



## Frank Phillips—What Makes St. Mary's Different?



What makes St. Mary's different? That is a question we posed to our students, their parents, our alumni, our teachers, and our staff when the new year began. It's a surprisingly difficult question to answer. Take a look in the mirror. What truly distinguishes you from the billions of people who walk the planet with you, from the thousands of others who practice your profession, from the family three doors down the street that owns pretty much the same stuff your family does? We've all grown up with Barney and Mr. Rogers telling us that each and every one of us is special and unique, but neither of these sages has seen fit to produce a handbook that tells us how to categorically define our uniqueness or scientifically identify our special attributes. It's a tricky job.

As the Rogue Valley changes and grows, as we plunge into a 21st century world economy, as revolutions in communications, technology, medical science, and a thousand other aspects of daily life swirl around us, we ask ourselves more intently than ever why people decide to attend St. Mary's, or to teach here, or to support the school. What is unique about our school? What does it give people that sets their experience here apart? We have had help in exploring these questions from Ian Symmonds, a Portland area consultant who has interviewed numerous individuals and focus groups about their perceptions of the school. In late January we had an enthusiastic and widespread response to an on-line survey of our current families. As Ian continues his work through April, we will get a clearer and clearer picture about the distinctive values of a St. Mary's education, about what matters to the St. Mary's community. We will share our findings with our families, of course, when we conclude this study in the spring. Suffice it to say, however, that, from its beginning, the study has produced varied, heartfelt,

and intelligent responses. St. Mary's means many different things to many different people. That's about as far as I will go right now, but I will return to the three adjectives employed a few sentences previous: "varied, heartfelt, and intelligent." As you read this issue of the Messenger, you will see that, whatever else we may discover, St. Mary's is a place where it is safe to hold various world views, safe to be sincere about one's beliefs, and a place characterized by intelligence and civility. From Judy Shasky Nadler, class of 1970, whose career has taken her from a graduate degree from Harvard to the mayor's office of Santa Clara and beyond, to our own "citizen of the world", Mr. Alastair Hunter, English and Art History teacher, to Ryan Greene of this year's senior class, whose experience with the Young Marines has helped him to define his own uniqueness, you will see that St. Mary's is a place where intelligent people can be themselves, take a variety of different paths through life, and be appreciated for who they are. In a world of people shouting at each other on television, a world of ever-increasing stridency and discord, it is nice to be a member of a diverse community characterized by civility, talent, and reason.

It is yet another reason for hope in this season of rebirth and resurrection.

Enjoy this issue of the Messenger.

