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Intersession Program Responds to Student Interest, Provides Unique Opportunities

By Denis Grasska

SAN DIEGO — Sandwiched between the first and second semesters, a month-long term of study called intersession is enriching the educational experience at St. Augustine High School.

More than 700 students — the entire student body — participate in intersession by choosing one from among a list of elective courses, including sailing, cooking, marine biology, architecture and criminal justice, all of which are offered exclusively during intersession.

Seniors have the option of either enrolling in a class or taking advantage of the many internship opportunities also available. Working closely with its community partners, the school has been able to offer internships in the fields of finance, medicine, law and education, among others.

Principal James Horne describes intersession as “a fantastic enrichment of the college-prep program we’ve been known to offer.” He explained that a solid academic program, one that provides everything necessary to prepare students for college, still “leaves out a grand portion of what’s wonderful about learning.” And intersession is intended



THE SKY’S THE LIMIT: Saints student Jack Downey gains firsthand experience in aeronautics during St. Augustine High School’s intersession program.

to fill that gap.

The types of courses and internships offered during inters-

session are generally the result of students’ recommendations, he said, and give students the oppor-

tunity to learn about the things that interest them.

SEE INTERSESSION, PAGE 14

Local Man’s Dream of a Catholic Baseball Team Becomes Reality

Fundraiser to be held April 5 at St. Brigid Parish

By Denis Grasska

SAN DIEGO — For 22 years, Dan Cassidy has dreamed of founding a Catholic baseball team.

He envisioned a team that would travel the world, playing games against professional sports organizations and sharing the Catholic faith at every opportunity.

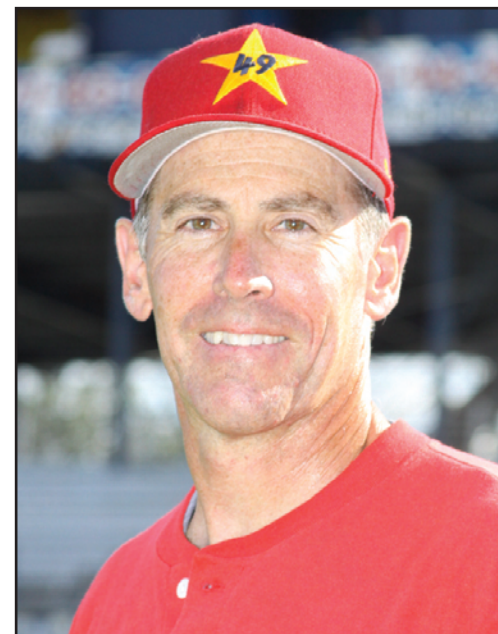
Today, that dream has come true: Cassidy, a former minor-leaguer who coaches baseball at St. Katherine’s College in Encinitas and has his own physical therapy practice, is the founder of the Catholics in Action sports ministry.

“The Lord unfolded this plan and I never lost the desire to do it,” said Cassidy, a mem-

ber of Queen of Angels Parish in Alpine. “But I realize now, looking back, how I had to be formed. I had to be formed in the Catholic faith ... and I had to be formed as a coach.”

Over the past two decades, he has studied theology at Franciscan University of Steubenville and amassed 12 years of coaching experience.

Cassidy’s vision for “the Catholic Church’s first international evangelical baseball team” was inspired by his experience with Athletes in Action, a sports ministry that is part of Cru (formerly called Campus Crusade for Christ). In 1991, he traveled with Athletes in Action to various Latin American countries. There, as the only Catholic member of a Christian baseball team, he and his teammates competed against national teams.



SEE BASEBALL, PAGE 16

DAN CASSIDY

► **BASEBALL**

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The team's name is the Missionary Knights

"I learned from the Protestants how to evangelize," he said. "I know how to do this for our [Catholic] faith, I know what needs to be done, and I'm going to train these guys" — the 23 ballplayers currently on his team roster — "to be lay missionaries."

Catholics in Action was officially recognized last March as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Its baseball team is named the Missionary Knights. The team, which is composed of college ballplayers as well as one minor-leaguer and a former major-leaguer, is scheduled to play 12 games in the Alaska Baseball League in June and compete in the annual Midnight Sun Game, which will be held June 21 in Fairbanks, Alaska. They will then embark on an international tour that will pit them against the Italian Professional Baseball League, the German National Team and the Croatian National Team. The tour will conclude with a visit to Medjugorje, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the site of alleged Marian apparitions since 1981. (The Vatican has yet to issue a ruling on their authenticity.)

Prior to setting out for Alaska, Cassidy

said, the team will spend five days preparing physically and spiritually for the tour. In addition to baseball practice, he said, there will be Bible studies and apologetics.

Cassidy said he plans to have team members share their personal faith stories with the opposing teams and, during the international tour, perhaps speak at churches as well. Though he is uncertain whether a similar opportunity will present itself, Cassidy said that Athletes in Action members were able to share their faith before stadium crowds of about 3,000 people. He also hopes that the team will be able to offer free baseball clinics for youth, sharing baseball know-how and handing out Bibles, rosaries and apologetic literature.

A fundraiser for Catholics in Action will be held at 6 p.m., Saturday, April 5, at St. Brigid Parish in Pacific Beach.

Cassidy said that the ministry needs to raise about \$60,000 and that it will cost an additional \$5,000 for each player to take part in the trip.

"We don't have a lot of money ... but it's coming together. I feel it," Cassidy said.

At the fundraiser, the evening's special guest speaker will be Jim Lefebvre, former manager of the Chicago Cubs, the Seattle Mariners and the Chinese Olympic WBC (World Baseball Classic) team, who will serve as field manager for the Missionary Knights. Along with Cassidy, he and assistant coach Joel Barta comprise the team's

coaching staff. The team is currently looking for a pitching and hitting coach.

Deacon Jim Vargas of Mary Star of the Sea Parish in La Jolla will provide spiritual support and accompany the team on its first tour. In addition to Deacon Vargas, the Catholics in Action Web site also boasts the "clerical assistance" of Msgr. Steve Callahan, pastor of St. Brigid Parish; Father Jim Rafferty, pastor of Mary Star of the Sea Parish; and Jesuit Father Mitch Pacwa, president of the Eternal Word Television Network.

'I learned from the Protestants how to evangelize. I know how to do this for our [Catholic] faith, I know what needs to be done, and I'm going to train these guys to be lay missionaries.'

Baseball has been a part of Cassidy's life since age 5, when he participated in Little League. In 1986, he was briefly a minor-league infielder with the New York Mets.

While in Medjugorje in 1988, Cassidy revealed to a priest that he had a vision of being in the major leagues, despite already

being 26 years old and having just seen his playing career come to an end. Only seven years later, that vision came true, though perhaps in an unexpected way: by becoming the team physical therapist for the Oakland Athletics, where he worked with Mark McGwire and his teammates.

As a physical therapist, Cassidy shared his dream of a Catholic baseball team with many of his clients, and he would even evangelize by encouraging struggling players to pray the rosary or read the Bible. Over the course of four years, Cassidy said, he came to know McGwire as more than the "steroid guy" many believe him to be. Cassidy said he and McGwire prayed together before every treatment and the two even attended Mass together.

"My destiny was to be the physical therapist for Mark McGwire at that time," said Cassidy, who believes that his "destiny" today is with the Missionary Knights.

To others with similarly long-held dreams, he counsels faith, trust and perseverance.

"If they feel God calling them to something, and they persevere and they don't give up, and they take those steps to train themselves for whatever it is that they feel their destiny is," he said, "[it] eventually comes to fruition."

The Catholics in Action sports ministry and the Missionary Knights are testimony to that.

For more information about Catholics in Action or to support the sports ministry, visit www.catholicsinaction.com, or contact Cassidy at (858) 735-8606 or dan@catholicsinaction.com.

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