

# Peace is theme of Ash Wednesday display in Westminster

WESTMINSTER - In the wake of the shooting at a Florida high school Feb. 14, 2018, schools around the country staged walkouts; in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Catholic schools instead held prayer services to honor the 17 people killed.

The shooting, at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland killed 17 on what was not only Valentine's Day, but also Ash Wednesday that year.

As last year's prayer service commenced at St. John Catholic School in Westminster, art and STEM teacher Clare Hoerl's mind was active.

"It was during that prayer service that we had these programs, which we never have," Hoerl said, referring to the paper worship guides distributed to those in attendance. "I thought, 'Maybe we can do something with that.'"

Earlier in the 2017-18 school year, Hoerl was asked by Mary Destino, archdiocesan director of school excellence, to coordinate a collaborative art project between St. John and another Catholic school. She had an 'epiphany' to center the art project on the theme of peace.

"We needed to bring some good out of this for the students," Hoerl said. "I thought maybe through art we could do that."

Not wanting to limit it to just one other school, Hoerl reached out to fellow Catholic elementary schools in the archdiocese. In the end, 30 participated in the project.

The result was displayed in St. John's narthex March 6, Ash Wednesday 2019.

"It just all came together perfectly," Hoerl said. "It's been a very rewarding process and I think the end result is very powerful, very meaningful."

Each school created its visual representation on a 10-by-10 inch panel with recycled materials, using a color palette of only shades of blue - the color of peace, and of the Blessed Mother. Hoerl requested the pieces be made by older students, if possible.

At St. John, the eighth-grade class took the lead. Eighth-grader Leslie Velazquez, 13, came up with the idea for St. John's panel – two hands holding another, representing God's hands holding that of his faithful.

Velazquez identified John 14:27 as the perfect Bible verse to adorn the creation: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."

"I think Jesus gives us peace if you let him guide us," she said.

Luke Chesebrough, 14, contributed his hand to the project as the model for the papier-mâché technique. The programs used during the 2018 prayer service became the strips of paper used to form the hands.

"We ripped them up and put them in papier-mâché and put them on (Chesebrough's) hand," said classmate Anna Tippet, 14.

Chesebrough added with a smile that he spent an entire class period with the concoction on his hand.

All three students, who said they love art, would recommend the project to other schools.

"Everyone has their different ways of expressing themselves," Velazquez said.

"It sends a message by letting everyone know that we should be happy and have peace," Tippet said.

Chesebrough saw it for the first time during the 9:30 a.m. Ash Wednesday school Mass.

"I think it looked pretty cool," he said.

Hoerl has high hopes for the future of the "Peace of Art" project.

"I think it's going to become one of those projects that's evolving," said Hoerl, who has taught at St. John for seven years. "Art at its core is able to communicate with everybody."

Everyone will take his or her own interpretation from art, and Hoerl hopes that people will be able to see Catholic school values in the “Peace of Art.” The display will travel to every school that contributed to the project for the remainder of the school year.

St. John Parish hosted Masses throughout the day to distribute ashes. After the 9:30 a.m. school Mass for grades K-8, principal JoMarie Tolj and pastor Father Mark Bialek visited the pre-kindergarten students in their classrooms to distribute ashes to the littlest members of the community.

*Email Emily Rosenthal at [erosenthal@CatholicReview.org](mailto:erosenthal@CatholicReview.org)*