

CATHOLIC PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS

HEALTHY COURIER

VOLUME 5, NUMBER 2

WINTER 2026

Exploring empathy with Sr. Alicia

Sister Alicia M. Perna, principal of St. Cecilia School, says that showing empathy is a big part of her daily job.

“My definition of empathy is thinking and understanding with your heart and head. Empathy allows you to have a clear view of another person’s feelings and actions,” said Sister Alicia. “I must be empathetic on a daily basis. My job is to make sure that the students are learning, safe, and fully understood.

“I must also be empathetic to my staff and parents. As a leader, I set an example of showing empathy. If I did not display empathy daily, this school probably wouldn’t be a happy place.”

According to Harvard University’s Making Common Caring Project, empathy is a key part of being a responsible and helpful community member at school and elsewhere. Showing empathy can reduce bullying, increase academic success, build communication

*(Please see **Show empathy** on Page 4)*



Illustration by Christian Bonifacio Dorado, St. Cecilia

Volunteering is one way to connect with other people and show empathy toward others.

Q&A with Mrs. Orosz

Learning how to deal with anxiety

It’s important for kids to learn how to manage anxiety so it doesn’t get in the way of what you want to do.

Simply connecting with family and friends can be a way to lessen anxiety, according to experts at the American Heart Association.

There are many strategies that can help you deal with anxiety, including having a pet.

St. Joseph Pro-Cathedral *Healthy Courier* eighth-grade reporters interviewed Principal Mrs. Kyle Orosz about the impact anxiety can have on students. The interview has been lightly edited.

Q. How do you define anxiety?

Mrs. Orosz: I would define anxiety as a feeling of doubt or nervousness about the unknown. Some-

times it is an overwhelming feeling of worrying whether you will get everything done.

Q. Have you experienced anxiety?

Mrs. Orosz: Oh yes! We all experience anxiety, especially when you have children, grandchildren, and in my case students. Something that really gives me anxiety is lockdown drills. Sometimes you have to realize that there are some things that you just cannot control.

Q. How does anxiety affect students?

Mrs. Orosz: Oh, there are so many ways anxiety affects our students. Anxiety affects students’ grades

*(Please see **Discussing** on Page 2)*

Discussing anxiety with Mrs. Orosz

(Continued from Page 1)

and behaviors. When they are experiencing anxiety, students tend not to perform well academically and act out in negative ways. It also affects students physically. Anxiety can cause headaches and stomachaches. Social media also is a major cause of student anxiety.

Q. What does the school do to help kids handle their anxiety?

Mrs. Orosz: We have a lot of tools to deal with anxiety. There is a guidance counselor available five days a week. We have talks with our students every Friday to check in to see how they are doing. But one thing I am most proud of is the calm and structured school culture that we have at St. Joseph. We strive to make our school a safe space and a refuge from all the chaos. Teachers are also trained to create calm environments in their classrooms.

Q. What are some strategies to help kids deal with anxiety?

Mrs. Orosz: The first thing we want our students to know is that they are not alone. Students can always talk to a trusted adult. We also encourage deep breathing, exercising, and yoga. I also find meditation and prayer is a great way to relax.

Q. What should kids and families know about the impact of anxiety?

Mrs. Orosz: I want students and parents to know that the impact of anxiety is massive. Lots of kids are currently suffering from anxiety. It is harder than ever before being a kid these days. And I really want

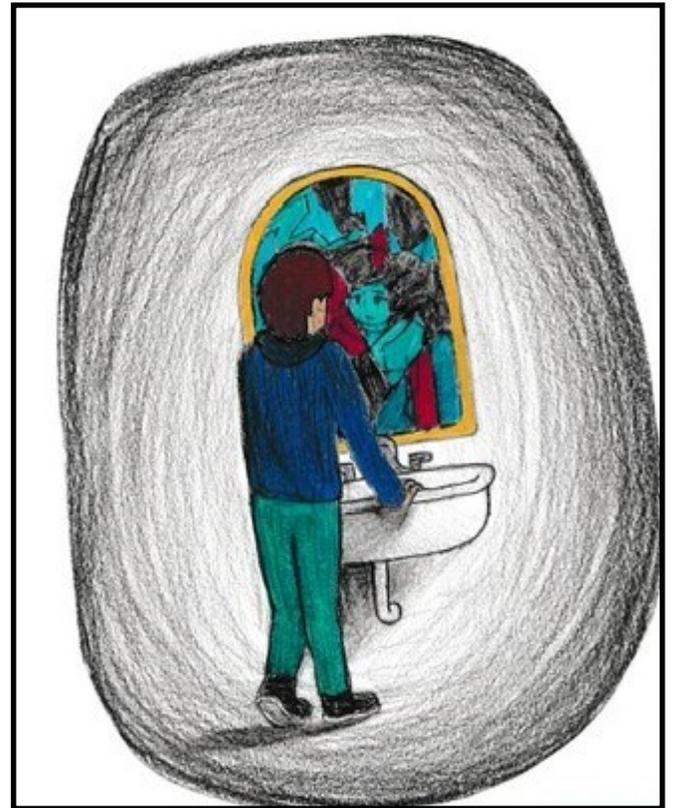


Illustration by Allison Morales, St. Joseph-Pro Cathedral

families to know about the impact social media has on our kids.

Q. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Mrs. Orosz: If you are experiencing anxiety, please talk to a trusted adult. But most importantly, bring all of your worries to God, because He cares for you.

How does anxiety affect students?

Everyone feels anxiety at one time or another. It may come with just a feeling of worry, but other times it can come with a stomachache, headache, or other health issues, according to the Mayo Clinic, a research hospital.

“I define anxiety as a big emotion caused by a big stressor in one's life. Anxiety manifests in different ways in the form of fear and stress,” Ms. Ally Craskey, youth development program assistant with Guadalupe Family Services, said in an interview with *Healthy Courier* reporters.

“I have experienced anxiety in my own life” she said. “Growing up I was extremely shy, and I found myself at times extremely nervous and anxious about things that I didn't really have to worry about.”

Connecting with others and finding support can be very helpful. In fact, simply connecting with family or friends can be a way to lessen anxiety, according to the American Heart Association.

“I have seen how anxiety affects students at our school. Some of our students who experience anxiety

(Please see How on Page 3)

How Holy Name helps students cope

(Continued from Page 1)

have problems with self-confidence, the ability to focus on tests, participate in class discussions, and tend to negatively act out,” said Ms. Craskey.

“To help our students cope with anxiety, we have an amazing team of caring teachers, a school social worker, and life skills classes. We want our students to know that Holy Name is also a safe space to discuss your emotions.”

Some of the strategies used for Holy Name students dealing with anxiety are flexible seating, physical movement during physical education and recess, according to Ms. Craskey.

“I want families and students to know that anxiety can lead to health problems, poor academic performance, and to other destructive behavior,” she said.

—By *Healthy Courier* staff, Holy Name



Illustration by Casandra Ureña, Holy Name

Meet Camden resident Ayinde Merrill

Holy Name *Healthy Courier* seventh-grade reporters recently learned how one Camden resident works to help New Jersey residents access timely and reliable information about their communities. The reporters interviewed Ayinde Merrill, program officer for the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium (NJCIC), a nonprofit organization.

“I found him to be very relatable, and I admire his mission for helping the community,” said reporter Samayeliz Rivera. Reporter Cassandra Ureña said, “I am impressed that he has accomplished so much at a young age.”

This interview has been shortened and edited.

Q. Describe your career journey.

Mr. Merrill: I have had a lot of experiences in life that have led me to understanding how news keeps communities informed and connected. It all started in my hometown of Camden. I began with grassroots movements, the arts, storytelling, and fully engaging with the community to bring about change.

Q. What is the purpose of the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium?

Mr. Merrill: The mission is to provide grants to support news organizations and nonprofits like Healthy NewsWorks to grow and share trustworthy information.

Q. What is your role at NJCIC?

Mr. Merrill: My role is to oversee how NJCIC works with grantees to help their programs provide quality civic information for the surrounding community and communities.

Q. What is your favorite part of your job?

Mr. Merrill: I like being able to go out into the community to meet people and see what is happening in the community.

Q. What is the most difficult part of your job?

Mr. Merrill: The most difficult part of my job is dealing with budgets and making those tough decisions that come with managing large budgets.

Q. Who or what inspires you?

Mr. Merrill: I get inspiration from everyday people. My wife inspires me. My parents had a service mindset, and I think that led me to the kind of work I am doing. Students, young people, and their way of thinking also inspire me.

Q. What advice would you give someone to enter your profession?

Mr. Merrill: The best advice I would give is to build strong communication skills. The work you are doing with your school newspaper is a skill that you can build on.

Show empathy by being a listener

(Continued from Page 1)

skills, and build more positive connections with people.

Sister Alicia shared her thoughts about the importance of empathy in an interview with *Healthy Courier* reporters.

“When you are being empathetic, you are also Christ-like,” said Sister Alicia. “The best strategy for showing empathy is to first listen to what someone is saying. Do not interrupt when someone is sharing how they feel. Make sure the individual has your full attention. Do your best to understand how the other person is feeling and put yourself in their shoes.”

Sister Alicia says she can tell when someone has benefited from a show of empathy “when they come to

me with a problem or are very sad, and they leave our conversation with a smile and feeling like they have been truly heard and understood.”

“The best advice I would give to others who are trying to show empathy is to never give up on trying to be empathetic,” Sister Alicia said. “Always put yourself in another person’s place. And simply treat people the way you want to be treated.”

The principal congratulated the reporters for writing about the topic. “I am happy to see that you are researching and reporting on the topic of empathy. We are living in a time where we all would benefit from showing and receiving empathy more than ever before,” she said.

—By *Healthy Courier* staff, St. Cecilia

How you benefit from gratitude

St. Joseph art teacher Ms. Dressel says displaying gratitude has a positive effect on her life. “I appreciate my family and the love they have for me,” she said. “Whenever I have the chance to help or give back to my grandmother and family, I do it because they are always there for me.”

Research has shown that a feeling of gratitude or appreciation for what one has can have a positive impact on your mental and physical health, such as boosting happiness and decreasing stress, according to psychologytoday.com.

St. Joseph *Healthy Courier* eighth-grade reporters recently interviewed Ms. Dressel about gratitude.

“When I think about gratitude, I think about how every Sunday I go to my grandmother’s house for dinner. I usually go an hour early to spend time with my grandmother and to show her how much I appreciate and am thankful for her,” said Ms. Dressel.

“Sometimes my cousins may join us for dinner, but most times it is just me and my grandmother.”

Ms. Dressel shows gratitude in many different ways. “I like to show gratitude by helping whenever I can. I do this sometimes right here in school by helping cover classes. I also enjoy cooking for people and writing thank-you notes,” she said. “I love it when people show me gratitude by sending me a thank-you card or note. I find them to be very heartfelt, and I usually keep them for mementos.”

Miss Dressel says when others express that they are grateful for her, it makes her feel appreciated and good inside. “Lastly, when you are showing kindness

and gratitude, it has a way of coming back to you,” she said.

Miss Dressel asked some of the reporters what they were thankful for. “I am thankful that my grades are good and that I am on the basketball team,” said Jayce. “I am thankful for my family,” said Matthew.

—By *Healthy Courier* staff,
St. Joseph Pro-Cathedral

Catholic Partnership Schools Healthy Courier

The *Healthy Courier* is a publication of the Catholic Partnership Schools in Camden, NJ. This issue has been created by reporters at St. Cecilia, Holy Name, and St. Joseph Pro-Cathedral.

Fifth-grade reporters from St. Cecilia include Kylan Dandridge, Yoarlin de la Cruz, Christian Bonifacio Dorado, Liam Gonzalez, Noah Infante, Giovanni Irene Jr., Antonello Jones, Masen Liranzo, Zaina Moulter, Amelia Osorio, and Gladys Ramos. Their faculty advisor is Mrs. Woerner. Sr. Alicia Perna is the school principal.

Seventh-grade reporters from Holy Name include Christopher Aguina, Raidhirys Espinal, Nelania Hidalgo, Nelson Hidalgo, Jayson Lara, Samayaliz Rivera, Christopher Rodriguez, Gael Samano Flores, Victoria Sanchez, Jamiel Savage, Adrian Sosa, Zoey Stroman-Santiago, Cassandra Ureña, and Xzavier Valdez-Sharp. Mrs. Buchhoffer is their faculty adviser. Mrs. Kent is the school principal.

Eighth-grade reporters from St. Joseph Pro-Cathedral include Yeury Coronado, Brandon Flores, Abigail Garcia, Andrea Garcia, Yanely Gomez-Maldonado, Kylar Harris, William Hernandez, Perla Jimenez, Alexandra Meza, Allison Morales, Jazmile Peralta, Miguel Pina, Matthew Ramos, Gianni Reyes-White, Diego Reyes-Xiqui, Eliana Sanchez, Jace Schwartz, and Mark Sevilla. Their faculty adviser is Mrs. Guernon-Wittman. Mrs. Orosz is the school principal.

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