

ST. THOMAS MISSION

A Publication of the Chaldean Archdiocese of Erbil



**“Holy Father,
keep them in
thy name,
which thou
hast given me,
that they may
be one, even as
we are one.”**

**John 17:11,
RSVCE.**

Mid-Year Update

by Alex McKenna

Once this academic term finishes, the St. Thomas Mission will complete its third year in full operation. From the beginning, many of us have heard again and again the question: Why are you going to Iraq? Isn't it dangerous? To fully answer that question, one must walk the streets with us and visit the 1.5 million people who call Erbil home. Often, our experience out on the town or playing pickleball in a local park cuts very differently from the picture Western media paints of Abraham's land. Since October 7 and in particular the past month, Iraq has hit the headlines more often. Without going into the details of the Iranian-backed offensives and U.S. military reactions, we remain secure, content, and free in our movements. The Archbishop and his staff is in daily communication with relevant officials monitoring the security situation intently. Regardless, we ask that you pray for our work and especially for our students as they grow in the Lord and their academic abilities. This Lent, we offer our gifts to God in the desert and pray that all who support our work will experience the blessings of the Almighty God.



PHOTOS BY ELIZABETH ALVA

Hearts and Minds of Faith

by Lizzie Amland

In the realm of education, Catholic schools play a unique and vital role, offering more than academic excellence. As a religion teacher, witnessing the blossoming of this faith within young minds is an indescribable joy. The simplicity of child-like curiosity and wonderment becomes a powerful catalyst for spiritual growth. Catholic education is a journey that extends beyond books. It provides a sacred space

where students not only absorb knowledge but also encounter their faith in a tangible way. In a world that often questions the significance of religious teachings, fostering critical thinking about one's beliefs becomes paramount. As a religion teacher, I find immense fulfillment in challenging students to explore, question, and deepen their

understanding of their faith. The inclusion of religion in the curriculum is not just about imparting doctrines; it's about inspiring a lifelong search for spiritual truth. It encourages students to grapple with profound questions, sparking a dialogue between their hearts and minds. Through this process, they develop not only as students but as individuals with a firm foundation of moral values and a deep connection to their faith. In Catholic education, we mold not just minds but souls, fostering a love for learning and an unwavering foundation in faith.

Whole Faith

by Margaret Wittmann

Whole child education has become a very popular practice in recent years. Essentially, the idea is that educators teach not just to a student's academic needs, but also their physical and emotional needs. In the Catholic classroom, this is taken further as we look to form students' spiritually. One Catholic educator shared this idea with me: if tomorrow morning the Pope announced that Christ is not the Messiah, then all truly Catholic schools would immediately close. This is because a Catholic school must integrate the faith into every subject. Each day and each lesson, I intend to integrate the faith in a way that every lightbulb moment, every 'wow' experience, points towards the beauty of a world created by and in the image of God.

