with their math and science lessons, I realized two things stand out the most in my life. The first is that God loves me, and second, He has taken care of me through the people He used in my life to show His love.

The list of those whom God has sent is long and could fill a book, but I want to focus on two people and the principle of being obedient to the people with authority over you, your parents (for young people) and your supervisors in work situations (for not so young people) and the principle of always giving your best effort to every task you undertake.

In the parental realm, I had a unique situation. My father died when I was 9, so the formative years I can remember revolved around my mother. When I was around 11, my best friend was an Altar Boy, and he invited me to become one also. When I asked my mother for permission, she asked me if I was willing to commit myself to meet my obligations and responsibilities when I was scheduled to serve. I agreed, and everything went well until the early winter of my first year. I was scheduled for 7:00 AM mass during a certain week, and on the first day of that week, we woke up to freezing rain and cold temperatures. I

had about a mile and half walk to the church. We owned no car. As I was explaining to her the difficulty of getting to the church, she simply said, “You committed to being there when assigned so get moving. Yes, you can have my umbrella.”

In the work situation, I have told many of my students my “Barney Barnwell Story.” I enlisted in the Air Force on my 17th birthday, because there was no work available for a 16-year-old high school graduate in 1949. After completing basic training and surveying school, I was assigned to a survey crew at Eglin Air Force Base in the panhandle of Florida. My first supervisor was a civilian local named ‘Barney’ Barnwell. Barney had been a surveyor in NW Florida all his adult life. He was a knowledgeable surveyor and was disciplined and fair to his 4-man crew of young Air Force enlistees. We learned a lot from being on his crew. However, in a short while, it was noticeable to all that he was holding me to a higher standard than the rest of the crew. I said nothing for quite a while, then one day, when he and I were alone, I said to him, “Barney, why do you dislike me so? You are holding me to a different standard than the other guys. You are not satisfied with anything I do unless it is perfect.” Barney smiled and said, “Don, I don’t dislike you. In fact, if I allowed myself, I could like you. From the time you joined this crew, I recognized you had the ability to be a very good surveyor. In fact, you could be very good at anything you tried. So, I decided I was not going to allow you to get comfortable with mediocrity.”

His comment did not immediately hit me as a principle for life, but it made sense. I began unconsciously to do everything in my military life to meet Barney's standards. That resulted in earning every promotion in the first month I was eligible. At age 19, I became the youngest Staff Sergeant in the Air Force at that time.

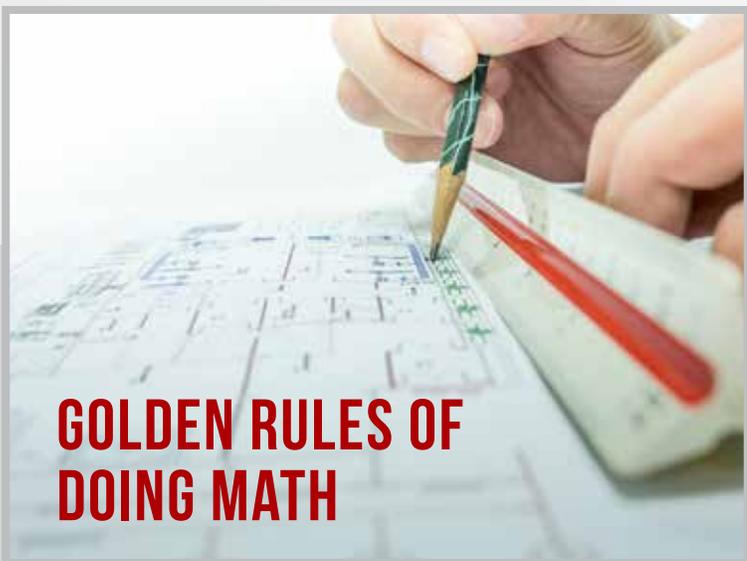
Promotions to the upper enlisted ranks required going before a Promotion Board to compete for a limited number of openings. I had been one of 35 sergeants competing for 4 staff sergeant vacancies. After the promotions were announced, I was called into the office of the senior officer on the promotion board. He was a reserve officer called up for active duty during the Korean War. He told me that, in his civilian life, he was a member of Congress, and one of his appointments to the military academy at West Point had withdrawn recently and

he could give me the appointment if I was interested. I joyfully accepted, and we began the enrollment process. Unfortunately, my joy was short-lived when I was informed that my uncorrected vision did not meet the standards for the academy.

Disappointed, but undaunted, I completed my enlistment and on February 4, 1954 (my 21st birthday), I enrolled in the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University). Like most things in my life, this did not go smoothly either. When I was accepted into Carnegie Tech at mid-term, it was with the proviso that I would catch up to the class that had enrolled the previous September, before they ended their sophomore year. This meant I had to do 2 years work in 1 1/2 years. With great difficulty (remember I was now 5 years out of high school competing with some of the country's best students in their first year in

Carnegie Tech). I completed my sophomore year barely on time.

Unfortunately, I was out of money and something had to give. So, I had to find a job and enroll in night school. Working and going to a tough college at night is not for the faint-hearted. Fortunately, God intervened and provided a helpmate. My meeting with Betty years earlier is another adventure worth telling, but it must wait. Many nights of her coaching/prodding and strong coffee and late nights of night school work resulted in graduation on Sept. 9, 1958. Our first child, Mary, was due on September 8 but waited until Sept. 20 to join our family. She would later be joined by Joe, Tim, and Susan. They all heard the "Barney Barnwell" story often when I felt they needed encouragement or prodding as they were growing up. They must have listened because they are all outstanding in their chosen fields.



## GOLDEN RULES OF DOING MATH

I have told parts of this story to many students and parents (and all of it to a few) in my years as a math and science counselor at Seton Home Study School. I felt they could benefit from the principles God has taught me in my journey. I will mention a few of these principles below that apply directly to math students and leave the rest for the readers to dig out on their own.

1. Be cheerfully obedient and loyal to the Authority in your life. First, to God as the ultimate authority (remember Jesus was obedient to The Father), then to the authority peculiar to your situation, be it a parent, teacher, supervisor, or superior.
2. Once you have enrolled in a course, commit yourself to completing the course with a superior grade by studying carefully every chapter in the text, even if you think its "old stuff."



**Don Valaike** served Seton families for twenty years as a math and science counselor and source of home schooling encouragement. Mr. Valaike graduated with a B.S. in Civil Engineering from the Carnegie Institute of Technology which he applied over twenty-five years in a variety of engineering projects. He is the grandfather of two homeschooling grandchildren.

3. Do every problem assigned in each chapter of math. Then have someone check your answers. If you have any wrong answers, you must redo the problem on paper until you have done it correctly. It is not acceptable to look at the problem and say, "I see where I made my mistake. I'll have to be more careful next time." Your mind and your eyes must see the problem done correctly.
4. Cultivate a disciplined way of doing your work, whether it's daily work or a crucial test. I recommend what I call "The Golden Rules of Doing Math":
  - Write down ON PAPER every step for every problem.
  - Write it in an orderly fashion, up and down the page, lining up all decimal points.
  - Make a separate written step of checking all the work you have done on the problem.
  - Carefully transfer your answer to the answer sheet or carefully choose the correct answer if it is on a multiple choice online test.



# Seton's Strategy for **ONLINE LEARNING**

BY JOE SPARKS

Over the past few years, many parents have asked about Seton's plans for offering online learning opportunities. In this article, I'd like to explain a little about our vision for online courses and share our direction for the future.

## What is an online course?

Ask ten people how an online course works and you'll likely get ten different answers.

The phrase "online course" is hard to pin down because there are so many types of online courses. Some online courses are live, while others are flexible. Some rely exclusively on video, while others use mixed multimedia. Some rely on a set schedule, while others are self-paced. Some use books, others eschew them completely.

Because online courses are so varied in format, schools throughout the world have individually created unique solutions to best fit the needs of their learners. In Seton's case, we considered the advantages and disadvantages of the various online methods to find the best solution for Catholic Homeschooling families.

## What is Seton's solution?

Seton has created a model for online courses that we think is uniquely suited for our families. Because the needs and expectations of our families are so varied, we wanted to create a solution that is flexible enough to allow parents to use the online tools to the degree that they determine to be best for their own family.

This approach, both flexible and parent-centered, is at the heart of Seton's philosophy of education.

To this end, Seton has started to release two different types of digital courses: courses aligned with a textbook or books and exclusively online courses. The courses are not taught live or presented on a mandatory schedule. Students may login when their time and schedule permits and complete the course at the pace that is best for them.

## Aligned Courses

Most of the digital courses offered by Seton are what we call "aligned courses." This means that the academic content taught within the digital course is aligned, in content and suggested lessons, with the print version of the course.

In speaking with many of our families, it became clear that families have varied expectations for how much time their high school students should spend on the computer or rely on online learning. We think that our new online-and-print aligned courses provide families a solution that offers both the flexibility that so many value and the latest educational helps that technology can offer.

When enrolling in an aligned course, families receive both the print lesson plans and access to the digital version of the course. Parents can then determine with their students the best balance of online and print utilization. The courses are designed in such a way to allow students to easily alternate between formats without worrying about losing their place.

This aligned functionality allows for superior flexibility with the online courses. With many online offerings of other schools, a computer crash doesn't just bring the computer down, it also brings the school schedule to a halt. With Seton's aligned courses, parents won't have to worry about technical glitches or lack of computer availability stopping or slowing a student's academic progress. It works the other way, too! If a family is traveling and has access to the internet, the student will no longer need to worry about packing up a whole set of lesson plans just to stay on track. The course content is just a few clicks away.

With regard to graded assignments, aligned courses operate exactly in the same way as traditional Seton courses. Seton grades the quarterly tests and compositions, but parents are given the opportunity to provide a home grade for other assignments. Answer keys or grading guides for these parent-graded assignments are provided.

Finally, a significant advantage of the aligned format is that it allows Seton to roll-out digital courses to students mid-year. Parents don't need to worry about "missing out" on a digital course if they enrolled before its release. If an aligned course becomes available mid-year, parents with students enrolled in the print course will receive a notification in MySeton, allowing for easy activation of the digital course material. Students can jump in easily and pick up right where they left off in the print version.

## Exclusively Online Courses

Some courses have been released that are exclusively online and contain no print component. These courses rely on videos, internet links, or interactivities to such an extent that offering a matching print lesson plan is not possible. One example is our online High School Economics course.

These exclusively online courses feature Seton-graded tests and assignments. No parent-graded assignments are assigned in these courses. Many parents have remarked that they enjoy “learning along” with their students in some of the classes offered in this format.

Like the aligned courses, these exclusively online courses are provided on a flexible schedule and timetable that can be determined by the parent and student.

## Features and the Future: Your Feedback Matters

Whether aligned or online-only, we are trying to add helpful features to each digital course. All have an interactive course interface that helps students monitor their progress in the course. Some courses have added video content. Others have added audio resources. Many have new interactive quizzes that help students better grasp the lesson content. A few even have new “learning games” to help make difficult concepts more easy to remember. We are constantly adding new features to these courses based on student and parent feedback.

And submitting feedback is easier than ever. A significant feature of the new online offerings—whether aligned courses or exclusively online courses—is the ability for parents and students to provide feedback. Every course offering in SetonOnline has a feedback tool that allows for feedback on every element within the course. This feedback is incredibly helpful to our course designers, as it allows us to know where improvement resources should be allocated. As a direct result of feedback submitted on the first batch of online courses, we already have dozens of new videos in development, all as our response to student and parent requests.

Seton has always been committed to meeting the needs of our parents and students. We encourage you to send feedback and to let us know what aspects of the online courses you like, what you don't, and what we can do better. You can be involved in the future of these courses, through your input and suggestions. As we continue to add features to the courses and make available new course offerings, we want to be sure that we are meeting the needs of our families and helping our students to become more successful than ever.



**Joe Sparks** is the Director of Multimedia Development at Seton. He has an M.A.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Instructional Technology from Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, VA. He lives with his wife and four children in the mountains of Northern Virginia.

# NOW AVAILABLE: ENGLISH 11 ONLINE

English 11 Online is now available for new students or as a free upgrade to students currently enrolled in the print version of English 11.

To upgrade, login to MySeton and you will find additional information under the “Courses” tab.

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- Religion 9 (*Aligned Course*)
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**[WWW.SETONHOME.ORG/SETONONLINE](http://WWW.SETONHOME.ORG/SETONONLINE)**

# The *Feast* of the *Epiphany*



**Feast Day - January 6**

Visitation of the Magi

12th Day of Christmas

**Names of the Magi:**

Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar

**Gifts of the Magi:**

Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh



# Are you ready to share your story?



Every month, we highlight a homeschooling family, alumni, or student in the Seton Magazine. The stories from these families help inspire, encourage, and motivate others within the Catholic homeschooling community.

## WE'D LOVE TO HEAR YOUR STORY!

To submit your family story for consideration, visit the website link below and answer a few short questions.

Find out how to share your story at: [www.setonmagazine.com/family-story](http://www.setonmagazine.com/family-story)



## Seton Student Achievements

SHARING SUCCESS WITH THE SETON COMMUNITY

## Calling All Seton Students!

Have **you** recently earned/won an award?

Have a success story? Achieved a goal?

**Share your achievements with us!**

Each of these achievements are recognized by individuals or organizations that may or may not be affiliated with Seton. We are happy to pass on the news and share them with the rest of the community to inspire and encourage each other, and to see what other Seton families are up to.



**Thomas** | I won 1st place in the 40 Meter Freestyle in the North Carolina Long Course Age Group Swimming Championship and placed in the top 5 in 10 events.

Submit your photo, your achievement, and how homeschooling has helped you succeed!

[setonmagazine.com/students](http://setonmagazine.com/students)

# Seton Home Study School

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FOR OUR SETON MAGAZINE READERS

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### In Preparation for the 2018 World Meeting of Families

One might ask: does the Gospel continue to be a joy for the world? And also: does the family continue to be good news for today's world? I am sure the answer is yes! And this "yes" is firmly based on God's plan.

The love of God is His "yes" to all creation and at the heart of this latter is man. It is God's "yes" to the union between man and woman, in openness and service to life in all its phases; it is God's "yes" and His commitment to a humanity that is often wounded, mistreated and dominated by a lack of love. The family, therefore, is the "yes" of God as Love. Only starting from love can the family manifest, spread and regenerate God's love in the world. Without love, we cannot live as children of God, as couples, parents and brothers.

*Pope Francis  
From the Vatican, 25 March 2017*

