



# SAINTS SCENE



**HIGH SURF.** Yes, St. Augustine is also Surf High as team member Nico Barreto ('26) smoothly navigates his epic wave during Saints "winter" sports surf competition vs. Santa Fe Christian. Image is a preview of Saints Scene's upcoming February Winter Sports Review. *Photo: Saints Dad Mr. Bill Hill.*

## The Road Together When a Calling Comes Calling

By Edwin Hearn, President,  
St. Augustine High School



President Edwin Hearn

On certain days of the week, the Union-Tribune runs two or three obituaries of people of significance

who have recently died. They come from every possible walk of life. I've always found these stories compelling. Whether the deceased was a jazz musician, physicist, artist, politician, or some other notable figure, each life

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## Love for Wisdom & Passion for the Truth

Dear Parents and Friends,



Principal James Horne

In an age of information overload St. Augustine High School must be especially attentive in its instruction to strike the delicate balance between human experience and understanding. What we want to avoid is having classes of Saintsmen say, "We had the experience but missed the meaning."

Our mission at Saints is to do far more than convey information to passive students. Our faculty is committed daily to the cultivation of a passion for truth in the students they serve. We aspire to teach love for wisdom, habituating each student to desire learning and to find delight in self discovery. This is the essence of the Augustinian value of truth (veritas).

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## New Year's Prayer

By Fr. John Sanders, O.S.A; Principal 1988–2000

Allow me to enter the new year in the security of Your love and with a grateful heart. Grant good health, true wisdom and the gift of faith to all those I cherish and love.

Free me from any disappointment, loss, or attitude of failure, which might keep me from the joy of Your presence in my daily life. Lift away anxiety or worry which cloud the direction of my life, and invite me to journey new paths when necessary.

Fill me with charity, truthfulness and a concern for others. Let me transform my weaknesses into strengths and trade my pride for the gift of humility. Give to all people of goodwill a desire to make our world a safe haven of peace, true justice, and a place where hunger and homelessness are unknown.

Amen.



# Flag Football Tradition Continues

## 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Parochial Football Tournament

By Billy Morstad ('12) Alumni Relations Coordinator, Photos courtesy of Dave Knoll '75

On a sun-drenched December Saturday, seven of San Diego's parochial schools gathered on the Saints campus for the 29th Annual Parochial Flag Football Tournament, continuing a tradition that has become a highlight of the season. As in years past, competition was divided into Varsity and Junior Varsity divisions, setting the stage for a full day of spirited play.

This year, however, there was little mystery about the final outcome. St. Michael's Crusaders of Poway proved dominant, capturing championships in both divisions.

The Varsity field included teams from St. Michael's of Poway, St. Rose of Lima, St. Patrick's of Carlsbad, and St. Columba. Junior Varsity competition featured St. Michael's of Poway, St. Patrick's of North Park, All Hallows Academy, and the School of the Madeleine.

Morning semifinal matchups were closely contested, with one game even stretching into overtime, underscoring the talent and determination on display.

By the afternoon, the championship games were set. St. Michael's advanced both of its teams, facing All Hallows Academy in the Junior Varsity final and St. Rose of Lima in the Varsity championship.

It was the Crusaders' day, as they claimed both titles. The Varsity squad earned its fourth consecutive championship and its fifth title in the last six years, continuing an impressive run of success.



St. Michael's Varsity.



St. Michael's JV.

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Where Are They Now

# Saints Grad David Popkins ('08) in the World Series

By John Cook ('26) Staff Writer,  
The Augustinian and Liam Olds ('26)  
Editor-in-Chief, *The Augustinian*.



David Popkins, Head Batting Coach for the Toronto Blue Jays, appeared in last year's MLB World Series with the team.

The Toronto Blue Jays clinched the American League Pennant on October 20, 2025, sending them to the World Series for the first time in 32 years. Propelled by their bats, the Blue Jays can attribute some of their success to Saintsman David Popkins.

Popkins, the hitting coach for the Blue Jays, graduated from Saints in 2008.. He was a four-year varsity baseball player, a CIF Finalist in 2007 and won four league titles with the Saints. He was First Team All-Eastern League both as a junior and a senior and was awarded CIF Player of the Year in 2008. He played under Coach Craig da Luz, who took over as head coach the year after Popkins's departure.

"Coach da Luz is the man," Popkins said. "He is an excellent coach and he really helped me as a player."

When he came to Saints, Popkins cited the school's challenging atmosphere as an avenue for growth.

"The ability to learn, to grow, to always be better, to be competitive with your peers, you know? Discipline in the dress code and our schedules and just having to grind through the academics [at Saints]. It wasn't easy, so it was good to continue to challenge and continue to learn and progress as a person. And I think all of that, all of those skills that I learned there really helped me in my career," Popkins said.

Popkins played for UC Davis after high school. He spent a few years in the minors playing in independent leagues, and he got as high as AA ball in the Cardinals system. Popkins primarily played in the corner outfield.

"I didn't get many balls out there, so I could really think about what I was going to do in my next at bat. That's probably what I liked the most about it," Popkins chuckled.

Then he turned to coaching.

Despite not having any salaried coaching positions available, Dodgers hitting coach Robert Van Scoyoc wanted Popkins in the Dodgers system. They signed Popkins to a minor league deal where he was to serve as a player coach, not appearing on the field in any games. In 2019, Popkins started coaching for the Arizona Dodgers in the Arizona League, before moving to the Great Lakes Loons, a Dodgers High-A affiliate. While Popkins coached the Loons, the team hit more home runs than all but two of the 90 teams in Class A and AA.

In an interview last month with *The Athletic*, Popkins said he became "addicted to finding out why good hitters are really good. Why certain guys have really good years, it was like this puzzle." He spent his time in the Dodgers organization bouncing ideas off "equally addicted hitting minds" like Will Rhymes, Josh Byrnes, and Will Vandenberg

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Start your Valentine celebration  
and join us for our annual

## Saints Parent Social

Saturday February 7th, 2026  
5:30 – 8:30pm

St. Augustine High School Commons  
\$10 per person

Register at [www.sahs.org](http://www.sahs.org)



# Textbook Purchase and Rental Information



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## 10 Things to Do as a Saints Parent Before Your Son Graduates



1. Join the school community for a Wednesday Mass
2. Run the Turkey Trot – yes, parents can run too!
3. Attend a Christmas Concert or Musical
4. Experience the Junior Mass and Brunch
5. Enjoy a St. Monica's Prayer group Potluck
6. Kick off a school year at the Family Mass and BBQ
7. Make memories at the Father / Son Breakfast
8. Encourage your son to serve at Hogar Infantil orphanage
9. Volunteer to support/chair an APA event
10. SENIOR Moms – don't miss the Mother / Son Lunch

# AROUND CAMPUS



## Bishop Pham Celebrates Mass at Saints

Customarily the Saints Chaplain invites parish priests from around the county to join us and celebrate Mass. Recently we were blessed to have San Diego Bishop Pham join the Saints Community for a weekly mass.

Michael Pham (full name Michael Phạm Minh Cường) was born in Da Nang, Vietnam in 1967 and came to the United States as a child refugee after fleeing Vietnam with some of his siblings in 1980. His family eventually settled in San Diego in 1985. He graduated from San Diego High School and earned a bachelor's degree in aeronautical engineering at San Diego State University, later feeling called to the priesthood and completing seminary training at Saint Patrick's Seminary in Menlo Park.

He was ordained a priest for the Diocese of San Diego in 1999 and served in parish ministry and diocesan leadership roles, including vocations director, pastor, vicar for ethnic and intercultural communities, and vicar general. In 2023 he was appointed auxiliary bishop of San Diego, and on May 22, 2025, Pope Leo XIV named him Bishop of San Diego.

He was installed in that role on July 17, 2025, becoming the first Vietnamese-American to head a U.S. Catholic diocese. Bishop Pham is known for promoting unity across cultural communities and advocating for the dignity of immigrants and refugees.



San Diego Bishop Michael Pham celebrates Mass at Saints.



## Record Setter

Earlier this Fall the Union-Tribune named Saints Varsity Football player Pai Polamalu as Player of the Week after the Junior set the one-game school rushing record gaining 316 yards and scoring four touchdowns in its 41-35 win over La Jolla High. The previous record was 298 yards by Elijah Preston in 2014.



## JV Basketball Wins Pre-Season Tourney

Saints Basketball JVers were victorious in this Fall's Holiday Classic Tournament that was held on campus. The Champs are (left to right): Lucius Wagner, Kade Gibbons, Peter Graves, Daniel Amare, Andre Dennis, Anthony Moyad, Brandon Williams, Steven Haskett, Ryan Hanniger, JJ McCoy, Daniel Horne, Matthew Prior, Leo Selig, Gus Carranza Tellez, Cooper Hamric, Coach Mike DeCeles, and Coach Alex Davis.



## Flag Football Tradition Continues

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The event was made possible by the generous efforts of Loyal Sons student volunteers and Alumni Association members who refereed games, operated the scoreboard, ran the concession grill, and documented the day through photography.



**GREAT GUYS!** Special thanks are due to alumni volunteers.

[From left to right:]  
Justin Williams '91,  
Jacob Real-Wisnew '27,  
Lance Klem '88,  
Joe Giammarinaro '89,  
Phil Sciuto '79,  
Christian Curiel '92,  
Fred Castro '90, and  
Dom Giammarinaro '92.



### TOURNEY TALK.

Saints Varsity Basketball Coach Mike Haupt addresses Varsity and JV participants.



### CAFE SAINTS.

Teams sharing a well earned meal after their scrimmage.

**Note:** With another successful year in the books, anticipation is already building for next year's milestone 30th edition of the tournament. Alumni and friends interested in helping carry on this tradition are encouraged to contact Phil Sciuto at [president@alumnisahs.org](mailto:president@alumnisahs.org).

## Love for Wisdom & Passion for the Truth

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In an ad limina address to a group of American bishops a little more than a decade ago, Pope John Paul II pinpointed the importance of having a correct grasp of truth if the Church's educational efforts are to bear fruit:

*"The greatest challenge to Catholic education in the United States today, and the greatest contribution that authentically Catholic education can make to American culture, is to restore to that culture the conviction that human beings can grasp the truth of things, and, in grasping that truth, can know their duties to God, to themselves and their neighbors."*

As we embrace the New Year, I pray that the school community will experience a year filled with purposeful, gracious living that seeks the truth in all things.

Yours in the Spirit of Catholic Education,

James Horne  
Principal



## When a Calling Comes Calling

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reminds me how profoundly one person can shape the world around them, sometimes even reaching far beyond what they ever imagined.

Recently, on a Saturday morning, two such obituaries appeared in the E-Edition Extra section. One featured a daredevil who had finally met his fate; the other profiled Brian Clarke, an artist known for his work in stained glass.

What caught my attention in Clarke's obituary was the description of the moment he discovered his vocation. In some students' lives, there is a singular, overwhelming moment of revelation that becomes the compass for everything that follows. For others, the clarity emerges slowly, and for some, it may never arrive at all.

To discover one's vocation at a young age is a gift. The surprising part is that one never knows when such a moment might strike, until it does.

Looking at Brian Clarke's upbringing, no one would have predicted his future while he was still a schoolboy. Growing up in the United Kingdom, his father was a coal miner and his mother a cotton spinner in a local mill. One day, as a young grammar school student, his class visited a 15th-century cathedral. He recalled hearing a choir practicing somewhere in the front of the church, but as his eyes adjusted to the dim interior, the sight of radiant light streaming through the ancient stained-glass windows overtook him. As the colors shifted and danced around him, the choir's sound disappeared from his awareness. He fainted.

That single moment defined the rest of his life. Brian Clarke went on to become a master of stained glass in both sacred and secular contexts. His work now appears around the globe. A moment of light through a window allowed him to see the world differently and ultimately reshaped how many of us see both the world and God.

My own story unfolded differently. I was never struck by lightning. As a young man, I entered secondary education as a coach. A friend at Loyola Marymount University had an uncle who was a Dominican priest and principal of a local Catholic high school. As I was entering my senior year, the

principal needed a "Cee" football coach. Since I had played in high school, I thought it would be a fun way to spend the fall. I recruited a friend to help, and together we coached the team. When the principal needed a teacher the next year, he hired me. I needed a job, so I accepted.

Teaching, I quickly learned, was hard. Most days I felt like I was failing, but gradually both teaching and coaching began to grow on me. The next year I moved to another Catholic school, where strong Jesuit mentors helped me develop.

Over time, I started to genuinely enjoy the work and explore it more deeply. By my seventh year, I loved being a teacher and coach. I assumed that would be my life's work.

Then one late fall afternoon, the principal, a Jesuit priest, stopped me in the hallway and asked if I knew he was interviewing candidates for the Dean of Men position. I said I did, but wasn't interested, and besides, I didn't have a master's degree. I remember clearly what he said next. "How many students do you influence in a day?" I answered, "About 150." Without hesitation, he replied, "Well, as Dean, you would have influence over 1,000 boys a day. As Jesuits, we always choose the greater influence."

Before I could fully process that, he said, "Would you step into my conference room? I have a team waiting to interview you." I looked up to find a committee seated around a table. By the time the interview concluded, I was the new Dean of Men.

At the time, I thought my life had been turned upside down. But as I grew into the role, I began to see a new world opening before me, one that eventually, over many years, led me to become President of St. Augustine High School in 2006. My call didn't come from a single dramatic moment; it arrived gradually, steadily, over time. And today, as I look back on the journey, I know I am exactly where I am meant to be. That realization brings real joy.

Most Saintsman aren't actively searching for a lightning-bolt moment like Brian Clarke's. But whether through a meaningful conversation, a strong mentor, a moment of unexpected clarity, or a slow unfolding of purpose, each young man is on a unique journey toward understanding himself and the impact he is meant to have on others.

## Saints Grad David Popkins ('08) in the World Series

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— the Dodgers player development vice president, senior VP of baseball operations, and research scientist, respectively. He also worked with Dustin Kelly and Keith Beauregard, currently the hitting coaches for the Cubs and Tigers, and Lou Iannotti, now his assistant hitting coach with the Blue Jays.

“To this day, those conversations really helped mold who I am,” Popkins said to *The Athletic*.

After a year with the Loons, The Minnesota Twins hired Popkins to be their big league hitting coach. Popkins then made the move to Toronto after the 2024 season.

Popkins saw great success in his first year with the Jays. The Blue Jays led the Major League in hits, batting average, and on-base percentage. In true Tony Gwynn style, the team had the second lowest number of strikeouts in the majors, with only three more than the Kansas City Royals who had the least.

In an interview with the *Toronto Star* last month, Blue Jays outfielder George Springer shared his respect for Popkins.

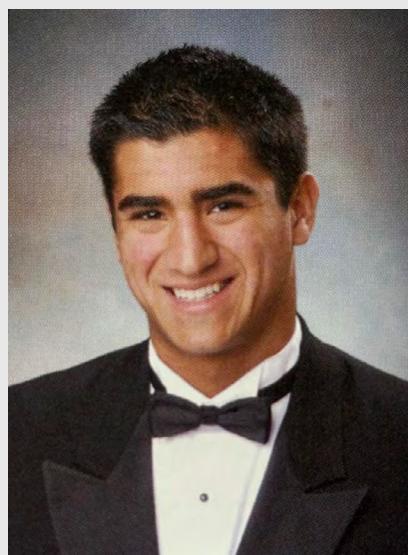
“He knows hitters and he understands players. When you have a guy who you trust — and I have the ultimate trust in him — it makes it easier to believe everything he says,” Springer said. “Pop has been able to resonate with pretty much everybody here.”

Springer revitalized his career last season working with Popkins. Springer hit .309 after posting a career low .220 in 2024. His WAR jumped to 4.8 after an anemic 1.1 the previous season.

Reflecting on his career thus far, Popkins emphasized personalization as essential to success as a coach.

“The best lesson I’ve learned was that everyone is unique and everyone is different. You really have to learn the individual. How they function, how they’re motivated, how they learn,” Popkins said. “I think when you learn to treat people as unique you start to find things that really help performance and development.”

Popkins offered some advice to current students pursuing baseball.



Saintsman David Popkins,  
Class of 2008

“No matter how dim or dark you think your opportunities are currently — or even if things are going really good — don’t stop working and don’t stop trying to get better. I’ve seen crazy stories of guys that were late developing and they ended up making it and ended up being the best player in college and professional. I’ve seen guys that have been really good when they were younger and they stopped working. [Those] who kind of relied on that really fizzled out. Even before senior year. So don’t stop striving to get better and don’t stop learning and improving,” Popkins said.

**Note:** This article first appeared in the November 25, 2025 edition of The Augustinian, Saints Student Newspaper. It has been slightly edited because of space requirements in *Saints Scene*.

# Kairos Events to Date

By Rebecca Hammock, Campus Minister, Religion Department

Campus Ministry reports in with two images from recent Kairos events. First is from the October Kairos showing student speaker Diego Reyes.

The second picture is a small group from December Kairos led by [in brackets] Faculty member Mr. John Lamerato and Saints senior Joshua Garcia-Pederson.

Kairos is a long-standing tradition at the school. Designed for seniors, the retreat offers students a chance to reflect on their time at Saints and to consider who God is calling them to be as they prepare to graduate. Over the course of three days, Kairos retreatants take part in small-group discussions, communal worship, and generous time for fellowship and fun. Guided by both faculty and student leaders, participants are encouraged to grow closer to God and to one another. Now in its 22nd year, the Kairos program remains a cherished and meaningful tradition among Saints seniors.



October Kairos.



December Kairos. Seniors are (left-to-right): Back Row: [John Lamerato], Benet Salmon, Liam Olds. Middle Row: Payton Del Toro, Oscar Sanchez Jr., Antonio Atallah, Emilio Barreto. Front Row: John Banzhof, [Joshua Garcia-Pederson], Mauro Franco-Fimbres.



## SAINTS SCENE

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