Welcome, Freshmen, to the St. Francis Prep experience. By now you have probably gotten lost frequently, had your books spill out of your arms in a crowded hallway, and been jostled by upper classmen hurrying to class. You may be feeling excited to be here, frightened by the size of the place, anxious about doing well in your classes, and generally overwhelmed by the amount of work you have been given.

For many of you, it is your first experience in Catholic school. For most of you, it is your first experience in a Catholic Franciscan school. Franciscans are people who try to model their lives on the teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi – who believed in following Christ by living his life simply, loving all God’s creation – especially the poor, and being a peacemaker in all situations.

The Franciscan family is very large and very inclusive. You may have seen Franciscan Brothers in the hallways wearing their black habits. But did you know that our family includes all people who try to live their lives following Christ in the way that Francis did? Students, teachers, and all the support staff here at St. Francis Prep are invited to try to live their lives a bit more simply, more joyfully, more peacefully, and more in harmony with creation. Many of the activities and clubs here are designed to help you reach out to those less fortunate. Our prayer and liturgies encourage us to praise God using all our talents.

St. Francis loved nature. He is usually depicted surrounded by birds and other animals, but St. Francis is about much more as we will learn. The Feast of St. Francis is on October 4, and is commemorated in school by celebrating Mass and having a day off from school.
Franciscan Reading 2

Francis and the Leper

Saint Francis went through many changes in his life.

Francis was born into a middle class family. His father, Pietro Bernadone, was a successful cloth merchant who travelled back and forth to the fairs in France. During one of his trips he brought home a bride, the Lady Pica. When his son was born, Pietro was away. So his wife named the child John. When Pietro returned, he nicknamed him Francesco (Francis) in honor of the country that he loved.

Francis grew up in a time when there was a large gap between the rich and the poor. At the top were the nobles and rich merchants; at the bottom, the poor and the lepers. During his youth, Francis was taught to be charitable to the poor, but everyone feared the lepers. Leprosy was a disease that rotted the extremities of the body, leaving the victim with ugly, oozing sores that smelled and looked terrible. Those with the disease were forbidden to enter the town and were banished to colonies outside the walls. They wore bells around their necks to warn travellers to get off the road when they were coming. Needless to say, they were not treated well by the townspeople.

As a teenager, Francis longed to become a knight. In this way he would win fame and fortune while protecting his town from other, more aggressive neighbors. While travelling to battle, he had a vision from God, which caused him to rethink everything that he was doing. In the vision, he was told to return to Assisi and listen for what God wanted him to do. One day, while Francis was riding a horse through the local countryside, he encountered a leper. The legend tells us that Francis, realizing that the leper was a child of God just like himself, and therefore his brother, got off his horse and embraced him.
**Discussion Questions**

In order for Francis to do this, to embrace the leper who was so different from himself, he had to put aside many things that he had been taught and stereotypes he had held about different groups. He had to undergo a conversion from who he was to who God wanted him to be.

- What are some the things that have changed in your life in the last year? (ie. socially, areas of responsibility, etc)
- What has changed (or is changing) now that you are in high school?
- What are the challenges in meeting new people – especially those who are different from you?
- How are these high school experiences similar to Saint Francis’ experience of conversion and meeting the leper?

**Mini-Scavenger Hunt**

- How many statues of Saint Francis are in public areas (not private offices) around campus (indoor and outdoor)
- Are there any statues of other Franciscan saints?
- Where is the biggest San Damiano cross on campus located?
- Can you find the Peace Pole?
- How many Franciscan Brothers are on staff?