Organizing a Community Book Study on

Mathematics for Human Flourishing
By Francis Su

Lessons from Regents School of Austin
2019-20 School Year

"Every being cries out silently to be read differently."
(Simone Weil)

**WHY?** The role of math department chair brings with it the role of “math public relations officer.” As a way to explicitly spread the math department philosophy to the school community as a whole I organized a book club on Mathematics for Human Flourishing (M4HF) for interested students, parents, faculty, and staff. The book club had the following objective:

To cultivate a community at Regents that appreciates mathematics as a worthwhile endeavor and is equipped to communicate the effectiveness of mathematics in pursuing Truth, Goodness, and Beauty.

**HOW?** I began by emailing all school employees, followed by parents, and then finally students. I asked them to do one thing before the opted out of reading a “math book” and that was to first: read/watch/or listen to the speech of the same title given by Francis as the outgoing president of the MAA. It begins with the quote above from Simone Weil and I hoped that was enticing to a variety of people as the opening line of a "math book."

**WHERE/WHEN?** We began at the beginning of the spring semester (since the book was published in January). I emailed those who had expressed interest to vote on what day/time would work best. Two options were the most prevalent, one in the morning before school and one after school so I decided to offer both time slots. We gathered once every other week in my classroom and followed this schedule:

- 1/22: Preface and Chapter 1
- 2/5: Chapters 2-4
- 2/19: Chapters 5-7
- 3/4: Chapters 8-10
- 3/25: Chapters 11-13 and epilogue

We covered multiple chapters each meeting because I had schedule Francis to visit Regents in April and I wanted us to be done with the book by then. The pandemic had other plans but we were able to have Francis join the book club on a Zoom call for our final meeting.

**WHAT?** The book comes with discussion questions for each chapter that are helpful conversation starters. I would usually start each meeting by sharing something I highlighted from a given chapter and then let people share. The reality is that everyone has a formative experience of mathematics (for either good or bad) so the conversation was never lacking on how the book related to us each personally or to our mission as a school.

**RESULT?** We had about 30 people join in the journey, a mix of students, teachers (from a variety of subjects and a variety of grade levels), staff, and parents. With the semester ending in remote learning and our last two book club gatherings occurring via Zoom, it is a little too early to assert any noticeable community changes in dispositions toward mathematics. However, multiple people (from each of the groups mentioned) expressed how the book positively impacted them or changed their perspective at one point or another.

As a classical Christian community we’ll often ask parents to be familiar with The Lost Tools of Learning and other important works on classical pedagogy. It is my firm belief that M4HF serves that same purpose in classical Christian mathematics education.