Building a Strong Foundation Through Catholic Education in the Syracuse Roman Catholic Diocese

VOL. 3, 2012
Dear Friends of Catholic Education:

The Chinese language uses two symbols or letters when speaking of “crisis.” The first symbol represents danger and the second symbol represents opportunity. This image is a perfect representation of what we are promoting here in the Diocese of Syracuse as we look towards the future. This is a time of great opportunity! It is a time in our diocesan history when we have the chance to be innovative and to push the outer limits of our imaginations so as to reinvent the Catholic schools entrusted to our care. From crisis comes opportunity, and from opportunity comes growth.

This edition of Pillars magazine serves as a reminder to everyone that Catholic education is alive and well here in Central New York. For 125 years, this diocese has served the Catholic faithful of this region, and Catholic schools have been an integral part of that story. Our teachers, administrators, alumni, benefactors and dedicated religious have made certain our schools remain a vital part of our story. Moreover, they are counting on us to preserve this treasured asset and to be good stewards of the traditions that they have passed on to us. In our 22 schools across the diocese, we are doing just that, and the results are astounding.

As we celebrate this time of opportunity, we recommit ourselves once again to the mission of Catholic education. It is my sincere hope that everyone reading this magazine will be proud of the accomplishments we have made in our schools and that this pride will propel us into a future filled with promise. This is a time of opportunity for Catholic schools, not a time of danger. May our prayer be that God’s grace continues to guide us in building up this precious tradition.

Peace and all good things,

Christopher Mominey
Superintendent of Schools
Service in Our Catholic Schools

BY THE MOST REVEREND ROBERT J. CUNNINGHAM

It should come as no surprise to anyone reading this article that I am convinced our Catholic schools provide quality education for all who attend them. Committed to the education of the whole person, they provide more than outstanding academic programs. Our Catholic schools remain the best vehicle for handing on our Catholic faith, forming disciples of Christ and preparing exemplary citizens of our great country.

Studies have been conducted, articles written and speeches delivered about our Catholic schools’ academic programs and faith-based education. Many, however, may not be aware that service is an essential component in our Catholic schools.

You may recall from St. John’s Gospel the account of Jesus washing the feet of His disciples. This gracious gesture has been captured by numerous artists throughout the centuries and is proclaimed each year on Holy Thursday. This annual retelling of the washing of the feet reminds us that we are all called to serve others. “If I . . . have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (Jn 13:14-16).

The responsibility to reach out in service to others is planted in the minds and hearts of our Catholic school students from their earliest days. Service, in imitation of Jesus, is seen not solely as a humanitarian effort but more importantly and fundamentally as a consequence of our baptism. By the grace of baptism, we are “in Christ” and carry divine life within us. We become the bearers of Christ to others. We recognize that Christ has no other hands but ours to carry on His ministry of service. A prayer attributed to St. Teresa of Avila says it well: “Christ has no body but yours. . . . Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good, . . . yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world.”

We have a special responsibility, rooted in our baptism, to act as Christ acted. The Gospels make it clear that Jesus was concerned about the physical and spiritual well-being of others. He teaches us, on more than one occasion, that an authentic love of God requires love for others. To care for the neighbor is to care for Christ. And our eternal life depends upon this attention or lack thereof. “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40).

Pope Benedict XVI reminded us in his first encyclical letter, Deus Caritas Est, that there are three constitutive elements to the Church’s mission: the proclamation of the Gospel, the celebration of the sacraments and the responsibility to reach out with love and care to our brothers and sisters in need. This lesson of service is taught, by word and example, throughout the course of a Catholic school education.

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As you read this article, perhaps you can travel back in time to those days when you learned the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. I still remember learning them in school; memorizing them and being encouraged to practice them by my dedicated teachers. The works of mercy give us very practical actions by which we can reach out to our neighbors, especially, but not exclusively, the neediest among us. The very names “spiritual” and “corporal” works of mercy remind us that our concern for others should address the totality of the human person. We are concerned about the bodily and spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters. Our children are not only taught the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. They are actively engaged in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, giving alms to the poor, comforting the sorrowful, instructing the ignorant and other activities which reach out to others.

In our Catholic schools, practicing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy takes many forms: regular visits to nursing homes; the collection of food for the needy; kindness shown to a student who is sick; assistance given to foreign missions; high school students helping younger students in tutoring; participating as an aide in parish religious education programs; praying for those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith.

This edition of Pillars is scheduled for publication in January, the month in which the annual celebration of Catholic Schools Week occurs. The theme for Catholic Schools Week 2012 is “Catholic Schools: Faith. Academics. Service.” This theme focuses on the three priorities that Catholic schools establish that make them stand out from other educational institutions. Our children are taught faith — not just the basics of Christianity, but how to have a relationship with God. Academics, which in Catholic schools are held to very high standards, help each child reach his or her potential. Service, the giving of one’s time and effort to help others, is taught both as an expression of faith and good citizenship.

When our Catholic school students give their time and effort to help others, they are putting their faith into practice and living their call to discipleship. By so doing they will most likely experience the satisfaction and joy that often accompanies good deeds. At a deeper level, however, our students are acknowledging the inherent dignity of the human person, made in the image and likeness of God. As they bring Christ to others, they recognize Him in those they serve.

Each and every year our Catholic school students provide service in so many ways. By so doing they convey the fundamental message of love for God and neighbor. May it always be so!
THE CALL TO SERVICE

Why Christian Service Is an Integral Part of Catholic Education

BY KATHERINE LONG

It's lounge period at Bishop Grimes Prep in East Syracuse, NY, and four seniors — Rossella Mingolelli, Sarah Gronau, Stephen Silkey and Natalie Hoke — are, appropriately, lounging around a table on the school's second floor. They're relaxed, chatting and laughing, but their fingers are working hard. In their laps and on the table, they're each winding 15 feet of string into little knots. Before too long, a familiar pattern emerges.

The students are working on their service hours. At Grimes, each student is required to spend a minimum number of hours per year in service to others. The required amount increases with each grade level, and each of these seniors needs to complete 24 hours before graduation.

That's a good chunk of time to eke out, considering all the writing, calculating, translating and memorizing a high school senior needs to do in order to keep up with class work. But here, service is class work, too. Since tenth grade, they've been spending spare moments much as they are now, twisting and looping a length of mason's twine into knots. They're hand-making rosaries.

They started in Josephine Rabideau's religion class, where making rosaries could be done as a project for the class. Once the project was done, making rosaries could be applied to their service hour requirements. Rabideau sees the service component as an integral part of Catholic education, especially at the high school level.

"One of the most important things we do when we become an adult in the church is serve our community," she said. "Teaching service as part of the curriculum helps to reinforce that idea."

Rabideau says she’s been making rosaries for years now and that she originally started thanks to fellow Grimes teacher Paul Hemsley. He had been buying the cord rosaries to send to soldiers serving in the Gulf War. Soldiers can't carry anything metal or noisy in their pockets, which means traditional rosaries are out of the question. Hemsley thought Rabideau might like to take a shot at making the cord versions and gave her a sheet of instructions.

After a false start or two, she got the hang of it and started teaching her students how to make them, as well. Rabideau says the knotting is "addictive," and the students agree. It is not uncommon for them to be knotting in front of the TV or covertly in class.

Rabideau estimates that she and the Grimes students have made at least 10,000 rosaries over the years. For these students, service has become more than just something they have to do to graduate. After all their years of Catholic education, service is now a part of their life, something they do not just because it's their duty, but also because they actually do enjoy it.

THE GOSPEL MANDATE TO SERVE

"In our Catholic schools, service is not an extracurricular activity," said Christopher Mominey, Superintendent of Schools for the Syracuse Diocese. "Service is an essential part of the curriculum, just as vital as English or chemistry."

While not all schools require service hours, all encourage and support students' participation. In the 2010-2011 school year alone, students from the diocese's schools collectively completed more than 78,000 service hours. Soldiers can't carry anything metal or noisy in their pockets, which means traditional rosaries are out of the question.
It’s not just service that Mominey is concerned with, however, but Christian service. “There are service opportunities in public schools. But our motivation [in Catholic schools] is the Gospel mandate to serve,” he said. “That means tying the concept of service to scripture and a greater lesson. Christian service is a central tenet of the Catholic faith and therefore at the core of a faith-based education.”

Mominey also stresses the importance of giving students the opportunity to experience Christian service early on. “It’s essential to introduce kids to service when they’re young, so that it becomes a part of them and they continue to serve throughout their lives,” he said. “The key is to keep them growing in their faith through service activities that are appropriate to their age and developmental level.”

LESSONS IN HELPING OTHERS
At Seton Catholic at All Saints in Endicott, NY, the students in Anne Merritt’s third grade class are already learning what it means to serve and why it’s important. On a recent Friday, an emergency appeal went out to the school’s families from Mother Teresa’s Cupboard, the food pantry run by Catholic Charities at St. Ambrose Church down the street from the school. The pantry’s regular order of food had not gone through, which meant clients would be faced with empty shelves. By Tuesday morning, dozens of bags of food had been brought to the school. Merritt’s class was chosen to deliver the donations and stock the pantry shelves.

“We talked about the pantry, giving to the poor, and what service means,” said Merritt, as the kids helped to sort the cans and boxes. “They are a caring group of kids, and they know that what they’re doing is helping someone else.”

Nicky Van Donsel said he was glad his class made the trip because he “wanted to help people who don’t have money, to make sure they don’t starve.”

After everyone had a turn stocking the shelves, the students declared the experience “awesome” and said it was something they’d want to do again. Principal Angela Tierno will ensure that they do have more opportunities to serve throughout their time at the school, either at the pantry or through annual holiday drives, bake sales and the school’s many other projects.
“Even at this age, they do understand,” she said. “Service is such a part of the Catholic school system, and we make sure they experience it.”

**PUTTING FAITH INTO ACTION**

Carla Nemecek, campus minister at Notre Dame Jr./Sr. High School in Utica, NY, worked to build on the service experience of the seventh and eighth graders with the school’s annual adopt-a-family project at Christmas. Though the whole school was involved, Nemecek said, “the seventh and eighth graders got into it the most.” Working with Sr. Joan Corcoran, DC, at Historic Old St. John’s Church, each religion class was paired with a family in need. Sr. Joan provided details on the family, and the students were then responsible for fulfilling their holiday wish list. There were no video games on these lists, according to Nemecek. These families needed basic necessities, like socks and gloves, laundry detergent and toothbrushes.

“We discussed how the Gospel says, ‘Whatever you do for the least, you do for me.’ The project helped [the students] to see their service as an act of compassion. They put themselves in the shoes of their [assigned] family and thought about what it would be like to not have even the basics, especially at Christmas,” Nemecek said.

This year, Notre Dame was able to make Christmas brighter for 16 families. The students will never know the names or recognize the faces of the people they helped, Nemecek said. “For the students, this is part of the joy of it. They were given freely. It’s about knowing they did the right thing without expecting anything in return,” she said.

The students also feel that the experience has enhanced their education.

“It let us reach out to the community in a way other schools don’t get to,” said Rachel Wojnas, an eleventh grader who has participated in the project for years. “It shows us that school’s not just about the quadratic equation. It’s about putting our faith into action.”

Katherine Long is the associate editor at the Catholic Sun.

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Helping Others Prevalent in Schools

In September 2011, flood devastated parts of the Syracuse Diocese in the Southern Tier, affecting many of our Catholic school families. The students, teachers and staff at St. Rose of Lima School, N. Syracuse, put their faith into action by contributing to a fund called Schools Helping Schools established to assist flood victims in Broome County. Through donations as small as 50 cents, the school collected $610 for the Schools Helping Schools project. Each student who donated received a paper brick on a display at the front of the school to represent the rebuilding of the Southern Tier. Pictured (above) with the display, left to right, are St. Rose students Lauren Misico, Leabella McCarthy, Luke Noonan, Michael Baker, Grace Fink, Adam Bonnier and Gabriella Kazinski.

Here are some of the other Christian Service projects schools have established:

**Holy Cross School:** The fifth grade at Holy Cross sponsored Pennies for Patients for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. The project combined service, core curricular areas and Gospel message, along with practical skills focusing on collaboration, problem solving and critical thinking.

**Blessed Sacrament School:** Following up on a lesson on the tenth anniversary of 9/11, fifth graders at Blessed Sacrament School, Syracuse, collected goodies for the firefighters at Station #17 in their Eastwood neighborhood. The students walked to the station to meet the firefighters and present them with tokens of thanks for protecting them and their community.

**St. John the Evangelist School:** Students at St. John the Evangelist organized and participated in a dress-down day to raise funds to support the Catholic Charities Flood Relief Center at St. Mary’s Center. Students and their families generously supplied needed items and cash donations.

**Rome Catholic School:** At Thanksgiving time, first and fifth graders at Rome Catholic School coordinated a liturgy and food drive to help those in need. The fifth grade students made signs posted throughout the school as a reminder to bring in canned goods and non-perishable food items, and first graders decorated boxes for each classroom to collect donations. Boxes overflowing with food were carried up during the offertory procession.

**St. Mary’s School, Cortland:** Students at St. Mary’s School, Cortland, were busy little elves as the Art Club made 100 hand-crafted ornaments to hang on a parish giving tree the school took responsibility for this Christmas season. Parishioners enjoyed taking the ornaments, complete with a tag describing a needed gift. Later, students in the Art Club picked up the gifts, wrapped them and delivered them to area agencies. In addition, each class at St. Mary’s put together at least one shoebox full of small gifts for a needy boy or girl close to their own ages as part of Operation Christmas Child. The boxes were distributed by Samaritans Purse, and the students were able to track their boxes via a bar code system to see their final destination.
Puppy Love

ST. MARGARET’S STUDENTS HELP BRING HOME NEW FAMILY MEMBER

BY KATHERINE LONG

Gracie D’Alberto met her best friend, Frankie, last spring. The two are constant companions, riding the bus together and sitting next to one another at church. They are affectionate with and protective of one another, and they seem to understand each other without speaking a word. They might be a pair of girlfriends but for one thing: Frankie is a service dog.

For years, doctors have struggled to put a name to 8-year-old Gracie’s array of developmental disabilities, but she remains undiagnosed. Unable to walk, talk or effectively regulate her moods, she is a student in a special needs classroom at Roxboro Road Elementary School in Mattydale, NY.

After Gracie had an incredibly positive interaction with a service dog at school, the D’Albertos decided their daughter needed a dog of her own. They connected with 4 Paws for Ability, an organization in Ohio that trains dogs for people with disabilities. Each applicant is asked to become a volunteer fundraiser for 4 Paws, and the D’Albertos needed to raise $13,000 for a dog for Gracie. They reached out to friends, neighbors and their faith community at St. Margaret’s Parish for help.

Lisa Perla, a first grade teacher at St. Margaret’s School, saw Bethany D’Alberto’s call for support for her daughter’s cause in the church bulletin. Each year, the school selects an animal-related organization to support in honor of the Feast of St. Francis, so Perla knew the project would be perfect. The whole school quickly got on board.

“Our principal, Sue Donze, stressed to us and we relayed to the children that the essence of the Gospel is Jesus dying and giving himself completely. Jesus told us that it is more blessed to give than to receive…and we wanted to provide the children with something very specific, so they could see the fruits of their generosity,” Perla said.

The school was indeed generous, presenting the family with about $3,000 raised through dress-down days and direct donations from families and teachers. Combined with the proceeds from other fundraising efforts, it was enough to put the D’Albertos over their goal.

Soon after, 4 Paws accepted Gracie’s application and began training the miniature black lab that in 2011 would become Gracie’s faithful companion. Frankie, named in honor of St. Francis, completed 500 hours of training during which she learned to open doors, press buttons, alert Gracie’s parents to problems and soothe the young girl when she can’t calm herself. In a remarkable maneuver called an “over,” Frankie lays chest-to-chest with Gracie and forcibly slows her own heartbeat — which makes Gracie’s heart slow, too.

Frankie came home in May 2011, and Gracie’s improvement has been dramatic. She has been able to eliminate one of her medications, and she’s having “the best school year ever,” according to her mom. Gracie kisses her dog constantly and shares with her — signs of affection the young girl had rarely displayed before. Frankie has accompanied Gracie to visit St. Margaret’s, where the dog is a huge hit with the students who helped bring her home. And in May 2012, Frankie will be by Gracie’s side when she makes her First Communion.

“We are truly blessed,” said Bethany D’Alberto of the generosity of the community, including students at St. Margaret’s who helped bring a very special little girl and very special dog together.
Hope After the Storm

REAL LIFE SISTER ACT HELPS TORNADO SURVIVORS

BY KATHERINE LONG

When tornados touched down in Okolona, Miss., last spring, the small town was left in ruins.

“It was a horrendous ordeal. They leveled everything. Destroyed homes. The whole town was in shock,” said Sr. Liz Brown, CSJ.

Sr. Liz, a former principal in the Syracuse Diocese, is the executive director of EXCEL, Inc. in Okolona. She started the organization as an after-school program to meet the educational needs of the area’s children, but it has grown to also encompass support for all people in the low-income, rural community. She funds the program through proceeds from her thrift store, as well as individual donations.

Sr. Liz knew her EXCEL clients needed help in the wake of the storms. Some families had nothing left but the clothes on their backs. So when her sister, Peg Brown, principal of St. Patrick’s School in Oneida, asked how she could help, Sr. Liz suggested a children’s clothing drive.

Peg Brown saw the drive as another opportunity to teach the students about service to others. “I strongly believe that children only know what we expose them to,” she said. “I want to teach them the importance of responding selflessly when there’s a need.”

Brown talked to the students about the devastating storms and asked them to put themselves in the shoes of the kids in Okolona. Many were concerned about whether the children had toys to play with. Brown said the response was sweet, but she wanted to make sure the students understood just how deeply Okolona had been affected.

“I asked them, ‘What would it be like if you came home from school and had nothing but the uniform you’ve got on right now?’ You could see it sort of dawn on them,” she said.

A note went home with the students, asking for donations of new basics, like underwear and socks, and gently worn clothing. Donations poured in. “I believe every family in the building brought in things,” she said.

Nick Stoker, a sixth grader, was one of the students who helped tackle the mountain of donated clothes. “We filled 15 boxes. Most of them were kids’ clothes but three were for grown-ups,” he said, adding that he didn’t mind the hard work. “I felt really good because I knew I was helping someone.”

Hundreds of dollars in cash donations came in, too — sometimes in 25 cent increments. Students gave up their ice cream money. Even some loose change found on the playground went toward the cost of shipping the clothes. About 50 families were reached with donations from St. Patrick’s, an important step in helping the community to get back on its feet.

“They were so happy to get anything — and to get so much was so deeply appreciated,” Brown said.

Katherine Long is the associate editor at the Catholic Sun.
Young Musicians Program Fosters Talents, Builds Community at CAP

BY CAROLINE K. REFF

The competitive spirit found in most young boys is apparent as a small group of fifth and sixth graders sit together after school in a classroom at Cathedral Academy at Pompei in Syracuse, NY. They’re quietly trying to impress each other with their skills, but the conversation is not about sports or even academics. They’re comparing notes about their progress — on the cello.

The boys belt out their best version of “Mary Had a Little Lamb” and the start-and-stop beginnings of a few carols for an upcoming Christmas concert. Each is clearly impressed with the others’ accomplishments, and why not? This group only began playing their oversized instruments a few months ago, but already their talents are beginning to shine.

These budding musicians are just a few of the 68 in grades one through six who participate in the newly instituted Imagine Syracuse Young Musicians Program at CAP. The program provides after-school enrichment in music and the arts to underserved children in the Syracuse community and is based on El Sistema, a visionary global movement started in Venezuela that transforms the lives of children through music. CAP students enrolled in the program receive free musical instructions every day after school, complete with the use of instruments donated through a grant from Music and Arts, a national retail music and instrument chain. Many of the instructors are former members of the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra, graduate students from Syracuse University, well-known Suzuki instructors, and other dedicated musicians from the Central New York community.

“It’s one of the best things that could have happened to our school. It’s a gift from God,” said Patty Schmidt, CAP development director. “Where else can children get two hours of free music lessons every day?”

Roughly 70 percent of CAP students come from refugee families — a group that truly appreciates the educational opportunities available at the school and often make great sacrifices to keep their children enrolled. This population fits the mission of Imagine Syracuse and made CAP an attractive choice for a pilot program after finding the red tape of the Syracuse City Public School District difficult to negotiate.

“There are amazing studies that show music has an impact on IQ scores, math scores, socialization and more,” said Jessie Keating, founder and executive director of Imagine Syracuse. “We are part of a growing network of El Sistema programs — only the second in New York State and the only one outside of New York City. We’re putting CAP on the musical map!”

A former youth minister who has worked with at-risk children throughout her career, Keating explained that the Young Musicians Program is a change in the way music is traditionally taught. “Music has long been an elite element in our society,” she said. “We’re trying to bring it to everyone.”
A vocalist, professional musician and former education manager of the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra, Music Director Bob Allen was sold on the El Sistema program from the first time he heard about it several years ago. “I was intrigued by the idea of using classical orchestral music training to strengthen inner city education and help children build better lives and healthy communities,” said Allen.

The program at CAP is taught in 45 minute blocks for two hours each day with students receiving instruction in small groups broken down by grade level. Snacks, friendship, dance and movement are also a part of each day and keep students motivated and enthused while fostering an unmistakable sense of camaraderie at the school.

The CAP students have an obvious enthusiasm for the program. “I LOVE playing the violin because we can play whatever songs we want, and I really can’t wait to come here after school,” said Nyachido Madit, a sixth grader.

“It’s the best,” said first grader Chol Mo, who plays the flute.

Clearly, the students take pride in having instruments in their hands — something many of them would never have the opportunity to pursue on their own — and thrive on the encouragement and accomplishments they receive through the caring individuals who run the program.

According to Allen the program’s aim is not to “create little professional musicians” but rather see “beautiful music from these kids as a wonderful by-product of social and community building using group music to affect change.”

“This is a different kind of student for me. Students at CAP have far less of a tendency to take things for granted,” said Allen. “They know instinctively that their parents are making huge sacrifices for them to be at this school. It’s rewarding to work with kids who haven’t had everything. You see a great sense of wonder and appreciation.”

Caroline K. Reff is a freelance writer and public relations consultant in Syracuse, NY.
This may be Brenda Reichert’s first year as a Catholic school principal, but she’s had a lifetime of experience. “I’m a product of Catholic education. All my children went to Catholic schools. My grandchildren are going to Catholic schools,” Reichert said. “It’s something that we’ve always found valuable. It’s a treasure.”

It’s for this reason that Reichert was delighted when she was appointed principal of Most Holy Rosary School in Syracuse over the summer. Reichert attended St Matthew’s School and Bishop Grimes High School. She earned a bachelor’s degree in English education from Le Moyne College, a master’s degree in counseling psychology from Chapman University and a certificate of advanced study from Le Moyne College as a school building leader. Before taking on the role of principal, Reichert had been an Alcohol Drug Abuse Prevention Education Program (ADAPEP) counselor for Catholic schools in the diocese since 1989. She said one of the first schools she worked in was Most Holy Rosary. “I’ve come full circle,” she said.

As an ADAPEP counselor, Reichert helped children learn how to make the right choices in life, and this was something that was taught to her by the nuns during her own Catholic education. “Sometimes we joke about what it was like back then, but those sisters really did teach us how to learn,” said Reichert, “and they made us good people.”

This devotion to building not just good students but also faith-filled Catholics and responsible citizens is something Reichert is clearly passionate about. “It’s about loving God. It’s about wanting this for future generations of children in a world that’s so destabilized,” Reichert said. “We’re not just educating their minds. It’s about preparing them for the world and beyond.”

As principal, Reichert said she is learning that running a Catholic school takes a lot more than just loving Catholic education. She knew going in that there would be a steep learning curve for a first-time principal dealing with everything from morning prayers to state mandates.

“So far, every day is a learning experience,” Reichert said, laughing. “I don’t know what I don’t know yet, so I really am still learning.”

“It’s just amazing that what we can pay our faculty is lower than at public schools, but still we are able to hire these really well-educated, capable, absolutely devoted people,” Reichert said. “It just goes to show that this isn’t just a job. It’s a ministry. We’re here to serve with God’s people.”

Reichert believes this dedication on the part of the staff at Rosary has led to small miracles happening every day. When there was no room in the packed schedule for a technology class, the teachers talked it over and somehow the time was made. When there was no one who could be at the back door of the school to let the children in and out, a retired sister agreed to come every day to help.

“Honestly, I feel like the Lord is working in this building,” Reichert said. “Whenever there is something that needs to be resolved, we always have teachers stepping up.”

Of course, it’s not just the teachers who are stepping up to meet the challenges of Catholic education in a modern world. Reichert was appointed principal of Most Holy Rosary School just before the school was handed back to the parish by the Syracuse Diocese. Reichert knew that meant a challenging year, but Rosary’s pastor, Rev. Fred Mannara and the families of the parish have made the transition a smooth one.

Reichert knows that a neighborhood school like Most Holy Rosary is unique and that, as principal, she has the opportunity to bring it into the future. A campaign is in the works to generate revenue so that all children who want to come to Most Holy Rosary will be able to attend.

“For this school to be around all this time is amazing. And, we’re in this big expensive building, but we’re still here,” she said. “Sure, we have to cut corners where we can to make sure our expenses remain low, but how wonderful is it that this place is still here for my kids and their kids — and every kid who walks in the doors of Most Holy Rosary each day.”

Jennika Baines is a freelance writer based in Syracuse, NY.
Outside the Classroom

Here are some of the interesting extracurricular and co-curricular activities that take place in our Catholic schools:

**Holy Family School, Syracuse:**
Students at Holy Family School, Syracuse, recently enthroned The Sacred Heart of Jesus, publicly proclaiming Him as the King of the school. Following morning Mass, each class marched out of the church and paraded back to the school to honor the shrine set up in the main lobby. The shrine will stay in place all year, and each classroom has a similar one in place. The enthroned image of the Sacred Heart reminds everyone at Holy Family that Jesus is among them during each school day.

**St. Mary’s School, Cortland:**
The Strings Off and Running (SOAR) program at St. Mary’s School, Cortland, is a unique opportunity for its students. The program is run by Ithaca College and staffed by music education majors. Each of the 40 enrolled students in Pre-K through grade six receives a 30 minute small group lesson with the option for private instruction. Students are also involved in a small, ability-grouped ensemble focusing on working together as a group and providing additional performance opportunities. Students perform at an annual Christmas concert and also have the chance to participate in the New York State School Music Association Solo Festival.

**Notre Dame Elementary School:**
Students from Pre-K through grade six at Notre Dame Elementary School, Utica, NY, are participating in the 2012 New York State Reading Association Charlotte Awards. Students in the lower grades will read ten books selected by the NYSRA and discuss their likes and dislikes with their teachers. In the end, students vote on their favorites, and teachers incorporate the books into activities, projects and core curriculum. In the upper grades, students have the opportunity to join the Charlotte Award Reading Club. Each student must read ten books and keep a log, noting likes and dislikes. They also hold “reading chat time,” an opportunity to discuss the books with their classmates. “This is a wonderful experience for the students,” said Maryann Buck, coordinator of the Charlotte Award Reading Program. “They are introduced to new books and new authors, and the variety of books chosen by the NYSRA gives students the opportunity to open up their world of reading to different genres.”

**Blessed Sacrament School:**
All the world’s a stage at Blessed Sacrament School, where 100 students in Pre-K through grade six participate in the Drama Club, coordinated by third grade teacher Sr. Nicolette and music teacher Mary Lynn Giacobbe. The students have put on wonderful productions, including last year’s “Peter Pan.”

**St. John the Evangelist School:**
For the past seven years, math teacher Anu Rai has offered sixth graders at St. John the Evangelist School the opportunity to participate in Mathalon, sponsored by BAE and the Coalition for Broome County Schools. The students meet weekly to prepare to compete against other schools in Broome County and demonstrate their outstanding mathematical knowledge.

While competing against much larger schools in the area, St. John’s team has consistently placed in the top three.

**Immaculate Conception School:**
For the third year, Immaculate Conception School has offered its sixth graders a Robotics Club to spark an interest in science for both boys and girls.

**Rome Catholic School:**
The newly-established Chess Club is gaining popularity at Rome Catholic School, giving strategic-minded fifth and sixth graders the chance to compete against juniors and seniors. Students meet in the library and play the game on interesting chess boards made of everything from carved oak to one game with detailed chess pieces in the shapes of Yankees and Red Sox. Weekly results are posted on the school’s website.

**Trinity Catholic School:**
Turkey with all the fixings was on the menu as 450 students, parents and grandparents attended Trinity Catholic School’s Harvest Feast this fall in St. Paul’s Church hall. The kindergarten class had the honor of saying grace before the meal and pre-schoolers provided musical entertainment. Later, families traveled to the school for dessert and an open house.

**Holy Family School, Norwich:**
Eighth grade students have created a business called “A Slice of Heaven,” centered around the production of whoopee pies. Students are producing the delicious products and learning the ups and downs of the business cycle — from planning to delivery. The students have also added a Christian service component by donating whoopee pies to the PTO as a dessert for Lenten fish fries.
Even some of the youngest in our Catholic schools can amaze us with their abilities to surf the internet, download a video or send a text. It’s second nature for these “digital natives” who were raised with computers in their homes and classrooms and cell phones and iPads at their fingertips. Clearly, there are widespread educational advantages to technology that schools throughout the Syracuse Diocese are incorporating into daily use, yet the cyber world also brings with it a new set of responsibilities and the need to prevent unethical or illegal activity and exploitation.

“Today’s students are faced with issues unheard of 20 years ago,” said Dominick Lisi, director of educational technology for the Syracuse Diocese. “Cyber bullying, identity theft, online predators — these are unfortunate but real issues that our students need to be aware of in order to protect themselves and act responsibly.”

As part of the Catholic schools’ initiative to educate and challenge 21st Century digital natives, and in an effort to place Catholic identity as the first and most important goal of Catholic education, a new cyber ethics and cyber safety curriculum was incorporated into classrooms beginning in September 2011. The curriculum enhances previous standards with a more comprehensive approach that offers students in kindergarten through grade eight the opportunity to learn the safe and ethical use of a variety of technology. It is based on one of six National Education Technology Standards for students, developed by the International Society for Technology Education (ISTE): promoting and modelling digital citizenship and responsibility, and is part of a larger goal to create a standardized technology curriculum throughout all diocesan schools for the 2012-2013 school year.

Individual lesson plans are based on information from Common Sense Media (www.commonsense.org), a national nonprofit that provides tools to help parents and educators “thrive in the world of media and technology.” Students learn quickly that a “digital footprint” can never truly be deleted and that the apparent anonymity of the internet does not mean they are invisible to others. They’re learning to create foolproof passwords and to avoid cyber bullying and identity theft, as well as practical lessons that touch on copyright infringement and the responsible use of email and other online communication.

While teachers are providing these lessons to the students, Lisi acknowledges that parents are a key part of the process, as well. To that end, many schools are holding parent internet and technology events.

“Parents are aghast when they learn what is out there and how quickly a predator can get to a student,” said Judy Hauck, principal of Notre Dame Elementary School of a recent parent information session on cyber safety. “This curriculum builds in safety nets to protect our children and educates parents in ways they can reinforce these lessons. We can monitor them in school, but what happens once they get home? This is an opportunity for parents to open up a dialogue with their children and — most importantly — keep their children safe.”

As e-books, iPads and iPods become teaching tools and students depend on computer and cell phones for basic communication with parents and friends, it is clear that technology in the classroom is here to stay and evolving rapidly. So, too, will the lessons that go with it, as teachers, administrators, parents and students in the Diocese of Syracuse work together to challenge digital natives in the classroom and further Catholic identity through this newly-established curriculum.
“This is an outstanding curriculum. It allows us to teach issues related to cyber ethics and cyber security to even our youngest students, making them aware of some of the dangers and pitfalls without scaring them,” said Angela Tierno, principal of Seton Catholic at All Saints, Endicott, NY. “The lessons build upon one another as students progress through the grade levels and discover more uses for the internet and other forms of social media that children today take for granted.”

The cyber ethics and cyber safety curriculum will challenge students growing up in a digital age to think critically, surf safely and utilize technology responsibly, while fostering the use of technology in the classrooms. “This initiative is a giant step forward in helping students become responsible digital citizens and developing the proper digital literacy skills,” said Lisi, “All while reinforcing Gospel values in our classrooms.”
Several schools across the diocese have used Program Enhancement Grants or other funding to purchase iPads, iPods and other state-of-the-art technology to enhance curriculums. Teachers were the first to explore the educational options available through these popular methods of technology and now are immersing students in an interactive, collaborative environment rich in multimedia content and educational possibilities that seem to be truly transformative.

Students are quick to learn the technology and eager to use iPads to read e-books, play skills practice games and access Google apps to create content, and iPods are often found in school listening centers to reinforce lessons. This technology also can be a valuable tool for students with learning disabilities who benefit from some of the online options that enhance their learning.

St. James School in Johnson City, NY, has taken a unique approach to this new technology — creating a reward system for those selected for Student of the Week. Two names are drawn randomly from those nominated, and "winners" have the privilege of taking an iPad home from Friday through Tuesday of the following week. At home, the students can read books and play instructional games that have been pre-loaded on the iPad. One of the iPads was funded through St. James' Annual Fund and the other was purchased with Heritage Grant funds. St. James also has four more units available for use in the library by students and teachers.

"Taking home the iPad gives a student all sorts of hands-on time and helps students think differently," said Principal George Clancy. "We hope the technology, fun and training that is gained by spending a weekend with a new 'electronic friend' further encourages a child to dream — and dream more!"
2010-2011 Program Enhancement Grants for Technology

Each year, the schools of the Syracuse Roman Catholic Diocese are encouraged to apply for Program Enhancement Grants made available through the Heritage Fund. To qualify, schools must show that projects truly enhance the curriculum and are required to provide measurable data to show that similar ideas have resulted in success at other sites. The grants are intended for programs, technology and other equipment that can be sustained and continue to benefit students and schools. Schools that have previously established programs with Heritage dollars received first preference in order to sustain their ideas. While Heritage funds are disbursed for a variety of efforts, a significant portion goes to support technology initiatives in many of the schools. Schools received over $45,000 in 2010-2011 Program Enhancement Grants specifically for projects related to technology.

**BLESSED SACRAMENT SCHOOL:**
Computers on Wheels
For nine mini Net books and a cart, two laptops, one projector, three iPads and accessories

**HOLY FAMILY SCHOOL, NORWICH:**
SMART and Computer Technology
For one SMARTboard, one projector, nine mini towers, nine monitors and accessories

**HOLY FAMILY SCHOOL, SYRACUSE:**
Computer Curriculum Project
For various software titles

**IMMACULATE CONCEPTION SCHOOL:**
Ticket to Read Introduction for iPads
For five iPads

**ROME CATHOLIC SCHOOL:**
Dimension M
For 12 desktop computers, one printer and toner cartridge; and for robotics for all grade levels.

**ST. JAMES SCHOOL:**
iPad Reader/Revive the Laptops
For one iPad and additional memory for 48 computers

**ST. MARGARET’S SCHOOL:**
SMART Technology
For a SMARTboard, projector and accessories

**ST. MARY’S ACADEMY, BALDWINSVILLE:**
Lego Mindstream Robotics
For Lego robotics supplies

**ST. ROSE OF LIMA SCHOOL:**
SMARTboard Technology
For a SMARTboard with attached projector, a document camera and accessories

**SETON CATHOLIC AT ALL SAINTS:**
SMART Technology and Learning Centers
For two SMARTboards, two projectors, eight iPod shuffles and accessories

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Students of the Week at St. James School earn the privilege of taking home an iPad for a long weekend.
It might seem odd to keep a spider web in place following a building renovation. That is unless you’re George Clancy, principal of St. James School in Johnson City, NY. He’s been watching the spider for some time between a window and screen on a stairwell. But rather than destroy it, Clancy would rather continue to see the creature at work, repairing, maintaining and improving its delicate web.

The spider’s tireless work equates nicely to the work parents, volunteers, supporters and the Syracuse Diocese have put into the four Catholic schools in Broome County in the form of time, labor and dollars. These renovations and improvements have been vital to the schools, which have undergone consolidation and restructuring over the past two years to maximize enrollment, facilities and resources. The improvements serve as an outward sign of a new spirit of hope and renewal for Broome County Catholic schools.

There are a lot of interesting things to see at St. James, which has been well-maintained since it was built in 1934. A transition from a middle school to Pre-K through grade six meant much younger students were coming in, and the time had come for updates.

Renovations didn’t always come easy, however. “The walls are 14 inches thick, so it was an endeavor putting the sinks in the first floor classrooms,” said Rev. John Donovan, pastor of St. James. “There were two rooms we couldn’t renovate because of cost. We just couldn’t get the plumbing there without major excavation.”

Most years, one or two classrooms are painted, but, with the transition, the entire inside of the school got a fresh coat — classrooms, gymnasiums and hallways. Lockers for the upperclassmen were electro-statically painted green to match the colors of the Saints from Seton Catholic Central Jr./Sr. High School. “If you stood still, you got painted,” joked Donovan.

The “new” school came with the cooperation of the Catholic School system in an effort to centralize resources and maximize enrollment. Donovan stressed that the parish is taking care of the structural efforts, while the school system is charged with the instructional elements. Most of the several hundred thousand dollar price tag was paid for by the McDevitt Trust, and additional funding from parents and other supporters provided an outdoor play set, which the former middle school was lacking. In addition, St. James School now has SMARTboards to bring the internet and other computer technology to students. Teachers have laptops with a variety of capabilities, including the ability to enter student grades from the classroom.

On the lower level, workers had to paint over a mural created by last year’s eighth grade. Looking at the blank wall, Clancy mused that his own son was disappointed by the change. But the principal brightened thinking of students spending time in the art room down the hall. “It’s a new school. It’s a new generation. These kids will do something new,” he said.
SCIENCE LAB AIDS A+ EDUCATION
Two miles away in Binghamton, NY, 100 seventh and eighth graders have come together to form a new middle school in a remodeled wing of the Seton Catholic Central High School building. There are new restrooms, an art room, a state-of-the-art science lab and new furniture for the classrooms. According to Principal Richard Bucci, feedback from parents and faculty has been “overwhelmingly positive” and seventh and eighth graders are fitting in well. "They’ve really become a cohesive unit, as they move through the school. The way the timing is set, they have their own lunch period, their own gym period. They shift through the school at different times without have to be in the mix of upper classmen," he said.

The new science lab is impressive. Students share workstations. Scientific models are in a glass-enclosed storage case, including one showing a body’s internal organs. A large SMARTboard dominates the front of the classroom. The entire room was equipped through a grant from the Mirabito Foundation. “This is a family that has a real commitment and passion for Catholic education,” Bucci said. “They wanted to make sure that there were real benefits to coming here — the lab would be new, state-of-the-art and have everything necessary for an A+ education.

They were very generous in their donation to make this project a reality.”

“THE SCHOOL IS REALLY ALIVE”
Parents of students at Seton Catholic at All Saints in Endicott, NY, also have been working to improve the facility with $20,000 raised through an auction. They quickly went to work painting, landscaping and replacing carpet, while also making playground improvements, updating bathrooms and installing new cabinets.

“We were so happy to open with all of these improvements,” said Principal Angelo Tierno. “It really looks beautiful. The school is really alive.”

In addition, St. John the Evangelist School has seen updates to the more than 60-year-old building in Binghamton, NY. Now a Pre-K to grade six building, St. John’s Parent-Teacher Guild raised more than $10,000 for the transition. Classrooms were painted. Cupboards and cubbies were put together with the help of parents and scouts, and each room for younger students has a theme with a rocking chair and comfort area.

“Our school offers an environment conducive to learning,” said Principal Mary Ellen Kelly. “Teachers can teach, and students want to learn.”

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“If you stood still, you got painted.”
—REV. JOHN DONOVAN, PASTOR

A busy center of activity, The Rev. Thomas J. Ryan Gymnasium at St. James School was completely repainted this past summer in preparation for the new school year.
The four diocesan Catholic schools in Broome County have seen changes to buildings and student bodies, but such changes have been marked by a new spirit that’s reflected across the Syracuse Diocese, according to Christopher Mominey, superintendent of schools.

“I think that people really feel a sense of hope and confidence in a brighter future for our schools,” Mominey said. “My sense, as I travel through Broome County, is that we did the right things in this process, and that we are now seeing the results of many people’s hard work and dedication.” He said. “There is still much work to be done, but I believe with all of my heart that we are headed in a positive direction.”

DC. Tom Picciano writes from the Binghamton, NY, area for the Catholic Sun.

Catholic Education Foundation Serves as “Third Leg of Stool”

BY DC. TOM PICCIANO

The Don Hengel Golf Tournament is a familiar name in Broome County (NY). Not so familiar is the name of the organization that sponsors the golf outing each year: the Catholic Education Foundation. The foundation also raises money through a car raffle and a “green tie” event, but, at more than half-a million dollars, the Hengel Tournament remains the major fundraiser for the organization.

While Foundation Treasurer Joe Carpenter acknowledges that most people notice the more high profile events that come out of the foundation, few understand that “it’s not the majority of what we do. “We’re trying to make the schools accessible for as many students as we can,” he said. “We obviously had money from tuition, and we had money from the parish assessments. It became apparent as we went down the line at some stage of the game that we were going to need the third leg of that stool,” he said.

The Catholic Education Foundation incorporated as a 503 (c) in 2005 with a major emphasis on helping students who could not otherwise afford a Catholic school education. It provides about $25,000 to $30,000 to the diocese for tuition assistance each year. The foundation has other restricted funds that provide money for a variety of scholarships, as well. The focus has shifted to other needs, however, especially given recent capital improvements made to schools in Broome County. The foundation helped by receiving and distributing a $50,000 donation from the Mirabito family for a new science lab for middle school students at Seton Catholic Central Jr./Sr. High School.

“I would say support of the children is number one,” said Carpenter. “When you’re trying to raise money, it’s nice to have projects that people can hang their hats on. We’re going to build a new science lab. We’re going to put up new computers. We’re going to put a new scoreboard up. People say, ‘That’s something tangible. That’s something I can get a grip on. I’ll give you $500’.”

Foundation President John Dowd, who established and heads up the Hengel Tournament, looks at the foundation’s work as key to ensuring the future of Catholic education. “You need to invest in Catholic education if the Church wants strong members and a high probability of vocations,” he said recently. “Even non-Catholic residents need to hope that faith-based education survives to attract businesses that demand educational alternatives. Without new resources, without parents willing to give us their children to educate, Catholic schools are clearly an endangered species.”

DC. Tom Picciano writes from the Binghamton, NY, area for the Catholic Sun.
Ludden Alum Returns As Development Director

BY CLAUDIA MATHIS

Bishop Ludden has always been a special place for Gallagher Driscoll, a 1988 graduate of the school. Driscoll said his mother, a single parent, made terrific sacrifices to send him and his siblings there after his father passed away when he was 6 years old. “I can’t thank my mother enough for giving us the opportunity to develop into good students, athletes and people,” he said.

After graduating from the College of St. Rose in Albany in 1992 with a bachelor’s degree in political science, Driscoll served as an administrative analyst for the City of Syracuse Parks Department. A former Ludden basketball standout, he began his coaching career in 1995, serving as an assistant coach for the men’s basketball teams at Le Moyne College, SUNY Albany and Loyola College. Driscoll’s career took a different direction last July when he took on the position of director of development at Bishop Ludden Jr./Sr. High School, where he also teaches. “I’m passionate about this place,” he said. “I like seeing kids succeed and having a good high school experience — just like I did.”

Driscoll said his biggest goal in his new position is to increase enrollment at Ludden, which currently has 320 students in grade seven to twelve. He plans to accomplish that by telling everyone about the “exceptional faculty, staff and administrators at the school,” as well as the safe environment, academic courses and strong athletic program.

He also hopes to continue to build upon Ludden’s alumni database. “We lean heavily on our alumni,” said Driscoll, who acknowledged that the sustainability of the school relies on the support of its graduates. “We have a very strong, proud alumni base, and we keep them involved as much as we can.”

One way the school makes the alumni feel welcomed and appreciated is LuddenFest, a fun-filled weekend held in the fall. The event offers a chance for alumni, students and parents to gather for a homecoming football game, tailgating, a 5K walk/run, and tours of the school.

“It was important that they had a good time,” said Driscoll of the successful event in 2011. “And, it was an opportunity to make sure I answered alumni questions about our program and how things have evolved since they last walked the halls of Ludden.”

A parishioner of St. Patrick’s Church, Syracuse, Driscoll credits his faith for playing a large part in his position as director of development. “Everything always works out, and you have to believe that things are going to be OK,” he said. “I’m grateful for the opportunity that has been given to me to help Ludden continue to be strong and to continue to grow.”

Claudia Mathis is a staff writer for the Catholic Sun.
Rosary’s Return Brings Students, Parish Together

BY CAROLINE K. REFF

Rev. Fred Mannara is a visible presence at Most Holy Rosary Parish in Syracuse, NY. He is often seen in the halls of the school, saying Mass in the church or chatting with parents. If you’re looking to find him between the hours of 7 a.m. and 8 a.m. on any given school day, however, just follow the delicious smell of French toast, pancakes, ham or bacon wafting from the cafeteria. That’s where the pastor is faithfully stationed every morning in his chef’s hat and coat, as he prepares breakfast for children from Most Holy Rosary School.

For just 50 cents — a bargain by any standard — Mannara provides a home cooked meal to 15 to 20 students who appear before school for a hot breakfast they might not otherwise get at home. He’s been cooking there for 13 years, since he became pastor and established the Federal Food Program at the school to provide not only breakfast but a low-cost lunch, as well.

“Running the cafeteria was too much to ask the faculty and staff of the school to handle,” said Mannara. “It ended up on my shoulders, and it has stayed there.”

What has also recently landed on Mannara’s shoulders is additional responsibility for Most Holy Rosary School. In 2006, the 97-year-old school was placed under direct control of the Syracuse Diocese, along with three other schools, with the intention of developing a more efficient and cost-effective education model. For a time, it was renamed the Bishop’s Academy at Most Holy Rosary. However, after five years, it was clear that the “academy” model hadn’t met its initial goals, so the diocese asked the parish to reclaim responsibility for what again became Most Holy Rosary School.

“This school is the backbone of our parish and, for the most part, our parishioners were glad to see it happen,” said Mannara. “There was some apprehension about finances — and we are still in need of support from the diocesan level — but, in general, the parish is happy to have the school back.”

Superintendent of Catholic Schools Christopher Mominey agrees. “Schools are best run locally,” he said. “While the Syracuse Diocese continues its support of Most Holy Rosary and our other 22 diocesan schools, the day-to-day decisions are back where they should be — in the hands of the principal, pastor and parish.”

While the school’s enrollment has struggled over the past decade due to the local economy and
changing demographics, Mannara was thrilled that the number of students increased slightly over the summer of 2011. Today, approximately 55 percent of students are parishioners and about 75 percent are Catholic. Others live in and around the neighborhood and come to the school seeking better opportunities in a safe, academically-oriented environment.

“Rosary is at the heart of the Strathmore neighborhood. We are here to offer an excellent education in an outstanding atmosphere,” said Mannara, who proudly noted that 100 percent of the school’s graduates go on to graduate from high school. “We are about high academic standards, discipline, an atmosphere of calm and a set of standards that are conducive to educating children in the Catholic faith. We are ready, willing and wanting to serve anyone who comes to us — and we’re happy when they choose Most Holy Rosary School.”

Mannara also is happy when the children join him for breakfast. “I know each morning that we’re providing these children with the basics they need to be successful,” he said, as he greets the first few students eager for the day’s selection of French toast, ham, fresh fruit and milk.

“The kids are always beautiful,” he added. “There’s a real connection at Rosary and a beautiful co-mingling of school, parish and faith.”

Editor’s Note: In September 2011, the Bishop’s Academy at Holy Family and Cathedral Academy at Pompei were also placed back under their respective parishes.

Caroline K. Reff is a freelance writer and public relations consultant in Syracuse, NY.
Immigrant Students Find Faith, Family at Diocesan Schools

BY CLAUDIA MATHIS

Adeolu Ademoyo arrived in the United States from Nigeria in 2003 to study philosophy at Binghamton University. His wife, Omobolade, and their four children, Akiirayi, Itunu, Iderase and Imisioluwa, joined him in 2008. Upon the family's arrival, the Ademoyos set out to find a school for their children. At each school, they asked if the day started with a prayer. They eliminated the schools that didn't offer this. Adeolu said he was looking for a setting that offered quality education but also valued faith and family. In the end, the family chose St. James School in Johnson City, NY.

The Ademoyos are very involved in their children's education, and they believe that St. James and Seton Catholic Central Jr./Sr. High School in Binghamton, NY, where their older children now attend, play a crucial role in the building of their children's character. “St. James is a model of the Catholic mission,” said Adeolu. “The mission is consistently articulated and, as a result, the students excel.”

St. James Principal George Clancy is pleased that the Ademoyos and other immigrant families have found a comfortable place at the school. “The wonderful thing that happens is that it opens up all of our children's eyes to the world,” said Clancy, who also has students from Russia and Vietnam. “It gives our students a chance to learn about other cultures.”

The three oldest Ademoyo children have since made a smooth transition from St. James to Seton Catholic Central Jr./Sr. High School, which has also embraced them. “They are enthused, engaged and considered to be strong students by their teachers,” said Seton Principal Richard Bucci. “The Ademoyo children diversify and enrich our student body.”

The Ademoyos are a prime example of immigrant families seeking the opportunities this country has to offer in the form of Catholic education. Many of the Catholic schools in the Syracuse Diocese have seen an increase in interest from this diverse population, which traditionally considers academic success a top priority but also seeks a safe and disciplined environment along with a welcoming student body.

Omobolade Ademoyo picks up her daughter, Imisioluwa, after school. The family chose St. James School for its academics, as well as faith and family values, after arriving in the U.S. from Nigeria.
SEEKING OUT A CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Jordanie and Joe Hakizimana were born in Congo and are now flourishing students at Bishop Grimes Prep in East Syracuse, NY. Jordanie, a senior, attended several schools in the area before coming to Grimes. “The kids at the other schools weren’t focused on getting an education, and the teachers didn’t care,” he said. “I knew I needed a way to find a Catholic education.”

When Jordanie was 14 he asked for an application to enroll at Grimes, according to Alicia Sovik-Socia, who has played a vital role in Jordanie’s life, including taking the young man in to live with her. “It’s wonderful to see what Bishop Grimes has done for him,” Sovik-Socia said. “It is the most loving, caring school. It provides stability for him, which is what he needed. He now has a lot of confidence.”

“I visited Bishop Grimes and felt comfortable and safe, and I felt that I could focus on my education,” said Jordanie.

Once he arrived at Grimes, however, the young man found the courses to be much more difficult than at his previous school. He attributes much of his success to his resource teacher, Susan Boone, and Susan Nedza, director of guidance, who helped him catch up. “Without them, I wouldn’t be here,” he said.

Jordanie worked a job in landscaping and at the New York State Fair to help pay his tuition. He also is a forward on the varsity soccer team and hopes to pursue a career in landscape architecture. Last year, Jordanie won the Most Improved Student of the Year Award, and he believes that the caring staff brings out the best in him. “Before I never really knew who I was,” he said. “Now, I know that I am a fun-loving person, and I’m empathetic toward other people.”

His brother, Joe, a ninth grader, decided to attend Bishop Grimes Prep this fall after witnessing the change in his brother. “He became more responsible,” said Joe. “I look up to him as a role model.”

Joe, too, knows he made a wise choice. “I love it here,” he said. There are a lot of kind-hearted people here. I feel loved. The school I came from was horrible.

The teachers didn’t care, and the kids didn’t care. I care about education. I want to be a lawyer.”

Principal Marc Crouse believes the brothers’ presence at the school has enriched the lives of all Bishop Grimes students, who have had the opportunity to learn about the traditions and customs of Africa, as well as important lessons in the tolerance and understanding of people from different cultural backgrounds.

“Our staff is happy to have different cultures represented because it creates opportunities in classes, such as social studies and religion, to talk about different perspectives,” Crouse said. “We’re lucky to have them here. They are shining examples of what we stand for, what we believe in and who we are.”

Claudia Mathis is a freelance writer with the Catholic Sun.

Immigrant students like brothers Joe and Jordanie Hakizimana, who were born in Congo, are welcomed into our Catholic schools. They are pictured with Marc Crouse, principal at Bishop Grimes Prep.
One of the cornerstones of Catholic education is a dynamic theology program. The intent of this program is to instill students with an understanding of the fundamentals of our faith, a familiarity with sacred scripture, an appreciation for the unbroken apostolic tradition that dates back 2,000 years, and a commitment to social justice.

For generations, this mission was undertaken by priest and religious brothers and sisters who brought enthusiasm and passion to their instruction. They were poignant examples of self-sacrifice and a ministry of service to the Church and its people. Unfortunately, as their numbers have diminished in recent decades, so has their presence in Catholic school classrooms.

Understanding the reality of the current dynamic, Seton Catholic Central Jr./Sr. High School has explored creative ways to reintroduce a religious teaching presence. During the summer of 2011, the school began to reach out to local priests and sisters to ask if they would be available to teach one period, three days out of a six-day class cycle. Four priests and one sister accepted the challenge.

As a result, Seton Catholic Central has been able to craft a curriculum of theology electives for juniors and seniors. Rev. Thomas Ward, pastor of St. Mary of the Assumption and St. Paul's is teaching Theology of the Body. Rev. Timothy Taugher, pastor of St. Francis of Assisi, is teaching Catholic Social Justice. Rev. Christopher Ballard, parochial vicar at St. James, is teaching Christianity in the Marketplace, and Rev. Clarence Rumble, pastor of the Church of the Holy Family, will be teaching Liturgy of the Church. In addition, Sr. Brigid O'Mahony, MHJ, is teaching Healing and the Miracles of Jesus.

Each brings a unique insight to the curriculum and instruction. Their involvement enriches and diversifies the Theology Department, and most importantly, students, who often only see priests at weekend Mass, have an opportunity to interact with them on a more personal level. It is the hope that this interaction may sow seeds for future vocations.

Although teaching high school students in any setting provides unique challenges, the religious have integrated well into their role, as they work to diversify their instruction and provide students regular opportunities for dialogue and discussion. This approach to engagement has fostered a spirit of critical thinking and reflection.

Seton Catholic Central continues its outreach to other area priests, many of whom made the commitment to consider the possibility of teaching. The school is optimistic about an even greater participation, which will allow a broader portfolio of course offerings in the future. And, other religious who have been unable to commit to teaching have offered to participate in the life of the school in different ways, such as officiating Mass for the student body or teams and clubs, or acting as guest lecturers.

Richard A. Bucci is the principal of Seton Catholic Central Jr./Sr. High School and serves as president of the Catholic Schools of Broome Co.
Update: “Pillars” Cover Family Helps Heroes at Home

BY JENNIKA BAINES

When Pillars magazine featured Sage Murnane and her children on its cover in 2011, her husband Michael was serving in the military, while they had found a home within the community at Blessed Sacrament School.

Now, almost a year later, the children are still happy at Blessed Sacrament, and Michael is still serving his country. But, there are some new developments in the Murnane household, too.

Baby Tess was welcomed into the family on March 23, 2011. Her arrival was a planned Cesarean section, which meant that Michael was able to be there. He came home again to see Tess baptized but is now serving in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

“So, he’s only seen her for less than two weeks, and she’s 7-months old,” Murnane said.

Still, the new baby is a joy for the entire family. “Tess is a great distraction,” Murnane said. “The other children play with her, read to her, hold her. They’re so good to her. She’s truly a gift from God. I call her ‘the missing link’ because she’s just brought us all together.”

Of course, there are times when the children realize that they are not all together. Murnane said the children miss their father every day, especially on special occasions like when they are blowing out their birthday candles. It’s for this reason that Sage started a campaign called Heroes at Home to help the children of other soldiers in her husband’s unit feel as if their parents aren’t so far away.

Each of the Murnane children, including Tess, has his or her own Daddy Doll with Michael’s smiling photo pasted on the body. Now the family and the students at Blessed Sacrament are helping to make Daddy Dolls for other children, as well, sending them off in boxes filled with handmade birthday cards from the students. According to Murnane, the teachers and parents have been incredibly supportive, and women at the school help sew the dolls together.

“Everyone knows that the soldiers are heroes, but sometimes the families are just kind of forgotten,” Murnane said. “We’re calling it Heroes at Home because that’s what the kids are. They’re making sacrifices, too. The kids really are the heroes at home.”

For information on the Heroes at Home Project, call Blessed Sacrament School at (315) 463-1261.

Jennika Baines is a freelance writer based in Syracuse, NY.

One year later: Sage Murnane holds new addition, Tess, while (left to right) Molly, Jack and Gracie hold “Daddy Dolls” made to look like their father, Michael, who is serving in Afghanistan.
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