



**MANHATTAN
CHRISTIAN SCHOOL**

Connections

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus
for he will save the people from their sins.
Matthew 1:21

DECEMBER 2025

ISSUE 4

VOLUME 26

Five Ways to Support Manhattan Christian School This Season

Joel Westa, Director of Development

Thank you for joining us at our Annual Campaign Dinner! What a wonderful evening we shared together; we are truly blessed. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to John Stonestreet, President of the Colson Center, for joining us and sharing such meaningful insight. A special thank-you as well to Jen Scott, Libby Triemstra, and our Board for their tremendous work in organizing this lovely event.

Your generosity made the night extraordinary. Our Annual Campaign received \$91,495 in gifts, an additional \$6,005 through the dessert auction, and \$7,500 in pledges, for a total of over \$105,000. For Building on Our Blessings, we received \$21,300 in new gifts and \$1,675 in donations toward previous pledges.

Thank you for your faithful support of Manhattan Christian School. We are grateful for this community and the ways God continues to bless our work together.

As we enter the final weeks of the year, we remain deeply grateful for the generosity and prayers of our Manhattan Christian School community. If you're considering year-end giving, here are five meaningful ways you can make a direct impact on our students, our mission, and the future of MCS.

- 1. Annual Campaign: Help Us Reach Our \$140,000 Goal**
- 2. Building on Our Blessings: Critical Need for New Classroom Space**
- 3. Prayerful, Long-Term Support**
- 4. Montana's Educational Benefits Tax Credit Program**
- 5. The Manhattan Christian School Foundation**

You can read more details about the opportunities that interest you on pages three and four. Above all, we ask for your continued prayers for our students, faculty, administration, board, and for God's ongoing blessing upon Manhattan Christian School and the mission we pursue here in the Gallatin Valley.

Thank you for your generosity, your prayers, and your partnership.

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Classroom Highlight of the Month

Mrs. Taber's freshmen English Class read Ivan Doig's The Whistling Season and then were tasked to write an alternate final chapter. Read a few on page five!

ROTARY

student of the month

Please join us in congratulating November's Rotary Student of the Month, Samuel O'Hara. Sam was chosen by his teachers because he is known to display high character, leadership, and community mindedness both at and away from school.

Samuel O'Hara



How long have you been at MCS?

I attended MCS from Pre-K through 3rd grade. I then went to Amsterdam from 4th grade through 6th grade. After 6th grade I came back to MCS, and have attended here from 7th grade on.

What extracurriculars are involved with?

While I am not involved with any extra curriculums at MCS, I am involved in a plethora of them outside of school. I am heavily involved with Missouri Headwaters Gun Dog Club where I spend a lot of time training my two English Field Cocker Spaniels, Kip and Trixie, for upland hunting. I also do a lot of upland game hunting with my two spaniels, as well as compete with Kip in AKC Field Trials and Hunt Tests. I enjoy big game hunting for deer and elk. In the summers I am an avid fly fisherman. I also have been skiing since I was 5 years old. I have been involved in Gallatin County 4H for 12 years.

What awards have you won during your time in those extracurriculars?

With Kip I have placed 4th at one AKC field trial as well as gotten Kip her Senior hunter certification through AKC hunt tests. I am a member of National Honors Society, top GPA in my class Freshman and Sophomore years, and have been on honor roll since 7th grade.

What have some of your favorite classes and teachers been while at MCS?

Some of my favorite classes at MCS have been my history classes with both Mrs. Sytsma and Mr. TeSlaa. This is because I enjoy history a lot. I also really enjoy my TA with Scott Kimm, helping with school maintenance. This has been my most favorite class over all of my years in school. I really enjoy this class because we have a lot of fun and I enjoy the things that we do to take care of the school, such as property maintenance, fabricating tools for use at the school, and the ever favorite task to taking out the trash.

What are some of your best non-academic memories?

My favorite memory at MCS was Mrs. Brewer's band tour that we went on last year. I really cherish this memory because it exposed me to a whole other part of the United States that I had never seen before, allowed me to experience a different culture, and brighten people's day with my musical talents.

What goal have you set for yourself during your senior year?

My goal for my senior year is to survive calculus and graduate.

What are you working on for your Senior Project?

After attending Western College of Auctioneering last summer, I decided to use my talent as a professional auctioneer for my senior project. I chose several organizations that I support including Heroes and Horses, MCS, Warriors and Quiet Waters, and Zoe Care to donate my time as a professional auctioneer and ring man to these organizations for their gala events. By doing this I can help organizations mitigate the expensive cost of hiring a professional auctioneer for their fundraising events.

What are your plans for after graduation?

At this point I am not yet sure of future schooling plans, however, I have invested in my education as an auctioneer. I plan to continue to pursue that career as well as possibly pursue professional dog training and welding.

What is one thing you think sets your education at MCS apart from other schools?

I think that one thing that set the education at MCS apart from other schools is the rigor of the schooling that well prepares the students for their endeavors outside of high school. This schooling allows for all students that graduate to be well prepared for life as well as possible schooling after high school.

Favorite Bible Verse?

Micah 6:8 "He has shown your O' mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

All School & Community Christmas Chapel



One of our favorite ways to close out the year before Christmas break is to gather together at an all-school Christmas chapel, and we'd love for you to join us! We'll worship together and hear a short message. See you Wednesday, December 17 at 10 am at MCRC.

Young Eagle Volleyball Team Advances to State

The Manhattan Christian School volleyball team wrapped up a truly memorable season—one defined by grit, growth, and a whole lot of heart. The Lady Eagles soared through the postseason, capturing both the District and Divisional Championships and earning their spot among the top eight Class C teams in Montana at the State Tournament.

With only a few of players holding previous state-tournament experience, the stage was big and the pressure even bigger. Still, the team competed with determination and unity against two talented programs, CJI and DGSG, ultimately falling short of a deeper run. But reaching that level, especially with such a young roster, was a major accomplishment in itself. And with many rising teams returning next year, the Lady Eagles are already hungry for another shot.

Not only did the team distinguish themselves athletically, but they shined academically as well. Nearly every varsity player earned Academic All-State honors with a GPA of 3.5 or higher, showing that this group exemplifies what it means to pursue excellence in every arena.

Several players also earned significant postseason recognition. Senior Aubrey Hofman and junior Bella Cash Rich were both named Second Team All-Conference, while sophomore Ashlyn Burley and junior Karissa VanKirk received First Team All-Conference honors and were additionally selected All-State. These awards highlight the exceptional talent and effort found throughout the roster.

A special thank you goes to Coach Van Dyk, whose steady leadership, care, and high standards have shaped this outstanding group of athletes. Her ability to develop both skill and character continues to elevate the program each season. The Lady Eagles may have ended their state run earlier than hoped, but the foundation laid this year is solid, and the fire is lit. With experience gained, lessons learned, and a young, driven roster returning, Manhattan Christian Volleyball is already looking forward to what comes next.



Five Ways to Support Manhattan Christian School This Season

Cont. from Page One

Annual Campaign: Help Us Reach Our \$140,000 Goal

Our Annual Campaign provides critical support for the school's ongoing operational costs. This year our goal is \$140,000, and thanks to your generosity, we've already raised \$105,000.

If you're looking for a purposeful place to make a year-end gift, we invite you to help us close the gap. Every gift, large or small, strengthens our programs, supports our teachers, and sustains the high-quality Christian education we provide.

Building on Our Blessings: Critical Need for New Classroom Space

As many of you know, we have a pressing and immediate need for additional classroom space. Both our elementary and middle school are experiencing significant growth, and our current facilities are stretched to capacity.

Our top priority in the Building on Our Blessings campaign is Phase One: the construction of a new classroom wing. This is not just a long-term vision; it is a critical need for next year and beyond. While we work toward beginning construction, you will likely see modular classrooms added behind the school next year. These will help us meet short-term space needs, but modular units are not the future of Manhattan Christian School. They are simply a temporary solution until we can build permanent classrooms.

To move forward with construction, we must reach \$2.33 million in cash on hand and 75% of our five-year pledge goal (\$7.1 million). We are currently at approximately \$2 million in cash and pledges, but we must significantly increase that amount to break ground.

If you've experienced capital gains, such as from the sale of land, buildings, cattle, or other assets, this may be an ideal time to give in a tax-advantaged way. We can accept gifts of stocks, bonds, retirement distributions, and other long-term assets.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you personally. Please contact Joel Westa to schedule a time to discuss how your gift can make a lasting impact and how you can structure it for maximum benefit. We prayerfully ask you to consider a significant gift toward the new classroom wing, our number one priority and a vital need for our students.

Prayerful, Long-Term Support

We also invite you to prayerfully consider a large or long-term commitment over the next five years. Sustained giving, whether through planned gifts, retirement account distributions, or other financial instruments, provides stability and helps us plan responsibly for the future of MCS.

Montana's Educational Benefits Tax Credit Program

Another powerful way to support MCS is through the Educational Benefits Tax Credit Program sponsored by the State of Montana. Each year, \$6 million is available statewide. When you give through this program, you receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit—a direct reduction of your Montana tax liability.

Individuals may give up to \$200,000, and married couples up to \$400,000. By law, 90% of the funds must go directly to scholarships, enabling us to support families seeking a Christ-centered education.

Last year, MCS received \$358,000 through this program, allowing us to offer substantial scholarship support to many students. The funds go extremely quickly; the statewide cap was reached in under five minutes last year, so we carefully prepare to submit as many contributions as possible immediately.

If you're interested in learning more or taking the next step, please contact Joel Westa at development@manhattanchristian.org. We would be honored to walk you through the process. Thank you again for your generosity, your presence, and your partnership with Manhattan Christian School. We are deeply grateful for this community and the ways you faithfully support our mission. From all of us at MCS, Merry Christmas! May your season be filled with joy, peace, and reminders of God's abundant blessings.

The Manhattan Christian School Foundation

MCS Foundation Secretary, Don Vaniman, would love to share the article on the following page as another resource for your 2025 and 2026 giving. See more about the MCS Foundation on page seven of the Connections.

Above-the-Line Giving: One Big Beautiful Opportunity

Reprinted from YB & GRF Wrangler with Permission, adapted for MCS Connections

By Bill Hritsco, President and CEO of Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch Foundation in Billings, MT.

Bill is a Montana Native and was raised on family farms in the Dillon and Deer Lodge Valleys of Montana. Bill graduated from the University of Montana School of Law in 1993 and practiced law in Dillon for more than 25 years. His legal practice focused on property law and real estate transfers, agricultural and water law, wills and trusts, and assisting individuals and families with estate planning.

Bill actively served the community through the Dillon Jaycees and Montana Farm Bureau, as an officer and Board member for the Southwest Montana YMCA, and the boards of the Montana Water Resources Association and Barrett Hospital and Healthcare Foundation. He is also a member of the State Bar of Montana.

Bill became involved with Yellowstone Foundation in the early years of his practice, after several court appointments as guardian ad litem for abandoned, abused and neglected children struggling in the court system. Bill then joined the Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch Board of Directors where he served for eight years before transitioning to Yellowstone Foundation's Board of Directors in 2008 where he served until 2016, with the last three years as its Chairman.

In an exciting development for nonprofits and generous Americans like, the recently-enacted One Big Beautiful Bill includes a renewed and expanded provision for above-the-line charitable tax deductions for gifts made in 2026 and beyond. This means individuals and couples can now receive a tax break for their charitable giving - even if they don't itemize deductions on their tax returns.

Today, rather than itemizing, over 85% of taxpayers simply opt for the standard deduction when filling their taxes. In previous years, that means their charitable gifts, while generous, didn't provide any direct tax benefits. With the One Big Beautiful Bill, Congress aims to change that by encouraging even more giving among all Americans.

What's New?

The bill allows for an above-the-line deduction of up to \$2,000 for married couples filing jointly and up to \$1,000 for individual filers. This deduction applies in addition to the standard deduction, making charitable giving easier and more beneficial for a wide range of Americans.

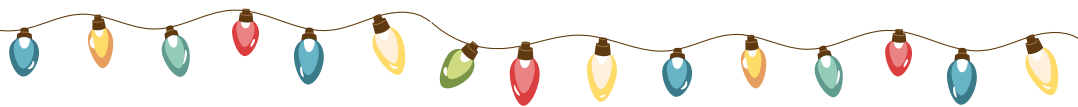
Congress Giveth, and Congress taketh away...

As wonderful as the above-the-line deduction will be for non-itemizers, those who itemize on their taxes will face two new limitations under the One Big Beautiful Bill. First, a 0.5% adjusted gross income (AGI) floor will apply - only the portion of charitable contributions that exceeds 0.5% of a donor's AGI will be deductible. Second, the value of itemized deductions, including charitable gifts, will be capped so that no more than 35% of a contribution's value can be used to reduce a donor's tax liability. These changes mean that high-income donors in particular may see reduced tax savings from their charitable giving and may want to consider accelerating gifts into 2025 or using strategic tools like qualified distributions from IRAs, donor-advised funds or charitable remainder trusts to maximize their impact under the new rules. Call on us with your questions and let us help you with planning the most tax-efficient ways to give cash in 2025 and 2026.

Your support helps ensure that youth families in crisis receive the care, guidance, and opportunities they desperately need. And thanks to this legislation, for the vast majority of Americans who no longer itemize on their taxes, your support in 2026 and beyond may also reduce your tax burden - without the need to itemize.

We know that people give because they care - but a tax benefit never hurts. For many donors, this will be a chance to give more than they thought possible and to help more of our youth get a Christian education.

To learn more or to make your contribution, please call Ron Hoekema (406-581-1460) or Don Vaniman (406-580-4250). Please know how grateful we are for more than 118 years of giving to support Manhattan Christian School.



Gear Up Eagle Fans!

Looking for the perfect gift? Stop by the MCS office to grab brand new Eagle gear. We've got shirts, hoodies, hats, and cozy winter beanies from three great vendors. It's the easiest way to check off every Eagle fan on your list! Some youth sizes available, and more for men and children is on the way!

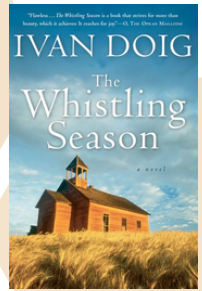
Don't see what you're looking for? No worries! You can also shop online; our Eagle Fan Store and Basketball Store are both open now through Game One. Find the link on our website under Support MCS. Spread some Eagle spirit this Christmas! 🎄



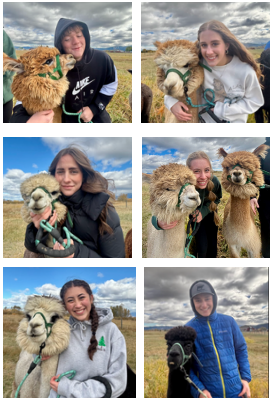
Spoiler Alert: Freshmen Craft Alternate Endings to *The Whistling Season*

Mrs. Taber's freshmen English class recently wrapped up a fun project with an imaginative challenge: writing their own final chapter to *The Whistling Season* by Montana author Ivan Doig. After studying Doig's voice, themes, and characters, Andrew, Dani, Micah, and Téa each crafted an original alternate ending that explored new possibilities for the story's conclusion.

From surprising character revelations to hopeful reinterpretations of the novel's closing moments, students showcased both creativity and a deep understanding of Doig's style. Their work was a thoughtful celebration of Montana literature. Scan the QR code to read!



AgriScience Elective Gives Students Hands-On Opportunities in the Community



High school science teacher Bree Leep is in her second year of offering the Agriscience elective, and it's quickly solidified itself as a student favorite. This hands-on course, rooted in both practical learning and biblical wisdom, invites students to explore God's creation through the lens of agriculture, stewardship, and science. The syllabus even opens with a reminder from Proverbs: "Be sure you know the conditions of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations." (Proverbs 27:23-24)

To bring these lessons to life, students have headed out into the community for a series of local field trips that highlight the diverse agricultural world around them. This year's visits have included Leep Dairy, Kimm Seed Potatoes, Three Hearts Farm, Alpacas of Montana, Churchill Cattle Company, and Gallatin Valley Malting Co. Each stop offers a unique, up-close look at the people and processes that keep our valley's agricultural heritage thriving.

Now in year two, Agriscience has become more than just a class; it's an opportunity for students to think deeply, work practically, and see firsthand how faith and stewardship intersect in everyday life.

The Ruffatto Family on the Network Podcast

"It means so much to me. The community that we have, the community that has poured into my kids for the last 10 years, its teachers and administration, its parents, its other kids, all that love the Lord and are working toward a similar goal and that's preparing our kids to go into this world."

Last month, I sat down with Ryan Ruffatto, MCS dad of five, former board chair, head girls basketball coach, and assistant boys basketball and golf coach, to hear his story. Ryan shares his moment of wholehearted conviction on the value of a Christian education for his children. If you know Ryan, you know he's tenderhearted, and this conversation is full of honesty, humor, and heart. You won't want to miss it; scan the QR code to listen.



Listen Here!



Sam (9th), Joice (Canvas College), Ryan, Ollie (7th), Alysha, Jenna (11th), Will (12th)

We'd love your brown paper shopping bags! Please drop them at the store or at the school office. Thank you!



Holiday Hours

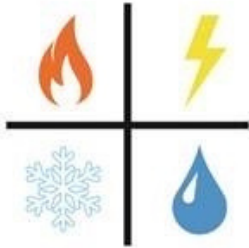
The retail store will be closed Thursday, December 24-Friday, December 26. We will be open for shopping Saturday, December 27, but will not be accepting donations. We will also be closed for New Years Eve and New Years Day.

Merry Christmas from all of us at Twice Treasured Thrift!

senior project SPOTLIGHT

Nikki Van Dyken

For her senior project, Nikki is tackling the problem of fast fashion: clothes being made cheaply and discarded quickly. To promote better clothing choices like thrifting, upcycling, and recycling, she's learning to sew for the very first time with Sharon Kamps, donating her creations to Twice Treasured Thrift Store, and even designing and selling an upcycled outfit displayed on a mannequin there. In fact, one of her pieces recently sold! It's a hands-on, creative way for her to champion sustainability and give clothing a second life.



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- Manhattan Christian Eagles Track & Field
- Manhattan Christian Eagles Golf



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The Manhattan Christian Network on Spotify

Manhattan Christian School Foundation

Our mission is to lower tuition!

COMPARE

Certificate of Deposit:

- \$10,000
- 3.0% for Term
- \$300 Annual Income
- \$300 Taxable Income
- 0 Tax-Free Income
- 0 Federal Deduction
- 0 State Deduction

MCSF Gift Annuity:

- \$10,000
- 7.5% for Life
- \$750 Annual Income
- \$236 Taxable Income
- \$513 Tax-Free Income
- \$4,689 Federal Deduction
- \$1,876 State Deduction

MCSF gift annuities may offer more than money in the bank. Let's talk about the options that could work for you!

Contact Ron Hoekema at (406) 581-1460 with any questions or for more information.

MCSF GIFT ANNUITY

Mary Jones, Age 77

Property:
\$10,000



7.0%
Annuity
Contract



MCSF

Federal Income Tax Deduction
\$4,689 (4.2%AFR)
Montana Income Tax Credit \$1,876.

Annuity of \$750 for one life.
Tax-free portion \$513.

Property passes to MCSF's
Endowment Fund without probate
fees or estate taxes.



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Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from your friends at
Manhattan Christian School!
A sincere thank you for supporting us in our mission of Christian education.

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