

THE ST. AUGUSTINE'S PARISHIONER

St. Augustine's Catholic Community

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It's not just a school. It's the principal of the thing.

Michael Yaptinchay has a radiant, infectious smile. He wears it a lot these days, and with good reason.

When Cathie Oberndorf retired as principal of St. Augustine School, she left some very big shoes to fill. Having completed his second year as her successor, the shoes seem to fit well.

Michael was born, the first of 3 children, in Manila, in the Philippines. It was a turbulent time. Marshall Law had been introduced and the economy was slow. Soon after his sister was born, his parents made the decision to move to Canada, in the hopes of a brighter

future for their children. There his second sister was born, and the family was complete.

Sadly, Michael's mother died in February of this year. She was 79. It was a tragedy that is still all too fresh in his heart. His mother was the matriarch of a large extended family. She had nine brothers and sisters, all of whom have relocated to either Canada or the United States. In our interview, it's evident how close he, and the entire family, were to her.

"The emotions come in waves," Michael explains, tears welling up even now, "at unexpected times and without warning."

He was at a St. Augustine School meeting when word came from his sister that complications from kidney failure were now very serious. He made it to the hospital while she was still lucid. There was heavy snow in Vancouver that night, and he watched it fall outside as he held her hand. "Falling snow will always remind me of her. And I'll never forget the love and support I got from the St. Augustine community."

But if you ask him today, he'll tell you that the decision his parents made all those years ago was a good one. He was schooled in French Immersion from Kindergarten on, and speaks it fluently today. When he graduated from Vancouver College, still unsure about his future, he enrolled at UBC, thinking perhaps law was in the cards.

From Student to Teacher

A friend's father, who was working in continuing education, told Michael he was short a teacher for the next class. Could Michael teach the class? He was apprehensive. Kids, maybe, but adults? He took a pass. Anxious for a replacement teacher, his friend's father told him that the position paid well. Being only 19, money was in short supply for Michael, so he quickly changed his mind.

Michael loved the work immediately. Now there was no question. He wanted to teach!

He eventually secured a job at Blessed Sacrament School, teaching grades four through seven. He spent the next 10 years as a teacher, and eventually, the vice principal. Paul Fraser, who was the principal at the time, saw something in Michael, and began showing him the ropes of elementary school administration. The mentor/apprentice relationship was fruitful, and when Paul left the position, Michael was the natural successor. For the next seven years, he presided over Blessed Sacrament as its leader and principal.

It was during his time at Blessed Sacrament that Michael began dating a young woman named Paula Rosehart. She was the kindergarten teacher at St. Augustine School. It was through this relationship that Michael became not only a parishioner at St. Augustine's church, but got acquainted with Cathie Oberndorf and the staff at the School.

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Recovery and Reconciliation at Sancta Maria House

Shelley Elder has been a parishioner at St. Augustine's since 2008. Her faith and joy are abundantly evident every time she speaks, her broad smile never leaving her face. She's spiritually grounded and happy. Really happy. But it wasn't always that way.

Shelley is the youngest of 3 girls, and grew up in Surrey. Her father was an atheist, her mother an agnostic. Religion and spirituality were not discussed in the house. As a young child, Shelley remembers looking for the church of atheism, trying to figure out what religion they belonged to. Surely they belonged to one.

Despite the lack of any religious upbringing, Shelley and her sister Marla found themselves drawn to the wonderful stories of love and miracles in the Sunday School books they managed to sneak into the house. She even took to telling her parents she was going swimming on Sunday morning, and instead snuck off to Sunday School.

But by the time Shelley was a teenager, she was much more interested in finding trouble, than finding God. She began socializing with other teens in similar circumstances and it wasn't long before alcohol and drugs figured into her young life. Addiction followed. It was

in this inexperienced and vulnerable state, that she entered into a relationship with an older man. It lasted for some twenty years, and was abusive, both mentally and physically. Shelley doesn't talk about the details. But you can read between the lines. This was a dark time in her life. She began using harder drugs to escape the anguish of her daily life. She also became all but completely disconnected from her family. This was rock bottom.

It was around 2007 when Shelley's sister, who had been working with Vancouver's Agape

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Michael Yaptinchay *(con't from page 1)*

About a year before she announced her retirement, Cathie asked Michael "off the cuff", if he wanted to teach French Immersion for the rest of his life. Michael assumed he was destined to stay at Blessed Sacrament, having been there for 17 years. But the seed was planted.

When Cathie officially announced her retirement the following year, Michael got in line for an interview. "When I got to the meeting, it felt like there were a hundred people there. The entire PEC, Cathie, teachers, Father Andrew..."

Eventually he got the call saying the position was his. He was ecstatic. Saying goodbye to the Blessed Sacrament community would be difficult after 17 years of service, but this was an opportunity for growth he could not refuse.

Michael is married to Lauren, and their daughter Mila will start at St. Augustine this September. Their son, Micah, will attend pre-school.

The Road Ahead

Today Michael feels he has one full year of careful and respectful observation under his

belt, and a second year of getting comfortable in the leadership role. This year he has hired five new teachers, the first to be brought in under his watch.

"This is an exciting place to be. There's so much that has been done by the faithful of this community, and now I can bring my contribution to the future of St. Augustine School."

Sometimes he worries about how all the growth will affect the culture of the school. "It's just a matter of being mindful of it. Being part of the new family selection process, initiating new events like family barbecues and dances and leaning on the experience of the long time teachers here is all part of maintaining the essence of this community."

Managing fund raising expectations is important too. "It's not just about a new gym. We have a mortgage to pay for our new school."

Michael smiles through our whole conversation. It's clear that Catholic Education has figured prominently in his life, and that teaching faith to young children is what he was meant for. Challenges, difficulties, triumphs and milestones all seem to roll into one, and for Michael, it's all a good thing.



Michael's Mom



with Lauren, Mila and Micah

Shelley Elder *(con't from page 1)*

Street Ministry, approached her about seeking help. Agape is a street Ministry designed for women who are homeless, addicted and working on the streets of the Downtown East Side. Her sister had seen first hand how faith can bring hope, and recommended Sancta Maria House as a possible refuge from Shelley's life of addiction. Shelley saw no value in the idea. If there was a God, He had punishment planned for her, not reconciliation.

In Shelley's situation, repeated evictions were the norm. On one such occasion, as she packed her belongings to move yet again, something happened that would change the course of her life. On a brief gust of wind, a small piece of paper blew into view, and landed at her feet. She references the feather scene from "Forrest Gump" in describing it. She picked it up, found it was a prayer card that read, "Thank you Lord, for hearing my prayers and answering them". Shelley had no doubt. Someone up there wanted her to pay attention to her sister's promptings.

Around the same time, Shelley had decided to reconnect with her parents. While her father still bore the anger and resentment that resulted from his daughter's destructive ways, her mother welcomed her home with open arms. It wasn't long before Shelley's mother was talking to her about Sancta Maria House. And so Shelley surrendered herself to what was clearly God's will. She no longer had anything to lose.



After 5 days of detox at her parents' home, a prerequisite for entering Sancta Maria House, Shelley began 9 months of rehabilitation. During that time she completed her high school diploma, and attended church at St. Augustine's. At the end of 9 months, she was baptized in front of the St. Augustine's Community.

Today she has been sober for 10 years. Her exuberance might lead one to think life is easy now. But recovery never is. Every day requires commitment, faith and perseverance. Some still pass judgment on her because of her past. She continues to work at Sancta Maria House, and with Agape, helping young women in trouble. Her experience and success gives her a credibility that makes her effective in addiction support.

She finds special joy in attending Sunday Mass, especially the Eucharist and sharing of the sign of peace. She enjoys the contact with her fellow parishioners. She hopes her story may inspire others to join organizations like Agape, and she's ready to talk to anyone who might feel that call, just like she did.

Alpha Update

by Clara Lum



After three months of planning, the Alpha ministry has begun!

Over these past few weeks, it is encouraging to see guests returning each week and hearing their feedback so far. A diverse group from

different backgrounds that are coming from as far as North Vancouver, White Rock, and Burnaby; growing in friendship, sharing stories, learning, and laughing together.

We walk away every Thursday evening grateful the Lord has brought us this far and trust in Him that He will continue to guide us along.

We are also amazed at how much the Holy Spirit has been stirring among the guests by their willingness to personally invite friends and family this early in the Alpha journey. This reassures us what Alpha is made to do - engage hearts and have those present draw people to Jesus through personal invitation.

Also, it has been humbling to be a part of a greater team at St. Augustine's. All made possible by the generosity of donated desserts for the Thursday meals, the support of the Hospitality team, the great Alpha hosts and helpers at each table, and the continued prayers in our parish and from parishes across the country.

In August, we will be spending a day away from the parish resting and relaxing together, and taking what we've learned from our minds to our hearts. We pray this time away will bring us closer as a group and look forward to experiencing God's presence.

Thank you for your support and please pray for us and for our church!

St. Augustine's
Alpha Team

