

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."
Philippians 4:13

St. Raphael School Newsletter

February 2026



Kontakion of St. Raphael Bishop of Brooklyn

You were a guardian and a defender of the Church's teaching: you protected your flock from false doctrines and confirmed them in the true faith. O holy father Raphael, son of Syria and glory of North America, always intercede before the Lord that our souls may be saved.

Table of Contents

Hello, dear readers, happy February! We're so glad to welcome you to our February edition of the Newsletter.

As winter settles in and snowstorms blanket our communities, our hearts are filled with gratitude for each one of you and for the strength and warmth we find together. February invites us to slow down and embrace a quieter rhythm, especially as we begin our Lenten journey—a time of prayer, reflection, and drawing closer to God.

Amid snowy, grey days and cold nights, we pray you all stay warm, cozy, and safe. Thank you for being part of our community. We are truly blessed to continue this journey through 2026 with you, and we are praying you a peaceful and grace-filled February.

Once Upon A Time.....	3
Written by Natasha Richart	
Featured Essay.....	4
Written by Seraphim Weaver	
Advertisement.....	5
Created by Mary Kjendal	
Student Submissions.....	6-7
Submitted by Students	
Poetry Corner.....	8
Written by Mary Kjendal	
Short Story Corner.....	9
Written by Seraphim Weaver	
Theosis Through The Arts	10
Written by Iván Stepanowich	
Stump The Priest.....	11
Answered by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky	
Reflection of the Month.....	12
Written by Lizveta Durka	
Meet the Newsletter Team.....	13

St. Raphael School Newsletter

Prayer List

Living

Fr. Peter
Eleousa
Phyllis
Lynn
Joseph
Linda
Andrew
Amalia Romero and
Family
Anna Clark and
Family
Mary Kate Durka
Cantrell Family

Departed

Barbara
Joy
Suzan
Elliot
Timothy
Fr. Porphyrios
Fr. Abraham
Anna
Zane
Rebecca

“Prayer and fasting are the wings that lift the soul toward heaven.”
-St. John of Kronstadt

St. Raphael, Bishop of Brooklyn



Kontakion – Tone 8

You were a guardian and a defender of the Church’s teaching; / you protected your flock from false doctrines and confirmed them in the true faith. / O holy father Raphael, son of Syria and glory of North America, / always intercede before the Lord that our souls may be saved.

Feasts of the Month

February 1

Sunday of the Publican & the Pharisee

February 2

Meeting of Our Lord in the Temple

February 8

Sunday of Prodigal Son

February 15

Sunday of the Last Judgment (Meatfare)

February 22

Sun. of Forgiveness (Cheesefare)

February 23

Beginning of Great Fast

February 24

1st & 2nd Finding of the Head of St. John the Baptist

February 27

St. Raphael, Bishop of Brooklyn

Note from the Editor

Dear St. Raphael Journal readers, thank you for taking the time to read our newsletter! This wouldn't be possible without the incredible support of the SRS teachers and staff. To see more student submissions, be sure to visit the St. Raphael School Journal Website. **To submit names for the prayer list or a student submission, email the Newsletter team at raphaelschooljournal@gmail.com**

Check out our website [here](#)

Theodora Ciuca
Managing Editor & Website Coordinator

Once Upon A Time

Door 7A

By Natasha Richart

.....

I felt just like one of those heroines in a bestselling YA thriller, right before the climax where one false step could and would lead to a dramatic death. But realistically, none of those things would happen if Sylvie or I was caught. A, because we had no proof Gabrielle or her male posse of one were trying to kill Sylvie and B, because we were acting in self-defense.

After that night a few days ago where I had burst in, un-announced into Sylvie's apartment blubbering about some murder-plot I had overheard, we had come up with a plan. Most people would have just called the police. But what YA heroine ever just called the police? Sure, the police were part of our plan, but we had a lot of work to do before they showed up. We were going to catch Gabrielle in the act if she did try to kill Sylvie. Keyword: if. I wasn't even sure exactly what I had heard, but from what I had gathered, someone was going to die. And gloves were somehow involved.

So now, I stood on the shaded corner of 8th Avenue and Francesco Street like

any Nancy Drew Jr. would. I was waiting for Gabrielle (or Gabs, as Antony called her. I swear there is something going on there) to come out so I could follow her home. My heart was pounding loud in my chest, like a monster trying to get out of a cage. Gabrielle appeared and I shrunk into the late night darkness as she crossed to 7th Avenue. I followed at a healthy distance, the pumping adrenaline making my ears ring. After about five minutes of stalking her, Gabrielle turned into an old apartment building. I followed up the steps and paused a flight below when I heard a door slam. Then I knew it was safe for me to run up the remaining steps, using my ballerina leg muscles to be as quiet as possible. Pressing my ear up against apartment door 7A, I heard the two voices I had expected to hear.

"Did you buy the poison?" It was Gabrielle. The answer was in the affirmative. "We better not get caught," Gabrielle's voice carried easily through the thin door.

Featured Essay

One Moment At A Time

By Sevastiane Archer

.....

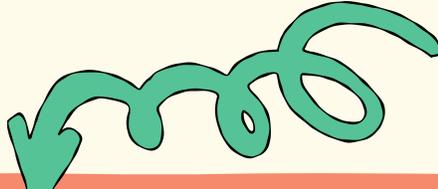
As we are approaching 2026 we are starting to get into our routines for this new year. Maybe some of us made New Year's resolutions and are sticking, or we were sticking to them. I'm the latter. I had all of these goals for 2026. I told myself that this would be the year but 2026 has not met my expectations. I am still the same person I was in 2025 and the year before and the year before. That's what I thought. However, we change a little bit everyday and we definitely learn something new every day. Even if we only change in the slightest everyday brings new experiences and new observations. One of my goals for 2026 was to read more and the book I have been reading is called Great Expectations.

In Great Expectations the story starts off with a young boy named Pip, he doesn't have money, and has to live with his only family, his mean older sister Mrs. Joe. Now Pip doesn't come from much, in fact he comes from very little but throughout this story we see Pip grow into a young man and we see how much he changes. These changes don't just happen, rather everyday Pip changes just a little. Just like I do Pip has great expectations for himself. He wants to be high society and be a gentleman; he wants to leave his humble past behind and in doing so ends up wounding those who were so kind to him.

As Pip grows older, his expectations begin to control rather than guide him. He becomes embarrassed by the people who have raised him. This shows how dangerous expectations can be when they are based on becoming someone you want to be instead of who you need to be. Pip believes that becoming a "gentleman" means leaving people behind and starting anew. In the same way, I am starting to realize that just because 2026 has not looked the way I imagined does not mean I have not grown. Like Pip, I expected change to be dramatic and obvious, but the truth is we grow a little bit everyday and maybe we don't need to have these big expectations for ourselves but rather focus on the things we can do right in front of us in the moment.

Stump the Priest!

Do you have a question for a priest, but you're not sure who to ask? Email us your question, and it will be answered by a priest; the question and answer will be published in the next newsletter.



Email us at
raphaelschooljournal@gmail.com

Student Submissions

Send us your poetry, creative writing, artwork, or photography to be published in upcoming issues of our very own student newsletter!



CALLING ALL
STUDENTS

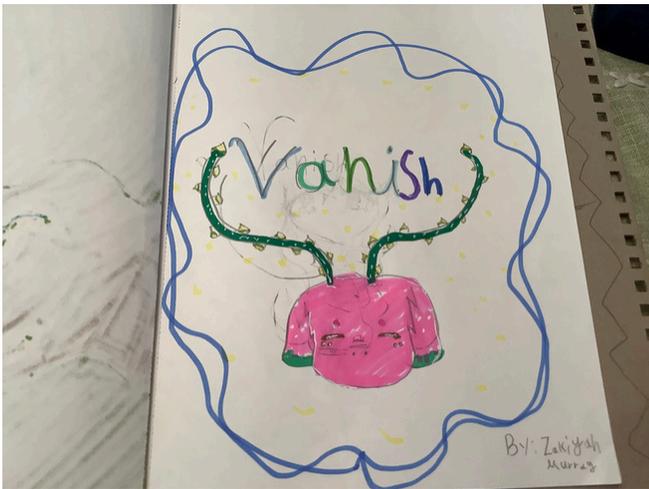
Student Submissions



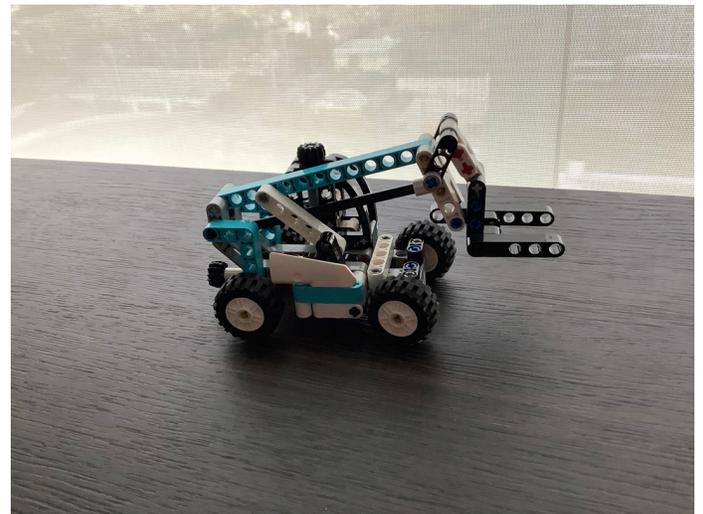
Drawn by Zakiyah Murray



Drawn by Zakiyah Murray



Drawn by Zakiyah Murray



Built by X'andra Murray



Drawn by Zakiyah Murray

Student Submissions

Poor Listening In Crab Hotel

Written By Mary H

.....

Crab Hotel was always busy, full of clacking footsteps, splashing fountains, and conversations that piled on top of one another like waves. Clippy the crab was walking through the hotel towards the grand double doors that led out onto the beach when something shiny caught his eye. A key lay on the wooden floorboards. A tag shaped like a shell hung from it marked Room 8.

Clippy picked it up and smiled. "Snapper must have lost the key to his room, I remember very clearly he's staying in room 8" he said.

At that moment, Snapper burst upon Snapper, "Clippy! This is terrible!" he cried.

"I've lost my key!"

Clippy laughed and raised his claw. "Snapper, I just f--"

"I must have dropped it somewhere," Snapper continued, pacing wildly. "We have to search the whole hotel before someone else finds it!"

Before Clippy could reply, Snapper grabbed him and dragged him down away. Again and again Clippy tried to explain to his friend that he had already found the key, but Snapper never gave him a chance to speak. Snapper searched the lobby, the dining hall, around the front desk and into every room he managed to get into. Meanwhile Clippy desperately tried to get a word in. In and out of doors Snapper dragged him, through halls, up and down stairs, and even through windows.

By the time they reached the sandy beach outside, Clippy was tired and frustrated.

"Snapper," Clippy said firmly, holding a hand over Snapper's mouth so he couldn't talk. "I have the key, I have had it this whole time."

Snapper paused, looking at Clippy surprised, "why didn't you tell before."

Clippy opened his mouth to give Snapper a piece of his mind, but before he could say a word Snapper snatched the key from him saying, "oohh you're such a prankster."

Clippy looked at him in disbelief.

"Never mind Clippy," Snapper said, "I'm just so glad I have my key back."

Clippy stared after Snapper as he scuttled back towards the hotel, pausing only once to call over his shoulder, "Don't you play any more of your pranks on me Clippy."

Let Snapper be an example to us of poor listening. Let none of us fall into the trap of blabbering as Snapper did.

Heartbeat

By Mary Kjendal

An untouched heart,
Soft and quiet,
Beats in the chest of a
Mother.

A wavering heart,
Unsure and a little loud,
Flutters inside a
Girl.

The Mother searches,
High and low,
Looking for someone, a
Girl.

The girl hears a voice,
Soft but sure;
She turns and finds a
Mother.

A thousand tears later,
But only one Word;
In each other's arms, a
Mother and a
Daughter.

A Guardian Angel Saves A Weaver

By Seraphim Weaver

A few years ago, during the covid 19 pandemic, a boy got the “brilliant” idea to amuse himself by climbing a very tall tree with his older brother. His name was Seraphim Weaver. He was seven, almost eight. His brother, Greg, was ten or eleven. When he got outside, Greg was already climbing the tree.

His mother came out and told them not to climb too high into the tree. They talked as they climbed and climbed high, anyway; and when Seraphim had almost reached the top (Greg had long ago), he slipped and fell down, hitting branches and being scraped all the way down. Halfway down the tree he hit a thick branch that knocked the wind out of him.

When he landed, he would have surely broken an arm at least, except he never did hit the ground. A knob about an inch long on part of the trunk had caught him by the shirt and left him dangling half a foot from the ground. The likelihood of this happening is almost impossible, and he never quite figured out exactly how the knob caught him. His shirt was so caught up that he had to take it off. By this time, Greg had gone inside to get help.

When he got his shirt off, he slowly walked inside, where his mother put bandaids and disinfectant on his wounds. He had a long scratch up his left side, a deep cut right above his left eye, and a cut on his stomach. This happened on Great and Holy Friday. Afterward, he has never climbed a tree carelessly, his guardian angel saved him from getting very hurt, and he still has his scars to prove it.

Theosis Through The Arts

A Sermon By The Fire

By Iván Stepanowich

Christ is in our midst! I hope that this message finds you well. To think that it is already February! I am still trying to get used to saying it is 2026! I want to start by sharing with you a brief story I recently read. It really touched me and I hope by the end of this article, you might feel the same:

“There was a parishioner who stopped going to church, which he had been doing every weekend. After a while the priest decided to visit that man. He came to his house. The door was open, and the priest came in. The ex-parishioner was sitting in front of a fireplace alone. When he saw the priest, he greeted him with a nod and invited the priest to sit by his side. The priest accepted the invitation. Now both men were sitting in silence looking at the dance of fire. Several minutes later, the priest suddenly rose to his feet, took a tong, and grabbed one piece of burning wood from the fireplace. He put it aside, far from the fire, and sat back. Both men kept silent. Little by little, the wood stopped burning until it finally became cold and black. The priest got up again, took the tong, and put the dead wood back into the fire. Just a moment later, it was ablaze like the rest. The priest put the tong aside and headed for the door. When he was about to leave, the man broke the silence:

“Thank you for your visit and for your sermon by the fire. I promise to come to church this Sunday.”¹

Without a single word—only prayer and silence—the priest was able to convey a very powerful message. When we look at an icon, a beautiful story is being told—one that words cannot always express fully. Likewise, this priest did the same. When I read it, I realized that I lack that simplistic form of communication. There have been many moments in my life when I would express something, only to recognize the handful of unnecessary words I had used. The interesting fact is that those words did not add to my point; rather, they diminished its effect. From that, I am left with the impression that a message without words is a very strong one, because words have a way of inviting resistance in a way that silence does not. Perhaps if the priest had tried to use conversation to persuade the man, his pride might have risen as a barrier, blocking them.

The Sermon by the Fire taught me that we should think more before we speak and also consider what other forms of communication we can use to express ourselves—and above all else, our actions carry more weight than speech. I have come to recognize that when we prioritize acting with humility and love, our actions will be much more impactful than empty words—and if we keep that fire within us burning strong, it will radiate its heat to anyone near.

“Acquire the Spirit of peace, and a thousand souls around you will be saved.” —Saint Seraphim of Sarov

I wish you a happy and fruitful beginning to Great Lent! God save you.

In Christ,

Iván

1. Editor. “A Sermon by the Fire.” The Catalog of Good Deeds, Saint Elizabeth Convent, June 2018.

<https://catalog.obitel-minsk.com/blog/2018/06/parable-of-day-sermon-by-fire>

Stump The Priest

Question asked by Leia M.:

"How come we have only one fast free week after Pascha and two after Christmas?"

Answered by Fr. Timothy Hojnicky

Man, that is the \$25,000 question I have been asking for years! It does seem strange that the Feast of Feasts officially gets Bright Week (until the Wednesday following -10 days) as fast free week and Christmas get's 11 fast free days (Christmas through the Eve of Theophany, which is a strict fast). Honestly it seems a lot more festive this year because with (NC) Christmas falling on a Thursday, it then gave us 2 fast free Fridays! Since Pascha always falls on a Sunday, the days are always Pascha through the following Wednesday of Thomas week. If Nativity would fall on a Sunday, it would have a similar feel as does Pascha.

Remember, that at one time Nativity and Theophany were one feast day (Note the similar themes of revelation, illumination, light, awareness, etc). When they were separated, for whatever reason, the Fathers saw the period of time between them a time of joy and celebration, so they are fast free until the Eve of Theophany. Those 12 days (yes like the song!) are there to celebrate AFTER the feast... the world tends to think it's the 12 lead up days. Nope.

Now having said all that the Antiochians (I believe) give a blessing to feast all 40 days of Pascha, but that not is a universally recognized tradition. The issue that most have is how hard it is for the faithful to start fasting after abandoning it for 6 weeks. :) But I also think that this economia (?) was a rather late development.

I hope this helps.

Fr. Timothy

Reflection of the Month

Love and Beauty

By Lizveta Durka

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In this month of February and with Valentine's Day just around the corner, I thought it would be fitting to write on the subject of love, and what it means to truly love someone. Love is a word we hear everywhere—on posters, in songs, in the hallways between classes. But in our Faith, love is far more than a feeling or a moment of kindness. It is a way of life, a path that shapes who we become, and the very heartbeat of what it means to be human. Yet before we can love others, we must first understand what it truly means to love—and to love Christ. Orthodoxy teaches that God is love. Not simply loving—Love. When we show genuine care for others, we participate in something divine. Every act of patience, every moment of forgiveness, every time we choose compassion over judgment, we reflect God who created us. One of the most beautiful truths in Orthodox Christianity is that love does not leave us the same. It changes us from the inside out. When a person loves with purity, their soul becomes like a clear mirror, able to reflect God's light without distortion. Love transforms us because it draws us out of ourselves. It softens what is hardened, heals what is wounded, and awakens what is asleep. When we choose love—especially when it is difficult—we become more patient, more courageous, more compassionate. We become more fully alive. This transformation isn't dramatic or sudden; it happens quietly, the way dawn slowly brightens the sky. But over time, love reshapes the heart. And so does beauty. Love and beauty are deeply connected because love makes the soul beautiful. Beauty is not just something we see—it is something that reveals truth. Beauty opens the heart, lifts the mind, and draws us toward what is good. When we encounter beauty—whether in nature, in music, in a kind gesture, or in the face of another person—we are reminded that the world is filled with meaning and purpose. When someone loves with Christ's love, their face becomes radiant. This radiance is not physical glamour; it is the quiet glow of a heart shaped by goodness. Love beautifies us because it aligns us with the God who is both Love and Beauty. And beauty, in turn, strengthens love. When we notice the beauty in others—their dignity, their uniqueness, their God-given worth—we find it easier to treat them with kindness and respect. Beauty opens the door; love walks through it. This kind of love isn't abstract. It shows up in everyday school life—when we help a classmate who feels left out, when we choose honesty over convenience, when we listen before we speak, when we forgive someone who hurt us, no matter how hard it is. These small acts of love create beauty in our lives and in our community. As we move through the school year, we all face challenges: stress, misunderstandings, pressure, and moments when we feel unseen. But love—real, patient, Christ-shaped love—has the strength to lift us above these things. It reminds us that every person we meet carries infinite worth. So let this be our challenge and our hope: to make love not just a word we say, but a way we live—a way that brightens our classrooms, strengthens our friendships, and helps us grow into the people we are meant to be. Because when we choose love, we choose beauty. And when we choose beauty, we reflect the very Light of Christ. Glory to God for all things!

Meet the Newsletter Team!

Theodora Ciuca



Managing Editor

"I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me."

-Philippians 4:13

Mary Kjendal

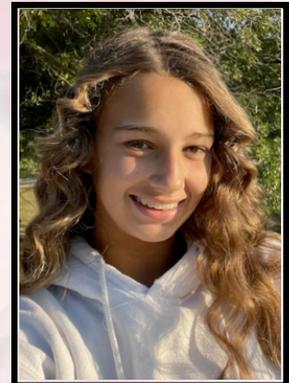


Co-Managing Editor

"A rose does not speak, but its fragrance travels far in silence."

-St. Theophan the Recluse

Natasha Richart



Column Writer

"All grown-ups were once children... but only few of them remember it."

-The Little Prince

Sevastiane Archer



Column Writer

"Prayer is the place of refuge for every worry, a foundation of cheerfulness, a source of constant happiness, a protection against sadness."

-St. John Chrysostom

Lizveta Durka



Column Writer

"God never abandons us... We abandon him!"

-St. Paisios of Mount Athos

Iván Stepanowich



Column Writer

"All that is gold does not glitter, Not all those who wander are lost;"

-J.R.R. Tolkien

Seraphim Weaver



Column Writer

"Some believe that it is only great power that can hold evil in check. But that is not what I have found. I've found it is the small things, everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keeps the darkness at bay. Small acts of kindness and love."

-Gandalf the Grey