

## Chaminade student cites Dr. King, other civil rights leaders, as examples of working toward racial equality

Brenden Piontek one of 29 students to be honored at Mass Jan. 17



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Brenden Piontek's love for cooking led him to a service opportunity at [Father Dempsey's Charities](#). But it became more than just making breakfast — he's also learned firsthand the effects of poverty in St. Louis via the men he's met at the transitional housing program.

The sophomore at Chaminade College Preparatory began volunteering with the Sunday Breakfast Crew as a sixth-grader, making regular breakfasts of eggs, bacon and pancakes for the men at Father Dempsey's.

"A lot of the men who come there are ex-convicts or have had problems with drugs and alcohol abuse," said Brenden. "It's a good way to get on their feet before going on to live their lives again."

Brenden's interest in service at such a young age drew the attention of Dietrich Smith, Chaminade's diversity director, who nominated Brenden for the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Model of Justice Award. Brenden is among 29 teens from Catholic parishes and high schools in the archdiocese who were to have been honored with the award Sunday, Jan. 17, at the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Louis. The awards ceremony is a highlight of the 45th annual Mass for the Preservation of Peace and Justice, which commemorates the birth and legacy of King. The Mass will be livestreamed at [cathedralstl.org](#).

"To my surprise, as a seventh-grader, Brenden re-enlisted and his contribution was outstanding," Smith, the diversity director, wrote in his recommendation of Brenden. "By the time he reached eighth grade, he was clearly one of my leaders for the breakfast program. I believe Brenden has demonstrated his commitment to the broader community, by dedicating his free time to addressing the affects of poverty in the City of St. Louis."

In 2019, the group was recognized by the City of St. Louis with a resolution for its work at Father Dempsey's. Brenden also received Chaminade's Diversity Office Service Award in 2018 and 2019 and the Diversity Office Leadership Award in 2019 — the youngest student to receive the award to date.

Dr. King's legacy of working toward civil rights in the face of oppression, ignorance and violence is legendary, focusing on the plight of others, and in particular, African Americans. Brenden said that his legacy lives on today in many ways, including demonstrations showing that Black lives matter.

Brenden also pointed to other examples of civil rights leaders, including the late Rosa Parks and U.S. Rep. John Lewis, who died in July. "I find his story and commitment to social justice one of the most compelling," Brenden said. "From his beginning fight for racial equality with his speech during the March on Washington to his service as Georgia's 5th District, being one of the most respected members of Congress, John Lewis' lifelong commitment to social justice should be known and appreciated by everyone."

Seeking racial equality remains an important issue in our society, Brenden said, and Dr. King's legacy should serve as an example for others. "Our best way to fix this problem is to continue to educate people on racial equality through examples like MLK and how he fought for civil rights," he said.



Brenden Piontek, a sophomore at Chaminade College Preparatory School, is one of the Martin Luther King Model of Justice awardees. He is pictured at the school in Creve Coeur Jan. 5.

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>> Mass for the Preservation of Peace and Justice

Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski will be the main celebrant and homilist at the annual Archdiocesan Mass for the Preservation of Peace and Justice, at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 17, at the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Louis. The annual Mass commemorates the birth and legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. High school teens will be honored with the Model of Justice Award at the end of Mass. The Mass will be livestreamed at [cathedralstl.org](#). For more information, call the St. Charles Lwanga Center (314) 367-7929.

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## **MLK Model of Justice awardees**

### **Parish honorees**

Ben Moses, All Saints Parish (St. Peters)  
Emma Bruegenhemke, Assumption (O'Fallon)  
Jason Nguyen, Blessed Teresa of Calcutta  
Joseph Hogan, Immaculate Conception (Dardenne)  
Ryan Harper, St. Elizabeth, Mother of John the Baptist  
Lucas Colligan, Saint Joseph (Farmington)  
Kira Gilles, St. Vincent DePaul (St. Louis)  
Lacey Best St. Vincent De Paul (Perryville)

### **High School honorees**

Liberty Kocsis, Bishop DuBourg High School  
Aidan Cotton, Cardinal Ritter College Preparatory High School  
Brenden Piontek, Chaminade College Preparatory School  
Justin Turner, Christian Brothers College High School  
Isabel Lee, Cor Jesu Academy  
Sara Oerding, Duchesne High School  
Madison Alexander, Incarnate Word Academy  
Abby Grunzinger, Nerinx Hall  
Mary Newsham, Notre Dame High School  
Candace Carr, Rosati-Kain High School  
Emma Busken, St. Dominic High School  
Jacob Lierman, St. Francis Borgia Regional High School  
Elian Dominguez, St. John Vianney High School  
Myles Kee, Saint Louis Priory School  
Ocean Okohson-Reb, St. Louis University High School  
Chris Garcia, St. Mary's High School  
Asha Peebles, Trinity Catholic High School  
Magdalene Naeger, Ursuline Academy  
Gage Heil, Valle Catholic High School  
Sara Fimmano, Villa Duchesne  
Megan Everson, Visitation Academy

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