



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE
A LIFE OF CURIOSITY?

2023 CAPSTONE PROJECT

SAINT PAUL'S CHOIR SCHOOL



Cover Image:

The Incredulity of Saint Thomas, Caravaggio (1602)

Collezione Privata, Firenze (Italy)

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2023 Capstone Project

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Introduction

WHAT IS CAPSTONE?

During Capstone classes, students explore a single philosophical question. Across eight presentations from eight different presenters, each utilizing academic sources, students grapple with the ins and outs of that year's philosophical question. In doing so, students examine several artifacts selected by their teachers and other presenters. These artifacts include the works of artists, authors, philosophers, poets, theologians, musicians, scientists, and scholars who have all considered this question through the ages. The students' task is to study these artifacts and consider what these works teach them about the question or concept at hand.

After their studies, students refine their own ideas in light of what they have learned, culminating in a three-to-five page paper, which they present to their classmates, teachers, and administrators.

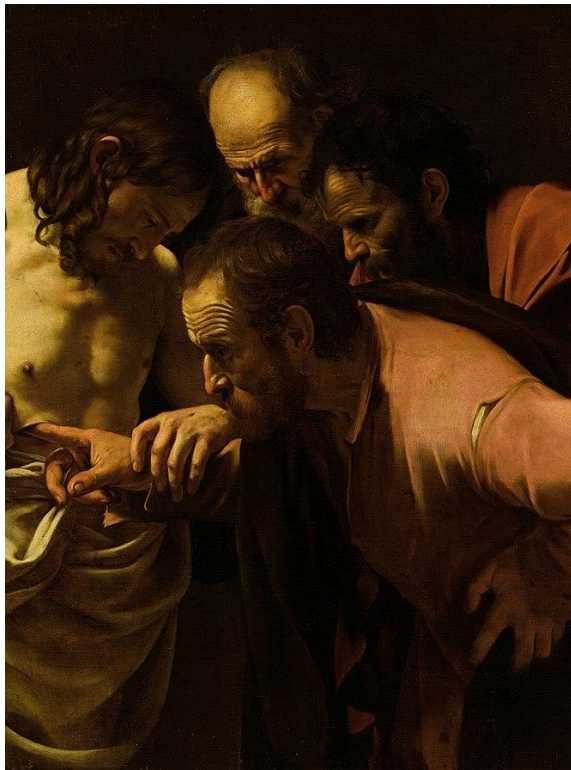
In 2021, students asked *what is a happy life*. In 2022, they asked *what does it mean to act courageously*. This year, they asked *what does it mean to live a life of curiosity*.

Looking to Aquinas, curiosity can be understood as either vice or virtue, depending upon its application. If we reach as far back as Aristotle, which we naturally do when exploring larger-than-life questions like these, we learn that "all men desire by nature to know." This in itself is a fitting start to understanding curiosity. More recently, pop cultural legend Stan Lee, the creator of the X-Men and Spider-Man taught Boomers, Gen Xers, Millennials, and now Gen Z that curiosity is a great power and, with it, comes great responsibility. Dante, at his most Dante-esque, cleared a whole level of Hell to pave it for – and *with* – the curious. Among these many definitions are hundreds, if not thousands, of interpretations.

For their capstone project, eighth-grade students have reconciled these differences in definition, putting forward their own academic scholarship on the matter. In the pages that follow, Saint Paul's Choir School is pleased to share the answers to the question what does it mean to live a life of curiosity.

What does it mean to live a life of curiosity?

2023 CAPSTONE PROJECT



The Incredulity of Saint Thomas by Michelangelo Merisi, named Carravaggio

1602

WHAT WE LEARNED ALONG THE WAY

1. **James Clear *Atomic Habits*** Curiosity is more than the spark that sets new ideas in motion; it is also tracking ideas, creating goals, and building habits . *Presented by Ada Zhu, et al.*
2. **Jordan Davis “How to find your purpose in school” *Ted Ed*** Curiosity, especially when rewarded by praise, is one of the most powerful motivators of people. This can be the very first step in discernment. *Presented by Ada Zhu, et al.*
3. **Stan Lee “Stan’s Soapbox” selections from various Marvel comics** Comic books & rich pop culture can draw the eye with bright colors and panache, but often they invite us to take responsibility for what we learn. *Presented by Mr. Moran*
4. **Aristotle** Curiosity is the very root of scholasticism. *Presented by Mr. Brooks*
5. **Genealogy and the search for family** Genealogy is a deep dive into the curiosity of personhood: who are we, where are we from, and what do we stand for? *Presented by Mrs. Flaberty*
6. **Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica*** Curiosity is at its most virtuous - and productive - when guided by an inspiration or, more specifically, a question. *Presented by Mr. Nemeč*
7. ***The Latin Library*** Our classical roots compel us to search for beauty and to be curious about its origins. But we cannot forget to search for the good and true: Can

curiosity lead to an achievable goal?

Presented by Mrs. Ahmad

8. **Matthew Hutson “Scientists imbue robots with curiosity”** *Science* By

contrasting it with programmed robot curiosity, we learn that human curiosity is not purely motivated by data input. Instead, it takes a qualitative view.

Presented by Mike Bozacamo

9. **Mandelbrot Set & Conway’s “Game of Life”** Both humans and machines engage in curiosity when they find large patterns in something that appeared, at first, to be small. However, artificial intelligence’s curiosity is rooted in probabilities, whereas humans’ is rooted in a search for beauty.

Presented by Thomas Clark

10. **Dante *The Divine Comedy*** Dante asks us to take his warnings on curiosity literally, but we must also be curious about the morality of Dante himself. Did he do the right thing by writing such concrete warnings that used real acquaintances, family, politicians, and religious people of his day? *Presented by Mrs. Barilleaux & Ms. Beck*

On curiosity

I wonder, where has curiosity taken you?

Did it land you in Nintendo's Hyrule, freeing the land from the rule of Ganon?

Did it bring you to a movie theater, eyes wide open as long-extinct dinosaurs roared to life for the first time in 65 million years?

Did it show you a world of rich color, the goodness of people, and the sights, sounds, and smells of heritage?

Did it bring you to a small school called Saint Paul's Choir School?

As in *Oh the Places You'll Go* by Dr. Seuss, curiosity is, truly, a journey. And it brings us to the most magical of places.

In only its third year, the Capstone Project at Saint Paul's has taken all of us on a journey. This year's project has genuinely sated my curiosity.

The project began as soon as our students had received their high school acceptances. Among a choice of three finalist questions, the class elected to study *curiosity* with the expectation that something so nebulous would be "easy" to study and write about. Little did they know.

What makes curiosity such an enticing subject to explore is, frankly, the curious number of ways that one might explore it.

Our students contended with such questions as *What is curiosity? How did the Ancients define it? Is there a difference in its understanding over time? What are we supposed to do with what we learn from being curious? Do machines experience curiosity? Is A.I. curiosity distilled from our consciousness or is it something different?*

I'm curious, how would *you* begin to answer these questions?

Answer them, our students have!

Their journeys through curiosity have taken them to some amazing places. I hope you enjoy following their course in the essays to come.

What I hope our graduates learned from our study of curiosity is that it *can be* non-judgemental and it *can* unite us: Like an absolute value, our actions and decisions in life can place a negative sign or a positive sign in front of it. Moreover, in exploring what makes us curious, our social nature is exposed: we find others who feel the same.

When curiosity and our social nature work in tandem, they help us broaden our social circle, our intellectual pursuits, our athletic abilities, and/or our artistic notions. This, in turn, does two things to shape us: it fortifies our relationship with our Creator and it propels us *to create* for our fellow man. Our curiosity nourishes and is nourished by the wonders of Creation and the achievements of man.

We are entrusted with the world around us, the people who live beside us, the achievements that came before us, and the curiosity to make the most of each.

I wonder, where will curiosity take you?

With sincerity, I hope it is to God and to your greatest potential.

.....

Repleatur os meum laude tua,

Mr. Moran

Our many thanks!

Thank you **Mrs. Ahmad** for your efforts to organize and refine our Capstone Program. This year's question, guests, and presentations were an incredible success.

Thank you Ada Zhu and her fellow pre-med students for sharing with us the stories of their own discernment and frameworks for how to explore our own vocational callings.

Thank you Mr. Brooks for nurturing our relationship to scholasticism and for refining our understanding of the works of Aristotle.

Thank you Mrs. Flaherty for sharing her family's story. By exploring your genealogy and the stories of your parents and parents' parents, we became curious about the stories our own families keep.

Thank you Mr. Nemecek for introducing us to the *Summa Theologica* and Thomas Aquinas. The notion that curiosity can be both a virtue and a vice and must be channeled by a guiding question was, by far, our most popular takeaway.

Thank you Mrs. Ahmad for sharing the Latin Library Project with us. We are all grateful to

not be working on it! It was the perfect example to explore whether or not curiosity can lead us to an *achievable* goal.

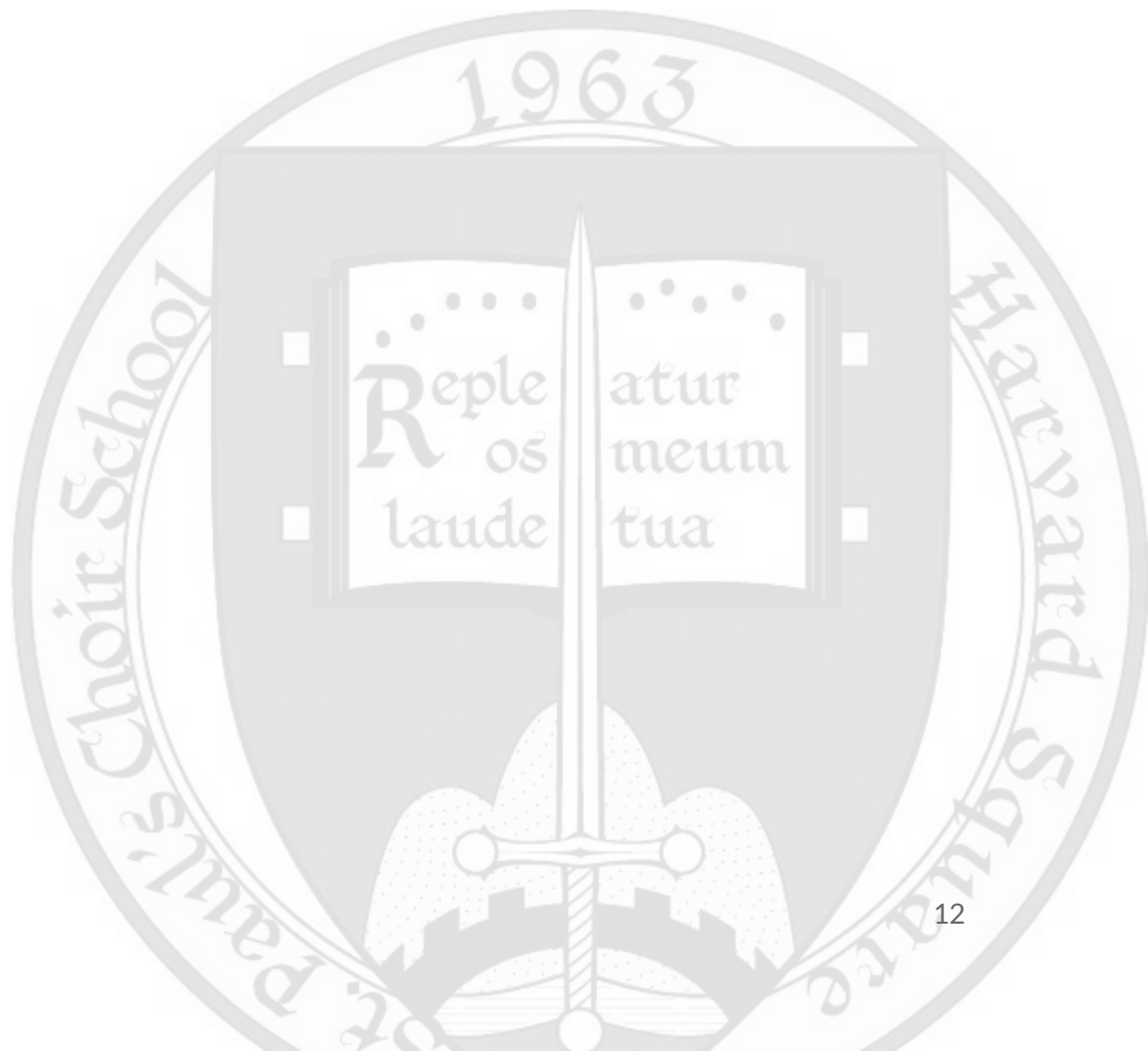
Thank you Mr. Hutson for helping us refine our understanding of curiosity by contrasting with the language of ones and zeroes used in robotics and programming.

Thank you Mr. Clark for teaching us that the probabilities that make up artificial intelligence are unique from – and don't stand a chance when measured against – the very human search for beauty.

Thank you Mrs. Barilleaux and Ms. Beck for guiding us like Virgil through Dante's *Divine Comedy*. It was doubly meaningful having walked in Dante's footsteps in Florence.

Lastly, an extra special thank you to Dr. Haferd, Mrs. Barilleaux, Mrs. Ahmad, Mr. Davis, Ms. Werne, and Mr. Brooks for devoting such time and care to the drafting and editing of these essays. We couldn't have done it without you!

Essays
answering
what does it
mean to live a
life of
curiosity?



Gerard Barilleaux



thoughts in conversation or to ask big, meaningful questions. Nor is he afraid to share his ready smile and quick wit.

Gerard is known in the classroom for his excellent questions, his high achievement, and his boundless energy.

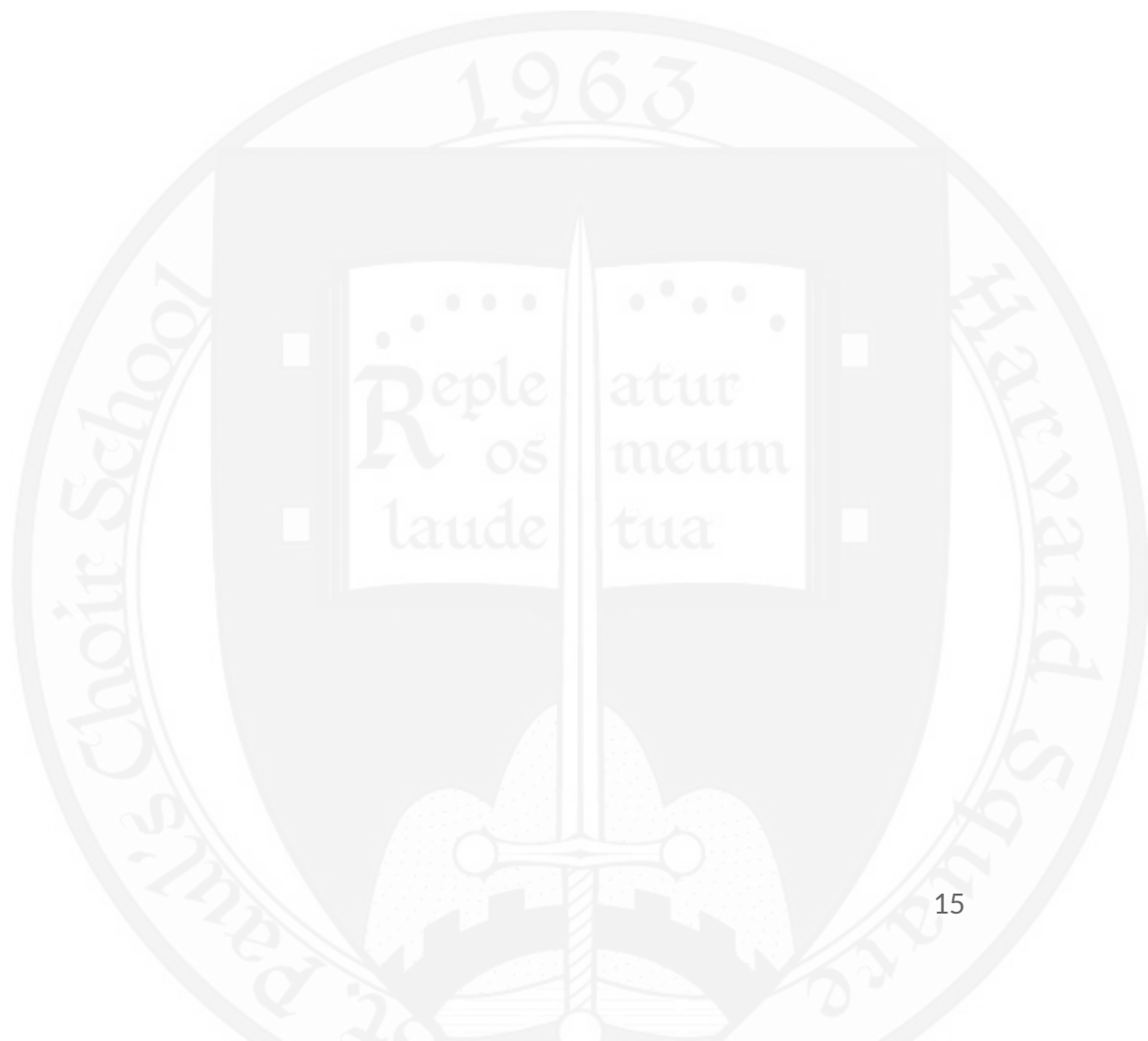
Gerard departs Saint Paul's as a scholar and junior philosopher of high renown. Next year, he joins the prestigious Saint John's Prep in Danvers, MA.

...joined Saint Paul's Choir School at the start of his fourth-grade year. He is especially well known for the beautiful solos he has performed with the choir.

Gerard is consistently curious because he is unabashedly himself everyday at school. He is unafraid to share his original, critical

“When we live a life of curiosity, we desire to seek our interests, knowledge led by truth, and our faith.”

Gerard Barilleaux



Curiosity Within Limits

BY GERARD BARILLEAUX

As we complete our last year at St. Paul's, the 8th grade class has spent its final past few months working on a Capstone project investigating the question: *What does it mean to live a life of curiosity?* Upon reflection, a curious life seems to be divided into five parts. First, What is curiosity; second; third, curiosity is seeking knowledge and one's interests; fourth, how and why curiosity can be sought negatively and positively; and finally, living a life of guided curiosity is a meaningful and rewarding experience.

Every human is born with an innate capacity of curiosity, a strong thirst for knowledge and understanding. When God gave life to humans, he also gave us the quality of curiosity. Curiosity is what caused us to develop languages, religions, and learn about our surroundings. As we get older, we better understand the difference between good and bad, and without guidelines curiosity can blind us of this difference, causing us to rather pursue knowledge than pursuing the truth.

From the moment we open our eyes to the world, we embark on a journey of exploration and discovery. To do this, we learn from others, we learn to say our first words, we learn to crawl and walk. These are our first forms of curiosity. When a baby is born, for example, they have a built-in system for appreciating new concepts: he either cries or laughs. That person begins to understand the world around them by what they like or don't like. This is when our curiosity starts to bloom.

Curiosity is seeking knowledge or investigating things you want to know more about. Reading books is a primary example. Those who seek to live a life of curiosity may read many books considering

the knowledge they contain. Reading a lot can spark one's interest in something. One prominent example from my life is developing an interest in Greek mythology. When I began reading, I had a Greek mythology book that my parents read to me. I found myself reading more books like it as I grew up, for example, it inspired me to read *Percy Jackson*, a series that I read in 6th grade. Now I know many facts about Greek mythology which is helpful when I visit museums in Boston or even in other countries. I found myself investigating and gaining interest in art. Art is a fundamental part of society because of its ability to express emotion and beauty. It is so crucial to humanity that we put art in public places where hundreds of thousands of people come to see it every year. Art is a way to encourage and inspire curiosity and this is why we go to see it.

When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, God told them not to eat the fruit of the tree that lay in the center of the garden. However, when the serpent tricked them to eat the fruit, they were blinded by their curiosity and they disobeyed God. Pursuing knowledge is not always good for you like scrolling through Tik Tok or Facebook endlessly with no particular topic you are searching for. St. Thomas Aquinas says: Just seeking knowledge is not a completely neutral activity. Curiosity, it turns out, is not so much about knowledge as such but about "desire and study in the pursuit of knowledge." Knowledge as such is good but it can be evil in virtue of the reasons we have in pursuing it. God has put in us the quality to seek knowledge, but the knowledge we seek may not always be the truth. Curiosity with no guidelines is a vice and damages your innate ability to be creative and attentive. But to seek out knowledge virtuously will be better for your mind, body, and soul.

Living a life of guided curiosity is edifying and indulging. Pursuing the truth is the beginning of living a life of curiosity. Further, living a life of curiosity with adequate guidelines will allow you to make insightful decisions about what you want to do for a living. Medical Student Adu Zhu said: Acting out curiosity can bring praise, praise brings motivation; Seeing the results of curiosity makes you want to learn more and be more curious. Living a life of guided curiosity will enable you to find what you are looking for and in the long term, it will be effective and satisfactory. If the things you want to learn are truthful, they must come from a reliable source, and you must search for a specific topic or matter. This is living a life of curiosity. When we live a life of curiosity, one principal thing we

do is try to figure out more about ourselves. Mrs. Flaherty told us about her story about how she wanted to know more about her relatives and ancestors. Her curiosity motivated her to put time and effort into finding what she sought. Mrs. Flaherty learned a lot about her genealogy, and this was all led by her curiosity. From my understanding, living a life of curiosity is the willingness to explore your thoughts, hobbies, and interests, to make mistakes, to grow vigorously in mind and soul, and to follow success and your passions sought through shrewdness and truth.

As I conclude my time here at Saint Paul's I've learned so much, most importantly, theology, music, and more about myself. I've read more about bits of the Bible that are not read very much such as Joel and Zechariah. I've also been gifted with the opportunity to learn piano and take music theory classes, and learn about what kind of extracurricular classes, sports and P.E. activities I want to take in high school. For example, I really want to learn coding languages, learn Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, and do track, and try boxing. During this Capstone, I understand more about living a life of curiosity. Without curiosity, humans are not able to learn, love, and most importantly, have faith in God. However, when we live a life of curiosity, we desire to seek our interests, knowledge led by truth, and our faith. Curiosity is the motivation that propels us to gain knowledge, to learn and discover new concepts and ideas, and to delve deeper into the future of mankind.

Clemens Ehrhardt



...joined Saint Paul's Choir School at the start of his fourth-grade year. Since then he has been charming faculty and peers alike with his humor and smile.

Clemens shows curiosity every time he dives into a new topic, whether it is Egyptology, choral masterworks, the lives of the Saints, or closely observing patterns of his peers' behaviors.

Clemens is noted and respected in the Saint Paul's community for his angelic voice and his leadership as Head Chorister. He has been a soloist in multiple performances, including during the choir's showpiece concerts at Christmas.

Clemens departs Saint Paul's as a musician and scholar of high renown. Next year, he joins Trivium School in Lancaster, MA.

“We have to be curious about what we can do to help and comfort people and help them get through the tough time when they need it.”

Clemens Ehrhardt



The Superpower of Curiosity

BY CLEMENS EHRHARDT

When people think about curiosity they usually think about a scientist experimenting in a lab or an engineer creating something like machines. Consider, for example, the extraordinary work of Leonardo Da Vinci, one of the most prolific inventors in history. Throughout his life he was curious about so many things that he invented an aerial screw, the predecessor of the helicopter, armored cars, giant crossbows, robotic knights and scuba gear, to name a few. While I recognize such prolific curiosity is extraordinary, I believe that there is also a different type of curiosity. I call this “People Curiosity”.

You might ask, “What is people curiosity?” People Curiosity is not weird like stalking or being nosy. It is about helping others to live a better life and eventually leading them to Heaven. My curiosity about people and how to help them live a better life started before we were even assigned this essay, and I have developed a framework for this type of curiosity. I call this framework A.C.T.: A for Alertness, C for Curiosity, and T for Togetherness. Through this framework I will show you a crucial part of what it means to live a life of curiosity, with a focus on people.

A is for Alertness. We need to be alert about what is happening around us, not only for our sake but also for the sake of others. We can not just think about ourselves. We have an obligation as described in the Beatitudes to think about others' needs.¹ For example, consider the role of superheroes. Superheroes barely think about themselves. Whenever there is a civilian in trouble they

¹ Beatitude Quote

come to the rescue. Though you might simply say it is their job because they are superheroes, there's a deeper reason for their response. Superheroes choose to intervene for the greater good. We can too. We might not have been bitten by a radioactive spider or have a suit that enables us to fly and shoot bad guys or have gotten injected by a super soldier serum and have a nice shield to throw at bad guys but we all have the ability to help people when they need it. These needs can be complex or really simple, like getting someone utensils so they don't have to get up, or refilling someone else's glass of water. They also can be complex, like comforting someone who has lost a family member. This is why we need to be alert because if we are alert we will know that we can help this person.

This then ties into C: Curiosity. We have to be curious about what we can do to help and comfort people and help them get through tough times when they need it. But how do you know they need it? Use your people curiosity. For example, use curiosity to imagine something that will make them happy, like bringing them something that has meaning to them, something that is very thoughtful. We could do this by learning more about their genealogy, which was the topic of Mrs. Flaherty's presentation. If this person comes from a family of hunters, they might be interested in hunting, which could give you ideas of what a nice gift might be for them. Beyond this we truly need to do whatever we can to make their life better. Talk to this person, comfort them, be the person that they can rely on so that others are happy and move on with their lives and become someone people can depend on when they need help.

For a person to be happy, they need to know what makes them happy. Things that very often make us happy are things we are passionate about. We can learn more by being both alert to what they say they like to do and curious about what they actually do. People show their passion often through curious activities. In our talk with Mr. Nemeč, he explained to us the two pathways that curiosity can take on social media. On the one hand, someone who has a clear goal in mind will be curious to find information that will help them to achieve their goal. This is what passionate people will do when they find something that makes them happy. If you find that weight lifting makes you happy, you will find out all you can about it and improve in the way you do it. On the other hand, without a particular

objective or goal in mind, curiosity in social media will lead you to worthless activities or worse. In my framework, I will help people to identify what makes them happy by observing their curiosity.

Finally there is T for Togetherness. We need to be available to help people through every step of the way doing whatever we can to help them get back on their feet to live a happier and better life. Researchers on artistic performances found that the experience of being and acting together often alternates while performing. When artists feel and perform, togetherness energizes the performers.² In other research conducted by the Pew Charitable Trust, researchers found that married families were 10% more likely to be satisfied with the amount of time spent together than unmarried couples despite the fact that they did not spend any more time together.³ Togetherness is so important because if we choose to not do things with others not only we will be miserable but also the people who you chose not to do things with.

One very nice thing about ACT is that it can be used for almost everything in life. Imagine you want to start a business and are hiring people and making deals with investors with whom you want to forge a lasting relationship of trust, you can use this framework. Likewise, even in the mundane everyday life at a meal where you want to engage in meaningful conversations with your family, it works as well. Most significantly, in the most important events in life, for instance when you commit to a permanent bond such as getting married or having a child, the framework provides a way to make the most of it.

ACT is an especially useful framework when we need to work in a team. One example of this is singing in a choir. When you sing in a choir you need to be attentive to the music sheet, the instrument that's playing part of the piece, and most importantly, the other choir members who are coordinated under the direction of the choir conductor. A choir sounds best when all members of the choir sing together. This is a central theme of togetherness. If people work together towards the same purpose, they are able to achieve much more than by themselves. The beautiful music of a choir is only possible

² From Frontiers in Psychology, [Frontiers | Creative Togetherness. A Joint-Methods Analysis of Collaborative Artistic Performance](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02561) (frontiersin.org)

³From Pew research center internet page, <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2008/10/19/family-social-activities-and-togetherness/>

when all voices unite at the same time. Even if just one person is not focused or not attentive to what is happening, the whole choir will not be as good as it can be or it may even fall apart. As my choir conductor often said “We are as strong as our weakest member,” drawing from the famous proverb that “a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.” This originated from an old Basque proverb that predicted a thread usually breaks where it is weakest⁴. Not only do we need to be attentive, we also need to be curious about what we can do to help make the mission of the choir prosper in its goal, which is to serve and to praise God triumphantly. In order to do this we need to do it together.

In summation, the three elements of the ACT framework - alertness, curiosity, and togetherness - help me to see what my family and friends around me need and how I can best care for them.

Finally, it isn't by coincidence that I have called the framework ACT. In other words - and as German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe famously said - there is nothing good unless you do it. This is also what I learned during my wonderful years at St. Paul's Choir School - we should put our learning into action. So, I cannot have you leave without some action. I invite you to take a pen or pencil and the piece of paper you will find at your seats. Now please take a moment and write down answers to the following prompts:

Alertness: Who might deserve special attention, needs your help, or would love to hear a few uplifting words from you?

Curiosity: What should you care about? What could be questions they would love to be asked?

Togetherness: Finally, do something together and if it is only to talk to them during a break or get a cup of coffee or ice cream with them. What is it you could do together? (my personal favorite lately: Berryline up the street).

Have you written down a few answers to the prompts? Wonderful - I know that the people you will reach out to will be incredibly grateful to you and your ACT of People Curiosity!

⁴ From website of In Other Words, [Proverbs: A Chain Is Only As Strong... | In Other Words](#)

The People Curiosity Worksheet

Please take a moment and write down answers to the following prompts:

Alertness: Who might deserve special attention, needs your help, or would love to hear a few uplifting words from you?

Curiosity: What should you care about? What could be questions they would love to be asked?

Togetherness: Finally, do something together and if it is only to talk to them during a break or get a cup of coffee or ice cream with them. What is it you could do together?

The people you will reach out to will be incredibly grateful to you and your ACT of People Curiosity! Thank you!

Nico Fenn



...joined Saint Paul's Choir School at the start of his sixth-grade year. Almost immediately, he was recognized by faculty and peers alike as a faithful altar server and a dynamic thinker.

Nico shows curiosity every time he poses a question, which is quite often! He is thoughtful, kind, funny, and punny in his

inquiries. He seeks to know God and man in equal measure as he navigates the world around him and the school curriculum.

Nico is most especially respected in the Saint Paul's community as the Head Altar Server and the program's greatest champion. No detail in service to the Mass is too small and rarely does it escape either his notice or his curiosity.

Nico departs Saint Paul's as an altar server and scholar of high renown. Next year, he joins Austin Preparatory School in Reading, MA.

“Curiosity can distract us from healthy activities, and how curiosity takes our time for nothing.”

Nico Fenn



The Price of Curiosity

BY NICO FENN

My name is Nico, I am part of this year's graduating class. In this final trimester the eighth graders worked on a capstone presentation, with the prompt, "What does it mean to live a life of curiosity?" My personal definition of curiosity is the casual pursuit of knowledge, consuming information for no apparent reason. So a life of curiosity alone would be a life without serious content or aims. This casual pursuit is a vice, because it is the act of nothingness that holds our attention which is destructive, as C.S. Lewis describes through his devilish character Screwtape. In Dante's *Inferno*, Dante punishes Odysseus's curiosity by leaving him to burn in a ball of fire forever. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica*, introduces the virtue of studiousness and has curiosity as a following vice. Through the lens of these three authors, we will find "what it means to live a life of curiosity?"

In C.S Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*, a devil in Hell writes to his nephew advising him on temptation, and the exploitation of human weaknesses. In chapter twelve, Lewis proves how curiosity can lead us away from healthy habits. "All the healthy and outgoing activities which we want him to avoid can be inhibited and nothing given in return". In this excerpt, Screwtape is saying all the good things like exercise and nutrition can be stopped by small distractions until a person is left with nothing. When you lose time like this, accomplishing nothing, you can only measure the loss by what could have been. The devil in C.S Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* uses the temptation of curiosity and advises us that even simple and gradual distraction such as a game of cards, can be a way to get humans away from the possibility of virtuous actions. In chapter twelve Screwtape writes "Murder is no better than

cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one — the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turns, without milestones, without signposts...”

Lewis is pointing out how any sin, no matter how small, can still lead to damnation. Sin will not be a sudden fall or a huge drop but like a gradual decline into murky water, to hell.

While Screwtape mentions the game of cards being a simple distraction, a more modern example of simple distraction is scrolling on Instagram or watching life hacks on any social media platform. Small bits of information are available throughout the internet, tidbits of knowledge to catch your attention such as 17 Ways To Reuse a Pringle Can that are essentially useless. Your curiosity allows media distractions to take large amounts of time and energy away from all the good habits such as social connections, fellowship and healthy exercise. When was the last time you went to the library with friends, got lost for hours in a good book and then discussed the ideas with friends? In contrast with the nothingness we consume through social-media, through curiosity. We have the option of sharing poetry with loved ones. No, in curiosity, I am going to sit alone and learn about my celebrity idols.

Dante Alighieri with his poetic representation of Hell shows us the consequences of curiosity. In Dante's retelling, Odysseus comes back from exploring the known world and is dissatisfied with his family life. Eventually he leaves again to go east with a small group of crewmates. Dante writes how in the middle of the trip Odysseus gives a speech that is used to motivate his crew and raise their spirits: "Think of your breed; for brutish ignorance your metal was not made; you were made men, to follow after knowledge and excellence." Odysseus is motivating his crew to travel to the ends of the earth. Being critical about this poetry, Odysseus effectively tells his crew, you were made to follow knowledge; not you are made to bask in knowledge, or obtain knowledge. And his crew follows him. While Odysseus's speech at first sounds reasonable, he is tempting his mates' curiosity to a meaningless hunt for adventure where no notable knowledge is procured.

Curiosity does not lead Odysseus and his crew to a happy ending. In Dante's *Inferno*, Odysseus and his crew drown at sea. What does Odysseus get in the end? He only gets a little bit of knowledge, and an eternity burning in a ball of fire in hell. The story does not end well for Odysseus. According to

Dante's rendering, Odysseus is not only left to suffer in hell, he also leaves his wife without her husband, his child without a father, and the crew members from their loved ones. For a glimpse at a foreign land.

In Dante's *Inferno*, the stakes of curiosity are dire. Another writer, Thomas Aquinas, provides a valuable framework to help people balance the risks of a life of curiosity with the rewards. Aquinas introduces curiosity's opposing virtue, studiousness, making it to be the ability to study, as well as apply your studies in real life. In his *Summa Theologica* Thomas Aquinas states "when the sensitive knowledge is not directed to something useful, but turns man away from some useful consideration." If fragile information is squandered, it takes one's attention away from what is useful. The object of curiosity, fun facts, are designed to be discarded. So automatically curiosity takes us away from what is useful. Taking curiosity as the antithesis of studiousness; Curiosity is the ability to avoid studying, and waste your intelligence on insignificant things. How bad does that sound? So if one wants to learn, and use their time as they would like, do not let yourself fall into this vice of curiosity.

There are many ways to define Curiosity and many ideas for a life of curiosity. In C.S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters* discussed how curiosity can distract us from healthy activities, and how curiosity takes our time for nothing. Similarly Dante in his *Inferno* displays how Odysseus's curiosity can cause a person tremendous loss without much gain. Finally, St. Thomas Aquinas shows the spiraling qualities of this vice. Curiosity in my own definition is the causal pursuit of knowledge consuming information for no apparent reason or purpose. Through the *Screwtape Letters*, *The Inferno*, and the *Summa Theologica*, we realize how this casual pursuit can leave us lost from the reality of true knowledge, deep focus, and serious study. Becoming aware of this human flaw, we can push ourselves to overcome the lure of curiosity and through virtuous and intensive study become closer to what is true and good.

Higor Fontoura



...joined Saint Paul's Choir School at the start of his fifth-grade year. Almost immediately, he was recognized by the faculty for his inquisitiveness and work ethic. Within minutes, he impressed further with his quick

recall, intellect, and caring attitude towards all others.

Higor exudes curiosity every day when he sits down to work at his desk. Over the past four years, he has proven himself in each class and with each teacher, eager to learn all that he can. Higor has maintained an A average in all of his classes throughout his time here at Saint Paul's Choir School.

Higor is noted and respected in the Saint Paul's community not only for his considerable talents as a dedicated chorister, but also as an excellent altar server. He is, quite simply, a dedicated man of faith.

Higor departs Saint Paul's as an altar server and a scholar of high renown. Next year, he joins Austin Preparatory School in Reading, MA.

“If you steer your curiosity appropriately, then it can be a virtue, which will lead to a life of virtue and holiness.”

Higor Fontoura



The Ship Called Curiosity

BY HIGOR FONTOURA

In Dante's *Inferno*, the famed Greek hero Ulysses is recast as a war veteran with an addiction to adventure. His curiosity about the wider world lands his crew in danger, resulting in their untimely demise. It is a case in which curiosity did not only kill the cat, but also everyone around him. Unbound curiosity is perhaps the most dangerous human condition— in real life as well as literature.

The tale of Ulysses that Dante recounts is an apt one: curiosity is, in essence, a ship in which you are at the helm. No matter the state of the sea, the ship is both your greatest lifeline and your biggest liability. If unchecked, or poorly steered, curiosity can be a vice, which will become a habit of vice, which will eventually lead you to Hell. On the other hand, if you steer your curiosity appropriately, then it can be a virtue, which will lead to a life of virtue and holiness, and will eventually bring you to Heaven. As a result, curiosity becomes a responsibility that you must safeguard. How, then, should you harness this innate human characteristic to help you navigate the dangerous sea that is life?

Curiosity, the Highway to Hell

The idea of curiosity possibly leading you to Hell can be found in the song, “Highway to Hell”, by AC/DC. In the song, the lead singer belts out, “Livin’ easy, Livin free... Askin’ nothin’ ... Don’t need a reason.” Curiosity works the same way. When you do not have a reason and you do not ask any guiding questions, it will drive you down the “Highway to Hell”. Dante Alighieri explored this notion in the *Inferno*. Among the souls of the lustful is Francesca, who tells Dante the story of her damnation. One day, Francesca was alone with her husband’s younger brother Paolo, and they were reading the tale of Guinevere and Lancelot’s catastrophic affair. In the *Inferno*, she recounts:

“One day we read for pastime how in thrall
Lord Lancelot lay to love, who loved the Queen;
We were alone – we thought no harm at all.

As we read on, our eyes met now and then,
And to our cheeks the changing colour started,
But just one moment overcame us – when

We read of smile, desired of lips long-thwarted,
Such smile, by such a lover kissed away,
He that may never more be parted

Trembling all over, kissed my mouth. I say
The book was Galleot, Galleot the complying
Ribald who wrote; we read no more that day”

Instead of recognizing the destructive consequences of Lancelot and Guinevere’s transgression, Francesca and Paolo were encouraged to have an affair of their own. Their story ends horribly when Francesca’s enraged husband kills the lovers, and all three parties are damned to Hell. Francesca and Paolo had wandering thoughts, which can be dangerous, but can also be fixed by directing your thoughts. In the letter of St. Paul to the Phillipians, he tackles this exact topic by stating, “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” Instead of directing their thoughts towards holy things, as St. Paul instructs us, Francesca and Paolo directed their thoughts towards temptation, which was ultimately the cause of their problematic behavior. This example demonstrates how curiosity can lead someone so far astray that it condemns them to Hell. Because they were intrigued by the idea of committing an affair, and did not have the barriers required to shape their lives, they ended up ruining their lives and those of others.

Curiosity can have a very dangerous effect in our lives: hurting others around us, harming ourselves, and possibly leading us down a “Highway to Hell”. That is why we need to be cautious when we are curious, and make sure that our curiosity is directed towards a specific goal.

When I went with the school to Italy, we stopped by the small hill town of Assisi, the birthplace of St. Francis of Assisi. Ever since I was born, I have felt a special connection to St. Francis. I was always amazed with the way that he chose to live his life, living free, seemingly with no end goal, yet filled with more purpose than most people ever will. I remember when I was younger, I admired St. Francis so much that I even dressed up as a Franciscan monk, and said that I wanted to become one. One of my favorite stories of St. Francis is about how he responded to temptation. Whenever he thought about something sinful, he would roll around in a thorny rose bush. Uncontrollable evil thoughts are a result of unchecked curiosity, because curiosity can cause our thoughts to wander towards temptation. Francesca and Paolo also had wandering thoughts, but unlike St. Francis, they did not interrupt their wandering thoughts with penance. They did not direct their thoughts away from the temptations. Instead, they inflamed their curiosity, and directed their thoughts towards the temptation by reading the tragic story of Guinevere and Lancelot. St. Francis, however, was able to control his curiosity so it would not develop into a vice, and we can learn from this story that we should always try to control our bad habits, especially ones that stem from curiosity.

Stairway to Heaven

Despite the fact that curiosity can lead you away from the path of righteousness, it can also be a “Stairway to Heaven”. I see this especially in the life of St. Francis of Assisi. St. Francis perfectly exemplified how having curiosity is the beginning of developing an openness to God’s plan, and how wondering about it, though we do not know what it is, can lead to our betterment. He chose to follow God’s plan, even though he did not know what it was or what it would lead to. He left his whole life behind, even announcing that his father was not his father anymore, and his only father was in Heaven. Francis did this so that he could marry Lady Poverty, the personification of poverty itself, which all monastic people are required to take up, and who was widowed when Christ died on the cross. This task, which was first Christ’s, is bound to be difficult, since it was meant for God. Yet St. Francis, a

human, was burdened with it, and he welcomed it with open arms. St. Francis developed a sense of curiosity in what a life of poverty could entail; he then made a vow of poverty, courageously accepting his vocation. St. Francis and Lady Poverty are a perfect contrast to Francesca and Paolo. Even their names are connected. Francis and Poverty in Italian are Francesco and Povere, contrasting Francesca and Paolo. Unlike Francesca and Paolo, who had a vocation, yet did not keep it due to their distrust towards God's Plan, Francis chose to listen to God and trust Him, due to his curiosity about where it could lead him.

Circling back to Dante, in his *Purgatorio*, the poet tasks the souls of the Proud with pondering the mystery of the Annunciation. That is, the souls in this cornice of Purgatory consider what openness was required for Mary humbly saying "yes" to God's plea. At first Mary believes that (as a mere human) she is too insignificant to bear God. But then she is overtaken by wonder and amazement of God and decides to accept God's offering. If she had not done this, we never would have had Jesus. One act of love and wonder led to what we have today: the Catholic Church. If we contemplate and are curious about the lives of the saints, especially the Blessed Virgin, then we are able to grow and learn from them.

To conclude, curiosity is a double-edged sword. When taken lightly and without guidance, it cannot only drive you down a "Highway to Hell", but also harm you and others around you in the process. On the other hand, if you understand its dangers, and you guide it accordingly, it will become a "Stairway to Heaven". So, what does it mean to live a life of curiosity? Well, to live a good life of curiosity means to steer the ship that is your life in the correct direction, by thinking about holy things and people, like the souls in the *Purgatorio* are striving to do, so that they can ascend to Heaven. It means being curious about God's plan, and living by it, like St. Francis. It means listening to God's guidance in our lives, making sure that we are never wandering towards temptations, unlike Francesca and Paolo. So, remember, be attentive with your curiosity, so that it does not let it lead your ship off-course, but to its destination.

Alden Kuo



...joined Saint Paul's Choir School towards the end of his seventh-grade year. Almost

immediately, he was recognized by the faculty for his intellectual capabilities. Alden was a top scorer throughout SSAT prep and then, again, on the SSAT itself.

Alden has shown curiosity all year as a sincere and caring Catholic young man. In fact, as you will read in his essay, that curiosity brought him into the Church. Only two weeks after being baptized, he met His Holiness, Pope Francis, on our tour of Italy.

Alden is renowned in the Saint Paul's community for his humor and the earnestness with which he speaks of the friendships he has made here at Saint Paul's.

Alden departs Saint Paul's as a scholar and altar server of high renown. Next year, he joins Boston College High School.

“Curiosity, perhaps, is one of our biggest assets in life both in this world and the next.”

Alden Kuo



Always within

Us

BY ALDEN KUO

What does it mean to truly live a life of wonder? ...of curiosity? The word ‘curiosity’ originates from the Latin word *curiosus*, which means “careful”, “attentive”, or “eager to learn” (Online-Latin-Dictionary: *Curiosus*). But I would argue that curiosity does not only apply to our day-to-day lives, but it can also orient the mind from this world to the next, within the life of God. In this way, curiosity is the basis of growing spiritually and intellectually.

If I were to describe my time here at Saint Paul’s Choir School in one word, I would describe it as *curious*. Curiosity led me to look into Saint Paul’s and I cannot deny that my time here changed my life. Without the fundamental curiosity that brought me to this school, I would never have met such wonderful and supportive students and teachers alike, nor would I have likely listened to the desire to be with God. My own journey has led me to conclude that curiosity is ultimately a part of a broader worldview that leads to faith.

When I first came to Saint Paul’s Choir School, I was a “firm atheist”. I didn’t believe in a God and I even scorned some parts of Catholicism. But less than a year later, I have become a firm Catholic, having been through formal catechesis encouraged by my peers and my environment. Curiosity led me to God, and it has the ability to lead anyone to the truth of Jesus Christ. Our innate sense of curiosity stems from His own divine love. Similar to the definition of *curiosus*, mentioned earlier, Merriam Webster’s definition of curiosity is “a desire to know”, which, in my opinion, is not contained within the material world of scientific inquiry. Curiosity is the spurring of one’s desire to fulfill their soul. We want to learn, which spurs us to want to know about our past and our origins. This has led to many

scientists and philosophers coming up with different theories as to how we came to be. Humans, since the beginning, have always strived to know, to learn, to grow. Saint Augustine, my patron saint from the fourth and fifth century, summed up this opinion perfectly when in his book, *The Confessions*, he said: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” (Confessions 1,1.5). We are incomplete because, despite being made in the image and likeness of God, we are not God. Therefore we are restless for *more* – the completeness of God Himself. In contrast, God is *not* incomplete. Simply, He IS. Only God can cure our incompleteness and our restlessness, because he is consummate – free from fault. The perfection of all perfections. Restlessness is the foundation of curiosity and it signals the incompleteness of the soul. We are curious because we yearn to achieve completion.

Living a life of purely satisfying one’s desires of curiosity by itself, however, is not enough to earn Salvation. Dante, although a poet and not a formal saint, has some insights into our final end – choices being: heaven, hell, or purgatory. Dante provides an example of how acting on one’s curiosity doesn’t always lead to heaven. Curiosity is what led Dante to journey down into the *Inferno* in the first place, and while he was there, he met many of the damned whose sense of curiosity directly led to their demise. Francesca and Paolo, the two main speakers in the second circle where the lustful are condemned, committed one of the worst offenses to love, to God, by cheating on their spouses and acting upon their desires outside of marriage. They thought that they “were alone” and they “thought no harm at all” (Dante, *Inferno*: Canto V). Though the two claim that their deeds were private and harmless, they did great offense to their sacred vows, their relationship with each other, and to God.

To restate: curiosity itself is neither good nor bad. Despite the potential for great evil, curiosity also has the potential to spur one onto greatness.

While there is curiosity that inspires vice, that which leads to empty self ‘fulfillment’, there is also a virtuous curiosity that leads to divine fulfillment. This is why curiosity has to go hand-in-hand with temperance and the other Cardinal Virtues. Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote about temperance, the first of the Cardinal Virtues, as something that “gives man’s appetite the capacity to observe reason”

(*Summa Theologica*, I-II, Q. 141, A.5). “[M]an’s appetite”, in this case, is curiosity. Intemperate and unbridled curiosity has the danger of leading one to become like one of the damned in Dante’s *Inferno*. Temperance, while being one of the most important of the Cardinal Virtues to use while exploring one’s curiosity, is supported by other virtues that can also help us and guide us away from our drive for aimless curiosity.

In his expansive *Summa*, Thomas Aquinas also discusses the Cardinal Virtue of Prudence – the ability to judge and to make good decisions. Prudence is taking the step to ask: “Is acting on my curiosity in this way the best way to fulfill my internal wonder?” Without prudence, this question would be impossible to answer. Without prudence, one will not have the moral compass of prepared decision making, and one will have the inability to differentiate between reasonable and unreasonable. The previously mentioned example of Francesca and Paolo from Dante’s *Inferno* rings true here as well. This is a classic example of curiosity without prudence. The lack of prudence led them to judging poorly on future events and their consequences. Had they had more prudent foresight, they would have never have cheated on their spouse and acted on their curiosity in such a heinous matter.

Continuing on this theme of bridling curiosity with the virtues, the third Cardinal Virtue is Fortitude. Fortitude is the act of perseverance, going on, no matter what pain or adversaries you have faced. Pursuing the fulfillment of curiosity doesn’t always bring you comfort. It doesn’t always bring you immediate happiness. Pursuing a virtuous curiosity, including when one considers a vocation to the priesthood with its sacrifice of many worldly pleasures, it isn’t an easy thing. But this is where fortitude comes in. If you are curious about something then this support from the Cardinal Virtues will help you realize the goal of your pursuit – otherwise that curiosity will not lead to anything, only emptiness.

The last of the Cardinal Virtues is Justice. Taken at face value, justice and curiosity are two very separate things, and yet, justice has everything to do with curiosity. Being just requires a certain degree of curiosity. You have to be curious enough to want to do the right things in life, and yet you need to do the right things in life to lead healthy curiosity. The four Cardinal Virtues all play a part in

controlling curiosity so, when utilizing virtuous curiosity, one will have the ability to steer their universal craving of curiosity towards God and life in the world to come with Him.

Though largely a philosophical presentation so far, the study of biology also helps us understand the life of curiosity. Furthermore, it confirms the notion that curiosity is fundamentally a search for *more* and completeness. Specifically we know this, because curiosity makes us happy. The human brain releases dopamine whenever we learn something new, or whenever we satisfy the internal question asking that we have. For example: Did you know that vacuum cleaners were originally horse drawn? Or that sunglasses were originally designed for Chinese judges to hide their facial expressions in court? You might have felt a miniscule dopamine hit when you heard these weird, but true, facts. This is because for thousands of years, humans have been rewarded with a happy feeling whenever they discover something. Curiosity, and the corresponding dopamine hit, is what spurred humans to discover so many different things. From the very first discovery of fire to the discovery of the nuclear bomb, humans have been driven to discover things religious or secular.

Therefore, in conclusion, what does it mean to live a life of curiosity? Simply asking questions for no greater purpose is not a scientific nor a moral form of curiosity, as both of them require an active search for a larger goal. Moral curiosity helps us get to God, while scientific curiosity helps us survive and thrive in the world around us. Curiosity, perhaps, is one of our biggest assets in life both in this world and the next; for thousands of years, humans have displayed curiosity. That's why the human race has been so successful. As much as some people may want to suppress their feelings of curiosity, of wonder, curiosity will always be within us. Therefore, be sure to utilize it to the fullest, by pursuing a virtuous curiosity, one that leads us back to God Himself.

Michael Lou



...joined Saint Paul's Choir School in his fourth-grade year. Almost immediately, he was recognized by the faculty for his easy balance of intellect and athletics. Whether he is acting as

chorister, altar server, athlete or friend, Michael can always be counted on.

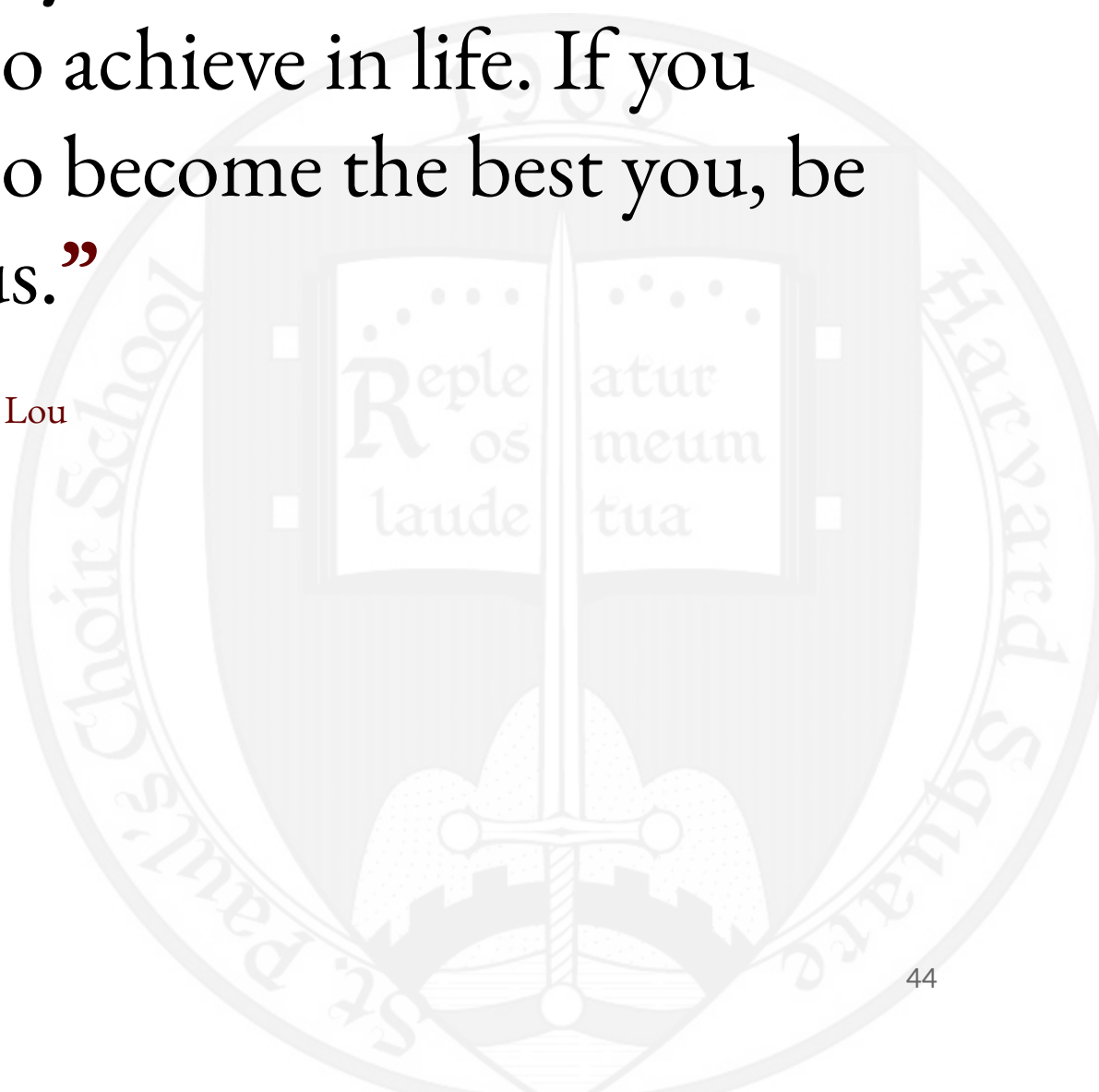
Michael exemplifies curiosity every day in both his attentiveness to his teachers and his active listening. Most often, Michael is actively listening to the tall tales his classmates make up about his alter ego, "Bat Mike." With quiet patience and curiosity, he allows their stories to unfold.

Michael is respected in the Saint Paul's community for his embodiment of the virtue of brotherhood. In his social, scholastic, athletic, and reverent leadership, Michael welcomes and makes time for each classmate.

Michael departs Saint Paul's as a leader of high renown. Next year, he joins Boston University Academy.

“Before we can realize our full potential, we must define what that looks like for us. It is through curiosity that we find what we want to achieve in life. If you want to become the best you, be curious.”

Michael Lou



Towards Peak Performance

BY MICHAEL LOU

Two thousand years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle declared, “All men desire by nature to know.” And I agree! We humans are thinking beings, and therefore it is natural for us to want to know more about ourselves, the people around us, and the world. During our Capstone project, the eighth grade was tasked with the question, *What does it mean to live a life of curiosity?* As children, our parents and teachers constantly encourage us to ask questions and explore. Likewise, in our modern world, we are always told to be curious, to learn, and to develop knowledge. But what does it actually mean to live curiously? The curious man is an adventurous traveler who does not fear the unknown, but rather he seeks the joy of finding beauty and meaning in that which is novel to him. To live a life of curiosity means to live a life of intellectual boldness.

“It’s not enough to have lived. We should be determined to live for something.” These are the words of Winston Churchill who tells us not just to live, but to have a reason for living. Curiosity is the gateway to finding that reason for living. Curiosity is an allowing of a broad intake of information. It enables you to choose that which is most important or meaningful to you. This attitude is crucial because without meaning you have no direction, and without direction happiness is hardly achievable. We humans find happiness when we have a purpose in life. Not having the curiosity to find what you want to strive for in life can have a huge influence on whether or not you are happy. During quarantine in 2020, I was spending the whole day on my computer, I had no direction, no sense of what I wanted to do in life. My routine was to wake up, maybe eat some breakfast, then straight to Youtube for the rest of the day. I was miserable and my life felt empty because I had no purpose in life. I know this will surprise you, but what ended up saving me was the return of school. School gave me purpose, it gave

me meaning, I felt like there was something I had to do everyday. Go out there, find what is meaningful to you, take risks and I promise you will be happy. The last thing you want is to look back at your life with regret, so live it with curiosity; live it to the fullest.

Curiosity is also an openness to the beauty around us. In my life, I have found beauty through learning more about Catholicism. When I first joined Saint Paul's I was very skeptical about anything taught by the Catholic Church; anything said at Mass or in religion class would go in one ear and out the other. I was puzzled as to why people could be so faithfully devoted to God.

One Sunday Mass in the fifth grade, the undergraduate chaplain Fr. Patrick delivered a homily, in which he said that as Catholics, people must have a reason for their faith, and that it is not okay to say that you believe in God just "because." I thought to myself, "That's just it, isn't it! There is no *reason* to believe in God." I was a firm believer that a God figure could not exist. But then I thought to myself, "If I'm going to be at this school for the next three years, I might as well try to get something out of Catholicism." So I did. For the next three years, bound by the tenets of Catholicism and the walls of the school, I let my curiosity lead me. Through attending Mass everyday, and learning from Scripture, God became a much more important piece of the puzzle of life that I am still trying to solve. While I am not yet fully committed to the Catholic faith, I have recognized some truths. What I have learned has definitely made me a better person than where I started. I learned to love and serve others, to develop virtue, and have even started to pray daily. My journey of recognizing the good in what I first found to be dull and uninteresting taught me that finding beauty in something requires hopefulness; it is not something that happens quickly, but is rather a product of patience. Even when you are unsure, if you look for the good, curiosity can lead to beauty in your life. Similarly, I have also found joy in skiing, a sport that I was reluctant to try, but I'm glad that I did. If I had not been open to skiing, I would not have had such great memories or something to look forward to in the winter. If I had not taken that first chair lift up the mountain, I would have never experienced the beauty in the indescribable sensation of skiing down a slope covered in snow. If I had not had the boldness to look at the steep slope and face it head on, I would not have had the satisfaction of conquering my fears and

realizing the true potential held up inside of me. Curiosity allows us to look at something that is seemingly mundane or even frightening, and find beauty in it.

Curiosity is also a responsibility to realize your full potential. If we are not curious about the world around us, we will never be able to become the best people that we can be. If we do not try new things and explore, we are wasting the life that God so graciously gave to us. As the wise Master Oogway says: “If you only do what you can do, you will never be more than you are now.” If you never get out of your comfort zone, you will never grow as a person. Before we can realize our full potential, we must define what that looks like for us. It is through curiosity that we find what we want to achieve in life. If you want to become the best you, be curious.

Curiosity, however, can be a vice if we pursue it aimlessly or for immoral purposes. St. Thomas Aquinas goes on to specify in his *Summa Theologica* four ways that our desire to know can lead us astray. First, we indulge in the vice of curiosity when we put off studying the things we have an obligation to study. With the exponential rise of cell phones, procrastination is more prominent than ever. It has gotten so problematic, in fact, that it is not uncommon to see students skipping their homework entirely. In this case, curiosity is without purpose, realization, or an openness to beauty. Second, St. Thomas Aquinas contends, we offend virtuous study when we seek knowledge from unlawful teachers. A perfect example can be found in *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*. In the movie, Anakin Skywalker, the main character seeks power so he can save his wife Padme from death. However, instead of seeking help from the Jedi masters whom he knows are righteous and trustworthy, he asks Emperor Palpatine, a wicked and selfish man responsible for the death of countless innocent lives. This decision leads to Anakin going down the path of the Dark Side and leads to him murdering his own wife whom he was trying to save! He later becomes Darth Vader, a dark lord who is driven by hatred and rage. Anakin’s blind trust in the unlawful teacher, Palpatine, leads to him becoming a monster who loses all sense of moral direction. Third, Aquinas asserts we hurt true study when we fail to refer things back to their ultimate goal. For St. Thomas and all other Christians the goal of life is heaven. If

we study the world without keeping God as the goal, we will be liable to dangerous errors. If we fail to keep life with God as our final goal, we are distorting everything that we were made for. For example, a student shows up to religion class every day and reads moral lessons in Scripture, but does not apply them to his/her own life; the person learns the words, but fails to apply what was learned to the ultimate goal. Therefore curiosity ceases to be useful. If we do not use our curiosity to lead us to our own individual goals in life, we are using our knowledge in vain.

Finally, we fall into erroneous curiosity when we seek to know what is beyond us. In Genesis, God commands Adam and Eve not to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree; but despite God's warning, they let their curiosity get the best of them and eat the fruit, directly disobeying God. Adam and Eve's curiosity led them to seek what was beyond them, and as a result they committed the first sin. In order not to harm our relationship with God, we must let go of the knowledge that is not ours to know. If curiosity can become a vice, how can we make sure that our curiosity is leading us in the right direction? We should cultivate curiosity that leads us to truth, keeping in mind that truth leads us to discern what purpose is to each of us.

To live a life of curiosity means being bold and taking risks. During the course of my 14 years in this world, I have learned that curiosity can lead to meaning, that it is an openness to the beauty around us, that it is a responsibility to realize your full potential; but also that it can become a vice if pursued aimlessly or without purpose. Through taking risks and exploring things that I was reluctant to discover, I found a path through the maze that is life; and while I still have a long way to go, I am definitely glad that I have begun to live a life of curiosity.

Xavier Maricich



...joined Saint Paul's Choir School in his fifth-grade year. Almost immediately, he was recognized by the faculty for his comprehensive written responses and as a chorister.

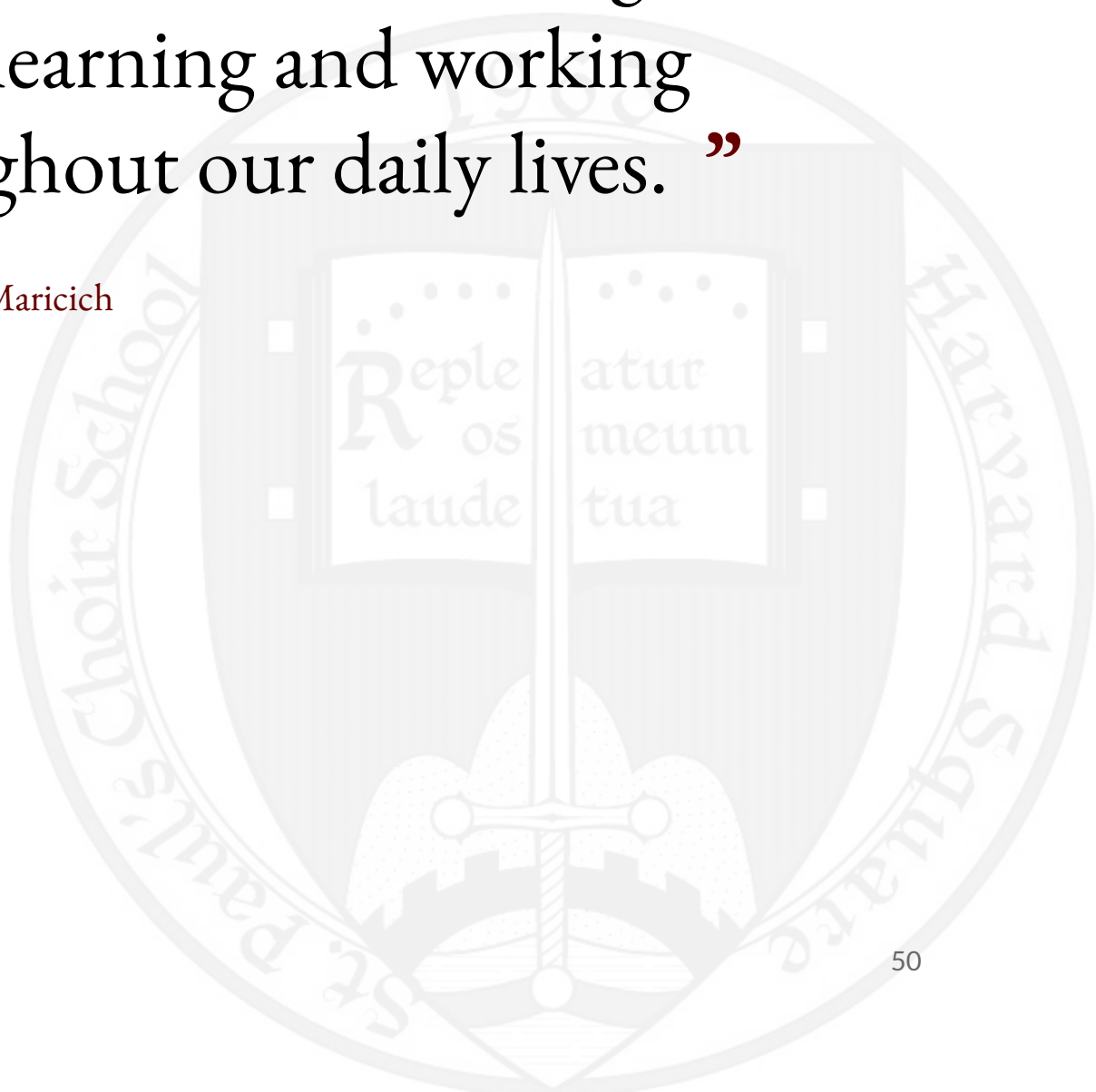
Xavier shares his curiosity everyday. He has a near-encyclopedic knowledge of aircraft, motorcraft, and even the most minute details of World War Two. His curiosity is the contagious kind. Fast facts about the 1940s draw his peers into conversation like moths to light.

Xavier is noted and respected in the Saint Paul's community for his embodiment of the virtue of wonder and, moreso, for his willingness to research and teach himself. The ease with which he shares this knowledge – whether with teachers or peers – always impresses.

Xavier departs Saint Paul's as a scholar of high renown. Next year, he joins Roxbury Latin.

“Curiosity is essential to a meaningful life because curiosity transforms the mundane into items of wonder, allowing us to enjoy learning and working throughout our daily lives. ”

Xavier Maricich



Ordinary to Extraordinary

BY XAVIER MARICICH

Curiosity. We have all been curious before. Maybe you were broadly curious about how the human body works or maybe specifically about how to beat that one level in Super Mario Bros. Today, I am going to be answering a much bigger question about curiosity: What does it mean to live a life of curiosity? Let's first define curiosity. Curiosity is the want or desire to know or learn about the world around us. Based on this definition, I believe curiosity is essential to a meaningful life because curiosity transforms the mundane into items of wonder, allowing us to enjoy learning and working throughout our daily lives.

Curiosity provides a drive to understand who we are, based on where we come from, and what we are passionate about. In Mrs. Flaherty's presentation, she spoke about how she was curious about her past, so she decided to learn about her family and their history. Her presentation encouraged me to learn more about my family, especially my great grandfather who stormed Normandy on D-Day, and I discovered he was a medic who won many medals, which I did not know about and made me feel very appreciative of him. In addition, in Ada Zhu's presentation, she mentioned that curiosity sparks learning, which includes discovering what we like and do not like in life, including our hobbies and work. This is true for all of us. For example, you may like cooking or bike riding or in my case, history, but the only way we would have discovered that passion is through being curious and trying new things.

In addition to learning more about ourselves, curiosity also is the first step in discernment in our daily lives. Curiosity allows us to take information and incorporate it into decisions we make in

school and our jobs. According to Eudiotopia by the George Lucas Educational Foundation, curiosity enhances learning because, when we are curious we ask questions and that encourages us to learn more. Moreover, Thomas Clark, an MIT PhD student, mentioned in his presentation that at first, he did not know what to do for a career, but he decided to be curious and try computer science, which led him to discover his own talent. This curiosity prompted him to take big steps in life to pursue this career and encouraged him to seek out other interests, such as the human brain and Artificial Intelligence. His experience shows us that curiosity can help us know how to direct our path and make important life decisions.

Proper use of curiosity is both a responsibility and a necessity in life. Curiosity will help you study better and learn more. And a good education will provide the foundation for being able to pursue a vocation and career that is meaningful. In my own life, curiosity has helped me in my education in surprising ways. While I love God, I did not think I would ever be interested in theology. But during my time at the Choir School, I have had wonderful teachers like Mrs. Celano and Mr. Davis, who have nurtured my curiosity in philosophy, theology, and ethics, all of which are interesting and will be essential to my future career, no matter what I choose to do. And curiosity has also rewarded me with new hobbies. For instance, when I was younger, I really only liked fictional things, like Star Wars. However, over time, I decided to be curious about world history, which instantly spurred a deep love of history and non-fiction work, like biographies. This taught me that curiosity was necessary for both developing a meaningful life, as well as side interests or hobbies.

Last but not least, curiosity also brings us closer to God. Curiosity is the desire to want or know something we do not know about yet. Curiosity leads us to learn about the world around us, which was all made by God for a specific use, whether humans use it for good or bad. By learning about creation, we are able to appreciate it, and in turn, God. We grow closer to Him when we admire Him and his creations. Furthermore, we can also be curious about God himself, who is an eternal mystery to humans due to the fact that current human brains, which are still flawed, cannot fully comprehend Him and the Holy Trinity. But by being curious about Him, we can grow in faith, become closer to Him, and enjoy His creation.

However, for as great as curiosity is, you should not base your entire life around curiosity. In Mr. Nemeč's presentation, he spoke about the vices of curiosity. A bad example of curiosity is waiting time by spending your entire day falling into the youtube or social media rabbit hole because you were curious about one video. Another instance of the vice of curiosity is becoming too focused on one subject in school while ignoring your other classes. Another is over-curiosity about other people, which can lead to gossip. These are all examples of the disordered use of curiosity, which may lead to wasted life, ignoring of responsibilities, or hurting people. Nevertheless, curiosity should still be incorporated in one's life so you can be responsible and discover what you are passionate about, so that you can make the most of your education and lead a meaningful life.

Now that I have told you about curiosity and its pros and cons, it's time to show you how to incorporate curiosity into our daily lives. In a speech by Admiral Mcraven, a former elite navy seal, if we want to change the world, we have to take risks. This is the same with curiosity. If you want to learn new, fun, or good things or accomplish big things in life, you have to be curious, which can be risky. I know taking risks may seem concerning or even scary at some points, but in the end it is worth it. In my life, I was very scared of how to ride a bike even though I was curious and wanted to learn. However, I took risks and decided to push through and with a little bit of bravery, I found my new favorite thing to do in the spring and summer. When I started at the Choir School I was curious about the singing, but I knew singing would be a risk. What if I was bad?! But by taking the risk, I became a part of an incredible choir, learned I loved singing, and have had many wonderful experiences - like singing for Pope Francis. These experiences taught me that curiosity alone does not help you learn or grow, but paired with other virtues, like wisdom, fortitude, etc, you can accomplish almost anything whether it be school, work, or even just fun. So that's why you should incorporate it into your life, no matter what it is, from just sitting at a different table and meeting new people at lunch, or maybe even researching a little bit more on a topic in science class because you found it interesting. All of these things, no matter how small, contribute to you discovering new and wonderful things in life. Sometimes you might fall and sometimes you will succeed, but in the end, the risk to be curious is worth it and will lead you to have a better and more fulfilling life in the end.

Curiosity is essential for a meaningful life because it changes the ordinary into extraordinary. Curiosity has changed the way I have thought about the world, how I should live my life, and has brought me closer to God. It especially helped me appreciate that every part of life is wonderful, even school and jobs, not just freetime. Every single moment in life should be appreciated and with just a little bit of curiosity, it can be so much easier to enjoy and have a deep and holy life through good friends, hobbies, interests, schools, and jobs.

Olivier Trevor



...joined Saint Paul's Choir School in his sixth-grade year. Olivier possesses a real gift for bringing out the best in those around him. His kindness and encouraging words reveal how much he thinks of others before himself.

Olivier's cheerfulness also conveys a deep foundation of gratitude that he cultivates

in his heart. As a result, he was recognized by the faculty for his leadership capabilities.

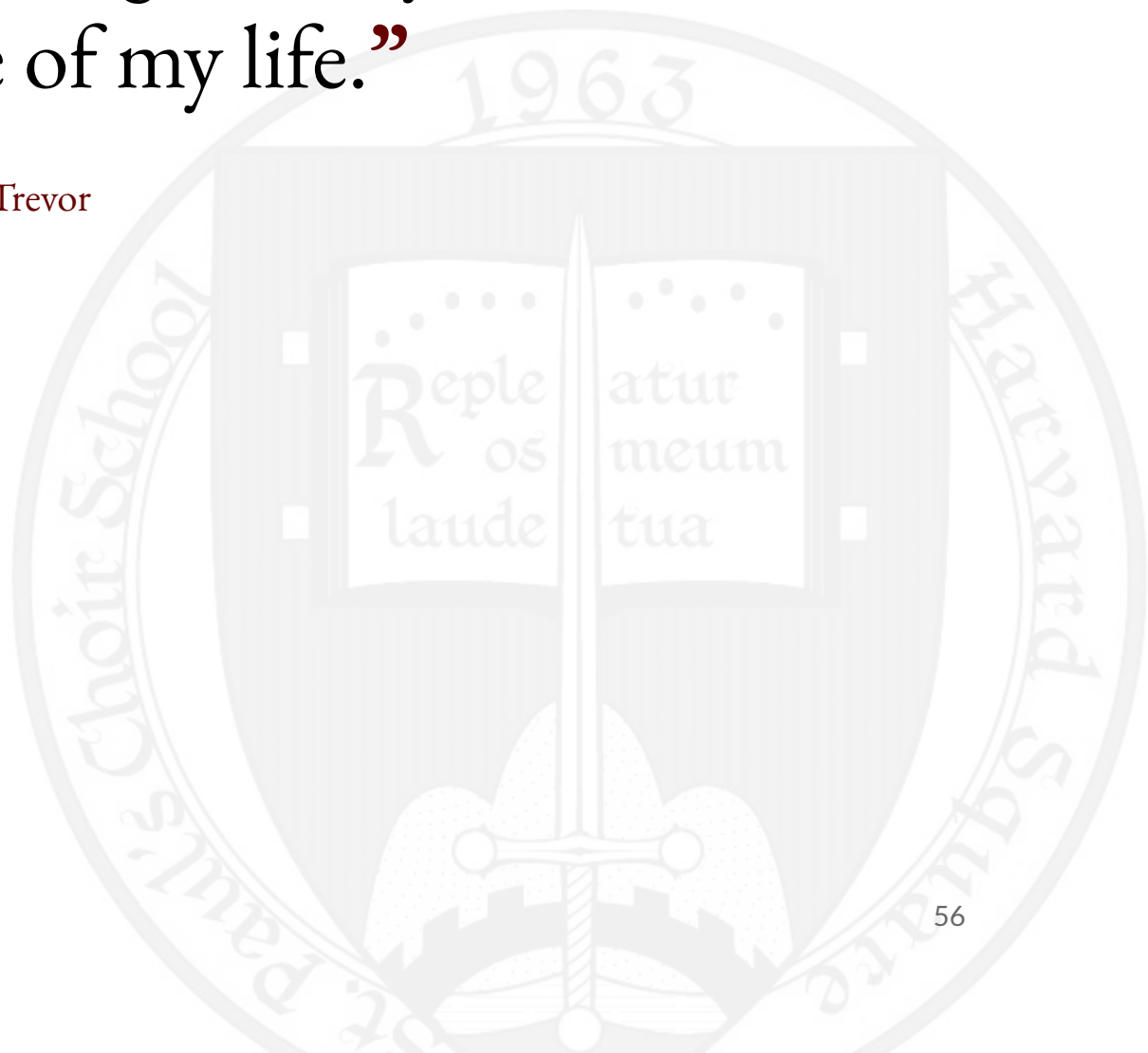
Whether he is speaking at a school assembly or speaking to the entire St. Paul's community at our Gala this year, Olivier models compassionate leadership for his peers.

In his Capstone essay, Olivier analyzed how curiosity is interwoven into the story of a person's life – using many examples but notably, including his own. His passion for music – and especially, the violin– brings energy to his peers amidst the routine of school days.

Olivier is noted and respected in the Saint Paul's community for his embodiment of the virtue of brotherhood. Olivier departs Saint Paul's as a leader in charity. Next year, he joins Boston College High School.

“That very first introduction to music opened a gateway of curiosity that has developed and advanced gradually over the course of my life.”

Olivier Trevor



Curiosity: the Music of Life

BY OLIVIER TREVOR

At the young age of four, I had the tremendous opportunity to experience a concert at Boston's Symphony Hall. That first introduction to music opened a gateway of curiosity that has developed and crescendoed over the course of my life. My first taste of music set in motion a love for music and desire to understand more deeply. It planted a seed within me that formed my perspective on how I look at life. In my presentation I will share my reflections on curiosity and show how it takes many forms because of the vast differences in perspectives from which it emerges but, nevertheless, often leads to outcomes that are either extremely beneficial or extremely detrimental. According to the Webster Dictionary, perspective is defined as "aiding the vision, relating to or employing or seeing in perspective, the technique or process of representing on a plane the spatial relation of objects as they appear to the eye, defined as a particular attitude toward or way of regarding something; a point of view." People can have a point of view towards curiosity. Among the various opinions one may have about curiosity, I believe that the best perspective to take is to use curiosity to learn.

In the philosophical world, a name that appears quite often is Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas has distinguished himself as one of the foremost philosophers over the centuries, particularly known for his *Summa Theologica*. His work has a very simple but fruitful definition of how the human mind is related with curiosity. Aquinas writes that the human soul is inclined to desire knowledge. In question 166 of the *Summa Theologica* he writes, "Now just as in respect of his corporeal nature man naturally desires the pleasures of food and love, so, in respect of his soul, he naturally desires to know something; thus the philosopher observes at the beginning of his *Metaphysics* : "All men have a natural desire for knowledge." What Aquinas contends here is that just as men desire food and love naturally, they also

have a natural desire for knowledge. However, this “natural desire for knowledge” can lead to different outcomes. For instance, the philosopher Dionysius describes a positive outcome when he states, “The good of the human soul is to be in accordance with reason,” whose perfection consists in knowing the truth. Therefore, we know that sometimes knowing the truth can be beneficial to the human soul.

St. Augustine’s writing demonstrates that the vice of curiosity might be in relation to the knowledge that we gain through our senses. Augustine states that “concupiscence of the eyes makes men curious.” Augustine later came to the conclusion that the “concupiscence of the eyes” can lead to such feelings as lust, greed and gluttony. An example of this is the story of King David and Bathsheba. David was overwhelmed with curiosity. Instead of protecting Bathsheba’s sanctity and her vow to her husband Uriah, David pursued Bathsheba. They then proceeded to form one of the Bible’s most scandalous love affairs. Further, David was so desperate to possess Bathsheba that he sent her husband into the frontline of battle, fully knowing her husband would die. David demonstrates this “concupiscence of the eyes” that Augustine speaks of. This biblical story shows us that we are vulnerable to the things we look at, and those things can lead us to acts of lust, hatred, and untruth. From this we can see that man’s natural desire for knowledge is not always a good thing, even if it is a crucial part of man’s well being.

Throughout most of my life, I have been a musician. I have conducted, composed, and played the violin for eight years. I have also played the piano and sung daily for three years. For eight years I have performed breathtaking pieces by composers ranging from Bach all the way to Aaron Copeland. Over these years I have developed an unbreakable bond with music. However, that was not the case for me prior to these eight years. On a rather warm spring day in 2015, I attended a performance at Boston’s Symphony Hall. I stared at the musicians, amazed at how they seemed so focused, yet so expressive and unshackled at the same time. Although the conductor was covered in sweat and looked extremely tired, he moved his arms so expressively in sync with the music. After the performance, I tirelessly asked my parents questions until they could bear it no longer. I was so curious and captivated by the experience. That curiosity about music never ended and I am sure it will never end. Of course, I no longer ask unending questions to my parents, but I believe that this same curiosity has simply taken

a different form. I believe that curiosity has turned into a passion, a deep love, and a dedication for me. As German composer Johann Sebastian Bach states, "The more you wonder the more you know, the more you know the more you appreciate, and the more you appreciate the more you love."

Because I was curious about music, my life was completely changed. I met new, important people, learned and performed under excellent teachers and conductors and even performed on the world's greatest stages. My profound curiosity in music also gifted me another life changing experience: Saint Paul's Choir School. If it weren't for my curiosity in music, I wouldn't have discovered Saint Paul's. My curiosity in music gave me the opportunity to sing praise for God daily at Mass and form a brotherhood with my fellow students. Curiosity can sometimes lead to great amounts of love, beauty and prosperity.

Creativity is another form of curiosity. Many times in my life I have been curious about problems and how to fix them. For example, when I was around ten years old, I struggled with practicing my violin. This problem continued until one night I became curious about how I could fix this problem. I asked my teachers and parents questions, and I later developed a better practicing method. Another example of this is the amazing story of Jim Abbot. In the 1970's a young Jim Abbott dreamed of pitching in the world series. There was just one problem, his right arm was amputated. He was bullied and made fun of and often was not even allowed to play on little league teams. He was heartbroken but curious about how he could fix this problem. This led him to be creative, and fifteen years of hard work later, he pitched in the world series for the Yankees. Even though he had a disadvantage, Abbott was eager to learn, and through this he was able to create. Curiosity can lead us to solve problems, but most importantly, it can lead us to be creative.

Curiosity in our modern society has a tremendous effect on youth. During my reflection on curiosity, I found that even the downside of being curious can lead to something beneficial. Now, I am sure everyone, as a young toddler, has been curious about the stove. Maybe some of you even touched it. I remember actually climbing onto the stove and burning my stomach in the process. But when you find yourself at home today, you don't randomly put your hand on the stove do you? This is because

you were burned this one time in your youth, and because you were burned that one time in your youth, you learned never to do it again. If we are curious about new things that we don't know are dangerous, we may get hurt but we can learn from the experience.

During our teens, curiosity, especially when paired up with social media, video, or texting platforms can be very harmful, leading to cyberbullying, depression, or unending hours staring at a screen. In Mr. Nemeč's presentation, he expressed that the vice of curiosity can sometimes never be satisfied. As a teen myself, I sometimes go to YouTube on my phone with the intention of watching one single video. When I start watching that one video, my mind is soon distracted by another video that seems more interesting. The same process happens again and again until I'm stopped by someone else. If I'm alone, I can sometimes keep watching videos for hours. My mind is constantly curious about another video which leads me to watch it. This is an example of curiosity that can never be satisfied.

For all that curiosity brings to life, I believe that there are better ways to engage in curious behaviors than others. As I shared in my stories, the most compelling way to pursue curiosity is when there is an outcome that is beneficial, like learning. In fact, while you always learn something through curiosity, I appreciate Mr. Nemeč's guidance that if you have a goal for your learning, you are able to limit the time spent. Finally, the best outcome, as Bach said, is that you can use your learning to develop a passion that you love, as I did with music, you will have a found meaning in your life.

Isaac Tsang



...joined Saint Paul's Choir School in his fourth-grade year. Ever since arriving at St. Paul's, Isaac has brought his dry sense of humor, analytical mind and impressive musical

talent to our community. In small moments during the school day, it is evident how deeply he cares for his classmates and the loyalty that he demonstrates in all his friendships.

Isaac can often be found teaching a younger student how to solve a Rubix cube quickly or battling other students on the chessboard. It is fitting thus that for his Capstone essay, his strategic mind intuited how curiosity is like a tool to be wielded, a neutral mechanism that needs wisdom as a guide.

In a real sense, Isaac has served as a guide for his classmates, consistently leading his peers as the verger for the Choir each day before Mass. He departs Saint Paul's as a leader with wit and wisdom. Next year, he joins Quincy Public High School.

“Curiosity can be a vice or a virtue depending on how it is used, like any tool, its use depends on the context and its user.”

Isaac Tsang



Curiosity as a Tool

BY ISAAC TSANG

My name is Isaac Tsang and I am in the eighth grade. My class and I have worked on the Capstone Project for the past few months, in which we studied about what it means to live a life of curiosity. First, we should define curiosity. My definition of curiosity is as follows: “Curiosity can be a vice or a virtue depending on how it is used, like any tool, its use depends on the context and its user.”

Many people view curiosity in a negative way, for example, the saying “Curiosity killed the cat,” which seems to indicate that curiosity is one of the deadliest traits a person can have. Another example is the myth of Pandora’s box that teaches its readers that curiosity is dangerous to not only you, but everyone else. In the myth, Zeus gave a box to Pandora and told her not to open it, but curiosity overtook her and she opened the box and released bad things into the world such as sorrow, disease, vice, violence, greed, madness, old age, and death.

From these examples we will start to think that living a life of curiosity is bad. However, curiosity can be used for good. For example, curiosity led Jeffrey Katzenberg to leave Disney and co-found DreamWorks in 1994, and that led to the creation of many great and memorable movies. Another example of curiosity used as a virtue is how curiosity can lead people to finding new hobbies. For example, when I was in the second grade, I visited St. Paul’s Choir School and became curious about what it would be like to become a singer at St. Paul’s. Curiosity also led me to learn piano when I was young, which reinforced my skill in singing and my musicianship. Curiosity can act as a virtuous tool or a weapon depending on how the person acts within the context of the situation. Therefore, living a life of curiosity can be both good or bad depending on you.

In Dante’s *Inferno*, we go through Hell as Dante, accompanied by Virgil, a renowned poet and our guide. We see the negative effects of curiosity and how living a life of curiosity can lead people to Hell. For example, we see Ulysses, who set sail to the end of the world and abandoned his family. His

punishment is that he stays burning for eternity in the eighth circle. In the second circle, “the circle of lust”, we see Francesca, who abandoned her husband for his younger brother, Paolo. In Hell, both Francesca and Paolo are stuck in an endless tempest. Their lustful curiosity was based on physical pleasures, so as their punishment, Francesca and Paolo in the storm had the opposite effect of physical pleasures.

We learned from Mr. Brook’s presentation that curiosity can be a vice without discipline. Thomas Aquinas wrote: “Temperance withdraws us from pleasures to which nature inclines.” This moderates our curiosity and with Temperance, curiosity can act as a virtue. Without Temperance, curiosity acts as a vice, an example of curiosity without temperance is Pandora’s box, using curiosity without a guiding question, and just because you are curious. This is not the point of curiosity, and using curiosity aimlessly is pointless. One must live a life of curiosity while moderating its use with Temperance.

Thomas Aquinas teaches us that curiosity without a guiding question can become a vice. However, curiosity with a guiding question and an aim is a virtue. We have to understand why we are drawn towards things that are outrageous or unlikely, and a guiding question can help us explore these things rationally. Thomas Aquinas wrote: “Man’s mind is drawn, on account of his affections, towards the things for which he has an affection.” This means that we are naturally drawn towards things which we have “an affection” for. He explains this further when he states: “man seeks to know how he may best sustain his body.” We have a natural urge to seek things that sustain us, like food and shelter. These are necessities for our survival and curiosity drives us to seek these things. Living a life of curiosity is good in this way, but without a guiding question, curiosity will act as a vice.

Mr. Moran showed us that curiosity is a responsibility. We should be curious about the people around us, and try to see things from other people’s perspectives. Comics have a flashy front page which grabs your attention. This makes you curious and want to learn the contents of the comic book, and things in the comic book are good, for example, they can teach you the values of being a hero, how to counteract racism, and helps you understand those around you. Being curious about other things or people can allow you to experience or see the world in a different way. Comics and even Youtube videos usually have a flashy appearance that draws your attention toward them and they can help you better

understand the people and the world around you. Curiosity should be used with meaning, and a question in mind. Without meaning you have no direction and without direction happiness is hardly achievable, and this is why curiosity is a responsibility.

One learns and finds new things because of curiosity. You can start a new hobby, or, in Jeffrey Katzenberg's case, direct multiple award winning films. Katzenberg was the chairman of Walt Disney, but in 1994, he left and co-founded DreamWorks. He used curiosity as a tool to build something new. I joined this school because of curiosity, wondering and pondering just like Katzenberg. Living a life of curiosity, as Katzenberg shows us, can be good. He is a great example of how living a life of curiosity is not necessarily bad, like Francesca and Ulyses, but can be good. Just like Jeffrey Katzenberg, we learn new things and explore new hobbies because of curiosity.

Living a life of curiosity is not necessarily good nor bad. We see in Francesca how, without an aim or discipline, curiosity can lead to Hell. However, we have also seen how living a life of curiosity can be good. Curiosity is like a hammer: it can build or destroy a house, it just depends on how you use it. In my life, and my friends' lives, we will continue to use curiosity to help us through high school and our lives as a whole.

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Saint Paul's Choir School celebrates our graduates!

Congratulations to this remarkable group of young men. It was our pleasure to teach you. Best of luck to each of you at your new schools and thank you for your service to Saint Paul's and the Church as students, servers, and choristers. We wish you all the best!

Sincerely,

Your teachers, priests, and administrators



Saint Paul's Choir School

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