



The Word Magazine

SUMMER 2026
VOL. 21/NO. 1

INCARNATE WORD ACADEMY MAGAZINE

**We are the Heart
of Sisterhood**



The Word

MISSION

Incarnate Word Academy provides young women with a Catholic college preparatory education, helping them grow in their relationship with Jesus, the Incarnate Word, and live according to His values. Our cornerstones are Academics, Values and Spirituality.

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ON THE COVER

Nahla Lewis '28 and **Maya Rahman '28**.
Photo by Daniel Pawlowski during our Fall 2025 Photoshoot.

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President's Letter



"Where there's kindness, loyalty, empowerment and understanding, you stop calling that person a friend—she becomes your sister."

DEAR IWA COMMUNITY,

With this issue of *The Word Magazine*, I invite you to join me in welcoming our new principal, Mrs. Christina Gensheimer. She comes to us from STHS with a wealth of educational background and experience. I look forward to you meeting her in person as the new school year begins.

IWA was established in 1873 with three strong pillars: Academics, Values and Spirituality. However, over the years, our students have identified an equally strong pillar: **Sisterhood**. It has become the heartbeat of the IWA community, shaping how students grow, lead and care for one another. It gives them a deep sense of belonging. For many students, this sisterhood becomes one of the most transformative aspects of their high school years, influencing not only their academic journey but also their character, confidence and faith. It teaches them how to lead with compassion, build community and celebrate others' gifts while appreciating their own. They take pride in their shared values and traditions. It gives them a sense of belonging that strengthens their confidence and shapes their perspective on life.

I am always struck by the way our students welcome others as sisters and enjoy and support one another. These moments build a school culture grounded in a spirituality centered on Jesus, the Incarnate Word, where students feel safe, seen and supported. The message is clear: *you are not alone here*.

Our excellent leadership program exemplifies a strong sisterhood. It encourages students to collaborate, learn from one another and uplift each other. This culture of support and celebration builds confidence, teaching students that another girl's success is not a threat but an inspiration—an essential quality for being an excellent leader. Together, they develop the traits and skills of the strong, positive leaders we all hope to see in our world.

I smile as I look through this magazine and I hope you do as well. I am reminded of how our commitment to our mission and our pillars positively impacts our students and our loyal alumnae. It is delightful to see that sisterhood has become a defining feature of our school—recognized by prospective families, nurtured by teachers and cherished by students. Now it is time for you to sit back, relax, and enjoy this issue of *The Word Magazine*.

May Jesus, the Incarnate Word, continue to bless you and your families.

Praised be the Incarnate Word,

Sr. Lauren Beck C.V.I.

SISTER LAUREN | President

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Falcon News

You Are Enough: IWA STUCO Elected Vice President School for Texas Association of Student Councils

Written in collaboration with **Kennedy Trahan '20** and **Johnny Misleh**

Congratulations to Student Council for being elected as the Vice President School for the Texas Association of Student Councils! This achievement reflects months of preparation, led in part by student representative Alex Beltran, '27. STUCO's platform, "You Are Enough," aimed to spread the message to every person that you are enough in every **ERA**: **E**mbrace who we are; **R**ecognize the individuality in others and encourage them to see it within themselves; and **A**ssemble to create a world where everyone knows they are enough in every era.

During TASC's 90th Annual Conference, the group presented their platform, "You Are Enough," to more than 3,700 student leaders from across Texas. They bravely confronted an issue that affects many as 50% of adolescents experience low self-esteem which can lead to depression, anxiety and trouble actively participating in social and academic life. The unique approach that IWA's Student Council took to address this critical issue of low self-esteem truly set them apart and allowed them to achieve the VP position. Our girls truly embodied the core essence of our leadership program by tackling this issue head-on and their ability to leverage their experiences to inspire change is nothing short of remarkable.

Throughout their campaigning, students demonstrated incredible hard work, dedication, passion, openness and sisterhood as they shared their platform. As outstanding representatives of Incarnate Word Academy, they were described as classy, poised, passionate, engaging, committed and inviting.

#TheHeartofLeadership

Advent at IWA: A Joyous Season of Waiting

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. —John 1:14

Every year, the Advent season begins at IWA with the beloved tradition of the blessing of the Advent wreath. This season of purposeful waiting continues throughout December with weekly student-led prayer meetings, perpetual adoration, Bible study and service projects.

Ms. Anja Ozols, Campus Minister and Theology teacher, explains, "The concept of waiting in hope and creating space in our hearts for Jesus speaks to the core of Incarnational Spirituality. We need to clear out space in our minds, hearts and schedules where we are not being inundated with inputs and content. We all need this time to be still and silent. It takes time for the swirling thoughts of our mind to slow down so that there is space for us to hear Jesus."

To encourage students to focus on their relationships with God, the school makes sure to set aside space even during midterms review week for Adoration and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The chapel is open every day and always available to students, faculty and staff for quiet times of prayer, Adoration and weekly Mass. "Although we are cramming our minds with knowledge, information and to-do lists, we can still take a little time to make room for Jesus," says Ms. Ozols. "It is only when we are still and silent that we can perceive His presence and voice, we can recognize Christ in our neighbor and slow down enough to show our love."

Throughout the school year and especially during the Advent season, Ms. Ozols joyfully collaborates with IWA's Choir Director and Theology teacher, Ms. Theresa Diaz. "I am so happy that God has brought me here to IWA," Ms. Diaz says. "All of my Theology junior and sophomore students are amazing and of course my choir rocks! Every day, I witness the Holy Spirit do many great things with our students."

#TheHeartofSpirituality

IWA's Student Council has received the prestigious Sweepstakes Council¹ recognition from the Texas Association of Student Councils (TASC), the highest honor a TASC council can receive. The student council that earns this award must first be recognized as an Outstanding Student Council², as well as going even further by meeting rigorous criteria in the areas of "Pride and Patriotism," "Energy and Environment" and "Drugs, Alcohol, Safety and Health." They also submitted accomplishments in "School and Community Service," showing a commitment to making a meaningful impact.

Only Student Councils that consistently go above and beyond receive this award; as of April 2026, only 280 student councils in Texas have earned this distinction for the 2025–2026 school year from TASC.

Additionally, IWA's Student Council was recognized as a 2025 National Gold Council of Excellence³ by the National Association of Student Councils (NASC). The NASC program is supported by its parent organization, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

"The student council at IWA ust pulled off something extraordinary," said NASSP CEO Ronn Nozoe. "Their student-driven change has earned them national recognition as a National Gold Council of Excellence, proving that when young people are given the chance to lead, they turn their vision into real-world impact."



Incarnate Word Academy Earns Jostens National Yearbook Design Recognition

IWA's 2024 yearbook, *The Margil: Perfectly Pink*, has been recognized for excellence and featured in the Jostens Look Book 2026, celebrating the best-of-the-best in yearbook design and inclusivity.

This edition was created by IWA's yearbook students Chloe Green, '24; Ginelle Guerrero, '24; Olivia Kaiser, '24; Gabriella Lopez, '24; Julia McMahon, '24; Leilani Tamez, '25; Valeria Velasco-Vaca, '25; Mikayla Duch, '26; Mia Howard, '26; Emery DeMontel, '27; Anne Parma, '27; and Alexis Zogg, '27, under the direction of Sue Blackmon, MJE, IWA's yearbook advisor.

The Perfectly Pink theme was loosely inspired by the Barbie movie that was so popular in the summer of 2023. "We wanted a book that would capture everyone's attention and be culturally relevant. It stands out to me because we only used one color: pink. It was a risk, but it paid off because the book was received well by students and our entire school community," Mia Howard said.

Our award-winning yearbook was one of 500 yearbooks selected from more than 1,200 yearbooks submitted. "The Jostens Look Book showcases the hard work and dedication of students who tell the story of the school year through photos and words. It is their collaboration and communication, as well as creative thinking in challenging situations, that results in the fine designs shown in this book," said Kristen Scott, Yearbook Marketing Senior Manager at Jostens.

Sue Blackmon and her yearbook staff received a copy of the Jostens Look Book 2026 with a plaque and banner from Jostens to recognize their outstanding achievement.

*Adapted from **Jostens Press Release**, March 2026.*



Photo by **Sadie McNeil**, '28

IWA Presents Inaugural We Heart the Arts Night

In February, IWA proudly hosted its inaugural We Heart the Arts Night! The evening celebrated the Heart of Creativity with beautiful performances from our choir, band, theater and the IMPACT Dance Team, as well as original poetry readings by some of our students. Guests also enjoyed a display of student art and a look back at the past four editions of IWA's beloved yearbook, *The Margil*. Dr. Nancy Zey, a Falcon parent, spoke at the event and encouraged the growth of Fine Arts at IWA by inviting parents to join the brand-new Fine Arts Guild.

Sister Lauren, IWA's President, opened the evening with a welcome speech and a prayer, followed by a dynamic performance from IMPACT Dance Team of "Zero to Hero." Two students shared award-winning original poetry: "I Remember the Day You Died" by Maya Rahman, '28, and "Forgive You Tomorrow" by Stephanie Smith, '28.

IMPACT Dance continued the celebration with a lyrical number entitled "I Don't Think of You" and "Flume," a contemporary piece. Our choir performed three moving songs, accompanied by piano (Phyllis Harris) and flute (Amanda Snook). The band played an excerpt from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons; Spring*. Theater students performed a sneak peak of their Spring play *Clue* to conclude the evening.

We are so proud of our students and their creative work—IWA truly is the Heart of Creativity!

Students Submit Incredible Artwork for Youth Art Month

Youth Art Month (YAM), celebrated in March, highlights the YAM Spring Exhibition at the Bullock Texas State History Museum, featuring over 100 selected artworks by Pre-K-12 students from public and private schools across Texas. Along with 592 other students from across the state, Issa Moore, '26, and Trinity Welsch, '26, submitted artwork for consideration.

Trinity's piece, entitled *Tinted Lizard*, earned a distinguished award and was selected for display at the Bullock Texas State History Museum throughout the month. The awards ceremony took place on Sunday, March 29. This was an incredible honor for Trinity, as well as for our Fine Arts Department. We are exceptionally proud of her, as well as all of our art students!



Tinted Lizard by **Trinity Welsch** '26

Career Day Excites and Inspires

January’s Career Day was an incredible success! Dr. Holli Clements, the Vice President of Engagement at Memorial Park Conservancy, was the keynote speaker. She set the tone for the day with a motivational speech, ending with a quote from Mary Oliver: “Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” It was a wonderful reminder for our students to value their time and keep showing up for themselves every day.

From there students dispersed into classrooms where they heard from knowledgeable speakers. Our speakers came from various industries including cybersecurity, TV and media, oil and gas, medicine and engineering. The girls asked insightful questions, expanded their horizons and were even able to build connections to use later in their careers.

This day wouldn’t have been possible without Dr. Pennington-Dorsey, Ms. Gray and Mrs. Bowman. Their hard work really made all the difference and we can’t wait for our next successful Career Day!



#TheHeartofAcademics



Senior Clap Out & Skirt Day

Congratulations, Class of 2026!

We are so incredibly proud of you and we’re so excited to celebrate all that you’ve accomplished at graduation! Senior Skirt Day was such a joyful tradition and a beautiful glimpse into your bright futures.

From the colleges featured on your skirts to the creativity and personality behind every design, each one reflected the commitment, dreams and academic excellence that make this class so special. Faculty, staff and classmates cheered you on as you ran through the halls one last time!

Congratulations again, Seniors! Your IWA sisterhood will always be behind you in all that comes next.

Fidelity to you!

#TheHeartofSisterhood



IWA Robotics Teams Bring Home Awards from TAPPS State Competition

Congratulations to the **Women of the Wires** (WOW) and **Sisters of the Servos** (SOS)! Both teams won awards at the Texas Association of Private and Parochial Schools (TAPPS) State Robotics Championship on April 11, 2026.

Women of the Wires won the Spirit of TAPPS Award—the second highest judged award that a team can receive! In order to win this award, the team must: cultivate leadership within their own team, show behavior that makes a difference in overall achievement and gameplay, nurture camaraderie with everyone they encounter, build strong relationships with other teams and encourage other teams (including opponents) to do their best.

Sisters of the Servos won the Rockstar Rookie Award, which celebrates a team that has competed for less than two seasons. The team who receives this award has clearly defined future, fundraising and sustainability goals, along with strong plans to achieve them.

Over the competition season, WOW and SOS earned many other awards and accomplishments:

- First Place Inspire Award | February League Championship | **Women of the Wires**
- First Place Reach Award | February Regional Competition | **Women of the Wires**
- Advanced To Texas State Cup | **Women of the Wires**
- Presented Workshop “Wow Amplify: Strategy And Outreach” | First Robotics World Championship in April **Women of the Wires**
- First Place Think Award | February League Championship | **Sisters of the Servos**
- Third Place Alliance Team Captain | February League Championship | **Sisters of the Servos**
- Emote Award | Halloween Havoc Scrimmage | **Sisters of the Servos**
- Six Team Members Selected to be Student Ambassadors | First Robotics World Championship in April **Women of the Wires & Sisters of the Servos**

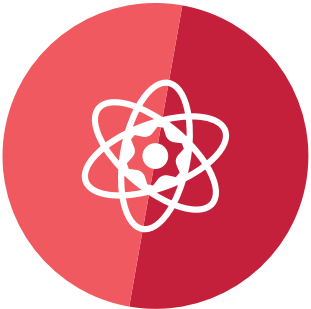
#TheHeartofSTEM



STEM Day Encourages and Inspires Next Generation of Students

On Saturday, February 28, our two robotics teams, **Women of the Wires** (WOW) and **Sisters of the Servos** (SOS) hosted our annual *Girls STEM Day at IWA*. Middle school girls explored the exciting world of science, technology, engineering and math through hands-on activities led by robotics team members, who were excited to share their passion for STEM, aiming to inspire the next generation of girls and to build sisterhood. Activities included making elephant toothpaste, building electric cars, driving both teams’ robots, building snap circuits and creating anemometers. With **over 40 middle school students** in attendance, the day was filled with curiosity, learning and joy. We look forward to seeing some of these young ladies in our hallways next year as they join and grow within our IWA sisterhood!

WOW and SOS are both passionate about STEM outreach. Over the school year, they have led the annual *Canstruction* event, presented during *Grandparents’ Day* and attended *Steps for Students* to showcase their robots—IWA truly is the Heart of STEM!



The Class of 2026: Incredible Young Women!

On Saturday, May 16, family, friends, faculty and staff gathered at the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Downtown Houston to celebrate Mass and the Class of 2026 as they became graduates of Incarnate Word Academy.

The Class of 2026, made up of 49 graduates, earned more than \$13 million in scholarships and awards. Collectively, these incredible young women were accepted to over 300 colleges and universities all over the United States and even internationally. Class of 2026, we are excited to celebrate you, your achievements and successes. You will always have a place within the Sisterhood and we cannot wait to see what the future holds for you!

49
TOTAL GRADUATES

308
ACCEPTANCES TO
COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES

2,296
CUMULATIVE SERVICE HOURS

\$13M
SCHOLARSHIPS & AWARDS

#TheHeartofAcademics



Honors for the Class of 2026

WOMAN OF THE WORD AWARD
Brigid Flaherty

SERVANT OF THE WORD AWARD
Dale Gold

SPIRIT OF THE WORD AWARD
Clare Hayes

CHARLINE BARRY THEOLOGY AWARD
Margaret Duncan

FIRST ROBOTICS INSPIRE AWARD
Taran Boles
Emma Jackson
Gemma Rene
Trinity Welsch

SERVICE LEARNING AWARD
Flor Sofia Castillo

DISTINGUISHED LEADERS AWARD
Rinelle Aliboso
Mia Borin
Nayeli Deciderio
Dale Gold
Eliza Hager
Clare Hayes
Mia Howard
Marin Kelly
Elle Lewis
Isabella Mireles
Sarah Oppermann
Brielle Reagins
Gabby Richards
Reese Starnes
Victoria Taboada-Palau
Madeline Uyenco
Ailey-Marie Willis
Marley Wingenbach

DEPARTMENT AWARD: THEOLOGY
Dale Gold
Camille Perez

DEPARTMENT AWARD: ENGLISH
Nayeli Deciderio
Sophie Ogbo
Misha Patel
Camilia Rodriguez

DEPARTMENT AWARD: MATH
Margaret Duncan
Clare Hayes
Camille Perez

DEPARTMENT AWARD: SCIENCE
Isabella Moore

DEPARTMENT AWARD: SOCIAL STUDIES
Nayeli Deciderio
Dale Gold
Eliza Hager
Misha Patel
Madeline Uyenco

DEPARTMENT AWARD: WORLD LANGUAGES
Sarah Oppermann
Marley Wingenbach

DEPARTMENT AWARD: LEADERSHIP
Dale Gold

DEPARTMENT AWARD: ATHLETICS, FINE & PERFORMING ARTS AND TECHNOLOGY
Julia Lively
Isabella Moore
Sophie Ogbo
Misha Patel

SCHOLAR ATHLETE
Clare Hayes

NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLAR
Clare Hayes

SCHOLASTIC WRITING AND ART AWARD: HONORABLE MENTION
Rinelle Aliboso

NATIONAL COLLEGE BOARD RECOGNITION PROGRAM
Rinelle Aliboso
Mia Borin
Elizabeth Carter
Margeaux Gonzales
Clare Hayes
Lauren Palomino
Madeline Uyenco
Trinity Welsch

PRESIDENT'S EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE SILVER AWARD
Margaret Duncan
Eliza Hager
Mia Howard
Marin Kelly
Lucia Lindstrom
Reese Starnes
Victoria Taboada-Palau

PRESIDENT'S EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE GOLD AWARD
Paloma Aleman
Rinelle Aliboso
Taran Boles
Mia Borin
Elizabeth Carter
Flor Sofia Castillo
Brigid Flaherty
Dale Gold
Margeaux Gonzales
Clare Hayes
Victoria Hillier
Sophie Ogbo
Sarah Oppermann
Gemma Rene
Madeline Uyenco
Ailey-Marie Willis

AP SCHOLAR
Margaret Duncan
Margeaux Gonzales
Emma Jackson
Marin Kelly
Lucia Lindstrom
Julia Lively
Loren Palomino
Camille Perez
Gemma Rene

AP SCHOLAR WITH DISTINCTION
Rinelle Aliboso
Taran Boles
Mia Borin
Flor Sofia Castillo
Clare Hayes
Victoria Hillier
Victoria Taboada-Palau
Madeline Uyenco

AP SCHOLAR WITH HONOR
Dale Gold
Mia Howard
Ailey-Marie Willis

AP INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMA
Victoria Hillier



Student Profiles

The Heart of Sisterhood

The young women of IWA are regularly recognized for their **caring hearts, compassion, lifelong friendships** and **leadership skills**. On these pages, three rising seniors speak about their experiences at the Academy, how their involvement in athletics has made them strong Young Leaders, how they overcome academic difficulties and the strength of the IWA Sisterhood.



Ava Bocock '27

FAVORITE SPOT ON CAMPUS

My favorite spot on campus is the cafeteria, especially in the morning.

When everyone gathers together before school, you get a real sense of the sisterhood.

Everyone is excited to see you, will say hello and ask how you are, even if you have different classes. Between classes, people will stop and chat in the hallways and on the way to their next class—everyone is so friendly and welcoming!



THE IWA EXPERIENCE

I was surprised that I didn't feel a need to "fit in." When I was in middle school, I felt pressured to fit in and couldn't discover myself or my personality. Here at IWA, I have been able to grow as an individual and in the sisterhood. I have also been able to develop my personality, passions and interests.

I can't imagine myself anywhere else!

FAITH

I have been Catholic all my life, but being at IWA has helped me to see how faith is integrated into my everyday life.

My theology classes have taught me how God's mercy and love have touched every aspect of my life and how my faith gives me a purpose.

ACADEMIC CHALLENGES & GROWTH

My freshman year English class really challenged me. Instead of struggling alone,

I learned how to reach out to my teachers and ask for help and clarification.

All of the teachers here at IWA really want to see you succeed and grow, including teachers who you don't have class with. They will go out of their way to check in on you and make sure that you are doing well. I have also learned how to rely on my classmates and friends to help me study and prepare for classes; other students here will also help you study and give you support.

The sisterhood is an incredible gift!

Madeleine Bartholet '27

THE IWA EXPERIENCE

I was surprised how welcoming and genuine the sisterhood is. I have built incredible relationships with my friends and even people outside of IWA that I wouldn't have met without coming to Incarnate Word.

I know that my friendships now will last a lifetime!

ATHLETICS, CONFIDENCE & LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Joining the Cross Country team really helped me to step out of my comfort zone. Before I joined, I was worried that I wouldn't like the sport or do well. But, through my leap of faith, I learned that I really love Cross Country. Being a student athlete has improved all areas of my life.

It has taught me persistence, accountability and how to work together on a team.

ACADEMIC CHALLENGES & GROWTH

Honors Chemistry was my most challenging class. Thankfully, I learned how to lean on support from my teachers and collaborate with my classmates in order to succeed. I was even able to get tutoring and assistance from upperclassmen who had already taken the class.

Everyone, both teachers and students at IWA, truly wants to see you succeed and they will do whatever they can to help you!



Molly Burrell '27

FAVORITE SPOT ON CAMPUS

My favorite place on campus is Ms. Self’s room. I always feel so welcome and comfortable there. Between classes, she is always ready to listen or give advice, or just let you take a minute to collect yourself.

ATHLETICS, CONFIDENCE & LEADERSHIP SKILLS

I’m on the swim team and my team members have really helped me become a stronger leader. I help new athletes gain confidence in the water and become better swimmers! At the beginning of the season, some of the new team members were not very confident in their abilities to do different strokes. I was able to coach them through how to do the strokes correctly and help them to learn and grow. I really do credit my swim team participation with helping me become a leader and grow in my confidence.

THE IWA EXPERIENCE

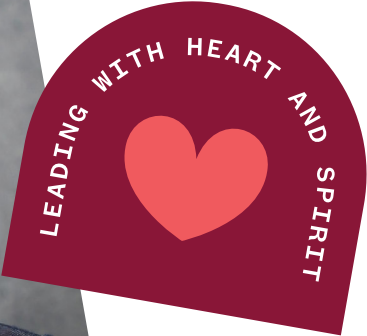
I have been really surprised by how welcoming the other girls are, especially the upperclassmen! When I was a freshman, I didn’t expect all of the other classes to be so excited to greet me and welcome me into the sisterhood.

I really love how friendships span across grade levels.

FAITH

I joined the Campus Ministry Team this year! Ms. Ozol’s theology classes have been really impactful and have helped me grow in my faith. I have learned that theology is something that can truly be a part of my whole life.

At IWA, I am able to grow in my faith while still learning and succeeding!



Athletics

The Heart of Champions

BY RICK PEREZ, ATHLETIC DIRECTOR

This spring, our Falcons brought home many wins and new achievements! Our swim team attended State, golf is advanced to both regional and district competitions, softball had a 13-win record, tennis had two singles players and two doubles teams compete at district, and our track athletes consistently placed in the top five at the TAPPS regional meet.

Our student athletes are incredibly talented, making our Athletics program extremely competitive; there is always room for everyone to compete!

It’s an exciting time at IWA as we continue to see many victories in athletics throughout the season.

With over 25 years spent guiding athletes to success at Incarnate Word Academy, I have decided to begin a new chapter in my life. I will be leaving IWA and my role as Athletic Director to focus more deeply on my passions for teaching and coaching. I am forever grateful to the IWA community for being my second family—a true home away from home. During my years here, I feel that I have grown as a person, especially in my faith, through attending junior and senior retreats. I have met so many wonderful people: graduates, former and current coworkers, parents and especially current students. Wherever I end up, I will always have a piece of IWA with me.

Praised be the Incarnate Word and go Falcons!





Softball

Chris Harden moved up from being assistant coach to our new head softball coach this year. Jacob Banda is our new assistant coach. Together, they made our softball team extremely strong and competitive, with 13 wins under their belt; they are 1-0 in district. 14 Falcons made up the team: seniors Paloma Aleman and Gabby Richards; juniors Olivia Montemayor, Leighton Murphy, Faith Puzon and Kara Baumeister; sophomores Eve Puzon, Katie Marciano, Karly Taylor, Ashlynn Richards and Alexandra Garrido; and freshmen Landry Case and Marianna Fandino. Eve led the team in home runs, with six for the season! Additionally, nine Falcons were chosen for the all-district team: Landry Case and Eve Puzon (first team); Olivia Motemayor, Faith Puzon, Katie Marciano and Karly Taylor (second team); and Leighton Murphy, Ashlynn Richards and Gabby Richards (honorable mention).

Swim

Our head coach, Rachel Boyle, welcomed a beautiful baby girl named Tatum in early September. During Rachel's absence, we welcomed back former coach Marcela Portillo, who guided our girls through the beginning of the season until December, when Rachel returned. The team had a great season! The team includes junior Veronica Burger; sophomore Katie Marciano; and freshmen Kathryn Damiati and Gemma Sonnonstine. At state, Gemma finished in eighth place! The relay team consisted of Victoria Burger, Kathryn Damiani, Gemma Sonnonstine and Katie Marciano. They participated in the 200 yard medley relay, the 200 yard freestyle relay and the 400 yard freestyle relay. Our swim team should continue to be strong next year, especially with the addition of any new athletes who join.

Golf

Our golf team is led by head coach Charlie Butler, who is returning for his third year. The team consists of four ladies: seniors Ailey-Marie Willis and Elle Lewis; junior Giselle Boxie; and sophomore Cecilia Trevino. The team has competed in five tournaments this year and done well at all of them—Ailey-Marie Willis shot a 79 in the Bay Area Christian Invitational and an 84 at the district tournament, where she finished in fourth place. Ailey-Marie will compete again at the District Regional Tournament in San Antonio. We wish her the best of luck!



Tennis

Peter Arienza is our new tennis coach. He has been leading our athletes in training since November, both in the weight room and on the court. The team consists of senior Gemma Rene; juniors Gabby Maggio, Sienna Brickey and Ava Peterman; sophomores Mallory Moore, Chelsea Nguyen and Nahla Lewis; and freshmen Sabrina Cervantes and Lily Ramirez. The girls competed in the TAPPS 4–6A district tournament at the end of March, with both Gabby Maggio and our doubles team Gemma Rene and Nahla Lewis advancing to the second round. Well done ladies!

Track

Margaret Glover is in her sixth year of coaching track at IWA, with 31 Falcons on the team. Ava Bocock, a junior, has done an incredible job this year on discus, having finished in the top three in a majority of the meets. Our 4x100m relay team, consisting of Leighton Murphy, Ava Bocock, Kyree Ike and Noelle Reed, finished in third place overall at the STH Eagles Relays. At the Track District Meet, the 4x100 relay finished in second place; both the 4x200 and 4x400 relay teams finished in fourth place; one of our triple jumpers placed third and the same athlete placed third in the long jump. Lastly, one of our athletes placed third in discus. The junior varsity team competed in the TAPPS/SPC relays in early April at Lutheran South. They also attended district at St. Agnes, competed fiercely and even qualified for regionals in San Antonio. Go Falcons!



Leadership

Student Body President Speaks About the Power of IWA's Student Council

Alex Beltran, '27, is excited to serve the IWA student body as their President for the 2026–2027 school year. As she prepares to take on this new leadership role, she credits much of her success to the support of IWA's Student Council (STUCO). "The girls are incredibly hardworking," she says, "and so dedicated to service."

IWA's Student Council is a member of the Texas Association of Student Councils (TASC), a non-profit organization serving middle and high school level student councils in Texas. Consisting of more than 1,400 member schools, TASC aims to develop leadership skills in students, promote democracy as a way of life and establish and uphold high standards for local councils.

During the 2024–2025 school year, IWA was elected as the President school for TASC, a huge achievement for Incarnate Word Academy! Building on this previous achievement, "we decided to run for Vice President this year," Alex said.

"Our girls are always the first to arrive, the last to leave, and always rise to the occasion; serving TASC as Vice President is the best way for IWA to show our leadership in action."

Each school that runs for a position in the TASC State Office must submit a platform to base their campaign on—IWA's platform was entitled "You Are Enough." *You Are Enough* focuses on raising awareness around the issue of low self-esteem and supporting students in learning self-acceptance. While demonstrating the core essence of IWA's leadership program, STUCO bravely confronts an issue that affects many: 50% of adolescents experience low self-esteem which can lead to depression, anxiety and cause individuals to have a hard time being social and succeeding in school. *You Are Enough* was a continuation of last year's theme of *Love is Respect*, focusing on encouraging peers to build

healthy relationships, respecting others and reminding the community that who you are in this moment is enough.

In April, IWA was elected as Vice President at the annual TASC State Conference! As the TASC Vice President school, IWA's STUCO will serve as the Chairman of the Credentials Committee, recruit other schools to serve on the committee, supervise set up of candidate booths, monitor election activities and assist other candidate schools at next year's State Conference, making sure to improve the candidates' experience and that the entire election process runs smoothly. This achievement would not have been made possible without the students' dedication and commitment. "I wish everyone could have seen them at the conference," Alex said. "They were campaigning for hours on end. When everyone else was getting tired out and ready to take a break, our girls kept going! They were so energetic and excited the whole time!"

In addition to being elected as Vice President, STUCO also won the TASC Sweepstakes award, placing IWA as one of the 280 student councils out of 1,400 member schools in Texas to receive this honor for the 2025–2026 school year. This award is given to Texas student councils who go above and beyond to serve their school, completing at least 60 projects per year. Some of the projects that IWA did during the 2025–2026 school year included You Are Enough Week, Red Ribbon Week, spirit weeks, pep rallies and regularly decorating the hallways and cafeteria to encourage school spirit among the students. The Sweepstakes award is an amazing honor for IWA to receive!

This summer, Alex will be traveling all over the state and country to learn how to best serve IWA's student body and TASC member schools. At the 2026 Steering Committee Retreat, she will meet the officers and presidents of each district, learn how to be an effective leader for the state, and work with the other TASC student leaders to establish the statewide service project to be implemented in schools throughout Texas for the upcoming school year. Following the Steering Committee Retreat, she will attend the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals Summer Workshop in Austin. At this workshop, she will promote TASC and encourage principals to become members. The rest of her summer will continue to be filled with

leadership opportunities, including the 2026 VISION National Conference in New Hampshire, a summer workshop with other IWA students and a board meeting with TASC's Board of Directors.

"I learned a great deal about the Student Council team this year," Alex shared. "Everyone works incredibly hard, rises to the challenge and always puts their best foot forward to represent themselves, our Student Council and our school. Bella Garza, '25, led STUCO into becoming the President school of TASC. Because of her enthusiasm and faith in us, I believed that we could run for a position like Vice President this year. Many other schools in TASC are large public schools with thousands of students and hundreds of Student Council members. Under her leadership, IWA was elected as the first private school to serve as President school.

This was an amazing moment for us, proving that we can stand out even in a big crowd!"

Alex hopes that this upcoming school year, IWA will leave a lasting legacy on the state through their work as a Vice President school. "I hope that we show other schools that anything you set your mind to can be done, allow other student leaders to become empowered and help others realize that they are enough in every era. Again, I am so, so proud of our girls—none of this would have been possible without their hard work and dedication. It is so great to watch them come together, collaborate and represent our school. I can't wait to see what they do next school year and at next year's conference!"



Shake-a-licious Brings in Over \$1,000 for DePelchin Children's Center

Twice a year, our Emerging Entrepreneurs class launches a small business on campus that allows students to develop entrepreneurial skills by leading and participating in departmental teams such as operations, finance, human resources, marketing and management.

For the 2025 fall semester, students created *Shake-a-licious*, where they served hand-made milkshakes and specialty fries every Tuesday and Thursday. Through efficient practices, a delectable menu and great customer service, Shake-a-licious surpassed their initial profit goal, earning a remarkable total of **\$1,435!** All of the proceeds were donated to DePelchin Children's Center here in Houston. Since its foundation in 1892, DePelchin has served Houston-area children and families through programs including parenting classes and counseling, foster care and adoption services, ensuring that children have the support they need.

Our student leaders are proud of their dedication and the positive impact that DePelchin can make with their donation.

HEAR FROM OUR EMERGING ENTREPRENEURS

WHAT WAS YOUR ROLE ON THE SHAKE-A-LICIOUS TEAM?

Cassi Martinez '27: I had a role in Management and Operations. Because of my role, I was able to manage different teams within our non-profit, as well as figure out how we would go about selling our shakes and fries.

Olive Focke '26: I was on both the Marketing and Finance teams!

Brielle Reagins '26: Like Cassi, I was also on the Management and Operations teams.



WHAT WAS THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECT OF RUNNING A SMALL BUSINESS? HOW DID YOU OVERCOME IT?

Brielle: The most challenging aspect of running Shake-a-licious was making sure we had enough product on sale day and ensuring that we were not wasting product or money. We overcame this challenge by cross-checking all of our sales and how much product we used each sale day to estimate how much we would need to buy each week.

Cassi: The most challenging aspect of running a non-profit was making sure we were fully prepped for each selling day, which involved making sure we had enough volunteers, ingredients and supplies to put our products together. It was never perfect, but we always did our best with what we had. Together, we solved a majority of the problems that arose!

WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST TAKEAWAY FROM RUNNING A SMALL BUSINESS?

Brielle: I learned that every role is essential and key to an establishment running smoothly; no role is a small role!

Cassi: The biggest takeaway from this experience is that all forms of communication are important, whether it be verbal or virtual communication. This non-profit is built on the ideas of our team and not an individual. I have learned that it is important to show others that they are truly valued and I give them credit for all the ways they contribute to the team. I always do my best to show my friends and family how unique their roles are and how much of a positive impact they have on me!

HOW HAS WHAT YOU LEARNED BEEN INCORPORATED INTO YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE?

Brielle: Being in this course has made me reconsider my everyday purchases. Now, I try to make sure that I am getting the best amount or value for the price I am paying.

Olive: Emerging Entrepreneurs has reminded me how important it is to listen to others and to have confidence in myself and my choices.

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF SHAKE-A-LICIOUS?

Olive: My favorite part of running a small business was that our class was able to work well together. Because of our small class size, we were able to compromise, suggest different ideas and everyone could have their voices heard.

Cassi: What I liked most about running our non-profit was seeing girls work together to produce delicious shakes and fries that our peers then got to enjoy!

Brielle: The best part about running a small business was seeing the ins-and-outs of what really goes on behind the scenes in a business.



Young Leaders Program Inspires Next Generation

Each year the Young Leaders Program (YLP) offers one-day workshops for seventh and eighth grade girls to develop as leaders through service and collaboration. Both of these workshops are led by teams of IWA students who share the skills they have developed through our Young Leaders Program.

This year's programming began in the fall when our Young Leaders Program hosted *Sisters in Service*, our one-day interactive workshop about servant leadership. The participants were guided by Young Leaders Program students who shared what it means to be a servant leader, taught how we apply Catholic Social Teachings and guided attendees as they put what they learned into action during the workshop by creating care bracelets for patients at Texas Children's Hospital, stress balls for seniors at a local nursing home to build strength in their hands, care bags for the homeless and thank you cards for Adopt-A-Platoon.

"Sisters in Service is an amazing opportunity for prospective students to learn more about IWA's Leadership Program, our school and for them to learn how they can make a big impact through small actions!" said **Catherine Nolasco, '28**.

The second workshop, *Look 'n Lead*, was also a great success! Our Young Leaders Program Team was joined

by seventh and eighth graders from various Houston-area middle schools to participate in leadership workshop sessions focused on authenticity, boldness, compassion and perseverance. This year's theme was Write Your Own Story.

The goal of this weekend event was to help the next generation of young women begin shaping a future written in confidence, courage and leadership. Look 'n Lead is always led by our leadership students, where they share with attendees the skills they have developed through our Young Leaders Program. Between imparting wisdom in general sessions and inspiring communication and collaboration in team challenges and activities, the YLP girls guided the middle schoolers through a Saturday of connection and learning.

Faith Puzon, '27, the lead student organizer of Look 'n Lead, says, "This program is so special to me. I oversaw every aspect of this workshop and worked with each of the student leaders to make this workshop the best it could for the middle schoolers. Seeing the growth in this program has been an honor and I hope it continues to grow and continue to inspire young leaders every year."

Leadership Live Speaker Series Continues

During the 2025–2026 school year, students in the Young Leaders Program invited two prestigious speakers to share their knowledge and experiences with the IWA community: Mrs. Kelly Woodward in November and Ms. Tiana Sanford in February.

Mrs. Woodward (pictured below) is the first female COO of Houston Airports. In her opening remarks, Mrs. Woodward shared that she loved how IWA describes leadership: authentic, bold and rooted in service to others. “IWA’s definition of leadership is how I would describe my own professional journey,” she said. “I didn’t know that I was the first woman COO; I just knew I wanted to take care of my employees.”

Mrs. Woodward’s presentation followed her journey from growing up in New Jersey, dreaming of breaking stereotypes and becoming a pilot, to eventually being in charge of the entire Houston Airport System, which includes Bush Intercontinental Airport, Hobby Airport and Ellington Airport—America’s first spaceport.

As she spoke to the next generation of authentic, bold servant leaders, she encouraged the ladies to not give up on their dreams, remain open to unexpected opportunities and to build strong connections with the people around them.

In February, Ms. Tiana Sanford built on the message

Mrs. Woodward imparted to the students. Ms. Sanford is a White Hat Award-winning attorney who currently serves Harris County District Attorney’s Office as a Bureau Chief in charge of professional development, is head of misdemeanor courts in Harris County and is an adjunct professor for Baylor Law School. She spoke to our students about relying on their inner compass as they figure out their next steps in life. “Finding your calling is listening to your body and your spirit,” she said. She also guides her life by following a quote from Pope Paul VI, “If you want peace, work for justice.”

Ms. Sanford is a former Catholic schoolgirl herself who was once in our students’ shoes. She spoke about how her parents modeled academics, virtues and spirituality—the pillars of an Incarnate Word Academy education—to establish in her a spirit dedicated to doing what was right, even if it wasn’t easy and using her voice, even if it shook.

Using her voice, Ms. Sanford has advocated for survivors as an appointee to the Governor’s Sexual Assault Survivors Task Force, was instrumental in shaping policy to provide communities with the tools to combat crime and support survivors and has been “blessed to be able to direct a team in the biggest office in Texas and to stand up for and represent [her] community.”

We are grateful to these wonderfully inspiring women for spending time with the IWA community and influencing the next generation of leaders.



Hernandez is Honored for Work With Student Leaders Across State

In September 2025, **Ms. Hernandez**, Director of Young Leaders Program, was honored at the Texas Associations of Student Councils (TASC) Advisor Workshop for her hard work and dedication as a leadership consultant at the association’s summer leadership workshop program.

From 2010 to 2024, Ms. Hernandez trained thousands of student leaders from across the state to become successful leaders. She received the *Pat M. Kirschner Award* for her service and dedication to helping so many young individuals grow in confidence and become strong leaders.

The TASC Board of Directors created this award in 1987 to recognize outstanding contributions to the

TASC Summer Leadership Workshop Program. In order to be nominated, the recipient must have served for 10 or more years as a Summer Workshop Director or Consultant. The TASC Board must vote to present the award.

We are so proud of Ms. Hernandez and her achievements! We are exceptionally grateful for all she does for our students and the IWA community.



Sisterhood in the Heart of Houston

The friendships made at IWA are the heartbeat of our community. Sisterhood helps our students learn to **lead with compassion, care for one another** and **give them a deep sense of belonging**. IWA students take pride in their shared values, traditions and welcoming others. At IWA, the message is clear: *you are not alone here*.



Office Hours



Dr. Talia Pennington-Dorsey

A HEART FOR COLLEGE COUNSELING

Dr. Pennington-Dorsey (**Dr. P-D**) began her work in college access in 2009 at her alma mater, Dillard University, where she served in the Office of Enrollment Management. Her passion for helping students began with watching her mother go through a 34-year teaching career in the Chicago Public School system where she taught special education. At the start of her career, Dr. P-D followed in her mother’s footsteps by also working in Chicago Public Schools. From there, she moved throughout the education system, working in K–8 schools, high schools, private schools and higher education as an enrollment management director and professor.

When Dr. P-D joined the IWA family in 2022, she was thrilled to continue guiding young women through the college journey, beginning in freshmen year and supporting them every step of the way. “The most rewarding aspect of my career is seeing students evolve. When students walk into my office for the first time, some of them come in thinking that the college of their choice is not attainable for them. **I love being able to help them see how college is an option and helping them realize how they can get there.** It is incredibly rewarding to watch students

graduate, emerge as leaders on their college campuses and later grow into executives and leaders within their professions,” she says.

In 2024, Dr. Pennington-Dorsey opened the Matel College Center here at IWA, a space on the fourth floor that has been specifically dedicated to all things college related. Throughout the school year, IWA welcomes representatives from various colleges and universities into the Matel College Center, where students can connect directly with admissions officers, learn more about a wide range of colleges, ask thoughtful questions and engage in meaningful conversations in a low-pressure setting.

“My goal is to provide a space where students can work on **college applications, research** universities and their educational programs, **brainstorm** and **collaborate** with each other while having me as a resource,” she says. “In my previous roles, I was noticing how many students did not understand the application process and were not prepared to present the best versions of themselves. Here at IWA, I aim to help our students do exactly that.”

In March of 2026, the College Counseling Department hosted its inaugural *Spring Case Study*. During this educational evening, the Houston Area Recruiters Network (HARN) representatives from six partnering schools came to IWA and facilitated small group conversations about how college admissions teams assess applicant readiness, potential, context, experiences, involvement, growth and overall fit. Participants took on the role of admissions committees as they looked through different applicant profiles and were guided through each section of an application. Through this hands-on approach, both students and their parents learned how institutions are asked to meet certain requirements, like geographic balance, socioeconomic access, programmatic alignment and retention and fit.

Dr. P-D also organizes our annual Career Day, Alumnae Panel and College Fair. During the Alumnae Panel, each grade level participates in a panel discussion, posing questions related to study strategies, dormitory life, cultivating friendships, involvement in campus communities, career guidance and other areas of

student life. During our college fair, students are able to meet with more than 30 top colleges and universities from across the country, where they ask questions, learn about schools’ unique programs and build valuable relationships with college representatives. The **College Counseling Department** is excited to launch the inaugural *Tour of Texas*, a college visit experience featuring some of the top universities across the state during the upcoming fall semester.

Dr. P-D is an invaluable resource for the students at Incarnate Word Academy and plays a key role in the *Heart of College Counseling*, helping to shape and strengthen its presence within the Heart of Houston.

Q&A

WHO INSPIRES YOU?

My mom is probably my biggest role model, especially for my career. I try to have a role model for every aspect of my life! My mom worked for 34 years in special education. She truly loved her job; I don’t remember ever seeing her call out from work. She taught me that neurodivergent students deserve the same quality education as every other student, and above all, to be loved.

WHAT’S TOP ON YOUR PLAYLIST?

I love gospel music, especially anything by CeCe Winans and Fred Hammond!

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR HOBBIES?

As one of my passion projects, I helped to found the Black Tennis Club of Houston. In addition to being a league member with United States Tennis Association (USTA), I also serve on the USTA Texas Board, where I focus on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. I also serve as a board member for Hope For Three, a nonprofit organization that supports families impacted by autism in Fort Bend County.

FAVORITE VACATION SPOT?

Anywhere with a good book! As a kid, I hated reading; I’d do almost anything to avoid it. Now, I can’t stop reading! The last book I read was *Kin* by Tayari Jones. It’s about mothers and daughters and focuses on friendship and sisterhood!



Fine Arts

Little Women, Falcon Theater's fall musical, was an incredible series of performances celebrating the childhood of Luisa May Alcott, a renowned American poet. "The iconic character of Jo March captivated us with a fire inside, inspiring us all to persevere against all odds—none of us were the same after this musical!" said Chip Simmons, Falcon Theater Director. Featuring young men from St. Thomas High School, the delightful musical ran for one weekend during November.

PHOTO BY
SADIE MCNEIL '28



Congratulations Choir!

Congratulations to our IWA Choir State Solo and Ensemble Competitors! Our Choir received **Superior medals** and **Excellent marks**. They have worked so hard all year and greatly deserve these high achievements. "I am incredibly proud of their growth that I have seen throughout the year," says Ms. Theresa Diaz, IWA's Choir Director.

SOLOS

EMILY BARNETT '29 | Excellent
Ah Mio Cor by Handel

REBECCA KOTA '29 | Superior
Pie Jesu by Fauré

MAYA RAHMAN '28 | Superior
Piango Gemo by Vivaldi

ZOE BUSH '27 | Superior
O Redeemed! by Brown

SOPHIA VASQUEZ '27 | Superior
Vaga Luna Che Inargenti by Bellini

CASSANDRA MARTINEZ '27 | Superior
Ave Verum by Mozart

ISSA MOORE '26 | Superior
Bist Du Bei Mir by Bach

ENSEMBLE

VERE LANGUORES NOSTROS
BY LOTTI | Superior

Altos: Cassandra Martinez, Issa Moore, Avery Tucker '27

Soprano 2: Emily Barnett, Zoe Bush, Rebecca Kota

Soprano 1: Laura Watts '29, Maya Rahman, Sophia Vasquez





Gala & Auction 2027: Save the Date

Mark your calendars for another unforgettable evening! Join us as we continue the tradition of celebrating and supporting Incarnate Word Academy. Stay tuned for more details—we can't wait to see you there!

SATURDAY, APRIL 3, 2027
HILTON AMERICAS-HOUSTON
DOWNTOWN HOUSTON



Advancement News

FEATURE

Spring in the City Gala & Auction Raises More Than \$1.1 Million for IWA

On Saturday, April 25, 2026, Incarnate Word Academy welcomed guests to *Spring in the City*, the 2026 Gala & Auction held at The Revaire. The evening celebrated the mission of IWA while raising an extraordinary **\$1,143,595** in support of the school and its students.

The event was co-chaired by Cheryl and Nick Dzurec, Juliana and Bryan Gaige, and Tiffany and Brandon Mullen, whose leadership helped bring the vibrant spring-inspired vision to life. Seasonal decor and beautiful floral arrangements generously donated by H-E-B transformed the ballroom into an elegant celebration of renewal, community and faith.

This year's Sister Agatha Sheehan Award honored Fr. R. Troy Gately and the members of Saint John Vianney Catholic Church for their enduring support of Catholic education and the mission of Incarnate Word Academy.

Throughout the evening, guests enjoyed performances by the IWA Choir, spirited bidding during the live auction and one of the night's most sought-after experiences—an exclusive dinner with Jose Altuve, which sold five times during the auction.

A particularly meaningful moment of the evening came during "Paddles Up," following a heartfelt speech from student **Cassandra Martinez, '27**, who shared her personal experience and the impact Incarnate Word Academy has had on her life. Inspired by her testimony and the school's mission, the community came together to raise **\$102,250** in support of scholarships and financial aid, ensuring that more young women can experience the transformative power of an IWA education.

Thanks to the generosity of parents, alumnae, faculty and staff, clergy, community supporters and friends of IWA, *Spring in the City* became another record-setting celebration of faith, sisterhood and the enduring mission of Incarnate Word Academy.

Giving Tuesday

This Giving Tuesday, our IWA family came together with remarkable generosity, raising over **\$61,000** and more than doubling our mission-driven matching gifts. Your support is a powerful affirmation of the work we do each day to form confident, compassionate young women grounded in the values of the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament.

We are deeply grateful for every donor who chooses to invest in our students and their futures.

Your belief in Incarnate Word Academy strengthens our legacy and ensures that our tradition of excellence continues for generations to come.



2025 Raffle Recap: Bubbles, Bling, and Everything!



The *2025 Falcon Raffle: Bubbles, Bling, and Everything* brought the Incarnate Word Academy community together once again in support of our students and school mission. Through the dedication and enthusiasm of students, families, faculty, staff and supporters, this year’s raffle raised an impressive **\$138,582.75** for IWA.

A highlight of this year’s raffle was the increased involvement of students in the planning and promotion process, helping create even greater excitement and school spirit throughout the campaign. Their creativity, leadership and energy played an important role in the success of the event.

The success of *Bubbles, Bling, and Everything* reflects the strength of the Falcon community and the generosity of those who continue to support IWA. Special thanks to the dedicated **Parent Raffle Committee** and **Student Committee** for the many hours spent organizing, promoting and reconciling tickets throughout the campaign. Their commitment helped make this year’s raffle a sparkling success!

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR TOP RAFFLE SELLERS:



MIA HOWARD ‘26 | **\$1,930**



MORGAN CASSIDY ‘28 | **\$1,820**



CLARKSYN CONNELLY ‘28 | **\$1,650**



From IWA to College Success: Alumnae Panel Insights

On January 8, 2026, IWA welcomed **25 recent graduates** back to campus, where they participated in our annual *Alumnae College Panel*.

During this morning of sisterhood and engagement, each grade level participated in a panel discussion with alumnae, posing questions related to study strategies, dormitory life, cultivating friendships, involvement in campus communities, career guidance and other areas of student life. The students greatly appreciated the candor and insight shared by the alumnae and the atmosphere was filled with warmth and laughter. Following the panel, students had the opportunity to engage in brief one-on-one conversations with the panelists, fostering networking and reinforcing the bonds of **sisterhood**. Notably, several alumnae from different graduating classes were also able to connect, further strengthening ties within the community.

“Moments like this are why we do what we do. Seeing our alumnae come back as poised, thoughtful college students, eager to guide and inspire those walking behind them, is incredibly moving. Their growth makes us proud and their continued connection to 609 makes our hearts full,” **Dr. Pennington-Dorsey** said.

Thank you to Dr. Talia M. Pennington-Dorsey, our Director of Counseling, and our Advancement Department for helping to organize these two annual events!

Falcon Families: The Heart of IWA

Throughout the year, our Falcon Families gather to celebrate the traditions that have come to mean so much to our community. On October 3, our students and their mothers filled the pews of Annunciation Catholic Church for our annual Mother-Daughter Mass, celebrating the bonds shared between our students and their moms. On January 9, IWA welcomed their fathers for the Father-Daughter Mass, another occasion that filled Annunciation Catholic Church. After each of these Masses, students and their guests gathered in the IWA Auditorium for a reception sponsored by our Falcon Family Club.

It is such a joy to welcome and truly honor our parents during these special occasions. They give so much to the IWA Community and we are blessed by their presence and commitment to the Academy.

More Than A Blessing: IWA Welcomes Our Grandparents

Our annual Grandparents Day Celebration may have looked different this year, but the joy and love remained constant. On March 27, IWA students welcomed their Grandparents to campus. The morning began with a student-led prayer service and blessing by Sister Lauren Beck, C.V.I., IWA President, after which the entire student body, along with our special guests, enjoyed a beautiful reception. During the reception, student work was showcased, allowing our grandparents to see the truly transformative power of an IWA education.

“Our Grandparents are incredible champions of the mission, giving so generously of their time, talents and treasure. Their support ensures that their granddaughters and their peers have the opportunity not just to attend, but thrive at IWA,”

said **Kathryn Griep**, Director of Advancement.



Red Check: A Beloved IWA Tradition

Red Check is a cherished IWA tradition that brings seniors together one last time as a class before graduation. This year, the Class of 2006 made the celebration even more special by sponsoring the luncheon. They provided a wonderful meal, shared words of wisdom with the seniors and presented each young lady with a special t-shirt welcoming them to the alumnae sisterhood. Afterward, it was off to the auditorium to bid farewell to the student body by performing entertaining skits that spoofed teachers and staff, reminiscing about their four years at IWA. It ended with a heartfelt “Senior Sign-Out” video and a slideshow.

After helping welcome the **Class of 2026** into the

alumnae sisterhood, the Class of 2006 enjoyed a *Happy Hour* on the rooftop. They reminisced about their time at the Academy, caught up with each other, shared life events and poured over old copies of yearbooks in the library.

Thank you ladies for continuing to give back to the Heart of Houston with your time and talent—it was wonderful to welcome you back to the 609!



Alumnae

FEATURE

From Classroom to Capitol: A Conversation with State Representative Rhetta Bowers '85

A member of the Incarnate Word Academy Class of 1985, **Rhetta Bowers** began studying biology on a pre-med track at Spelman College in Atlanta, GA and later continued her education at Texas Southern University, earning her Bachelor of Arts degree in Telecommunications with a minor in Broadcast Journalism in 1991.

Today, she serves as the Texas State Representative for District 113. However, her path to state government wasn't a traditional one: "This journey has taught me that everything you do matters. Every step I have taken from media to motherhood to education to public service has played a role in getting me where I am today. Even without a traditional legal or graduate degree, I have gained invaluable knowledge through lived experience—no experience is wasted," she says. "Every path, every opportunity and every season contributes to your growth and prepares you for what comes next."

Rhetta spent eight years working in television and radio before making the incredible decision to stay at home and raise her children. Over the next 11 years, she became a remarkably active member of her community and spent many hours volunteering at her children's school.



With a desire to stay active in the workplace and on campus volunteering almost daily, she re-entered the workforce, serving as a long-term substitute teacher at her children's schools. "It was there that I realized my passion extended beyond the classroom. I developed a strong desire to advocate for students, support teachers and improve education across our state," she said.

Rhetta then began to work in a colleague's office, where she saw firsthand how policy and funding decisions impact communities. Through this experience, she realized how she could make an even greater difference through public service.

At the end of the year, it was evident that this was where her future lay: "I was asked to run for city council," she recalls, "and to run for House District 113—the very district I now have the privilege and honor of serving in."

During this same time period, Rhetta was also serving on the Rowlett Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and did this for eight years. In 2012, she was honored to be one of 100 Texans invited to the White House during the Obama administration—an experience that challenged the attendees to return home and continue the work in their own communities.

Currently, Rhetta is seeking a fifth term in office and is hard at work preparing her legislative priorities for the upcoming session. Her focus includes maternal and reproductive health, as well as domestic violence issues that remain critical to the well-being of our communities. She continues to host town hall meetings and community conversations to ensure that her work reflects the voices and needs of the people that she serves.

"I don't take this calling lightly. I believe I was placed in this position for a purpose, to serve people, to stand in the gap and to honor the values of faith and family that shaped me, as I work to ensure every voice in District 113 is heard!"

Q&A

HOW HAS IWA PROVIDED A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR YOUR LIFE?
IWA gave me both a strong academic and spiritual foundation. It nurtured my faith in a way that has stayed with me throughout my life and continues to guide me today.

ARE THERE ANY TEACHERS THAT MADE AN IMPACT ON YOU?
Absolutely! Sister Madeline, Mrs. Whittington, Ms. Greer, Mr. McDonald and Sister Brendan all had a lasting impact on me. They were not only exceptional educators, but also deeply invested in their students' growth and success.

DID YOU FIND OPPORTUNITIES TO LEAD AT IWA?
During my time at IWA, I was sophomore Class President, served on Student Council and was also an



officer in the Black Student Union. Those experiences helped build my confidence and taught me the importance of leadership, service and using my voice.

WHAT SHOULD READERS KNOW ABOUT THE QUALITIES OF AN IWA EDUCATION?
IWA taught me the true meaning of sisterhood. I recently celebrated my 40th reunion; those bonds remain strong today. The Academy also taught me how to find common ground with people who may not look like me or think like me and how to work together with understanding and purpose in order to embrace our differences. Those lessons have stayed with me throughout my career and have been essential in building relationships, navigating diverse spaces and leading effectively.



CLASS OF 1975 REUNITES

Members of the Class of '75 reunited to celebrate their 50th Reunion on November 1, 2025, at Romero's Las Brazas in Houston, TX. The afternoon brought together an unforgettable celebration of friendship, laughter and lasting connections. Familiar faces reunited, old stories resurfaced and new memories were made. Even after 50 years, the sisterhood remains strong!



60 YEARS OF MARRIAGE

Dorothy Hernandez Jimenez, '62, and her sister, Jean Hernandez Garcia, '63, both celebrated their 60th wedding anniversaries with their husbands. We are delighted to honor these two IWA alumnae sisters and their remarkable legacy of love and commitment!

Standing (left to right): Raymond Garcia, Jean Hernandez Garcia, '63, Dorothy Hernandez Jimenez, '62, Isaac Jimenez

CLASS OF 1962 GATHERS TOGETHER

The Class of '62 gathered for lunch on October 15, 2025, at Union Kitchen on Memorial Drive to share memories and strengthen the sisterhood! In December, they also gathered together at Peggy Schulin's house to celebrate Christmas!



Front row (left to right): Felicia Caporino Cox, Christine Micklitz Womack, Irene Olivares Brizuela, Peggy Schulin
Seated at table (left to right): John Kozel, Lillian Cegielski Kozel, Teresa Medina Martinez, Lena Schuttee Tomasino
Back row (left to right): Elizabeth Barrett White, Loretta Prazak Kasowski, Edward Kasowski, Harry Buzek, Jake Martinez, O'Reen Fires Johnson, Maria Villagomez Buzek
Those that attended the Christmas gathering were: Loretta Prazak Kasowski, Janet Hamala Huber, Christine Micklitz Womack, Peggy Schulin, Lena Schuttee Tomasino, O'Reen Fires Johnson, Lillian Cegielski Kozel, Cynthia Beam Higginbotham, Dorothy Hernandez Jimenez and Maria Villagomez Buzek.

FIFTY YEARS OF MARRIAGE

Dorothy Swierkowski Battaglia, '74, and her husband, Vincent, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on October 16, 2026. Congratulations on five decades of marriage!



WEDDING BELLS RING

Caitlin Linton Thurston, '16, married William Thurston on October 11, 2025, at St. Brigid Catholic Church in Atlanta, Georgia. The two met after Caitlin graduated from Ole Miss and moved to Atlanta. William is a University of Georgia graduate, so their household is always "divided" during football season. They are excited to begin this new chapter together and look forward to all that the future holds!

CONGRATULATIONS DR. GUIDRY ANDERSON

Rosalind Guidry Anderson, '67, was awarded her Ph.D. from Our Lady of the Lake University in August 2025, while keeping a remarkable 4.0 average. Dr. Guidry Anderson completed this accomplishment after retiring from her career. Her commencement ceremony was held on May 7, 2026, which is also her mother's birthday! Congratulations Rosalind—we are proud of you and your accomplishments!



ANGELA GARZA CANTALAMESSA '07

Angela has been thriving at Stream Realty Partners for nearly three years and was recently promoted to Property Manager in Austin, TX. We are so excited for her as she continues to grow in her career. Even more joyfully, Angela and her husband, Kirby Cantalamessa, are embracing life as parents to their two beautiful children, Noah and Gabriella. What a wonderful season for their family!





MADISON RIPP '18

Madison Ripp, '18, met her husband Nick Kauffman during her sophomore year at Loyola University. They were joined in matrimony on October 18, 2025, at Loyola University Maryland's Alumni Memorial Chapel. They currently reside in Pittsburgh, PA, and love visiting their family and friends in Houston!



ENJOYING RETIREMENT

Gina Oggero Rizzo, MD, '78, has recently retired from her OBGYN practice. In June 2025, she moved to Morristown, New Jersey, to spend more time with her two grandchildren, Sophia (4 years old) and Miles (2 years old). She is greatly enjoying her free time with Tap, Zumba and Mah-Jongg!

CONGRATS ROSEMARY!

Rosemary Bua Williams, '67, made the incredible decision to return to college shortly before COVID began. Now, at the age of 75, she has graduated Magna Cum Laude with an AAS in Accounting from Lone Star College Cy Fair!

The IWA sisterhood is incredibly proud of her! Congratulations Rosemary!



WORKING FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

"My time at IWA prepared my heart and mind to face the challenges and injustices of the world. I worked for years as a volunteer with the Loretto Community in Kentucky. The Loretto Community, through Gospel Teachings, focused on social justice issues—working to heal past injustices of slavery and the mistreatment of the indigenous people of the area. Working for peace and justice has given my life great purpose and I am grateful for the opportunities," says Sonja Hlavaty Earthman Novo, class of 1959.



SISTERHOOD SIXTY YEARS LATER

Several members of the Class of '62 met to catch up with each other. The heart of sisterhood remains strong, even after graduation!

Seated (left to right): Peggy Schulin, Lena Schuttee Tomasino, Christine Micklitz Womack, Loretta Prazak Kasowski

Standing (left to right): Janet Hamala Huber, Felicia Caporino Cox, Maria Villagomez Buzek, Teresa Medina Martinez

SIXTIETH REUNION

The 1967 60th Reunion volunteers gathered at Coconut Grove Restaurant in Kemah, TX, to plan their special celebration.

Save the date for **Tuesday, October 20-Thursday, October 22, 2026!** Join your classmates for a few days of sisterhood, fun and memory making. For questions, please contact Belinda Postman Kaylani at belindakaylani@gmail.com or Paulette Spinella Janak at pjanak@comcast.net.



HEATHER DAY '00 AWARDED SCHOLARSHIP

Heather Day (Rooney), '00, is currently enrolled in graduate school at Montana State University. She is working towards a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree in their Midwifery Program. She has been awarded the ANEW Scholarship for Rural Ready Nurse Practitioners and has maintained a 4.0 GPA. She is set to graduate in May 2028. Congratulations Heather!

Pictured (left to right): Patty Arnold Arnett, Rosemary Bua Williams, Paulette Spinella Janak, Belinda Postman Kaylani, Terri Enriquez Hickman, Patricia Bilinoski Hoffman and Mary Pat Owens Cook

MIRANDA LOZOYA ‘16

Miranda Lozoya and Nicholas Vivanco (Cristo Rey Jesuit, Class of 2016) were recently engaged! They are both proud alumni of Catholic high schools in Houston. Although they grew up in the same circles, they didn’t meet until they attended Texas Tech University, where they became fast friends. Ten years later, they are preparing for the sacrament of marriage! They are incredibly excited to begin this new chapter of their lives and look forward to sharing in their love of God. They plan to be wed in the fall of 2027. Praised be the Incarnate Word & Viva Cristo Rey!



FORMER FALCON ATHLETE CONTINUES TO HIT IT OUT OF THE PARK

Melina Bellomo, a graduate of the class of 1990, is now the General Manager of the Baytown Bulkheads, Texas’ premier collegiate summer wood bat baseball team. During her time at IWA, she played softball and attended state championships several times. Being a student athlete taught her discipline, teamwork and how to be a leader. “My IWA roots prepared me to be a confident woman and that nothing is impossible,” she says, “Returning to the diamond feels like coming home.” Congratulations Melina!



50 YEARS OF MARRIAGE

Josephine Lamonte Simpson, ‘60, and her husband, Dr. Bobby Simpson (pictured to the right of Fr. Norbert Maduzia), recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary with a special Mass at St. Ignatius of Loyola Catholic Church in Spring, TX, celebrated by Fr. Norbert. Surrounded by family, all members gathered for the joyous occasion. A beautiful reception followed at Giuseppe’s Italian Restaurant.

GABBY THOMAS ‘15

Gabby Thomas, ‘15 and fiancé Brent Miles met while working together in Columbia, South Carolina, and have been together for nearly five years. Now living in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the couple is excited to be getting married in Tennessee on March 9, 2027 (3¹/3²/3³). Brent proposed on their four-year anniversary in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. Congratulations Gabby and Brent!



ALUMNAE RETURNS TO HOUSTON AS ART THERAPIST

Adrianah Rangel, ‘19, graduated from Hofstra University in Long Island, New York, in May of 2026 with her Masters of Art in Creative Arts Therapy Counseling. She has spent the last three years living in New York, exploring healing modalities through creative expressions that focus on visual arts, digital, 2D and 3D in application with mental health. She has been able to take in various cultures, go on adventures and experience life in the unique ways that New York offers. “God has really blessed me with the ability to experience an excellent education,” she says, “I can’t wait to return to Houston as an art therapist! I am so excited to share the power of healing through art; art knows no limits and the positive impact on mental health and physical health is unmatched potential.”



CLASS OF 1985

The class of 1985 gathered in July and again in November of 2025 to celebrate their 40th reunion. The sisterhood remains strong!



WE ARE THE HEART OF SISTERHOOD

At Incarnate Word Academy, we are blessed to have an alumnae network that is **over 6,000 strong**, with our graduates living across the United States and throughout the world.

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

Cathlyn (Cathy) Binder Widner, '56, graduated from IWA 70 years ago. Despite a recent cancer diagnosis, she has not slowed down. She still regularly attends Mass, plays bridge, shops and gardens in her yard. The prayers of the IWA community are working—her cancer is stable and shows no sign of spreading.

Cathy was married to a wonderful man for 57 years and has visited almost every U.S. state, as well as several countries in Europe. She always told her friends that her goal in life was to walk the Great Wall of China and about 20 years ago, she was able to do so!

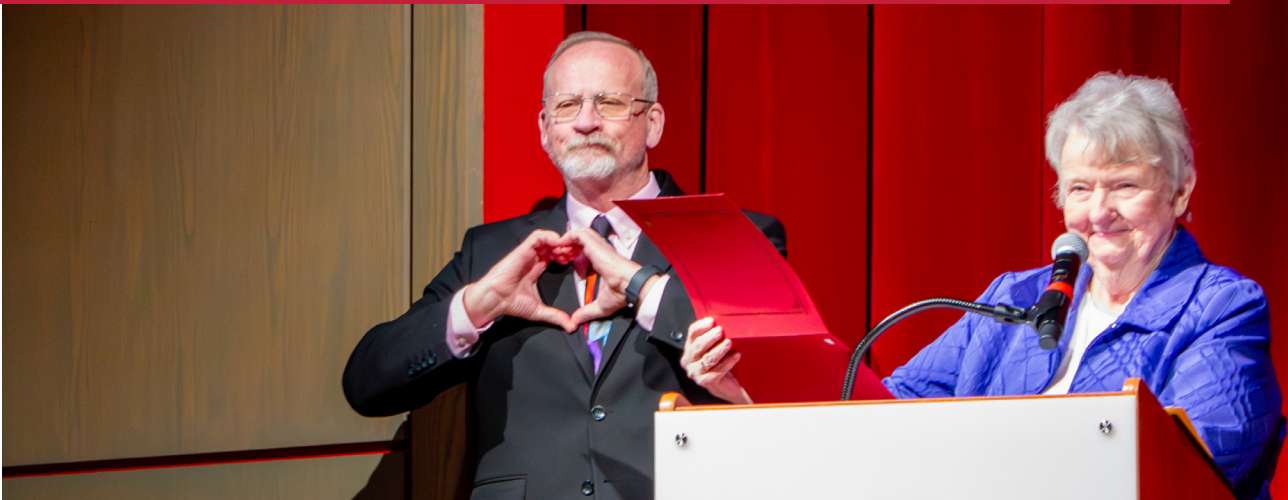
She is blessed with four children, eight grandchildren and seven great grandchildren. Every Christmas, they all gather in her home. It truly is a wonderful life!



ANY NEWS?

We want to hear from you! Please send your news—weddings, engagements, pregnancies, career news and IWA get-togethers—to the Advancement Department at alumnae@incarnateword.org.

Foundation Day



Forever Sisters

Each year, the school celebrates **Foundation Day** when we recall our roots, remember those who came before us and celebrate who we are today. We recall the heroism of the first three sisters who came to Houston to establish a foundation of the Order of the Congregation of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament and to found the Academy.

From leaving the Congregation's original foundation in Lyon, France, to responding to a request to come to Texas to serve in education, the sisters walked in faith, answering God's call to serve where they were needed. In April 1873, Mother Mary Dillon and two other sisters traveled to Houston to begin a new foundation for the Order. Once again, they walked in faith.

Coming with an unshakable trust in God, the Sisters took up residence in a building in a former Franciscan Monastery on Franklin Street in Downtown Houston. They moved on to the Crawford Street location and shortly after, had their first Mass in their own little chapel. The date was May 5, 1873, and it became known as Foundation Day. Shortly after, the sisters began educating students at what we now know as **Incarnate Word Academy**, a Catholic college preparatory school for young women.

In 2001, Foundation Day celebrations expanded into full-day events that included a Mass of Thanksgiving and the development of unique themes to "retell the story," fostering gratitude for the past and appreciation for

the present. The *Jeanne de Matel Award for Excellence* was established in 2002 to honor students, faculty, or staff for demonstrated excellence during the school year. The award, named in memory of **Jeanne de Matel**, the congregation's founder, recognizes individuals or groups who exemplify the IWA mission and values and offer a strong positive impact on the Academy. Their name(s) are engraved onto a plaque that hangs within the halls of the school as an inspiration to those who will follow in their footsteps. The award also includes a \$500 gift. The 2026 recipient was Mr. Steve Comer (pictured above), a beloved science teacher and role model for students.

Reflecting on the importance of Foundation Day, **Sister Lauren**, an Incarnate Word Sister and president of the Academy, shares, "It is amazing to take a look back and trace the difficult, yet faith-filled path those first sisters traveled to where we are now. It is also heartwarming to think of all that has been accomplished throughout the years by those who followed. It is equally amazing to see the accomplishments of our current students and our alumnae who continue to take the Word out into the world. From the beginning, God's guidance has always been with us every step of the way."

We can all be proud of our history and of what is being accomplished today. We are all sisters on the same mission in **The Heart of Houston**. Foundation Day belongs to all of us. It is easy to see why this annual celebration is one of the most cherished by the student body.

Acorn. Emblem. True.



In Memoriam

Delia G. Alejandro
Mother of Heather Pedraza '96

Mark Bartniski
*Father of Noel Bartniski Ingoldsby '16,
Former IWA Teacher*

Joan Hill Brown '51

Jane Kiely Cassidy
*Mother of Claire Fletcher,
Former IWA Marketing Director*

Gayle Gordy Maness '57

Helen Osterhaus Matula '50
Sister Brendan O'Donnell, C.V.I.

Emily Ann Trabulski O'Neill '57

Deborah Broussard Smith '69

Julia Ragusa Spedale '51
*Mother of Nickie Spedale Bounds '87
and Grandmother of Julia Bounds '25*

Donna Sanders Wiersema '62
Sister Marian Grace Thies, C.V.I.





PHOTOS BY

Anna McCorkle, Sadie McNeil '28,
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