

# TOGETHER

a monthly bulletin insert from the archdiocese



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## An Interview with Principal and Author Casey Kettmann

By Cassie Bird

Cassie Bird, Archdiocesan Associate Director of Stewardship Development, recently sat down for a video interview with Casey Kettmann to learn more about his book series titled, *Saints Through the Year*. The following text is transcribed from a portion of the interview.

**Cassie:** Casey has been the principal at St. Joseph Elementary School for nine years in Marion. Before that, he taught third grade at Resurrection Elementary in Dubuque for four years, and prior to Resurrection, he spent a year teaching at St. Joseph Elementary School in DeWitt. Beyond being an educator in Catholic schools, he has also had experience as a student at Marquette Catholic in Bellevue from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Casey and his wife, Shelly, along with their four kids, Hailey, Adam, Rayna, and Tanner, belong to Saint Joseph Parish in Marion. Beyond the time that he spends as principal and with his family, Casey has embarked on an exciting project - writing a series of books for children about the saints.

The series is titled *Saints Through the Year*, and each book features ten different saints whose feast days fall within each month. In these books readers can learn about the saints, see

an illustration of them, and even scan a QR code to learn more about them.

Casey, I am curious about what inspired you to write these books about the saints.

**Casey:** Well, I think it's a two-fold approach, Cassie. I think as an educator, I see the value in it, and I've seen a need for it. And, even probably more so as a parent of young children, trying to find a book that really highlights the saints with positive, happier-looking illustrations and kid-friendly verbiage [is challenging]. There are a lot of books out there, but I really was focusing on the imagery so that kids could really be able to relate to them. And I think it works for adults, too. Sometimes simpler is better. That's really where my inspiration came from - as an educator, but then also as a parent of four small children and for children in general.

**Cassie:** How has your experience as a Catholic educator influenced your writing?

**Casey:** It's had a huge impact on who I am and what I've done as a professional. But then also in this opportunity too, it's shown that there's a need for this type of content out there. There's a need for more exposure to the saints and not just your heavy-hitter saints that we hear about.

You know - your Saint Patrick's and your Saint Valentine's and all those which are great saints, don't get me wrong, but having exposure to others that you might not have heard



Casey Kettmann

about before [is also important]. And I like that I'm learning a ton in this process. So it's not only just for the kids but also for me and my own spiritual growth.

**Cassie:** How do you think these books can impact a young reader or listener's understanding of the saints?

**Casey:** I have a built-in focus group with my family, so that's good. I have my twins who are five, my oldest is ten, and my youngest is two. So I have a range of different ages. And I'll write it and then I'll read it to them before we go on to publishing and get a little bit of feedback. I look for how long they can sit there, to see if it's too long. If it's too long, then they're not going to read. It's not going to be valuable. I try to find that sweet spot of an impact where they can either say [the saint's name] or recognize that saint, and then maybe take a tidbit away about them as well.

It's going back to what I said earlier about being very kid-friendly and kid-conscious, and not looking at it through the lens of an adult, but looking through the lens of a child. And being in an elementary education my entire life ... I'm in touch with the reality of what, three, four, five, six-year-olds can take in without it being too much and overwhelming for them.

**Cassie:** That's great. And, just to dive into that a little bit deeper, I was wondering what sort of techniques you've been able to include in your books to help young children understand the lives of the saints better?

**Casey:** The illustrations are an important part of it. I use [Artificial Intelligence] for that. I'm not an artist, so I don't claim to be. They [are generated through a filter] that mimics a Disney animations style so they're friendly and smiling. I use that imagery first to get them hooked, like, "Oh, that person looks like [a famous cartoon character] and that makes it relatable to me as a child." And then it's about making that reverse connection to the writing portion of it and how can a young child take a small snippet, even if it's one thing, from at least one saint in that book. That's a win in my eyes.

**Cassie:** What do you hope that readers will take away from your books about Catholic faith and spirituality?

**Casey:** I think the biggest takeaway is we are all striving to be saints, and every one of us can be a saint-in-the-making. We're working towards that. I think sometimes, we think that we can't become a saint because many died for their faith. That's one potential way to become a saint. But there are other ways. We should all be striving to become saints. I think that's the biggest takeaway: let's not think this is something that's unachievable. It's achievable for every one of us. I think that's the other piece of it I really want people to recognize. I want to inspire people to say, "Let's do this, let's get after it. We can all do it."

*Casey's book series, Saints Through the Year, can be purchased on Amazon.*

## October 18, 2024 | Happy first anniversary of your installation, Archbishop Thomas Zinkula, eleventh Archbishop and thirteenth Bishop of Dubuque! | *Ad Multos Annos!*



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