



St. Joseph's Indian School  
We serve and teach, we receive and learn.

# Mitákuyepi



Mitákuyepi is a publication for employees of St. Joseph's Indian School like **Preston Chmela**, Production Equipment Technician, recognized for his technical expertise and his drive to ensure our equipment is running efficiently to support our donor mail efforts.

This employee newsletter is named Mitákuyepi because it speaks the mission of St. Joseph's Indian School. Mitákuyepi is a Lakota word used to say, "my relatives." Also, it is the address to an audience that means, "I have something to say." This is the voice of our thiyóspaye.

Its masthead has a backdrop of sacred sage to remind us that our work is Wakhán.

**PROBLEMS?**  
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Chamberlain, SD 57325-0898  
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# Mitákuyepi

WINTER 2024

VOLUME 6 NUMBER 1

# 4

YOUR INFORMATION



## SACRED SIGHTINGS

Sacred Sightings is a pictorial celebration of God's presence and signs of hope at St. Joseph's Indian School.

WINTER 2024 **4**

## MESSAGE FROM MIKE

### Lent Is a Time to Ask, "Where Are We Going?"

Where are we going? Lent allows us to reflect on many aspects of our lives. Through that reflection, I hope each of us can gain some insight into an important question: "Where is my life headed?"

Personally, here at St. Joseph's Indian School, I have participated in several initiatives designed to set a course for the future. This idea of looking ahead comes with assumptions or best guesses as to what the future may hold. It's an inexact science, but one necessary for all organizations to employ to plan for the future.

When it comes to planning, our "true north," so to speak, is our

mission. It is an ideal that stays true over time and is one of balance, hope and service.

Balance comes with our holistic approach built on the pillars of mind, body, heart and spirit. It directs us to deal with the whole person, and points to all aspects of life. We try to do this in a balanced way.

Hope is what we are all about. It is a conviction that we can support our students, their families, our alumni, supporters and one another. It is part of our fundamental belief that through personal interactions, inspired by love, we can help others overcome hardships and difficulties in their lives. If you allow yourself,

you can feel the hope the minute you drive onto campus.

Lastly, service comes through the staff, as we are the hands and feet of the mission. It is through our employees, as an extension of our donors, that quality and competent programming is provided to all who are part of our St. Joseph's Indian School circle.

It is my hope that your Lenten journey inspires Easter awakening and gives insight into the question, "Where am I going?" God Bless!



Mike Tyrell  
President  
St. Joseph's Indian School



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Mitákuyepi is PUBLISHED QUARTERLY BY ST. JOSEPH'S INDIAN SCHOOL. ITS PURPOSE IS TO COMMUNICATE ACTIVITIES AND ISSUES PERTINENT TO THE SCHOOL, TO SHARE IDEAS AND INFORMATION USEFUL IN PERFORMING THE MISSION, TO ASSIST IN FOSTERING A COMMON CULTURE AND TO REINFORCE THE MISSION AND CORE VALUES OF ST. JOSEPH'S INDIAN SCHOOL.

### QUESTIONS?

EDITOR: CLARE WILLRODT  
Send comments and questions to:

St. Joseph's Indian School  
PO Box 89  
Chamberlain, SD 57325

For additional information about St. Joseph's Indian School, its outreaches and the Priests of the Sacred Heart visit:

www.sjiskids.org or  
www.stjo.org



## How a Star in Our Lady of the Sioux Shined Its Light in Pennsylvania

Our Lady of the Sioux Chapel rises at the center of St. Joseph's Indian School's campus. The Morning Star symbol appears some 350 times in the stenciling, stained glass and statuary of the Chapel, an icon of the bridges between the Lakota and Catholic traditions.

- Mary is called the Morning Star because she preceded Christ and her "yes" opened the way to salvation.
- The Easter Vigil liturgy refers to Christ himself as "the One Morning Star who never sets."
- For the Lakota, to walk in the light of the Morning Star is to walk a holy path.

At the highest place in the Chapel's rose window, the most prominent rendering of the Morning Star shines brilliantly, leading the way.

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Michelle Kissinger was lost. She stood in the doorway of Our Lady of the Sioux Chapel on the campus of St. Joseph's Indian School. She had wandered away from the group of conference goers, of which she was a part. She was lost – or perhaps summoned.

Her artist's heart stirred, bathed in the gold and cobalt light of the Chapel's windows. She grabbed

the brochure describing these treasures from the nearby rack and entered the nave.

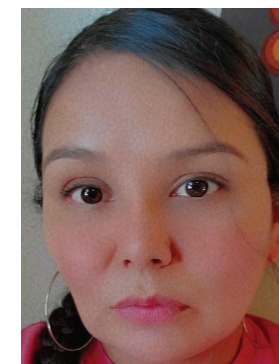
It was the rose window in the bell tower that most enthralled her. Its diamond shapes emanating from a circular center told a story: Just as the sun, in the natural world, is the great billboard for God's presence, so the Eucharist, in the supernatural world, is the great billboard for Christ. Though she hadn't heard that explanation, she felt the presence, and it stuck with her. Punctuating the radiant sun beneath it, the Morning Star glistened above.

She was in Chamberlain to give a talk about her art-based work to members of CORE (the Coalition of Residential Excellence). Having spent 10 years in out-of-home care while growing up, including seven as a student at Milton Hershey School in Hershey, Penn., she had a passion for this group of people who all work in youth-serving organizations. In her session, she would present her experience using expressive arts to work through developmental problems with individuals and groups.

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Back at home in Berks County, Penn., the Executive  
*(Continued on page 2)*

## Spring Scholarships Support Upcoming Difference Makers



In an era abuzz about the teacher shortage and how it is affecting schools across South Dakota, one Native American scholarship recipient and St. Joe alum aims to make a difference by achieving a teaching certificate in the coming year. Her name is Charity Merritt, and she hopes to soon complete her

bachelor's in Early Childhood Education at Sinte Gleska University. An alum of St. Joseph's Indian School, Merritt is a nine-time recipient of the school's scholarship, which was started in 1985 to support Native Americans pursuing higher education.

Merritt is one of 106 Native American scholars nationwide receiving a total of \$103,264 in spring-semester funding. The awards bring the total for the

school year to a record \$233,214. This spring, the school granted awards to 22 St. Joseph's alums, 11 alum family members and 73 other scholars enrolled in a federally recognized tribe and pursuing higher education.

Merritt is approaching 16 years with Crow Creek Headstart in Fort Thompson, S.D., in a career that was sparked just after she graduated from high school. "I was babysitting for my sister, and I liked child care, so pretty soon I began working there," she explained.

While she enjoyed working with preschool children, Merritt felt the call to work with kindergarten through third-grade students as teacher. As soon as she completes the degree, she will seek teacher certification.

Meritt attended St. Joe's from 1996 to 1998. She has fond memories of a sleepover for the girls hosted in

the skyway between the school and administrative offices. Laughing, she recalled, "We dog-piled Mary Jane Alexander," then principal of the school.

Other St. Joseph's Indian School alumni on track to complete courses of study this May or June include: Kayla McClosky, receiving Bachelor of Science degrees in both American Indian Studies and Sociology from Black Hills State University in Spearfish, S.D.; Tamra Merritt receiving an Associate from Mitchell Technical College in the Medical Office Professional Program; Cody Catches receiving an Associate in Tribal Law from Oglala Lakota College; and Tanner Veo graduating from United Tribes Technical College, Bismarck, N.D., with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Science and Research.

### LEAD STORY

A Star Shines  
Scholarships Support  
Difference Makers

### MISSION IN MOTION

Mission in Motion

### PEOPLE NEWS

Welcome Aboard  
St. Joe Senior  
Hits the Runway

### MESSAGE FROM MIKE

Where Are You Going?



(Continued from front page)

Director of CASA of Berks County, Nancy McCullar, was also feeling a little lost. Each of the past four Octobers, she had called together for training her group of some 60 volunteer court-appointed special advocates who work on behalf of children in foster care. The "stares from the chairs" style of the training had left her looking for a change. "As advocates, they work mostly on their own, not side-by-side. I wanted something that would inspire them through the camaraderie of each other."

That's when someone who knew Michelle's current work mentioned her. A former CASA advocate, Michelle had jumped at the chance. Now the day had arrived to go over the design with Nancy, but Michelle's initial enthusiasm felt dampened as she looked over her proposal. Heading out the door, she grabbed the Chapel window brochure. Just weeks after being lost in the Chapel, she was about to find her answer in the rose window.

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"When I approach a project, I begin with the developmental situation to be addressed," explains Michelle. In this case, it was bringing together a mixture of personalities who work separately to build bridges and create a sense of team. There is no cookie-cutter nature to this work, no repeat performance. "Form follows the function: First we determine developmental needs, then we scope out art-based activities that will support the necessary learning," says Michelle.

Our Lady of the Sioux Chapel's diamond-shaped rays set in a radial pattern held the answer. In a somewhat remarkable feat of geometric genius, Michelle deconstructed the rose-window-inspired design into six separate one-by-two-foot canvases. The 60 volunteers worked in groups of three or four to color their patterned canvases. Michelle then bolted together the separate canvases to create a stunning mural.

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A post-survey reveals that the finished piece not only embodies the team spirit and new bridges that participants experienced that day, but that it carries forward in the daily work of CASA of Berks County. "Collaborative art has tremendous power to build and reinforce organizational culture," explains Michelle.

Nancy reports, "The training was by far a hit. Volunteers got to know each other and look forward to the next gathering. I am having a print of the mural made so that each participant has their own."

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"Don't be afraid to get lost once in a while," encourages Michelle. "You never know what you might find." And the Morning Star shines over all.



### Rec Center Project on Track

Good weather has kept the Rec Center renovation moving along as planned, according to Director of Support Services Rich Zelinski. Builders have completed the outside walls and roof on the new structure, and the interior work is well underway. Framing for all of the new inside rooms – offices, workout room, game room, conference room and more – is basically finished. Work is completed on door and window frames. A crew has poured the floor, and those responsible for plumbing, heating and A/C ducts are hard at work. Electricians are roughing in electric lines.

Despite setbacks in the early stages, the project is moving along according to plan, says Zelinski. Those of us who have used the construction as an excuse to forego exercise, will have to find a different scapegoat come late August, as the project is on track for completion and use at that time. And, don't plan on blaming it on the parking. The Rec Center and Museum lots, as well as outside areas, are on track for completion by then, as well.

At that time, a new phase will begin with the remodeling of the existing Rec Center. For the most part, the pool will remain open throughout the remodel.

During the remodel, a small area in front of the old Rec Center will be closed until the project is complete. This phase will create an adult weight room, concession area, new locker room and restrooms, storage areas, laundry, remodeled showers and locker room area for the pool. Starting in late August, this phase is planned to last until June 2025.

Platinum  
Transparency  
2024

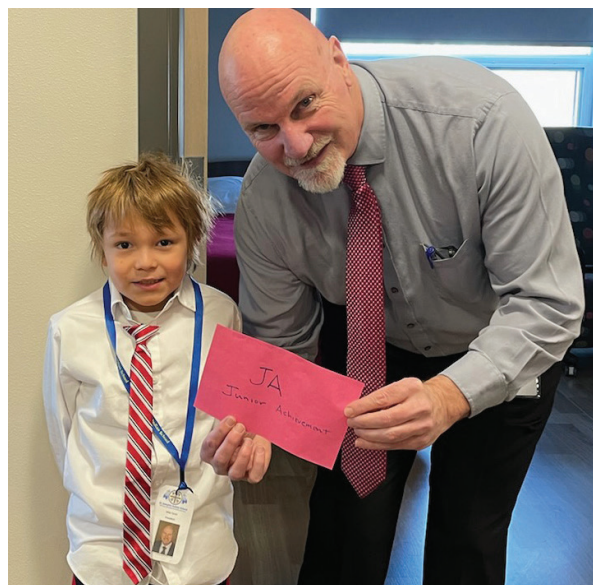
Candid.

### Donors Can Trust the Platinum Candid/ GuideStar Seal

Candid, a leading assessor of nonprofit organizations, recently announced that, for the second year running, St. Joseph's Indian School achieved the Platinum GuideStar Seal of Transparency for providing comprehensive information about the school's programs, success measures and services. Platinum is the highest possible rating for a nonprofit organization.

Kory Christianson, Executive Director of Development for St. Joseph's Indian School acknowledged this superior level of transparency in the organization's fundraising efforts. "Our staff works tirelessly and proactively to maintain a transparent and efficient organization while ensuring we are good stewards of donations we receive from likewise hardworking people. We know this level of integrity is expected from our donors."

About 5% of the 1.7 million nonprofits registered by the IRS have a GuideStar Seal, and only 15% of those are Platinum.



### Catholic Schools Week Celebrated at St. Joseph's Indian School

Beginning January 28, St. Joseph's Indian School joined other Catholic schools across the country in celebrating Catholic Schools Week. The national theme was "United in Faith and Community." Faith-based activities included a Lakota Mass on Sunday, a Monday Catholic Schools Week Prayer Service and a Friday Rosary in honor of Nicholas Black Elk, Lakota catechist who is nominated for sainthood.

Throughout the week, homerooms enjoyed "Finding Jesus," with figurines of Jesus placed throughout the school to emphasize His omnipresence; a scavenger hunt in Our Lady of the Sioux Chapel to teach the meaning and purpose of holy items; and pretzel snacks because the pretzel shape is like the prayer posture with arms crossed.

Adding to the fun were dress-up themed days: Monday – Pajama day, Tuesday – Sunday-best day, Wednesday – Opposite-role day when students dress like adults and vice-versa, Thursday – Twin/triplet-dress day by matching a friend or two, Friday – School-pride day.

Opposite-role day for second-grader Sylus Sisneros meant sporting a look that no one had to doubt was President Mike Tyrell, right down to the ID badge.



### Don't Miss Hóčhoka Season 5

- Hear about the wisdom of the traditional Lakota bow and arrow from Joseph Marshall III.
- Learn from Don Forrester, Michelle Maikotter and AJ Rinaldi, thought-leaders in residential education.
- Spend time with Oglala Sioux ledger artist Donald Montileaux and follow him into sessions in the classroom with our students.
- Join Dr. Damian Costello as he again provides fresh perspectives on Catholicism through an Indigenous lens.
- Catch up with Fr. Vien Nguyen, SCJ, mid-way through his term as Provincial Superior.
- And so much more.

# WELCOME ABOARD



**Sabrie Black**, houseparent, feels working at St. Joe's is the beginning of something great. Her advice: "To learn something new is the greatest superpower." Pair that with her insight that she'll know she's done when she has learned

all there is to know. Keep her appetite happy with pasta.



**Chloe Carney**, houseparent, says the best music is anything with a good beat. A wise person taught her to enjoy all the moments in life – good, bad, big or small. She enjoys Italian food and sees work at St.

Joe's as an exciting new adventure.



**Tonya Derald**, drug and alcohol prevention specialist, says failure is impossible. "You either succeed or you learn. There is no failure." She likes country music and tacos and says working here is a great opportunity to impact youth.



**Nathan Dobbs**, software developer, enjoys country music and Italian food. He says that failure is a part of success, and that success, in fact, is paved on the road of failure. He is excited to start his career in a place with excellent values.



**Lori Dolezal**, production support I, likes classic rock and blues and Chinese food. She reminds us to treat others as we'd like to be treated.



**Jodi Gregerson**, houseparent, says the best advice she ever received was, "Be a fountain, not a drain." The best advice she ever gave was, "Don't touch that. Its poison ivy." When she was younger, she wanted to explore outer space. If the wojapi is missing, she might have it.



**Stacey Junke**, lead custodian, enjoys all kinds of music. He is ready for his new role and looks forward to meeting everyone. And, if it's good, he says he'll eat it.



**Noah McNaughton**, web developer, is a Mexican food lover. When he was younger, he wanted to be either a paleontologist or a hyperbaric welder. (That's a welder who works at elevated pressures, usually underwater.)



**Dwayne Melchert**, press operator, likes '80s rock and country and good baked walleye. He's finding St. Joe's warm and friendly. He passes on his dad's advice: "Give everything to your job. Work hard!" And he reminds us, "Treat people as you want to be treated. Always smile."



**Theda Mesteth**, alum and custodian, says, "Do what makes you happy." The best advice she ever received was not to give up. "Anything is possible if you want it enough." For her, the best music is the kind that relaxes you.



**Camille Ortega**, Rec Center intern, has broad musical tastes that include original Filipino music, pop, rhythm and blues, and contemporary praise and worship. Favorite eats include Filipino food, tacos and sushi. She quotes Robert T. Kiyosaki: "Failure is part of the process of success. People who avoid failure also avoid success." Her younger self aspired to be a high school teacher in the Philippines.



**Kimberlee Schumacher**, school administrative assistant, loves her mom's spaghetti pie and country music. She says when she was younger, she thought she knew. Today she says that failure is important for growth. Best advice she ever received: "Pray in detail!"



**Leon Welcome**, houseparent, is a jazz fan who trained in martial arts for many years beginning at age 5. The best advice he ever received and likewise gives: "Be relentless. Keep working hard and treat people well." For him working at St. Joe's means doing important work, and it is a blessing.



**Modina Westerling**, houseparent, loves all food but Japanese is her favorite. When she was younger, she loved working with Girl Scouts and the community. She advises, "Life is too short. You will remember the moments and not the things you accumulate. Do the things that bring you peace and touch the lives you come into contact with in an impactful way."



**Ethan Zephier Rich**, grounds-keeper, might be jamming to country or hip-hop while mowing. He enjoys steak and potatoes and says success is when you are happy in life exactly where you are at. He, too, wanted to be an underwater welder.



## St. Joe Senior Hits the Runway

Five-year-old Cante Rencountre was blessed with a mother who understood the value of "dress-up" play and provided her with plenty of pretty dresses and high heels to capture all of the social-emotional strengths that the activity provides. Fast

forward a few years. Today, the St. Joseph's Indian School high school senior continues to reap the benefits of that joyous fantasy play in the fantasy-that-has-become-reality of a budding modeling career.

It so happened that she and her mother, Marylou Boyzo of Crow Creek, were cruising around on social media together when they came across a call for auditions for the O Wang Wasté Wahwayela Mani Fashion Show, a collaboration of Duwana Two Bulls and Katrina Drust. The two women put the Rapid City show together during the annual Black Hills Powwow to emphasize that clothing design and modeling are forms of artwork and to celebrate the evolving world of Indigenous fashion. Consulting with elders, they selected the name, which means "We walk with grace and elegance."

Rencountre did just that when she auditioned and was selected for the show in October of 2023. She felt inspired by the experience that included a cast of Indigenous designers, so many pretty designs and different models all preparing together, rehearsing and then walking the runway. "Native culture is underrepresented," Rencountre said, commenting on the difficulty of growing up without seeing herself in the dominant culture. She treasured the opportunity to represent her culture, herself and her family – especially her mother. "I never saw Native American representation in the fashion industry as a child."

There's more. Walking the runway that day, Rencountre caught the eye of Kelly Holmes. Holmes, Cheyenne River Lakota, grew up feeling the same absence of "people who look like me," and in 2012 launched the world's first Indigenous fashion magazine, "Native Max." She tapped Rencountre and a few other models for a day-after-the-show photo shoot. Rencountre can be seen in the magazine's "Native Heritage" edition wearing the "Sing to me Blue Birds" dress from Bitterwater for Redhouse by Michelle Luna. Accessories – a beaded fedora, earrings and beaded body chains – by S.N.O. Inc.

Asked who her biggest inspiration has been, she didn't pause but offered two women: Ashley Callingbull-Burnham, actress, model and television personality who was the first Indigenous and Canadian woman to win the Mrs. Universe title in 2015; and Quannah Chasinghorse, a young Indigenous activist, land-protector and sought-after model who speaks to the felt strength that happens when people who feel invisible have a sense of visibility.

What's next? Rencountre's immediate future includes participation in the tenth annual "Native Fashion in the City" in Denver this March. She noted that she also feels honored to work with St. Joe Houseparent Kirstie Mattos in St. Joseph's Indian School's first fashion show soon. The Crane home student also has plans to attend college, maybe Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colo. Her parting advice: "Don't be afraid to put yourself out there." Thanks for the inspiration.