

Why Boarding School ?

Recently a St. Bernard parent was asked, "I know St. Bernard is a fine school, but why would you choose a boarding school for your child?" Her answer: "Why wouldn't I?"

Why would a parent see the choice of a boarding school as a great advantage for a child? What are the benefits?

Without a doubt, boarding school life is a wonderfully unique experience, an education in itself. Part of that experience is the strong, lifelong identification with a place and a people. That happens nowhere as it does in the life of a boarding student, especially a St. Bernard boarder. Why?

First, St. Bernard is a place that believes in a full life, a life of true involvement, of overcoming fear and taking risks, and of accepting responsibility and self-control. That means high expectations. One must realize the great strides that are made by the boarding student who learns to accept such expectations and the dedication necessary to meet them; it means the growth, maturity and self-knowledge that come through a healthy measure of independence and self-reliance. More than others, boarding school students know how to study, set goals, watch less TV, budget time, and get along with other people. A St. Bernard student must make decisions and accept consequences, solve problems, clean a room well, do laundry, and learn to accept the joys and difficulties of life with others – and that may mean an occasional disagreement and an "I'm sorry." It's all a matter of making choices for yourself, a thing each of us must learn to do; that is what growth and responsibility are all about. Allowing a young person to sprout wings and make decisions is difficult; sometimes more difficult for parents than for their children. But helping them gain such independence is so necessary for a full life and for true happiness.

Second, there is the closeness that develops between the student and his or her fellow students. The experience of life together – not just sharing a few common classes and activities, but living together – creates a dynamic that remains with a person for life. Such relationships ground a person, giving associations that open the individual to a new dimension of experience, a depth of life that is found in no other way.

Third, there is the connection to the school community as a whole. Identification with a certain small community of people in a particular place beyond the immediate family truly establishes a person. That community consists of fellow students, faculty and staff and, uniquely at St. Bernard, the monastic community. It is the Benedictine monks and their love for God and neighbor who make St. Bernard Prep School possible. Though it may not be often articulated, the students know this and they identify with those men who, in spite of the changes brought about by time, are always here and always care for them. Alumni frequently

renew their connectedness by simply coming "home" and seeing one of the monks.

That brings up a final point of identification: the place. A boarding student becomes a part of his or her other "home" partly because of the surroundings. At St. Bernard that aspect is awesome, and though it may take years for a student to realize the atmosphere of natural beauty and peace that surround life at this school, the marvelous effect is always immediate. The place is a privilege. And of course the memories are powerful: the dorm and its director, the dining hall and the "good food," the gym, the Abbey church, the quad, the Brahma Room (snack bar), study hall, the routine, the hard work. It is difficult to describe the positive power of such rich experiences and identifications.

Parents often comment on the changes they see in a child who enters into the boarding life: increasing closeness to and affection shown toward the family; a depth of communication, appreciation and love that is often undeveloped at home; and the self-discipline, self-respect and self-confidence that comes from the school's belief in teenagers and in their ability to think for themselves and to do what is good.

It must be understood that parents are always very much connected to the daily lives of their children at St. Bernard: visiting, phoning, giving necessary permissions and money requests, and communicating with dorm directors, teachers and staff. On a deeper level, parents usually relate to their children more profoundly, increasingly aware of the bond that exists between them; and children grow in their understanding of the love that comes from parents who commit to the opportunity that the St. Bernard experience offers.

As you consider our boarding school at St. Bernard don't hesitate to come to us with any concerns. If you like, we will put you in touch with some of our students and their parents. They know St. Bernard and will be happy to advise you.

***A note about St. Bernard's purpose:** We are a Catholic college preparatory school (grades 9-12) for young men and women who are academically capable of and willing to prepare seriously for the life that lies ahead of them in college and university studies and beyond. St. Bernard is not equipped as a therapeutic setting for students who suffer from serious personal, social or academic difficulties.*

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