



Everybody's got a mission statement nowadays. I received an invoice from a plumber last month that had a plumbing-related mission statement. It didn't strike me as particularly memorable, so I can't

quote it verbatim . . . something about the firm's commitment to superior service and excellent pipes and fittings. I'm sure, however, that a focus group of earnest plumbers brainstormed until they were able to express their core plumbing values in a single pithy sentence. That process conjures up some interesting mental imagery, but you've got to applaud their sincerity. Good plumbing is critical to a well-regulated society . . . and so are good schools. All kidding aside, a mission statement sums up the *raison d'être* for any institution. It guides all of its decision making processes, and helps propel the institution toward a bright future.

As part of taking stock of ourselves last year, we revisited our mission statement. Independent schools usually do so every five years. Ours had been unchanged since the 1980's. Although the old mission statement served reliably for the past two decades, rewriting it gave the faculty and board of trustees a chance to re-articulate the principles that focus our work at St. Mary's. Here, for your reference is the school's recast mission statement, as approved, unanimously, by our teachers and trustees:

*St. Mary's School provides a community in which intellectual curiosity and academic excellence combine with Catholic and democratic values to inspire and prepare responsible local, national, and global citizens.*

Luckily for you readers, I have limited space here, so I am not going to parse our new mission statement in detail. I do, however, want to point out that there are phrases embedded in it that have real meaning for those of us who work here. To wit, St. Mary's is a community where reason, civility, and a desire to learn set the overall tone. We believe in a tradition of serious academic inquiry. It's a cerebral environment. We also believe that, of our own free wills, we can decide to do a bit of good in the world. We believe we are part of a global family that requires positive participation from all of its members.

How do these beliefs play out in real life? You will find several examples in this issue of *The Messenger*: alumna Monica Goracke's legal work for Americans with disabilities; current student Sara Bayer's experiences in Washington, DC; and St. Mary's teachers Kacey and Scott Dewing who took a remarkable trip, underwritten by a grant available only to St. Mary's faculty, to the Middle East to try to understand the state of the human and political relations there. All of these evince a school culture committed to its mission. Other examples abound. St. Mary's introduction of a Mandarin language curriculum with visiting professor Su Guoying, our collaboration with Costa Rican and Middle Eastern secondary schools as part of NAIS's "Challenge 20/20" program, and our administering the International Schools' Assessment tests to our 8th and 10th graders in February of 2008, tests that will rank them against students from forty industrialized nations. As important as any of these accomplishments or initiatives, however, is the concern that our teachers show day in and day out for the well-being of each of their students as individuals. A mission statement does indeed set lofty goals for an institution, but it informs our actions and gives us an ideal to strive for as we come to school every day.