

St. Mary School PE & Health Program

The St. Mary School Physical Education & Health Program is in the midst of a transformation since Brian Geeding has taken over the helm of this vital aspect of student development. A graduate of St. Mary's School, St. Xavier High School, and Miami University, Brian has dedicated his life to youth ministry and education. After college, Brian taught religion to students on a Native American reservation in South Dakota before entering the Jesuit Novitiate for six months. However, he determined that priesthood was not his calling through reflection and prayer. Brian then returned to St. Mary, where he became the Director of Religious Education for five years, taught junior high religion for a year, and with Sean Laudeman started Sol Life Group, a nonprofit focused on summer camps, retreats, and outdoor education.

The departure of our longtime PE/Health teacher left an opening for Brian to rejoin the staff of St. Mary School officially. As a longtime student and advocate of physical, mental, and spiritual health, Brian was the ideal candidate to chart a new direction for our program. Brian says, "I am grateful that it is my job to facilitate play and exercise as a means to be healthier and happier humans."

Brian's approach to Health/PE is to build a foundation in which each student comes to understand their physiology and how they can engage their bodies in a physically healthy way while providing ways to talk about and care for their mental and spiritual health. His vision is for Health/PE to be less about performance within the typical fitness system of grading students and more about students practicing what they are discussing in class.

To achieve his goals, Brian combines traditional spiritual practices, such as the Jesuit prayer structure first taught by St. Ignatius Loyola in the 16th century, with more contemporary approaches like the Breathwrk app, which focuses on guided breathing exercises based on scientific research. In the same way, Brian is following the State of Ohio and the Archdiocese of Cincinnati's physical education standards. Still, he is also referring to Physiology First. This Maine-based nonprofit organization promotes research-based practices that improve youth mental health through better exercise, sleep, and nutrition choices.

Walking by the St Mary playground during physical education class, you might see kids joyfully chasing frisbees or sitting in mindful meditation and contemplative prayer.

Your junior high student might have come home talking about the benefits of walking barefoot in the grass, then, for homework, gone outside to reflect in nature and write in their journal.

At SMS, we celebrate our teachers' efforts to develop new ways to inspire kids to find joy in learning. We also applaud Mr. Geeding's enthusiasm and ingenuity as he prioritizes health and physical education in our student's lives.

