

# Bingo nights bring OCA, St. Joseph Pantry together

written by Alesia Schaefer |



Ozark Catholic Academy and St. Joseph Food Pantry in Tontitown have teamed up to host bingo nights, generating funds and donations that support the food pantry's community services.

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## From burgers, running and seminary to Ozark Catholic

written by Alesia Schaefer |



Chase Feltner, known for his achievements in track and restaurant business, has been appointed as the dean of athletics at Ozark Catholic Academy in Tontitown. Feltner believes his diverse experiences have equipped him for this position.

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## Cindy Argueta: 13 young adults who inspire us

written by Alesia Schaefer |

She has been a volunteer in two countries and two different churches, so it is easy to understand why Cindy Argueta makes a difference in any parish she attends.

A parishioner of St. Mary Parish in Siloam Springs, Argueta, 20, has taken on various roles and been actively involved with everything from youth retreats to parish religious education classes to Vacation Bible School. For the past two to three years, Argueta has divided her time between the demands of being a college student, working and volunteering at her parish. But, as in other aspects of her life, Argueta has not shied away from a challenge.

Currently, Argueta is a junior studying kinesiology and sports medicine at John Brown University in Siloam Springs. She juggles her demanding academics while working two jobs. She manages the women's soccer team with the work/study program at JBU and also at the Walton Family Health Complex.

In her home country of El Salvador, Argueta said she was very involved with her childhood church. Since moving from El Salvador with her parents and older brother as an early teen, Argueta decided to continue her desire to volunteer at her church and became involved at St. Mary's.

"I am inspired by the people around me," she said. "I have people who helped bring me closer to Christ, and I want to do the same," she said.

**If you were canonized, what would you be the patron saint of?**

"I think I would be the patron saint of smiles. I like smiling, being kind and helping others."

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## **Schools adopt house systems to boost community spirit**

written by Alesia Schaefer |





TONTITOWN — When the days turn crisp and school is back in session, “Sorting Day” at Ozark Catholic Academy is right around the corner.

The day’s event is marked with cheers and chanting at a ceremony that the entire student body attends. But the event centers around bundles of paper packages containing screen-printed house T-shirts ready for new students and faculty to rip open and reveal their new school family. Welcome to your new home away from home.

For those who find making friends in high school daunting, joining a house can provide a new sense of identity.

This idea is reason enough for three schools in the Diocese of Little Rock to adopt house systems into their school-wide curriculum to encourage community, foster leadership and establish culture.

Similar to the houses at the fictional Hogwarts Academy in the “Harry Potter” book series by J.K. Rowling, the separation of students into different groups, or houses, encourages a sense of belonging and family. Administrators say students who do not participate in sports find it to be a chance to be a part of a team, and students see houses as a way to mingle with the upperclassmen whom they otherwise do not see.

Although somewhat new to the idea, Kristy Dunn, principal at St. Theresa School in Little Rock, said her pre-K to eighth-grade school is still figuring out how to best incorporate the house system.

"To be fair, we just started in 2023," she said, "but I have already seen friendships develop between families who otherwise may not have interacted with one another," she said.

"We wanted families to mix with other families," added Dunn, "not necessarily just from their homeroom. It was a strategy for building relationships, fellowship and devotion to a particular saint."

St. Theresa's approach proves that every school tailors the house system to their needs.

After a decade, St. Vincent de Paul School in Rogers, serving students from pre-K to eighth grade, has expanded its pilot program from four houses, four faculty leaders and limited participation by seventh- and eighth-graders to a school-wide program.

"After visiting the Ron Clark Academy in 2022, we recognized the alignment between the house model and our school's mission of faith, knowledge and service and were inspired to expand it to include all students, kindergarten through eighth-grade," said assistant principal of curriculum, Danielle Mooney.

Mooney said the expansion has since transformed the culture of the school.

"This inclusive model ensures every member of our school community is part of something larger," she said. "It is a collective that celebrates growth, connection and shared purpose."

Since opening their doors in 2018, OCA, for ninth-12th graders, has used the house system, but has expanded upon and improved it as the school has grown.

"We have presidents, vice presidents, captains, sophomore Prefects, freshman Prefects and spiritual leaders," said Patrick O'Donohoe, a senior. "All of these roles have been part of the system for some time, but now each of these positions comes with greater responsibility and a deeper level of commitment."

Unique to each school, the houses themselves can be different. St. Vincent de Paul uses the cardinal and theological virtues for the house names. OCA has four houses represented by symbols that reflect the northwest Arkansas region: water, elk, oak and mountain. Each house has a characteristic virtue of a saint for students to emulate, such as purity, generosity, piety and peace. St. Theresa's houses are named after saints, with the notable difference being that they induct entire families.

"We use a literal raffle barrel to draw names," Dunn said. "We draw the family names, so entire families are sorted, not just students."

"The transformation in our school culture has been profound," said Mooney of SVdP's integration of the house system. "The most notable changes have been the increased excitement, engagement and sense of belonging among both students and staff. It's not unusual to see eighth-grade students and teachers greeting and encouraging kindergarteners in the hallway, or lower-grade teachers reaching out to their junior high house counterparts for mentorship and support."

O'Donohoe, who serves as head boy for the OCA student body, also believes the house system is beneficial for creating a better sense of unity.

"I think the house system is good for high schools because you get to meet new people and create connections through games and competitions within all of the grades," he said. "It's a really special opportunity to continue building culture, community and a sense of identity. There are a variety of different ways students can help by planning events, leading prayers or mentoring the underclassmen. The houses have changed by bringing more leadership roles to all of the grades, not just juniors and seniors."

"The house system has unified our school in spirit and action," Mooney said of Rogers schools. "Students and staff alike earn house points for embodying core virtues, demonstrating school spirit, participating in service and striving for academic excellence. It's a joyful, uplifting and dynamic system that has raised the bar for what it means to be part of our school community."

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## **At 64, Fayetteville doctor enters Navy medical corps**

written by Alesia Schaefer |



Dr. Jim Gorman, an obstetrics and gynecology physician, will depart Fayetteville at age 63 to join the United States Navy as a commissioned lieutenant commander in the Medical Corps. This move fulfills his lifelong aspiration of military service and extends his commitment to a life of service.

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## **Regina Mora always steps up to serve at OCA**

written by Alesia Schaefer |





Regina Mora, a senior at Ozark Catholic Academy, has demonstrated a commitment to service through her leadership as National Honor Society president and her work on the yearbook staff. She plans to attend John Brown University to study nursing.

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## Haitian priest, Father Balthazar, celebrates 25 years of service

written by Alesia Schaefer |





Father Rodolphe Balthazar, who served as a priest in Haiti for 19 years, will celebrate his 25th anniversary in June at St. Vincent de Paul Church in Rogers. Since joining the Diocese of Little Rock in 2019, he has ministered through Masses, pastoral counseling, and sacraments.

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## **St. Vincent de Paul third Catholic school to build safe room**

written by Alesia Schaefer |



Less than a year after an EF3 tornado struck Rogers, St. Vincent de Paul School has opened a new junior high wing in November 2024, which doubles as a tornado safe room built to withstand EF-5 tornado conditions.

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## **St. Phoebe ministry group lifts up service in college town**

written by Alesia Schaefer |





The St. Phoebe ministry group at St. Thomas Aquinas University Parish, founded in 2022, organizes events, liturgies, and programs to serve students and the parish community. The group also donates to community organizations, including Canopy and the M&N Augustine Foundation.

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## **Dropping a beat or fighting fires, sophomore taking leadership role**

written by Alesia Schaefer |





Bryzinn Smith, a sophomore at Ozark Catholic Academy, has initiated a drumline club and is training to become a volunteer firefighter, while maintaining a 4.0 GPA and studying Latin, archery, and guitar.