Dear Partners in Catholic Education:

It is my pleasure to introduce our inaugural edition of Pillars, a magazine devoted to spreading the good news of Catholic education across our diocese. Indeed we have much to be proud of, and I trust that as you page through this magazine, you too will agree that our schools are institutions of which we can all be proud.

The title of the magazine derives its name from my first superintendent’s address in September 2009. As the new superintendent of schools, it was my desire to not only show my gratitude to all of our educators but to also offer them a hope-filled vision for our future. In that vein, I challenged everyone to begin thinking about the following “5 Pillars” on which we could build a sustainable school system for years to come:

- A renewed commitment to CATHOLIC IDENTITY in light of the needs of the 21st century Church
- QUALITY administration of Catholic education and instruction from the offices to the classrooms and to the fields
- A commitment to reshaping Catholic education in order to accommodate the needs of students that are “BORN DIGITAL”
- Sound FISCAL STEWARDSHIP that looks at innovative ways of funding Catholic education with special emphasis on development
- Bold and INNOVATIVE INITIATIVES across the diocese that set Catholic schools apart from all others.

As I look around the diocese today, I am proud of the fact that we can see these “pillars” in place in so many of our schools. It is my sincere hope that you will be encouraged by the work that we are already doing. I ask that you join me as we embark on a future filled with promise as we create a system of Catholic education that academically and spiritually prepares young men and women to be active participants in building God’s kingdom.

Peace and all good things.

Christopher Mominey
Superintendent of Schools
Fr. Joe O’Connor: Leading Young People to Christ

BY CONNIE BERRY

Catholic schools want to provide a strong Catholic identity and what better way to do that than to have a priest walk the halls, eat lunch with the students, play a game of kickball and ask them if they’ve ever considered what God might be calling them to do with their lives.

Fr. Joe O’Connor has been doing just that for the past two years. He has traveled all the regions of the diocese speaking to students in all the Catholic schools. He might read “What Does a Priest Do?” or its flipside, “What Does a Nun Do?” to a group of kindergarteners, or he might play a vocations video with the music of Switchfoot in the background to a group of sophomores. O’Connor has covered all the bases as to how to reach young people. He realizes they may forget a 40-minute presentation, but if he jazzes it up with memorable videos, pictures, skits and props, part of his message just might stay with them.

“I have different programs for different grade levels,” O’Connor explained. “Seniors are looking at colleges and picking majors and trying to find out where they fit in. An elementary school student might respond to a word maze or a coloring activity. I give them stickers, so that when they get home, it might start a conversation with their parents.”

Fr. Joe O’Connor talks about vocations with children at all grade levels.

O’Connor’s elementary school visits find him playing with the students and seated at the cafeteria table chowing on chicken nuggets with them. He realizes it’s the personal relationship building that opens the conversation and offers the invitation to consider a priestly or religious vocation.

SITTING WITH THE LORD

A 1995 graduate of Bishop Ludden Junior/Senior High School, O’Connor spends a full week with each of the Catholic high schools in the diocese. He starts the week off with an assembly and Mass to introduce himself and his mission and teaches all religion classes for every grade level. He meets with educators during free periods and after school to help them develop skills to recognize and promote vocations. Eucharistic adoration takes place in the school chapel at the end of the vocation week. Students spend the week listening to O’Connor talk about vocations and what God is calling them to be, and adoration offers...
Priests Are Added Blessing to Schools

Many of our Catholic schools are blessed to have their curriculums enhanced by the priests serving in their parishes and/or schools.

- At St. Daniel-St. Matthew Academy in E. Syracuse, three priests, Msgr. Eugene Yennock, pastor of St. Daniel Parish; Fr. Joseph Clemente, pastor of St. Matthew's Parish; and Fr. Severin Yagazza, parochial vicar of St. Matthew's, visit the school regulary and teach religion to the students. “The presence of our priests brings a special dimension to our Catholic identity,” said Dr. Joseph Celentano, school principal. “They are a presence that allows our students to meet our priests up close and personal.”

- At St. Rose of Lima School in No. Syracuse calls its pastor, Msgr. James Kennedy, the “school man,” as he plays an important role in both school and parish. “His love for children is wholeheartedly returned as he makes himself visible on a daily basis in the corridors of the school and in visits to the classroom,” said Principal St. Catherine Labouré, OSF. “His presence is welcomed with delight by the children because he always has a joke, riddle or a smile.” Not only does Kennedy serve as a “living Gospel,” but he also teaches religion to first, second and sixth graders at St. Rose on a weekly basis. Said Kennedy of his interaction with the students, “Anyone who needs a lift in spirit should go over to the school for a few minutes. Satisfaction guaranteed.”

- Holy Cross School in Dewitt is fortunate to have two Jesuit novices come to work in the classrooms. When school began this year, Kevin Hughes and Gil Stockson, young men considering the religious life while studying at St. Andrew’s Hall at Le Moyne College, were assigned to Holy Cross. “The kids love them,” said Holy Cross Principal David Wheeler. “It’s good for the students to see them as ‘regular guys,’ as they work with them in the classrooms or play football with them on the playground. We are pleased to have them here with us.”

- At St. Joseph’s School in Endicott, students received a special lesson in both vocations and the Spanish language when Fr. Amedeo Guida, parochial vicar at St. James Parish, visited the 7th and 8th grade Spanish class. Fr. Amedeo, who also serves in the Spanish Apostolate Ministry in the Southern Tier, spoke to the students in Spanish about his own vocation experience.

- The students at St. Patrick’s School in Oneida like to celebrate! Recently, the students surprised Fr. Richard Kapral, the school’s host pastor, with a popsicle birthday party. The students also gave him a spiritual bouquet and sang to him. Fr. Kapral is pastor of St. Patrick’s Parish and St. Joseph’s Parish, Oneida.

- At St. Margaret’s School in Mattydale, fifth grade students get up close and personal with the
I went to a football game at one of the high schools after spending the week there," O’Connor said. "A father approached me and said, 'My son is actually thinking about this, and I don’t know what to do.' I told him to keep him involved in the school activities, and he’ll form leadership abilities. I told him a vocation to the priesthood doesn’t mean his son is running away from home. In fact, his home is a huge part of his formation.”

REACHING EVERY AGE GROUP

O’Connor said he may hear from about five percent of the students to whom he reaches out. "That percentage lowers as the age group gets higher," he explained. But, a new development came from his work with Catholic schools. Now, O’Connor is facilitating a college discernment program. "Guys who have gone away to college are making the commitment to come back once a month and get together at different rectories to see how a priest lives. We host a holy hour and offer speakers. There are about seven guys right now, but they are making a commitment to the group," he said.

O’Connor said he can’t begin to express how grateful he is to the Catholic schools of the diocese that have enabled him to plant the seed of vocations. "I’m extremely grateful to the schools for their openness and the launching pad they’ve given me for this ministry," he said.

O’Connor’s own vocation has grown even stronger since he has committed himself to furthering vocations within the diocese. "What I miss in parish life with baptisms, weddings and funerals, I constantly get back by dealing with youth," he said. "I am talking with young men and women who are trying to embrace God in their lives. I share my life and heart with them and they share back. I’m still leading people to Christ.”

Connie Berry is the editor of The Catholic Sun.

Sacrament of Baptism, as Fr. Robert Hyde, pastor, holds an “authentic” Rite of Baptism, from beginning to end, complete with students acting in the roles of parents and Godparents. "This is a moving activity that offers the students a more indepth, personal understanding of the sacrament," said Principal Susanne Donze.

At St. Mary’s School in Cortland, students look forward to saying morning prayer with Fr. Mark Kaminiski, pastor, who joins them several times a week for the school’s 25-minute "morning meeting." Fr. Lukasz Kozlowski, pastoral assistant, also interacts with the students, particularly training altar servers in the proper procedures. "Having the priests in our schools helps the students see a ‘real person’ in the clergy, not someone just up on the altar," said Principal Susan McInvale. "We always encourage vocations here at St. Mary’s, and I think the example of our priests makes our students say, ‘I could be like that someday.’"

Students at St. Margaret’s School in Mattydale learn about the Rite of Baptism by role playing with Fr. Robert Hyde, pastor.
Ask almost any of the hundreds of students who have passed through the halls of the Bishop's Academy at Holy Family in Fairmount (formerly Holy Family School) over the past 19 years what they remember and most will certainly recall some pivotal experience that involved Sr. M. Alvera O'Grady, OSF. Some give her credit for their ability to print perfectly formed letters of the alphabet. Others remember fondly their stage debut in "Ten Little Indians," a Thanksgiving classic; or can still recite their poetic job description from Sister's annual vocation play. Most bring to mind her influence on them as they prepared to receive their First Communion, and a few even recall "Sr. Al-bear-a," a stuffed Build-A-Bear one first grade class presented to her complete with signature wire-rimmed glasses, black habit and crucifix.

Given all the memories, the community of Holy Family had mixed emotions when Sr. Alvera announced her retirement in June of 2009 after 62 years of teaching. However, while she no longer teaches first grade (in what has since been dedicated as "The Sr. Alvera Room"), she still returns faithfully every Monday to give a religion lesson to the younger grades and share the same qualities that have made her such an outstanding gift to the Syracuse Diocese for so many years.

"Children need some guidance. The Lord knew that," she said, citing the passage "Let the little children come to me" from the Gospel of Matthew. "I taught first grade through most of my career, and I love that age because each is like a bud just opening up. I always tried to make parents understand that each will blossom in his or her own time — and only the Lord knows just when the right time is."

Sr. Alvera has tried to instill that deep sense of faith in all of her students and credits Catholic schools for "educating the soul and body together." She acknowledges that the fast-paced lives of today’s families are very different from her early days as a teacher, but she takes that as a sign that Catholic education has become that much more important. "It’s difficult for some of today’s parents to make the time for religion, so I’m honored I can assist with that," she said. "Sometimes it’s up to those of us teaching their First Communion, and a few even recall “Sr. Al-bear-a,” a stuffed Build-A-Bear one first grade class presented to her complete with signature wire-rimmed glasses, black habit and crucifix.

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in Catholic school to lead the children to the presence of God.

Through six decades of teaching, 40 years of which were in the Diocese of Syracuse, Sr. Alvera said she never dreaded a day of school. A two-time cancer survivor, even when she was ill she “couldn’t wait to get back there. I knew my students were eager and wanted to learn.”

That strong spirit certainly made an impression on students and parents alike. “Everyone loves Sr. Alvera,” said parent Karen Connell Wheeler, whose two daughters, Emily, a sophomore at Bishop Ludden; and Casey, a freshman at Providence College and the 2009 Bishop Ludden valedictorian, both had Sr. Alvera in the first grade. “I credit her for giving my girls a solid foundation that helped them take full advantage of the opportunities our Catholic schools have to offer. That’s not something you can find just anywhere. Sr. Alvera is special, and we have been so fortunate to have her at Holy Family.”

For now, that good fortune continues, at least on Mondays when Sr. Alvera heads into school to give students in kindergarten, first and second grades a brief religion lesson and then volunteers in the library until the end of the day. And, while she is officially “retired,” Sr. Alvera hardly schedules herself any down time during the rest of her week, as she also volunteers at St. Camillus Health and Rehabilitation Center and St. Joseph’s Hospital Health Center.

Still, Sr. Alvera enjoys her greater sense of flexibility and is comfortable with her decision to retire. “The Lord told me it was time, but I am pleased that He still allows me the ability to spend a few hours with these wonderful children,” she said.

The students at Bishop’s Academy at Holy Family wholeheartedly agree. 

Caroline K. Reff is a free-lance writer and public relations consultant in Syracuse, NY.

Giving Thanks

Students at St. Mary’s Academy in Baldwinsville held a Thanksgiving prayer service last November. The student body collected non-perishable items to donate to St. Mary’s Parish food pantry, which helps the underserved of the community. Sixth graders volunteer at the food pantry by stocking the shelves when donations are made.

- Last fall, two students at the Bishop’s Academy at St. Charles in Syracuse came up with a creative — and colorful — project that combined recycling and community services. Christine and Jessica Villi collected broken crayons, melted them and created “new” crayons in interested shapes and sizes. Later, the students from St. Charles donated the crayons to Vera House, a local shelter for abused women and their children. The crayons will be distributed to children living at the shelter, who often arrive frightened and with few possessions.

- In honor of “The Year of the Priest,” students at Our Lady of Sorrows School — Seton Campus in Endicott prepared gift boxes filled with toiletries, small treats and handwritten notes for retired priests in the area. According to Principal Jo Anne Rowan, the retirees were so pleased to be on the receiving end of the children’s kindness and generosity.

- A new endeavor this school year at Holy Family School in Norwich is the G.O.D. (Giving Others Delight) project. Students adopted a military unit of one of the parents stationed in Afghanistan and have since been collecting basic items like razors, soap, toothpaste, phone cards and more. During the first half of the year, the Holy Family students sent 10 large boxes to the troops. “This compassion for others complements the knowledge and skills learned in academic classes at Holy Family,” said Principal Eugene Chilion.

- Members of the student body at St. James Middle School in Johnson City participate each year in the “Make a Difference Day” held each fall in Broome County. Students at St. James contribute hours of service to their neighbors and extended families. Student Senate members designate a fall and spring weekend, where they purposely look for jobs like raking leaves and other helpful activities to assist their neighbors, grandparents or others who can use a hand. When 100 or more service hours are reached, Principal George Clancy thanks students by issuing a “dress down pass,” a special reward that all St. James students look forward to earning.
Twenty-nine years ago, the marriage of Cathy Voltz and Marty Byrne combined families with well over 100 years of combined attendance at the Bishop’s Academy at Most Holy Rosary (formerly Most Holy Rosary School) on Syracuse’s west side.

The history begins with Mary McDonald, Cathy Voltz Byrne’s grandmother, who came to the parish in 1910. Mary’s father helped build the school’s gymnasium. Mary married into the Voltz family, and then all of her children attended MHR. Those children sent their children to MHR, and the next generation, of course, did the same.

Cathy’s mother-in-law is Katie Byrne, another legendary MHR treasure. Katie graduated from MHR and married Jim Byrne, a graduate of St. Anthony’s School on the south side. They had seven sons — all of them graduated from MHR except for the last two, who finished high school at Bishop Ludden after Rosary’s high school closed in 1978. After attending Catholic high school, six of the seven sons graduated from Niagara University, where their father was president of the alumni association. One son graduated from Notre Dame University. Today, Katie’s great-granddaughter is a student at the Bishop’s Academy at Most Holy Rosary.

“Oh, they’ll never get rid of me,” Katie laughed. Her love of MHR runs like a current throughout her days still. Katie is a trustee of MHR, a member of the former Mother’s Club, Altar Rosary Society and many more aspects of parish life. She has run many committees and events over the course of her time at MHR, and she is now very active in the Loretto Guild and, of course, her grandchildren keep her busy.

“I have four graduations this year,” Katie said. “And I still try to make all their games. I keep up with all the kiddos.”

When Katie’s family gathers for Thanksgiving, there are 50 people around the tables.
“We have a very loving family, and we’re very close,” she said, “and we have loads of fun.”

One of Katie’s granddaughters, Kelly, graduated from MHR last year and is a seventh grader at Bishop Ludden this year. Kelly is the last of Cathy and Marty Byrne’s five children to graduate from MHR. Cathy’s oldest, Kim, was just married at MHR this October, and she is a teacher at Immaculate Conception in Fayetteville.

Cathy comes from a family of five girls, the daughter of Mollie and Jim Voltz. Her aunts lived in the neighborhood as well, and when Cathy was in elementary school, as many as 10 of the cousins would walk home together from MHR school each day.

“My dad would drive us in the morning, and we were about six blocks from school when I was little. We had permission from one of the neighbors to cut through his yard on the way home, so one of us would hold the gate while the rest passed through,” Cathy remembered.

Cathy was a cheerleader in high school, and her husband was a couple of years ahead of her at MHR. They met when Cathy was in first grade and were buddies throughout their school days.

“I guess he really was my best friend,” Cathy said. “He still is.”

It was when she was a cheerleader and he was working as a janitor cleaning the school when the two considered dating. “He was supposed to be cleaning, but he would shoot baskets all the time while I was in the gym,” Cathy remembered.

Marty still loves basketball and referees all over for junior varsity, varsity and CYO games.

Cathy was the school nurse at MHR for a few years and now works in that capacity at Cleary School in the Valley neighborhood of Syracuse. All of her sisters still live within blocks of her, and both her mother and mother-in-law live in the neighborhood.

Cathy’s mother, Mollie Voltz, converted to Catholicism when she married her husband Jim. He passed away 12 years ago.

“I wanted the girls prepared for their sacraments and I knew the Catholic school could explain things better than I could,” Mollie said. All five of her girls went to MHR and all 13 of her grandchildren as well.

Her husband never answered the telephone, Mollie said. “He figured it would never be for him with the five girls in the house. His girls were his pride and joy.”

It wasn’t until her father passed away that Cathy learned that her dad really wasn’t a fan of basketball.

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even though he attended every game when she was cheerleading.

“Dad never missed a basketball game,” Cathy said. “I only found out when he was gone when my mom told me he didn’t really like it. He was a quiet man. He was outnumbered — even our dog was a female.”

When her girls went to MHR, Mollie took a job working in the cafeteria there, so that she could keep an eye on her girls.

Ironically, there is still a teacher at MHR who had Cathy in class.

Mary Ellen Montague was Cathy’s seventh grade teacher. She began teaching at MHR in 1971 and is a fourth grade teacher there now. “I said I’d quit before I started to get my student’s grandchildren, but here I am,” Montague said. Katie Byrne’s great-granddaughter — which makes her Cathy’s niece — is there now.

“If you’re going to talk to me about the Byrne family, I’m going to need a family tree in front of me,” Montague laughed when she was interviewed. “There’s no mistaking those two clans — they all have MHR emblazoned on their foreheads.”

Montague is a bit of an MHR legend herself. Her son, Thomas, teaches art at the school.

“It’s great,” Montague said. “The kids will see me in the hall and say, ‘I really like your brother.’ That just makes my day.”

All the Byrne and Voltz family members who live in the neighborhood still attend church at MHR and most were married there. They love their pastor, Fr. Fred Mannara. “He’s in the cafeteria for breakfast and lunch and always passes out treats for the kids,” Cathy said. “We have to remind him about eating a healthy lunch.”

The lunch being doled out is likely different than the one Cathy’s mom served. The neighborhood has changed, and the school doesn’t have nearly the number of Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters walking the hallways anymore. But, there are still plenty of Byrne family members — and it doesn’t look like those numbers are going to be dwindling any time soon.

Connie Berry is the editor of The Catholic Sun.
ELIZABETH BAIRD:
Blessed Sacrament Alumna Finds Faith in Full-Day Kindergarten

BY CAROLINE K. REFF

It’s snack time in Elizabeth Baird’s Kindergarten class at Blessed Sacrament School in Eastwood. The children sit quietly, trying to be patient, as Baird routinely passes out four graham crackers to each child. They fidget, and one starts to dive into his snack. A quick look from his teacher reminds him to mind his manners, and he gently places the cracker back on his napkin. When everyone has their food, Baird gives the signal and the students begin:

Thank you for the world so sweet. Thank you for the food we eat. Thank you for the birds that sing. Thank you, God, for everything.

It’s one of Baird’s favorite times of the day. Not only does she get her first two minutes of complete silence — if you don’t count the crunching — but she is grateful that teaching in a Catholic school allows her the freedom to pray with the children. “Faith is another way to tie in a lesson,” she said. “It’s a wonderful teaching tool.”

Baird began teaching at Blessed Sacrament 14 years ago. In fact, her first Kindergarten class just headed off to college this fall. Her years at the school started much earlier, however, as she herself was a student there, as were her brothers and sister.

“I can truly say my first grade teacher at Blessed Sacrament, Mrs. Barbara McElroy, was a major influence in my decision to become a teacher,” said Baird. “I’m not exactly sure why, but she had a profound effect on me.”

Now it is Baird’s turn to have a profound effect on her students. With snack over, she calls some children into a small group in the “reading center,” while others finish a project at their desks before going to the “red carpet” to work on alphabet puzzles. Like any good teacher, she does seem to have eyes in the back of her head and cautions one child who may have rushed through her assignment to “make sure that’s your very best work.” The student reconsiders and heads back to her desk. Several times during the reading lesson, she reminds her students to “look her in the eyes” when their attention wanders, and she entices them with the possibility of singing their favorite “Alphabet Song” when the instruction ends.

Baird knows each lesson takes time, and she is glad that Blessed Sacrament, like the other diocesan elementary schools, offers a full-day Kindergarten program.

“Children come to Kindergarten at all different levels,” she said. “Some are reading; some don’t know their letters. I can’t imagine meeting all the New York State standards in just a couple of hours each day — look how long it took me just to pass out graham crackers! A full day gives students the time to achieve on their own — and that’s satisfying to them, and to me.”

While Baird knows she could earn a higher salary in a public school, her heart remains at Blessed Sacrament. “It’s never been about the money,” she said. “It’s more about the families — many of whom live right around this neighborhood — and about sharing our faith in the classroom. My parents sometimes worked two or three jobs to put four kids through Blessed Sacrament because learning about God in the classroom was a priority for them. Now, being able to help my own students strengthen their faith truly helps me appreciate the sacrifices my own parents made.”

“Kindergarten is just my favorite age group, as they are just so excited about everything,” Baird added. “Every year, I discover a reason why I’ve stayed just one more year — something that makes me say, ‘I’m glad I was here for that little guy this year. He needed me just a bit more than the rest.’ I truly believe I’m meant to be here.”

Caroline K. Reff is a free-lance writer and public relations consultant in Syracuse, NY.
Distance Learning Begins a New Era of Technology for Diocesan Schools

BY JENNIFER BALOG

This fall as bells rang though the halls of Rome Catholic School (RCS) and Bishop Grimes Junior/Senior High School in E. Syracuse, a new era of innovative learning began — distance learning via video-conferencing. The concept of distance learning is not new, but advancements in technological media and the desire to expand curriculums on tighter school budgets make distance learning a vital teaching tool for 21st Century Catholic schools.

The birth of distance learning dates back to the mid to late 1700s, where instructors communicated simple and practical lessons through the mail, allowing students to gain valuable job skills away from major centers of education. Today’s distance learning models are tailored after university programs originally implemented for students off-campus, and some colleges and universities have been founded on the sole premise of distance learning to accommodate the growing adult student populations.

Barbara Jacques, principal of RCS, attended a Cyber Symposium in 2008 sponsored by Cyber Innovation Center in Shreveport, La., where school systems across the country, both public and parochial, attended to share Cyber Security applications. Jacques and RCS technology instructors Sandra Engle and Thomas Potter pursued the vision of distance learning within the Syracuse Diocese. Because the resources necessary to purchase the technology were funded through the Diocese of Syracuse Heritage Program Enhancement Grants, the partnership with RCS and Bishop Grimes High School, 50 miles down the New York State Thruway in Syracuse, became a reality.

Distance learning via video-conferencing technology is made possible by the use of two units made by Tandberg equipped with a Precision HD camera and HDTV with tuner on a LX video conferencing cart. RCS already had a unit thanks to a 2007 New York State Learning Technology Grant and authored a Heritage grant in November 2008 to purchase the $12,200 sister unit with Bishop Grimes.

RCS and Bishop Grimes successfully launched their distance learning courses, but the initial set up took hours of testing. A preliminary test in the spring of 2009 was conducted to verify the feasibility of offering

Faculty member Paul Hemsley adjusts the video screen so his AP Biology students at Bishop Grimes Junior/Senior High School can share a lesson with students at Rome Catholic School.
distance learning courses by fall and involved four students from Bishop Grimes and RCS’s Technology Integration Specialist Sandra Engle. Engle installed the software, created a web site and set up student e-mail accounts and feedback modules, and the groundwork was laid for building a system of communication and utilization of technical support. Full integration between buildings began last August with a faculty project manager assigned for each school to communicate the installation of the units and report any technical difficulties.

Sarah Gates, a RCS science teacher, simultaneously instructs AP Biology to RCS students and seventeen Bishop Grimes students on site in Syracuse. Gates said, “The technology works very well. It is as if all the students are in the classroom together. For example the students at Bishop Grimes are able to see the board and Power Point presentation at the same time as the Rome Catholic students.”

Gates uses a traditional textbook and a Power Point presentation for class lectures. Again, students at Bishop Grimes follow along with the students in Rome by visually seeing Gates through the Precision HD camera and interact through the HDTV tuner, much like a telephone conference call. Bishop Grimes students take quizzes, tests and receive feedback via e-mail. Lectures can be filmed and posted online for absentee students or on snow days.

Although the distancing learning program between the two schools is a success, there is a wish list of enhancements, explained RCS’s Potter. “We are looking into enhancing the visual and audio components by adding multiple monitors and dual video systems,” he said. Gates also is investigating the possibility of incorporating the Angel Learning Network for distancing learning on-line test taking.

Both schools’ administrators are pleased with the initial success of the project. Said RCS’s Jacques, “Our schools have begun a new era in the Syracuse Diocese, opening the door to expanding curriculums through shared personnel, and enriching the academic experience for students.”

Jennifer Balog is the development coordinator for Rome Catholic School.

Robotics Recharge Math/Science Skills

At Immaculate Conception School in Fayetteville, students can participate in a robotics program, where they work to resolve real-world engineering challenges by designing, building and programming LEGO-based autonomous robots. As part of the annual First LEGO League Challenge, IC students put their team-building and presentation skills to the test by competing against others from around the nation. The robots perform dozens of tasks in a set time, and the team presents a unique concept they have researched and developed. It is an exciting mix of science, math, programming, and creativity with skills to last a lifetime.

Seriously Scientific During a science class at St. John the Evangelist School in Binghamton, sixth graders use PASCO temperature probes and specialized software to analyze temperature change occurring during exothermic and endothermic reactions.
SchoolReach Technology Improves Communication, Alerts Parents to Emergencies

BY CAROLINE K. REFF

This is David Friedlander, principal of Trinity Catholic School. Due to forecasted severe lake effect snow, we will be dismissing students at noon today.

Living in one of the snowiest areas in the nation, parents of Trinity Catholic School students in Oswego hear a similar message several times each winter. But thanks to a technology called SchoolReach, they don’t have to rely on catching the information on the radio or television. The message goes immediately to their home phone, cell phone or e-mail.

SchoolReach is a technology system most of the Catholic schools of the diocese have invested in recently. It allows school officials to send a recorded voice or text message in real time to a predetermined list of parent contacts. Using an access code, school principals can activate the system by phone from any location, a benefit when a decision has to be made in the early hours of the morning or when a school administrator is off site. Regardless of where the message originates from, parents see the name of the school on their caller ID, so they know to pick up the phone.

This came in particularly handy last year when Friedlander was attending a conference in Albany. “The weather was great in Albany, but that wasn’t the case in Oswego,” he said. “After talking to school officials back home, I made the decision to close and was able to send the message right from my hotel room. Even members of my own family thought the call came from the school because some of them called me back to say, ‘I thought you were in Albany?’ I was, of course, but the system works from any location.”

SchoolReach is not only used for emergencies, although policies vary by school. Last year, Bishop Robert J. Cunningham was coming to say Mass at St. Joseph’s Church in Oswego, but Trinity Catholic School wasn’t notified until several days before the event. “I wanted our students and families to have the opportunity to attend and represent Trinity Catholic, so I used SchoolReach to send out the information. People did get the message, and, because of that, we had an excellent turnout for the Bishop’s visit.”

At Holy Cross School in Dewitt, Principal David Wheeler also uses SchoolReach to communicate with parents. “So far, I’ve only used it when Holy Cross had to close, but our public school district did not,” he said. “We had a day off coming up that had not been well-publicized, and I wanted to make sure every parent had the correct information. SchoolReach allowed us to send that message in minutes.” Wheeler uses parent-teacher conference day in the fall to test the system using the current school year’s most recent contact information. Parents are prepared to receive the “test” call and can let the school know whether or not the message was properly received. All contact information is stored in a database that can be updated quickly by school personnel as often as necessary.

Both principals acknowledge that the use of the technology requires some fine tuning and common sense. “The message you send out is relayed in seconds, so you don’t want to do it at 4 a.m.” said Friedlander. “And, I try not to send non-emergency information during school hours, because parents see ‘Trinity Catholic’ on their caller ID and worry. Timing is everything, but once you figure that out, SchoolReach serves as an excellent communication tool.”

Caroline K. Reff is a freelance writer and public relations consultant in Syracuse, NY.
A young boy juggles to survive in his medieval village. He comes upon a celebration of the Christ Child and the Blessed Virgin and decides to perform his juggling as a gift in front of their stained glass images. The Christ child appears sad in the artwork, so the juggler is determined to make him happy. He performs at his finest, and when he is finished, he faints from his efforts. Soon after, the crowd notices that images of Mary and the Christ child are now smiling.

Everyone in Notre Dame Elementary School knows the story of the Little Juggler of Notre Dame and his determination to please the Lord. So essential is that image, that the newly created school has adopted “the juggler” as its mascot. But, more importantly, the lesson learned from the juggler is one that has helped faculty, staff, students and parents through a major consolidation, as all have put forth an effort aimed at doing their best work for Christ.

With the 2009 school year, a new era began with the opening of Notre Dame Elementary School. With it began the vision of a truly unified Catholic school system in the Utica area, as three schools came together: St. Peter’s School in No. Utica, St. Mary’s School in Clinton, and Our Lady of Lourdes School, on whose campus the new school now resides.

A spirit of unity is the predominant factor in this merger. With a name change to mirror the identity of the local high school, Notre Dame Junior/Senior High School, the students and faculty now identify themselves as the “Junior Jugglers.”

Bringing the children together would prove to be the easy part, as children are much more adaptable to change than adults. With that in mind, the administration conducted a workshop over the summer for all interested staff to become trained in Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Although the philosophy behind PBIS is to focus on children’s behavior, the staff needed to have a common language that would unify the school. Working with Peaceful Schools, members of the staff learned how to identify rules that could be adapted to the building and teach these rules to the children in a humorous yet effective way. The result has shown that the children responded positively.

While the teachers and the children have been working hard to establish a rapport, the administration has been working diligently with a committed group of volunteer parents. They have come together to form the school’s new advisory board known as the “Commission.” This group has drafted a mission statement for the new school and has begun a strategic plan with definitive long- and short-term goals. With only a few months of school behind Notre Dame Elementary, the group has already completed work on Catholic identity, staffing, curriculum, enrollment and facilities and intends to help steer the direction of the school for years to come.

At the school’s opening faculty meetings last fall, the teachers echoed many of the thoughts of the newly formed commission. They felt strongly that one area should be the focus: Catholic identity. Although each of the merged schools had a unique faith com-
munity of its own, the faith was one pillar that all could hold onto for support during this transition. The faculty believed that prayer and the traditions of the Church would ground the children and their families, allowing for a smoother transition. They believed that relationships here on earth would be fostered through a stronger relationship with the Lord.

The relationships created have been the outcome of what many would say was a merger necessitated by a desire for sound fiscal management of available resources. Undoubtedly that is true. But the relationships that have formed due to the founding of this new school will be lasting. The students have built friendships that will follow them onto the basketball court where Catholic school students are no longer their adversaries but are their friends. Parents have reached out to each other to make each other feel welcome. Teachers who had been teaching at the existing site have been partnered with new teachers to help them become acclimated to a new school.

While the first year of the transition is not yet over and there is still work to be done, one thing is clear. Just like the juggler, everyone gave their all — students, teachers, staff and parents. And, the community at Notre Dame Elementary certainly believes that the Christ child is, indeed, smiling down on their efforts.

Joe Jones is the development director for Notre Dame Junior/Senior High School and Notre Dame Elementary School.
Le Moyne's Loyola Institute Continues Catholic Education with Credits, Tuition Dollars

BY CAROLINE K. REFF

Last year, Le Moyne College announced the creation of The Loyola Institute, a unique program offering qualified students from Bishop Ludden Junior/Senior High School, Bishop Grimes Junior/Senior High School and Christian Brothers Academy in Syracuse the benefits of a Jesuit education and the opportunity to earn 12 college credits and up to $58,000 in college savings.

“The Loyola Institute is designed for students to recognize the real value of a Catholic, Jesuit education,” said Dr. Dennis DePerro, Le Moyne's vice president for enrollment management. “We have seen a lot of students from Catholic high schools leave Syracuse to go to Catholic institutions elsewhere that are very similar to Le Moyne. Our hope is that our partnership will showcase the excellence of the Le Moyne academic programs and also help students get a head start on their college studies while still in high school.”

The first group of students entered the program last summer, and the Catholic Schools Office is eager to monitor their progress. “From our perspective, it's a wonderful opportunity and promotes a larger vision to educate our students in the Catholic tradition, not only from Pre-K through Grade 12, but well beyond into their college years,” said Christopher Mominney, superintendent of schools for the Syracuse Diocese. “We are blessed to be on the receiving end of Le Moyne's commitment and generosity. A few years from now, I expect to see many of the students currently participating in the program walk on to the Le Moyne campus as incoming freshman thanks to The Loyola Institute.”

CHRISTIAN FREEMAN, '12
BISHOP GRIMES JUNIOR/SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Christian Freeman thought about spending last summer simply hanging out with friends or playing video games and sports. So, when the opportunity arose to attend an intensive three-week class at Le Moyne College's Loyola Institute, he wasn't immediately enthusiastic.

“I didn’t want to sacrifice my summer for school,” said Freeman, a sophomore at Bishop Grimes Junior/Senior High School. “But, then I figured I’d probably be sleeping in until about the time the class got out anyway, so it wouldn’t really take away from my summer.”

Missing a few hours of sleep proved to be a good choice, as what Freeman got in return was an invaluable glimpse at college life on the Le Moyne campus. He enrolled in Success Skills for Critical Reading and Writing and soon plunged into the works of one of his favorite authors, Mark Twain. During the three-week course, he read both Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, while taking a critical view of Twain's work. In the end, Freeman was required to write a five-page research paper.

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The Loyola Institute Curriculum

Upon acceptance, students enrolled in The Loyola Institute must successfully complete:

- One of two non-credit skills courses during the summer prior to 10th grade
- One undergraduate course during the summer prior to 11th grade and 12th grade
- Successful completion of two undergraduate classes during 12th grade (may need to attend classes outside of traditional high school hours)
- The standard admissions process and acceptance to Le Moyne College.

Through The Loyola Institute, qualifying Catholic high school students are able to take Le Moyne undergraduate courses at a highly-discounted rate, plus the cost of books and supplies. An investment of just a few thousand dollars offers up to $58,000 in return upon completion of the program and acceptance into Le Moyne College. Students who do not opt to attend Le Moyne College should be able to transfer the 12 course credits to most colleges or universities, saving one semester’s worth of college tuition and room and board.

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“That was the toughest part,” said Freeman. “There is a lot more freedom at the college level. We weren’t told exactly what to write about, but we had to choose our own topic on Twain and work through it. I definitely developed some skills I didn’t have before, and it gave me a sense of how much responsibility college is going to be.”

A straight-A student and three-sport athlete, Freeman said his experience has led him to consider majoring in English in college, and he might want to be a writer. “I know this will be something to put on a college application, and when I complete The Loyola Institute, I’ll have college credits,” said Freeman. “This has definitely given me a jump start.”

EMILY MORRELL, ’12
BISHOP LUDDEN JUNIOR/SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

 Bishop Ludden Junior/Senior High School sophomore Emily Morrell enrolled in The Loyola Institute’s Success in Mathematics course last summer. And, while she admits it was her mother’s idea, Emily is glad she made the commitment. “I learned a lot of stuff I wouldn’t have learned in my regular math class,” she said. “And, there was a lot of trigonometry, too, which has already helped me a lot this year.”

Morrell found the work at Le Moyne challenging at first, but the straight-A student caught on quickly. “It helped me perfect my note taking skills,” she said. “In high school, the teachers tell you what to write and when to write it. In college, you have to make those decisions for yourself.”

While attending The Loyola Institute, Morrell had the chance to see more of the Le Moyne campus, and she is considering attending the college after high school graduation. “Both my dad and my grandfather graduated from Le Moyne,” she said. “My grandfather, William McCarthy, was a member of Le Moyne’s first graduating class, so he’s always encouraging me to go there. I don’t want to go far away from home anyway, so Le Moyne might be a great fit.”

For more information on The Loyola Institute at Le Moyne College, contact the Center for Continuing Education at 315-445-4141 or visit www.lemoyne.edu.

Caroline K. Reff is a free-lance writer and public relations consultant in Syracuse, NY.
Houses Rule at Bishop Ludden

BY MARIA WALSH

Peter Cappuccilli, ’68, Pat Donnelly, ’76, Tim Murphy, ’82, Steve Infanti, ’94, Colleen Sierotnik, ’01. These are just a few of the alumni that Bishop Ludden Junior/Senior High School has named its “Houses” after in a recently established program to give students a greater sense of belonging and responsibility, while providing leadership, camaraderie and community service opportunities to its 402 students in Grades 7 through 12.

The program was created by Bishop Ludden faculty in the summer of 2008 and refined by staff with funding from a Heritage Program Enhancement Grant given that year through the Catholic School Office’s Endowment Fund. Instead of attending traditional homerooms, Bishop Ludden students now are assigned to one of 35 Houses consisting of nine to 13 students. Students meet in “House” for both a 32-minute morning session, which allows time for activities to take place, and a shorter period in the afternoon. Each House has a housemaster, who will lead his/her house for a two-year term. After the two-year term, the House will be passed on to another Housemaster during a special ceremony.

The alumni namesakes participate as House stewards. The alumni represent all decades of the 46 years since Bishop Ludden opened, and many House stewards have children of their own now attending the school. Each House steward has made a commitment to serve the system for a pre-determined length of time — from 1 ½ to 6 ½ years — depending on the grade level he/she chose.

“It is the goal of the House Steward Program to
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“This unique program has been a tremendous success, as we’ve worked to find innovative ways to engage our students and form greater connections with our alumni at Bishop Ludden.”

— PRINCIPAL CURT CZARNIAK

Students at Bishop Ludden Junior/Senior High School recite the Pledge of Allegiance while gathering in “House” each morning. The House system provides students with leadership, camaraderie and community service opportunities.
have these distinguished alumni and their families as an on-going presence at Bishop Ludden and in the lives of our students,” said Czarniak. “They participate in Masses, service days and career days and act as mentors. It’s not unusual for them to be seen dropping by in the morning to have breakfast with their House members.”

According to Czarniak, Houses are expected to participate in both service and spiritual activities and many of the Houses have adopted not-for-profit agencies in this area. In morning House, students have made Halloween treat bags for the children at the McMahon-Ryan Child Advocacy Site and have collected gloves and mittens for the Rescue Mission, for example. Houses also participate in activities outside of the building and have tutored students at the Bishop’s Academy at St. Charles and walked in the annual St. Patrick’s Day Parade. Prayer services, morning masses, rosary recitations and Stations of the Cross also are part of the experience.

In addition, each House also is a member of a “College” within the building. Colleges, which are named for saints, are made up of one house from each grade level. All students in a college share the responsibility for the academic success of each individual within that college. This system also allows for students at the high school level to act as peer leaders and mentors to those students at the junior high level.

In addition to the academic, spiritual, and service benefits, the House system also has created an esprit de corps among students in their Houses and Colleges. Each spring, the Houses and Colleges participate in spirited competitions at the traditional Ludden Day festivities. The winning College and Houses are honored by having their names engraved on trophies, which they “own” and display until the next year’s competition.

“This unique program has been a tremendous success, as we’ve worked to find innovative ways to engage our students and form greater connections with our alumni at Bishop Ludden,” said Czarniak. “It’s exciting, and we look forward to continuing and expanding the opportunities we can offer our students through this program. At Bishop Ludden, Houses rule!”

Maria Walsh is the director of development at Bishop Ludden Junior/Senior High School.

If you were inspired by some artwork on the side of a Binghamton city bus recently, you might have the area’s Catholic school students to thank. Horizons Federal Credit Union sponsored “Art on the Bus” and asked students from around the area to submit art work of any kind to the contest. Winners were selected from St. Thomas Aquinas School, Our Lady of Sorrows-Seton Campus School, St. Joseph’s School and Seton Catholic Central School, and the art appeared on the side of busses for four months in the fall of 2009. “It is so important in this high tech world for children to still be allowed to create,” said art teacher Sheila Wilcox, who works at all four schools. “We were thrilled to show the community what our Catholic school students can do. After all, children’s art can brighten anybody’s day!”

Maria Walsh is the director of development at Bishop Ludden Junior/Senior High School.
A Couple of Aces: Seton Catholic Has a Tennis Legacy in Its Coaches

BY CONNIE BERRY

There is a special spirit that fills the halls and classrooms at Seton Catholic Central High School in Binghamton, and that spirit extends to every department, every athletic team, right down to the principal, Kathleen Dwyer, and her availability to anyone who knocks on her office door. At Seton, her casa is your casa and there are obvious strong bonds between parents, students, staff, educators and administrators.

Dwyer began teaching English at Seton in the mid-1970s, when the school was located in Endicott. She was also the tennis coach. “Oh, we were good,” she said. “We were very good. We took sectionals several years in a row. It wasn’t my coaching though. I had excellent players, and we had great team spirit.”

Katie Mahoney Loughlin, ’82, was a member of that team, and now she’s coaching tennis at Seton. She has truly come back to her roots, and her tennis team is pretty remarkable, too.

“We won sectionals this year,” Loughlin said. “Our boys won in the spring, and now the girls won this fall.”

Loughlin’s players, including her daughter Ellen, said they enjoy their time on the tennis team more than the other sports they’ve played.

Players Julia O’Connor and Haley Farrell, both seniors, have taken tennis lessons since they were little. They enjoy playing on Loughlin’s team and what she brings to her experience as their coach. The girls practice tennis two hours a day during the season, mid-August to late October, depending upon how far they make it in the tournaments. A sense of belonging is a benefit to any high school student, and, for players O’Connor and Farrell, the tennis competition is fun, but it is Loughlin’s approach to the game that appeals to them.

“That’s why tennis is the favorite sport for both of us,” Farrell said. “It’s not as stressful, and it’s a positive pressure to win. Coach Loughlin definitely wants us to work hard to win, but she wants us to enjoy it.”

“It’s a great sport and I try to make sure I give everyone an opportunity to play because it’s about giving them a lifetime sport,” Loughlin said. “I just try to be fair and work at the basics with them. If they get the fundamentals down then they’re going to do well.”

Both Dwyer and Loughlin talk about the life-long aspect of being a tennis player. It is a sport that is easy to stick with even after high school.

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“I still play some now,” Dwyer said. “And the girls from the team stay in touch. It’s a nice part of the past that threads into the future.”

She gave up her tennis coaching when she became principal in the 1980s. And, even though Loughlin gave up tennis to play soccer, Dwyer doesn’t hold it against her.

“She defected to play soccer,” Dwyer laughed. “The students now think it’s pretty cool that she played on the team for me.”

When she’s not on the tennis court, Loughlin is a stay-at-home mom with four children — two at Seton and two at St. James in Johnson City. Loughlin and her husband, Kevin, knew they wanted their children to attend Catholic school when they moved back to the area to raise their family. Loughlin said she finds the sense of community at Seton a great benefit as a coach and as a parent. Now in her fifth year of coaching, she is happy to follow in Dwyer’s footsteps.

“She’s a great mentor, and I’ve always admired her,” said Loughlin. “She really makes Seton what it is, and I was fortunate to have her as a teacher and a coach, and now an administrator. She has a great way of keeping everybody together — and that’s why it’s such a strong school.”

Connie Berry is the editor of The Catholic Sun.

Scholars First, Players Second at Notre Dame

Varsity team players at Notre Dame Junior/Senior High School, Utica, not only cheer about a great jump shot or passing game, they cheer about great grades, too. For the past ten years, Notre Dame has participated in the New York State Public High School Athletic Associations’ Scholar/Athlete Awards, given to teams that have an academic average of 90 percent or higher. Last year, Notre Dame had 99 scholar athletes receive this recognition on nine varsity teams. To qualify, grades must be earned during the student’s particular sports season, meaning a student has to be able to excel not only at practices and games, but after the competition, when it’s time to hit the books.

“I have noticed more of the senior students using the Scholar/Athlete Team Award in their communications with potential colleges,” said Patricia Mundtschenk, guidance counselor at Notre Dame High School. “The recognition is good for the school, and it’s good for the students.”

Athletic Director Gene Leuthauser thinks high school sports get a fair share of the limelight and that the academic focus at Notre Dame is right thinking.

“We’re very fortunate to have a large number of our students do well academically,” he said. “They have to know that sports and competing are fun but that is not what is going to carry them through the rest of their lives.”

With a foundation built on a strong emphasis for success, it’s no wonder nearly all of the school’s graduates go on to college. For example, National Honor Society member Patrick Moore, ‘10, recently signed a letter of intent to play basketball at Colgate University next year — on a full scholarship.

“He’s a perfect example,” said Leuthauser. “Patrick understands that he’s preparing for the rest of his life, and he’ll get a great education out of this.”

— Connie Berry
I salute all involved in the education of our young — parents, teachers, principals and school staffs. They truly touch the future as they educate our children and young people. We owe them a debt of enormous gratitude! Catholic schools, I believe, remain the most effective vehicle for passing on our Catholic faith to our young people. And our teachers, religious and lay, deserve our admiration and respect. Their commitment to our Catholic schools should be noted and gratefully acknowledged.

Last year when Pope Benedict XVI visited our country and met with Catholic educators, he called them “bearers of wisdom.” The word wisdom comes from the Latin word “sapientia” and means “tasting knowledge” — the knowledge that is delightful and not merely abstract. Wisdom is like the experience of tasting a good dessert, a very different experience from reading the recipe for the dessert! As a gift of the Holy Spirit, wisdom enables us to delight in the love God has revealed to us in His Son, the Word made flesh.

As “bearers of wisdom” our Catholic school administrators and teachers are called to instill in their students a taste for knowledge not only about math and science, social studies and literature, but most importantly, a taste for knowledge about God and His plan of salvation for all His people. This knowledge is not abstract information about God, but rather a “knowing” Him that is more fittingly called love.

Catholic school administrators and teachers play a crucial role in the Church’s primary mission of evangelization, spreading the Gospel, the words and deeds of Jesus, into all areas of life. Their professionalism and the witness of their lives are vital if our schools are to be sacred places where students not only learn about Jesus but become conformed to His likeness. In the practice of the Christian life, students will learn more by the example of their teachers than by their masterful pedagogical techniques. As a Catholic school student, I know that the example of my teachers was a powerful inspiration for me. The words of Pope Paul VI are as meaningful today as they were more than 30 years ago: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” (Evangelization in the Modern World #41)

I am grateful to the 530 lay teachers, clergy and religious, and the 285 non-teaching personnel who staff our schools. All of them are called to witness to the Gospel in our 26 schools that educate approximately 7,750 students from Pre-K through 12th grade.

I thank parents for entrusting their children into our care. I am grateful also to our pastors and parishioners who continue to support Catholic school education. The national theme for our Catholic schools this year is: Catholic Schools: Dividends for Life. In these difficult economic times, I am confident that our Catholic schools will produce long-lasting dividends. A Catholic school education is a priceless investment in a child’s future. A visit to any one of our schools will show dedicated faculty and staff, and students eager to learn. A visit would enable you to experience a future that is bright with hope.
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<td>St. Patrick’s School</td>
<td>Oneida</td>
<td>315 363-3620</td>
<td><a href="mailto:pbrown@syrdiocese.org">pbrown@syrdiocese.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Rose of Lima School</td>
<td>North Syracuse</td>
<td>315 458-6036</td>
<td><a href="mailto:srosel@syrdiocese.org">srosel@syrdiocese.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Thomas Aquinas School</td>
<td>Binghamton</td>
<td>607 797-6528</td>
<td><a href="mailto:stthomasb@syrdiocese.org">stthomasb@syrdiocese.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity Catholic School</td>
<td>Oswego</td>
<td>315 343-6700</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dfriedlander@syrdiocese.org">dfriedlander@syrdiocese.org</a></td>
</tr>
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