

The CATHOLIC MISSOURIAN

February 6, 2020

Five Catholic schools in Osage County get together for Catholic Schools Week celebration in Linn



(/uploads/original/20200206-175524-Five Catholic schools in Osage County get together for Catholic Schools Week celebration in Linn.jpg)

Children from five Catholic schools in Osage County clap to the music of Shannon Cerneka and Orin Johnson of Oddwalk Ministries during a Catholic Schools Week celebration Jan. 27 in Linn.

PHOTO BY LISA GRELLNER

Posted Thursday, February 6, 2020 5:55 pm

“ They were with us from the word ‘go.’ They participated well and were certainly welcoming not only to us but to each other.”

SHANNON CERNEKA

By Jay Nies

More than 500 children from five Catholic schools in Osage County kicked off Catholic Schools Week with a day of faith, fellowship and fun.

Students from St. Mary School in Frankenstein, Holy Family School in Freeburg, St. George School in Linn, Sacred Heart School in Rich Fountain and St. Joseph School in Westphalia gathered at St. George School Jan. 27 to celebrate the gift of a Catholic education.

"It was a great way to kick off Catholic Schools Week," said St. George Principal Lisa Grellner. "It was amazing to see so many young people from Catholic schools interacting and having fun together. There was a lot of great energy among them."

Shannon Cerneka and Orin Johnson of Oddwalk Ministries kicked off the day with songs and stories about the light of Christ dispelling darkness.

"Beyond that, there was a lot of singing, a lot of just being up and moving and having fun," said Mr. Cerneka, who teaches at St. Peter School in Fulton.

They warmed up the crowd with a rousing sing-along of an Oddwalk praise anthem, "We Are His People."

They told the students about a boy named Sam, whose courage in the face of childhood cancer united people from different schools and churches throughout his community in prayer and solidarity.

They told a story about what happened recently when a young basketball player got injured at a tournament.

While the girl's condition was being evaluated, the adults and players in the gym held her up in prayer and concern.

"There was a big poster-board card that we made that everyone signed to give her," said Mr. Cerneka. "I had probably a dozen people ask how she was and say they were praying for her."

Mr. Cerneka and Mr. Johnson then asked the crowd to think about how they can be light for one another in times of darkness.

"These kids were tremendous," Mr. Cerneka said of the audience. "They were with us from the word 'go.' They participated well and were certainly welcoming not only to us but to each other."

"That's what we want our Osage County Catholics to be – light in the darkness," said Mrs. Grellner.

Something for everyone

The pre-kindergarten students from Holy Family School joined those from St. George for some shared playtime.

Groups of kindergarteners, first- and second-graders from all the schools went from station to station in the gym, partaking of story time, games and crafts.

Third- through fifth-graders played Pictionary and word games.

Junior-high students were divided into integrated teams of 10 for an electronic scavenger hunt.

Led by a St. George student, each team made its way around the school complex in search of items such as symbols of their faith.

They took a picture of each item and then moved on to the next clue.

Worth repeating

Students from all grades ate sack lunches together in the gym.

The junior-high students then gathered in a large circle and passed around pieces of candy based on their answers to questions.

Then they got back together with their teams for another game. The teams were given questions and five answers. The players worked together to determine which two of the five answers were incorrect.

The celebration closed with a prayer service for students of all ages.

"It was a good day," said Mrs. Grellner. "The junior-high kids had an especially good time."

The principals of all five schools hope to make this an annual Catholic Schools Week tradition.

Doing their job

In an interview later in the day, Mr. Cerneka pointed to something all successful Catholic schools have in common: a deliberate, coordinated effort on the part of parents, students, teachers, staff and the entire parish to live and show the Gospel values they profess.

"They're focused not just on academic excellence but on helping the children know Christ and how to live as His disciples," he said.

He noted that a school reflects the values of its people.

"It's the parents' primary job to form their children in the faith and introduce them to Christ," he stated. "A Catholic school's job is to help them do that."

When Mr. Cerneka and his wife, Erin, enrolled their children in St. Peter School, they were welcomed into "a community of people living their faith and caring about one another and about our kids and wanting us to be part of it."

That's the kind of environment that helps the faith stick.

"That is certainly worth celebrating," he said.