As a Stone Ridge lifer, I have embraced pink accessories and pink gouter on the Feast of Mater Admirabilis for the past fourteen years. However, much like many things at Stone Ridge, something that once appeared to be an opportunity for copious baked goods took on a greater meaning as I matured through the Sacred Heart community.

In Lower School, Mater’s story struck me as a fairy tale would; it was magical, and even a little silly. In 1844, novice French painter Pauline Perdrau painted a, shall we say, “unappealing” portrait of Our Lady in the corridor of Trinita dei Monti, a Sacred Heart school in Rome. The painting was desecrated with shades of blue and pink that were so vivid, the Mother Superior of the school covered it with a curtain for two years. But this would be no fairy tale without a happy ending. Two years later, Pope Pius IX visited the Trinita dei Monti and, confounded by the peculiar curtain that hung in the school’s opening corridor, unveiled the fresco. It had transformed. The bright shades had softened to florid shades of pink, lilac, and ivory. Overcome with the fresco’s beauty, Pope Pius IX exclaimed “Mater Admirabilis!”—Mother Most Admirable—thus naming the masterpiece.

Hearing the story of Mater Admirabilis gave the pink accessories and snacks some context, but as a six-year-old, it was still difficult for me to relate to such an extraordinary tale. I counted on my faith to entrust that I would eventually uncover the deeper meaning of the magical story and the pretty portrait. It was not until I looked at, really studied, the masterpiece that I began to unveil its message.

Throughout middle school, I passed the Mater Admirabilis painting on the fourth floor almost every day. Certain details began to stand out above others. Firstly, I noticed
the of the painting’s soft palate that correlates beautifully with Mary’s soft countenance. She appears gentle, welcoming, and warm. Beside her is a lily, pure and lovely, and on the other side a distaff and spindle. The combination of a fair flower and industrious-looking tools portrays her ethereal balance of serenity and work. On the floor beneath her lays a book, evoking her dedication to learning. Gravity weighs Mary’s head down, but not in a morose way. Rather, she rests her head in serene reflection. Surrounded by the many things that interest her, Mary still makes time to reflect.

The portrait and all of its small details seem to encompass what makes up Mater, a Sacred Heart role model; She is dedicated to her work and study, yet peaceful.

Momentary analyses of the stunning portrait became my daily reflections that liberated me from my hectic daily schedule. Each time I looked at Mater, I reflected on the faith that her story had kindled in me back in Lower School.

Mater’s story had ignited my faith, and her beauty had caused me to take few daily moments to recognize my spirituality. However, Mater was not all about me and my faith and my reflection, and it wasn’t until high school that I discovered this.

During the spring break of my sophomore year, I, along with several other students from Stone Ridge, made my way all the way to New Orleans for a Habitat for Humanity build. For three days, under the hot Louisiana sun, we climbed, hammered, and drilled in an effort to build a home for a family who could not afford one. Poverty was prevalent around us, as homes were decrepit and scarce. Some homes still showed the daunting affects of 2005’s Hurricane Katrina with torn roofs and black graffiti X’s on the doors.
The labor of the Habitat build was grueling and frustrating. We hammered what seemed like millions of nails in an effort to cover one side of the house with wooden siding. It became difficult at times to remember that the goal was not to simply “finish,” but to provide a home for a poverty-stricken family.

One day during the trip, we took a break from building to visit the Academy of the Sacred Heart, the Sacred Heart school of New Orleans. Throughout visiting ASH, I was reminded of my own home back in Bethesda—Stone Ridge. Photos of girls in white graduation gowns, gouter, and the omnipresent Sacred Heart seal were all loving reminders of home. But what made me feel most at home at ASH was the portrait of Mater Admirabilis that hung in the school’s front corridor. Identical to that of Stone Ridge, the Mater painting immediately inspired me with the same senses of faith and reflection that had become familiar to me over the past decade at Stone Ridge.

Seeing Mater halfway across the country reminded me that she represents more than my own personal spirituality; She unifies the entire Sacred Heart community by exemplifying what it truly means to be a Sacred Heart girl. She is smart, serene, hard working, and dedicated. And she is *global*; She finds her niche wherever she goes. She thrives in any environment.

Then, it was time to get back to work. However, this time I grabbed my hardhat and hammer with a different perspective: I would build as Mater would build. I would strike a balance between work and reflection. I would find serenity in my faith when I became frustrated.

Mater Admirabilis had slowly inspired not only my faith, but also my appreciation for the worldwide Sacred Heart community. She is more than a beautiful
work of art with a magical tale, and she is more than a symbol of reflection; She embodies the worldwide Sacred Heart community with the most admirable balance of focus and grace. Just as her beauty was once miraculously unveiled, my deeper understanding of Mater Admirabilis has been gradually unveiled. As Saint Madeline Sophie Barat said, “Once a child of the Sacred Heart, always of the a child of the Sacred Heart.” So, my vision of Mater will always be adapting; becoming clearer and clearer.
NOTES:

NOLA STORY—amidst service reminded of worldwide mission and significance/SOCIAL ACTION/She exemplifies a SH girl (a story of faith and a portrayal of the many facets of SH)

Through her fantastical story, Mater had laid a foundation for a worldwide community. It wasn’t until high school that Mater unveiled yet another spiritual revelation. She represented a community that had

SOCIAL ACTION—H4H IN NOLA--- understand meaning: community and service (HS), as well as faith (LS) and reflection (MS)

From the words of Janet Erskine Stuart
You are God’s property, and your life must be one wild bird’s song of praise, one wild flower’s face looking up to God. Do not try to be a garden flower. We must never try to be copies of the other. However excellent the model, copies are always deplorable. God never meant for us to be copies. If we imitate too closely the actions of another, we are not truly ourselves, and we cannot give the true, the real note that we should given when speaking with our own voice. We must remember that each one of our children is destined for a mission in life. Neither we nor they can know what it is, but we must know and make them believe that each one has a mission in life and that she is bound to find out what it is, that there is some special work for God which will remain undone unless she does it, some place in life which no one else can fill... we must bring home to ourselves the responsibilities for our gifts.

Luke 1:39-45
During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of
your womb. And how does this happen to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.”