

June 2020



SAINT CATHERINE CENTER FOR *Special Needs*

Graduation 2020: Reasons to be Thankful Every Day

Although the outdoor venue was different, Saint Catherine Academy Graduation 2020 was no less joyful for this year's graduates, Ronald Scott and Elise Hilton. The two were celebrated in a ceremony at the Center with immediate family, staff, and a few classmates in attendance.

Monsignor Robert Weiss, pastor of St. Rose of Lima Church in Newtown and Center Board Member, led the prayer service and offered a short homily in which he noted that even while the pandemic has taken away so much from many, it has also reminded us of what really matters in life. "You truly see the goodness of people... Certainly today is an example of that as we celebrate Elise and Ronald and the great gift that they are for each one of us, the love and joy they bring us in their own unique ways, reminding us of the preciousness and joy of life."

Lorraine Hilton, Elise's mother, offered Prayers of the Faithful. After the presentation of diplomas, Eric Spencer, Principal, read words of affirmation from staff about the graduates, noting Elise for her "warm, angelic smile" and Ronald for his "great spirit and enthusiasm." Ronald was also one of several students recognized by the Diocese with the St. Thomas Aquinas award for academic improvement and exemplifying Gospel values through service to others.

In his closing prayer, Msgr. Weiss repeated the message of the scripture reading. "The message today is to be grateful," he said. "Even in the midst of our darkest moments, to find reasons to be thankful. Certainly this holy place provides reasons for being thankful every day."

The ceremony closed with a lively version of "This Little Light of Mine," a Saint Catherine Academy tradition. "It was a



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wonderful day, in the true Saint Catherine way,” Helen Burland, Executive Director commented.

Reopening Plans

After a building-wide deep cleaning this month, the Academy is set to open for a four-week summer school session beginning July 6, expecting some students to attend in-person, and some to continue with virtual programming. From pick-up and drop-off, to mask-wearing, daily temperature checks, and maintaining small groups, the protocol has been carefully developed. “We are following the State and CDC guidelines closely and are implementing this plan with confidence,” said Helen Burland, Executive Director. “The summer session will be a template for fall.” [Details of the plan](#) are available on the Academy website.

The reopening of the Adult Program, which serves almost twice as many individuals, is more complex. Guidelines from the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) were announced just last week, and have multiple restrictions due to the vulnerability of much of the special needs population. Following those guidelines, we expect half of our adult participants to return to onsite programming starting mid-July, with a goal of full attendance by October. Over the next month, we will be reassessing the use of space at the Center to provide for the required social distancing.

“It’s going to require patience, flexibility, and a lot of creativity,” said Helen. “Luckily between our parents and staff we have all three of these qualities.”

Joke-of-the-Day, the Patrick Ross Way

The theme of the morning Zoom session was Ducks, and as usual Patrick Ross had an appropriate Joke-of-the-Day. “What did the duck have for dinner?” Pause. “Cheese and *quackers!*” The joke was followed by the usual guffaws and exclamations, “That was a good one, Patrick!”

Patrick, age 31, was one of the first participants in the Adult Program when it opened in March 2015. Memorizing jokes started as a form of speech therapy when he was just 5 or 6 years old, according to his father Bob Ross. Patrick learns his jokes from “joke boxes” at home that allow him to control the content (“gross” or “regular”) and topic of the joke. He can also specify a topic and ask Alexa to tell him a joke. “After that, it’s all about repetition,” said Bob. “He’s probably got about 100 jokes ready to go at any one time.”

While Patrick does not understand all of the jokes he tells, he definitely appreciates the positive responses he receives. The Joke-of-the-Day ritual has continued online during the daily Zoom session these past few months. Some of Patrick’s jokes are more gross than others (“*What do you do if your nose goes on strike? You pick it!*”), and Patrick claims he has a “degree in gross-ology.”



“He has a genuine desire to make people laugh,” Bob said. “It allows him to break the ice in a conversation, or when meeting someone new.” Jokes are also the entrée to less scripted conversation with others, a place to establish trust.

“Jokes diffuse tension and anxiety for Patrick, as well as for others,” said Pat Gorman, a direct service provider who often works with him. “They lift our spirits, and our laughter tells Patrick that he not only belongs, but is loved by us.”



[Click here to enjoy a couple of duck jokes from Patrick](#)

Inspired by Our Volunteers

During National Volunteer Week in April, the Center recognized several of the many volunteers who help us in our mission. Whether they are making sandwiches with us on PB&J Fridays, running the Library Program, coming up with creative projects while we've been at home, or guiding the future of our organization, our volunteers inspire us. Visit our [Volunteering page](#) to find out more about these individuals and groups.



DONATE NOW

**Please support our mission.
Now, more than ever, your contribution is greatly appreciated.**

 *Joy and Gratitude* 

Our annual "Joy & Gratitude" Dinner is now scheduled for Sunday, October 11. More details to follow!

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[Saint Catherine Academy](#)

