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

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Pillars
Dear Friends of Catholic Education:

Welcome to our latest edition of Pillars magazine where we tell the story of Catholic education in the Diocese of Syracuse. As we continue to celebrate the Year of Faith across our Universal Church, I am constantly reminded of the great gift that Catholic schools contribute to our faith community here in Central New York. Since its founding 125 years ago, our local diocese has counted on Catholic schools to pass on the traditions of the faith in an academic environment that expects excellence, promotes self-discipline, and, above all, teaches young people the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. Indeed it is an awesome responsibility, but it is one that we welcome and embrace each day. And thanks to the work of our dedicated teachers and outstanding administrators, we are succeeding in this ministry.

A 2012 study conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University revealed that 62 percent of parish leaders attended Catholic primary school at some point in their lives. And, almost 50 percent of parish leaders stated that they attended a Catholic high school. So while there can be no doubt that our parents, our alumni and our parishes make significant sacrifices to support Catholic education, we believe that it is well worth the long term investment if we expect our Church to thrive in the future. This is the story that we must tell: Catholic schools remain an effective tool for passing on the traditions of the faith and are necessary in forming our Church leaders of the next generation.

We thank all of those who continue to support this integral mission of the Church. We hope that a glance at this edition of Pillars will make everyone proud of what we are accomplishing in our Catholic schools across the Diocese of Syracuse.

Peace and all good things,

Christopher Mominey
Superintendent of Schools

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Connecting with Rome from Home

SKYPE BRINGS CANONIZATION TO STUDENTS IN DIOCESE

BY KATHERINE LONG

Standing in the middle of an ancient city full of history, Catholic Schools Superintendent Christopher Mominey used some of the most modern technologies to send the experience of a canonization in Rome, Italy, home to students in the diocese.

“Hello St. Margaret’s!” he greeted the 5th and 6th graders with a wave, the dome of St. Peter’s Basilica peeking over his shoulder.

Using a wireless Internet connection, an iPad and Internet-based video messaging platform Skype, Mominey was able to chat in real time with not just St. Margaret’s but every school in the diocese from St. Peter’s Square.

When the canonizations of St. Marianne Cope and St. Kateri Tekakwitha were announced late in 2011, Mominey said the wheels in his mind started turning. Two women with roots in Upstate New York — St. Marianne, a Franciscan nun who was born and worked in the diocese before moving to Hawaii to minister to people with Hansen’s disease, and St. Kateri, a 17th Century Mohawk convert to Catholicism who was born near what is now Albany — would become saints of the universal church in an October 2012 ceremony at the Vatican. Mominey, teachers and Catholic Schools staff put their heads together.

“We brainstormed as a staff,” he said. “We knew very few students would be able to go to Rome to witness the canonization. We started thinking, ‘How can we educate our students about this once-in-a-lifetime event?’”

A plan began to take shape. First, a thick binder full of information about St. Marianne, the Franciscan order and its spiritual roots in the town of Assisi, and St. Kateri was developed and distributed to teachers throughout the diocese, along with instructions to incorporate the information into classroom lessons.

Then, in the weeks leading up to the canonization, Mominey and Diocesan Director of Educational Technology Dominick Lisi started filming a series of short educational videos. The videos were uploaded to YouTube and shared on a Facebook page created especially for the project. One of the first videos took students to Utica to learn about St. Marianne’s childhood and to visit her home parish of St. Joseph-St. Patrick.

As the canonization drew closer, Mominey and Lisi traveled to Italy, where they filmed additional videos about Assisi and the Franciscan tradition, Rome and its spiritual and historical significance, and on the process of becoming a saint.

continued on page 2
Finally, just days before the October 21, 2012, canonization, came the culmination of the project: live video chats with students in the diocese from the outskirts of St. Peter’s Square. Outfitted with a wireless microphone headset and standing square in front of the iPad’s web cam, Mominey started dialing up schools back in New York. Over the course of three days, he held individual 30-minute Skype lessons with students from each of the diocese’s 22 schools.

His chats included a brief history of the square and some of its most prominent landmarks, including the massive obelisk that stands at its center. He taught students about its origins (a trophy the Emperor Caligula brought to Rome from Egypt), how it came to stand in the square (moved by horses and hoisted by pulleys at the Pope’s request) and even its weight (1 million pounds).

Barbara Sugar, principal of Trinity Catholic School in Oswego, said the session with her students was an incredible experience. “We had done a lot of study on Marianne Cope, so the students were prepared with many questions,” she said. “And because our session took place the day following the canonization, they came up with plenty more during the course of the chat. They truly got so much out of the experience, more than just reading about a canonization.”

Trinity 6th grader Aaron Carter had never Skyped before and enjoyed getting to see Rome via the chat. “I asked how people were able to see and hear during the canonization, and Mr. Mominey told me that the ceremony took place outside, so there was lots of room for everyone,” he said. “It was pretty cool to talk to him all the way from Rome.”

Fellow 6th grader Damion Douglas also declared the Skype session “great.” “I liked seeing the cars driving around in the background and having Mr. Mominey point out all the places where the ceremony happened,” he said.

There were also a few special guests at a number of the lessons. Diocesan Director of Communications and Assistant Chancellor Danielle Cummings stopped by, as did Rev. John Manno, pastor of St. James in Syracuse. Diocesan seminarian Chris Seibt also took a turn at the mic, answering St. Margaret’s questions about relics and whether the Sign of the Cross is made the same way in Italy (It is!).

“I was particularly moved by their questions about the relics of saints in the various churches of Rome. It gave me the opportunity to talk about the bones of St. Peter located below the high altar of the Basilica of St. Peter while standing in front of this magnificent church,” said Seibt. “What a profound experience this was for me! It brought our beautiful
Catholic faith alive not only for me but for them, especially by recalling how men and women actually gave their lives in service to handing on the tradition that they received from the Lord through the Apostles in the place where it happened.”

Another special guest was Luke Redmore, a 5th grader at St. James School in Johnson City. He traveled to Rome with his parents and baby sister and planned to meet up with Mominey for the Skype session with his school. “It was really fun to talk to everyone,” Luke said. “I didn’t recognize anyone on the screen, but I got to answer some of their questions after Mr. Mominey finished his lesson. I remember they wanted to know about the food we were eating!”

Mominey said the whole experience, which went off with no technical difficulties, was extremely rewarding. “I love teaching, and to be able to do it in a way that is fun and appealing to the students was a blessing,” he said.

The project was sponsored by multiple partners, including the Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities, Smart Tuition and retired Bishop of Syracuse James Moynihan and would not have been possible without the support of Bishop Robert J. Cunningham, according to Mominey. He hopes to expand the project into a larger curriculum for use both inside and outside the diocese.

My Pilgrimage to Rome, Italy

BY LUKE REDMORE

My name is Luke Redmore. I’m 10 years old and in 5th grade at St. James School in Johnson City. My family and I belong to St. James Parish.

On October 17, 2012, I was able to join my parents and baby sister, Ann, on a pilgrimage to Rome and Vatican City. My parents felt that it was important to be a part of the historic canonization of St. Kateri Tekakwitha and St. Marianne Cope. I was determined to go with them! I even agreed to help Superintendent Christopher Mominey Skype to Catholic school students back in our diocese.

Our plans fell into place, and on October 18 we arrived after a long journey. The next day was the canonization in St. Peter’s Square. The crowds of pilgrims were unbelievable. Everyone was excited to get a good spot. It was so awesome to be at mass with Pope Benedict XVI as the celebrant! The crowds were from all over the world and included lots of priests and sisters.

It was a happy and holy day I will never forget as long as I live! I was very blessed to be in Rome and Vatican City.

Videos and photos from the project are available on the “St. Marianne Cope – Syracuse Catholic Schools” Facebook page, and more information can be found on Mominey’s blog at www.diosuptmominey.wordpress.com.

Katherine Long is the editor of The Catholic Sun.
Holy Cross Students Rally Around Principal’s Cancer Fight

BY JENNIKA BAINES

It was at the 2011 Race for the Cure fundraiser for cancer research where Mary Conroy first heard that a school in the Syracuse diocese was looking for a new principal.

One year later, Conroy would cross the Race for the Cure finish line again, but this time alongside her students from Holy Cross School — and as a cancer survivor herself.

The cancer diagnosis came on a sunny Columbus Day in October of 2011. Conroy and her husband were on the way to get the car washed. “And I thought, ‘Oh! My mammogram,’ I almost forgot about the appointment,” Conroy said.

Soon she was hearing the words that no woman wants to hear: “They said there was an abnormality.” It was tiny, but it was something, and they just wanted to get it checked out. It was pretty shocking,” Conroy said.

Then there was a visit to the surgeon, a biopsy, and the results showing that the abnormality was cancer. It was Stage One, and a lumpectomy was scheduled for just a few weeks later. The doctors recommended 36 radiation treatments and eight rounds of chemotherapy.

“I had just started the job that summer,” Conroy said.

Her doctor said she usually recommended that people who work in schools take time off during treatment, but Conroy refused. She wanted to keep going, to retain some control over her life.

Somehow, she said, it worked out. The chemotherapy was every other week, and she could usually schedule the appointments in the afternoon, so she could work all morning and through both lunch periods where she spends most days with the children in the cafeteria.

“I would go in the next day, and the sickness doesn’t really hit you until day four or five, and that would get me to the weekend,” Conroy said. “Aside from the day of the lumpectomy and the day I got a port, I only missed two days of work.”

But Conroy knew she couldn’t keep her battle with cancer from the school community, especially when everyone had been so welcoming to her. She decided to tell everyone, from the parents and faculty members to the tiniest students. She would be honest and open and encourage the students to learn what they could from her experience.

“I didn’t want the kids to be concerned. I wanted them to know that I had cancer, but the cancer was removed,” Conroy said.

She sent an e-mail to all of the school’s parents and then went through, classroom by classroom, to explain and to answer questions. “I said that I was taking medicine, and that the medicine would make me feel sick and that I was going to lose my hair and have to wear a wig. For the little ones especially this was really what they focused on. They would say, ‘Mrs. Conroy, is that the wig?’”

In fact, Conroy lost her hair around Christmas and started wearing the wig to school after the break. She was always open and honest with the students.

“There were a lot of times I turned to God and said, ‘You’re going to have to get me through this,’” Conroy said. “Probably the most difficult aspect was having the port as it was a constant reminder that I was receiving treatment.”

The last day of chemotherapy came in March 2012, just before the annual St. Baldrick’s Day fundraiser in which participants collect donations to fight childhood cancer by shaving their heads. Holy
Cross had always drawn together a large team of students and parents ready to shave their heads to raise thousands of dollars. Conroy’s husband was also a regular participant in the fundraiser. But this year Conroy took part, too, having her photo taken without the wig and next to her newly-shorn husband.

Holy Cross students also participated in Locks of Love, which makes wigs of real hair for children with cancer. They raised money for Pennies for Patients which benefits people with lymphoma and leukemia. Beyond that, the staff, students and families of Holy Cross supported Conroy by making dinners, saying prayers, and telling her of their own battles against breast cancer.

“The community itself is just all about support and community service,” Conroy said. When a survey asked her to estimate how many hours of community service the students participated in, she couldn’t even begin to put a number to the devotion she had seen. It was all around her every day.

Conroy was still undergoing radiation when she took part in this year’s Race for the Cure, but the treatments were nearing their end. It was her first run since the diagnosis, and parents and students in the Holy Cross “Crusaders for the Cure” Running Club ran right alongside her.

She’s not much of a crier, “But still,” she said, “that was kind of emotional for me.”

Being honest with the students was, she said, a good opportunity to show them how to cope with the challenges that come in life. “It was a great opportunity to see that everybody doesn’t die from cancer, that there can be a happy ending,” Conroy said.

She has since gotten a clean bill of health from her doctors.

And now that Conroy has crossed the finish line, she’s back out running most days, grateful for her own happy ending.

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

“There were a lot of times I turned to God and said, ‘You’re going to have to get me through this.’”

—MARY CONROY, PRINCIPAL
Pilgrims from St. Patrick’s

STUDENTS VISIT SHRINES TO ST. KATERI, ST. MARIANNE

By Katherine Long

On a bus bound for Auriesville, N.Y., on September 21, 2012, one of the littlest St. Patrick’s School students leaned over to his teacher and said, “I have been waiting for this day for so long!”

Having spent several weeks learning about soon-to-be St. Kateri Tekakwitha, Matthew Pennise and more than 100 of his schoolmates were excited to make the pilgrimage to Auriesville and Fonda, N.Y., to visit the birthplace of the saint and the national shrine dedicated to her.

“With [shrines to] St. Kateri and St. Marianne only about an hour away from us, I knew I just had to bring the students there,” said Principal Peg Brown. “The pilgrimages were a way to bring their lessons to life.”

The Shrine of Our Lady of Martyrs in Auriesville is dedicated to the North American martyrs and marks the site of St. Kateri’s birthplace. Students toured the sacred grounds and attended Mass in the huge, circular coliseum. Elizabeth Lucas, a 5th grader, said her favorite part was walking down into the wooded ravine where martyr St. Isaac Jogues buried his companion St. Rene Goupil. “You could really feel the saints there,” she said.

Just a stone’s throw away at the National Shrine of

Students from St. Patrick’s School visited the Shrine of Kateri Tekakwitha and the Shrine of Our Lady of the Martyrs.
Many of the Catholic schools joined in the excitement surrounding the canonization of Marianne Cope with various activities to celebrate the historic event rooted in the Syracuse diocese. Students from St. Rose of Lima School marked the occasion with a mass honoring St. Marianne. The banner was drawn by Sr. Laurita Kelly, a member of the Sisters of St. Francis.

Katherine Long is the editor of The Catholic Sun.
Le Moyne Program Prepares Tomorrow’s School Leaders

BY JENNIKA BAINES

FROM BULLIES ON THE PLAYGROUND TO BACKED UP BATHROOM SINKS, FROM NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATION TO NEW TECHNOLOGY FOR CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES, A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A PRINCIPAL CAN INCORPORATE AN INCREDIBLY DIVERSE SET OF CHALLENGES.

To help prepare the next generation of principals to meet these challenges, the Syracuse Diocese has teamed with Le Moyne College to offer certification in School Building Leadership as part of its graduate courses in Educational Leadership.

The School Building Leadership Program provides New York State certification to prepare teachers and administrators for positions such as principal, department chair or assistant principal. Faculty members who would like to take part in the program benefit from a system in which the diocese, Le Moyne and the student split the tuition in thirds.

"For a Le Moyne education, that was a no-brainer," said Denise Hall. Hall was a 6th grade teacher at St. Mary's School in Cortland, NY, when she began the program in 2008. She was just three courses in when she was called upon to act as interim principal. She has now been principal of the school for three years.

Hall said the coursework she had was invaluable in changing how she understood the work being done in classrooms throughout the diocese. It was her very first class, one on school law, which had the biggest impact on how she viewed her work.

"It was probably the class that changed me the most. I went in there looking at things through teacher’s lenses, and it just changed everything. It just really changed the way I thought about parents entrusting their children to schools," she said. "I do actually think that every teacher should take that class."

The certification requires 30 credits of coursework in topics such as human resource management, supervision, culturally responsive leadership and social justice, as well as an internship. Classes also focus on more principal-specific topics, such as effective strategies for marketing the school, how to motivate teachers and how to integrate technology into the school system.

“You might have somebody who’s been a teacher for 37 years, and you can’t just say to them ‘Okay, now go use a Smartboard,’” said Renae Henderson, principal at St. Mary’s Academy in Baldwinsville, NY.

Being an effective principal is about more than just managing the school, according to Henderson, and the Educational Leadership Program provides the necessary tools to help principals consciously and consistently lead, rather than simply cope. "The Educational Leadership Program prepares administrators to successfully lead schools and really maintain a vision for the 21st Century," she said.

Henderson said it took her three years to complete the program while she worked full-time as a teacher at Holy Cross School in DeWitt, N.Y. She took classes during the summer, spent her Saturdays attending educational law courses and clocked 480 hours of internships at two schools and the diocesan schools office. This took her 13 months of tacking on a few hours at the end of the school day or coming in early to coordinate a before-school program.
Despite the demands, Le Moyne worked with students to accommodate their schedules while teachers inspired the students to keep going.

Henderson graduated in 2011 and got the job as principal at St. Mary’s that June. The courses taught her valuable lessons in how to lead others. “Make an effort to understand them and where they’re coming from and really support them, and when you do that, you earn the respect of the teachers and of the parents,” Henderson said.

“Someone has to be in charge, and that’s me, but we’re all leaders. I don’t make any decisions without my teachers,” Henderson said. “We’re all in this together.”

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

St. Mary’s Academy Principal Renae Henderson completed the School Building Leadership Program at Le Moyne College.

Loyola Institute Introduces Grimes Grad to College Success

BY CAROLINE K. REFF

Editor’s Note: Pillars initially featured Christian Freeman in a 2011 article about his participation in the Loyola Institute at Le Moyne College.

All that hard work has started to pay off for Christian Freeman. The 2012 graduate of Bishop Grimes Prep spent many extra hours in high school pursuing college level courses through Le Moyne College’s Loyola Institute. Today, he is a freshman at Canisius College in Buffalo, NY, majoring in biology on a pre-med track.

The Loyola Institute was created by Le Moyne College as an opportunity for diocesan students to earn college credits and scholarships, as well as a way to encourage students and their families to extend Catholic education in the Diocese of Syracuse through to the college level. Students must be accepted into the program and complete a series of rigorous courses on their own time from 10th through 12th grade. At the completion of the program, participants have earned 12 college credits. Those interested in attending Le Moyne after high school graduation will, upon admission, begin their college studies with a semester’s worth of courses already behind them – and significant tuition savings. Credits can also be transferred to many other colleges and universities, as can the valuable lessons learned both in and out of the classroom from the experience.

Freeman is grateful for the experience he received from the Loyola Institute. “It taught me that college is all about how well you personally want to do. In other words, all the pressure is on you as a student, as opposed to high school, where teachers would guide you through the work,” he said “I guess it’s a rough lesson to learn, but it’s a true one, and the Loyola Institute taught me that very well.”

“I am very pleased that I decided to stick with the Loyola Program,” he added. “I believe that my involvement in this program led to my acceptance into the Honors College at Canisius, where I currently attend. The journey to knowledge and learning of study skills for college level testing are extremely important. This gave me an intangible leg up on the incoming freshman I live with on campus.”

For more information on the Loyola Institute, visit www.lemoyne.edu.

Caroline K. Reff is a freelance writer based in Syracuse, NY, and a marketing consultant for the Catholic Schools Office.

Christian Freeman

St. Mary’s Academy Principal Renae Henderson completed the School Building Leadership Program at Le Moyne College.
Guardian Angel Mentoring Program Helps CAP Grads Succeed

BY CLAUDIA MATHIS

Daniela Dhieu, a 9th grader at Bishop Grimes Prep in East Syracuse, NY, is getting help from a program that is changing her life immeasurably. She is getting personal guidance and help with her academic studies from her adult mentor, Tammi Fabiano, through the Guardian Angel Mentor & Tutor Program.

Dhieu, along with 17 other students, began to receive assistance with their studies this past summer at St. Vincent de Paul Church in Syracuse, where the four-week program was held. The program consisted of three components: math, literacy and study skills.

“We had remarkable results from the summer program,” said Catherine Ranieri, educational program coordinator at the Guardian Angel Society, who noted that 75 percent of the students increased their literacy skills and 60 to 65 percent increased their math skills. The program has been extended into the 2012-13 school year with tutors and mentors in place at Bishop Ludden Junior-Senior High School and Bishop Grimes Prep, as well as Christian Brothers Academy.

The Guardian Angel Society is a nonprofit organization aimed at supporting underserved students and graduates of Cathedral Academy at Pompei (CAP) in Syracuse. Through the help of generous donors, it provides tuition assistance for CAP students, as well as scholarship opportunities for students to continue a Catholic education at the secondary level.

The Guardian Angel Mentor & Tutor Program has been extended into the 2012-13 school year with tutors and mentors in place at the high schools to help recent graduates of CAP make the transition to secondary schools.

“I like the way the teachers taught. I was able to get things right away because of the way they explained things. I also learned a lot about myself. For example, I learned that I should believe in myself more. Before, I used to keep answers to myself, but now, I say the answers out loud. I started to raise my hand and share my answers because of their encouragement. I know I will become more successful in life with their help. It has made a difference for me,” said Dhieu about her mentoring experience.

Ranieri said she collaborated with the principals from the high schools to “build a path to success” for eligible students, many of whom are refugees from foreign countries. “When they entered CAP they were seriously deprived of language skills because of their lack of education when they were in refugee camps,” explained Ranieri. “When a child finishes 6th grade and enters 7th, they’re still not prepared, and especially for the state math tests. We know from research that if they aren’t prepared by the 9th grade, it’s very likely that they will drop out of school.”

Ranieri said that the program is designed to equip students with confidence, determination and the skills to set goals and solve problems. These students have great potential, but they need a mentor or “friend” to encourage and guide them as they gain skills, set goals and prepare for college and beyond.

Dhieu’s mentor Fabiano had always wanted to work with the Guardian Angel students, and she got the opportunity during the summer session. “It has been much more rewarding than I had originally anticipated,” Fabiano said. “I feel that it is so important to reach children and impact them in ways they can carry with them beyond the mentoring/tutoring process. Our young people have so much going for them if they recognize the gifts they
inherently have inside themselves. Sometimes it takes another individual or adult to acknowledge and identify their strengths in order for them to believe in it for themselves.

Fabiano said adults and students began to build positive relationships during the summer session, which have carried over into the new school year. “This bond was evident again when we met with the students this fall,” she said. “We greeted each other with smiles and hugs and pleased hearts.”

Fabiano meets with Dhieu once each week. They begin each session by discussing Dhieu’s personal life, academics and her relationship with her teachers. Then, they discuss her goals, prioritizing and tackling each one.

“Sometimes we discuss strategies she can use to improve outcomes, figuring out her role in what is going on,” said Fabiano. “I give kudos when necessary and discuss possible things she could try to enhance her situation. Daniela is a very motivated person and truly wants to succeed. I love that she takes responsibility for where she is at and is very coachable and very easy to spend time with. She has a happy heart and is beautiful inside and out.”

Bruce LaGrow is serving as mentor and tutor to Bak Bak, a Bishop Grimes Prep 8th grader. As a student of Sudanese heritage, Bak faces many challenges in his education, as his parents are unable to help him study for his Spanish class and he often has trouble juggling many subjects at once.

“I first met Bak Bak during this past summer’s session at St. Vincent de Paul Church, and over the eight-week term I learned much about him and what his learning needs were. These will become hurdles he will need to cross in this school year and into the next for him to have success,” said LaGrow. “I hope to be able to, in some small way, assist him in getting there.”

LaGrow has tutored 6th grade students in math at CAP since 2004. “My first year was very enriching and I believe I was helpful to my student,” said LaGrow. Reflecting on the years he served as a tutor, LaGrow said, “For me, it was a chance to do something that I enjoy doing outside the realm of my day-to-day career in financial services. The business that I am in is all about caring for people, and working to help our young people learn and succeed is important to me personally.”

“The Guardian Angel Society tutors really helped me a lot with my studies,” Bak said. “Because of this program, I will get the help with this school year and my future.”

Ranieri is overwhelmed by the generosity of the people who have volunteered to mentor and tutor the students. “The students and parents have said that they are very grateful for their help,” she said. “These days, it really does take a village.”

Claudia Mathis is a staff writer for The Catholic Sun.
Science, Engineering Lead the Way at Seton

BY DYANN NASHTON

In his 2011 State of the Union address, President Barack Obama said, “Maintaining our leadership in research and technology is crucial to America’s success. But if we want to win the future — if we want innovation to produce jobs in America and not overseas — then we also have to win the race to educate our kids.”

Seton Catholic Central School in Binghamton, NY, has supported this concept by fortifying its own Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) focus. It has done so by building and updating science labs and becoming the first Catholic high school in New York State involved in Project Lead the Way (PLTW), an innovative national pre-engineering program for middle and high school students.

According to Principal Richard Bucci, the U.S. Department of Education and New York State consistently documents that there is a shortage of professionals in STEM areas. “The premise is that it could potentially put our national security at risk in the future,” he said.

Science Department Chair Diana Simpson agrees, “STEM is so big right now. Everyone is talking about it from the high school up to the President of the United States.”

Seton is in the final phases of strategic planning. Bucci said one of the goals of that plan was to become a model school in STEM. It not only provides students with necessary skills for the future but is helpful in marketing the school.

The school is one of only 4,000 across the country to offer PLTW. The program helps students develop skills they need to successfully navigate high tech fields. The course of study consists of a sequence of five pre-engineering courses taken over four years, beginning with Principles of Engineering. Simpson said this course provides groundwork and introduces students to the types of engineering careers possible. Lesson plans include field trips to engineering firms and guest speakers. She also asks her 14 students to provide oral presentations on the type of engineering that interests them, including potential income and required qualifications.

“Students have a limited comprehension of the diversity of the field,” Bucci noted. Engineering can include a range of studies, such as robotics, simulation or aeronautics. He pointed out that the PLTW
program helps student get a leg up on their college credits. If a student is accepted at Rochester Institute of Technology, a partner program, he or she could start a college career as a second semester freshman.

The move to offer PLTW at Seton was natural, based on the area's demographics and rich history in engineering. IBM began in nearby Endicott, and the Binghamton area was also the birthplace of flight simulation. Even closer to home, Bucci said, “A lot of families in Southern New York have careers anchored in engineering.”

Response to the program has been overwhelmingly positive. Simpson describes students as eager to learn and said they “seem to be eating it up.” Parents who attended an open house “were awe-struck.”

Bellringers, a tool used by teachers to focus students at the start of the class, are a little different in pre-engineering. Simpson said her class watches and discusses a two-minute video of something being built, taken apart or even being blown up. Recent discussions have covered the conversion of Route 17 to Interstate 86, which involves blasting through a mountain.

**RENOVATED SCIENCE LABS ADD TO CURRICULUM**

Setting the stage for STEM education, Seton’s students can also explore their studies in new and improved science labs. With a new 7th to 12th grade configuration, labs were built for the junior high classes, prompting renovation to the four existing senior high labs.

“With the exception of some minor things, the high school labs hadn’t changed since I graduated in 1972,” Bucci said.

Thanks to the support of donors to Seton’s capital campaign, renovations provide more flexibility and mesh better with current technology and teaching methods. “We asked ourselves, ‘How would this look on the college level?’” Simpson said.

In some rooms, fixed tables called lab benches were replaced. New mobile benches have locking wheels and are hardwired with electricity accessed by dropping down cords to covered floor outlets.

Front benches for teachers were removed altogether in the chemistry and biology labs to provide another 6 feet of lecture space. Cabinets were refinished to provide a facelift. Behind and above the scenes, new gas, water and electric lines, as well as new lighting, were installed.

Funding also made it possible to outfit the rooms with equipment. Simpson said 12 new computers with probeware were ordered and iPads will now be available in the earth labs and chemistry. Thirty new biology microscopes and materials for eight new physics lab lessons were also purchased.

*Dyann Nashton is a freelance writer based in Oneida, NY.*

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**Rome Catholic Furthers STEM with Legos, NDEP**

Rome Catholic School also focuses on STEM-related fields of study and professions with its integrated robotics curriculum. Younger grades experiment with Lego simple machines and basic robotics, while Lego “NXT” Robotics are integrated in grades 5 through 8. For students looking for further challenge, Rome offers Lego Tetrax Robotics and programming as an elective in grades 9 through 12, and an after-school robotics program and Lego League Competition team is open to students in grades 6 through 8. In addition, Rome Catholic School also is at the forefront of providing cyber security, cyber forensics, Dimension M and other STEM-related opportunities within its curriculum. The school has partnered with the Air Force Research Laboratory’s Information Directorate in Rome, NY, as part of the National Defense Education Program (NDEP) to further enhance STEM skill sets in the areas of cyber security and robotics, and engineers with the lab have been working closely with the school’s faculty to ensure that technical areas are supported.
Newhouse Students Collaborate with Schools on Social Media, Marketing

Over the past year and a half, four diocesan schools have collaborated with public relations students at Syracuse University’s S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications to develop strategic PR campaigns aimed at increasing enrollment and retention efforts. The initiative is part of an upper level Newhouse course, Special Projects: Public Relations Campaigns, taught by Adjunct Professor Caroline K. Reff, who also serves as the marketing consultant for the Catholic Schools Office.

“This has been a wonderful opportunity for our Catholic schools to tap into the resources of the bright, creative and innovative students at the Newhouse School,” said Reff. “The class is an exercise in developing a PR campaign for a real-world client, so the students focused on enrollment and retention issues related to social media, special events planning and more. The Catholic schools were able to reap the rewards with well-planned campaigns that are being used to help in their marketing efforts.”

In the fall 2011, Bishop Ludden Junior/Senior High School and Bishop Grimes Prep worked with Newhouse students to further their social media efforts and enhance enrollment and retention opportunities. Both schools had tested the waters of social media but neither was using these resources to their full potential. Bishop Ludden Principal Michael Sandore and Development Director Gallagher Driscoll and Bishop Grimes Principal Marc Crouse and Advancement Director Claire Downey met with students throughout the semester — both on the SU Hill and on site — to develop campaigns that fit each school’s needs. Bishop Ludden ended the semester with a social media plan with an alumni focus, as well as an outline of a summer sports camp event aimed at recruiting new students.

“The marketing strategies that were created by the teams of Newhouse students have been a tremendous asset for Bishop Ludden – particularly the use of social media to enhance our current advancement and development efforts,” said Sandore.

“Bishop Grimes Prep appreciated the opportunity to work with the students at Newhouse,” added Downey. “We have incorporated elements from each of the presentations in our advancement procedures. We now have an iPad and update our Facebook and Twitter accounts regularly, communicate with our alumni via email regularly and have also made some changed to an elective offered to our students to include career opportunities and connections to our alumni – all thanks to insight from the students at Newhouse.”

Once the semester was complete, both schools took advantage of an opportunity to work with other Newhouse students through Hill Communications, a student-run advertising agency at the university. Over the spring 2012 semester, Newhouse students worked with the schools to develop a social media use handbook and a style guide, while also continuing to increase each school’s presence on Facebook and Twitter. In addition, Catholic Schools Superintendent Christopher Mominey worked with a team of students to enhance his blog and further his use of Twitter.

In the fall of 2012, Reff again taught PR Campaigns at Newhouse and invited two more schools to take part in the process. St. Mary’s Academy in Baldwinsville, NY, and Holy Cross School in Dewitt, NY, joined a new group of Newhouse seniors to again develop campaigns that enhance their current
recruitment and retention efforts. Projects included a redesign of the principal’s newsletter and a special event plan for the opening of St. Mary’s proposed playground, as well as the creation of an alumni web page, early registration incentives and an online virtual tour for Holy Cross.

“Working side-by-side with my teammates and Principal Mary Conroy gave me real life experience with both the strengths and weaknesses of campaign development,” said Newhouse senior Jessica Ente. “I think the student expertise in the developing digital world will truly help the Catholic schools with successful plans that will improve both retention and enrollment. I couldn’t be more thankful for the opportunity to create a strategic PR campaign for our client.”

*Submitted by Inkwell Creative Services, Syracuse, NY.*
Maria Lerch, a 2nd grade teacher at Most Holy Rosary School in Syracuse, NY, loves using her iPad to educate her students. “It’s great having it in the classroom, especially for accessing information quickly” Lerch said. “It makes everything much more convenient.”

Lerch, along with teachers from Most Holy Rosary, Blessed Sacrament School and Cathedral Academy at Pompei, were trained last June on how to use the iPad and its applications in the classroom. Each of the teachers was given an iPad, and training was provided through professional development grants and/or federal Title funds.

Although using the iPad is second nature to many students, the teachers weren’t exposed to the technology like the students were when they were growing up.
Lerch is grateful for the training and said she is learning more and more every day. “I’ve become more comfortable with the latest technology and I feel more professional and up-to-date,” she said.

The introduction of the iPad into her classroom has put a new spin on the way her students are learning. The children respond positively to the pictures of vocabulary words that Lerch retrieves instantly with her iPad.

As 2nd graders, Lerch’s students are preparing for First Communion. Using a vocabulary checklist of items such as “chalice,” she instantly pulled up images corresponding to each word.

“And, I like the quality of the pictures,” she commented, adding that she recently took pictures of a student’s birthday party and then forwarded them to the child’s parents because they were unable to attend.

When Lerch uses the Siri app, the students are actively involved in learning. The children ask questions which are answered instantly on the iPad.

“The kids love it,” commented Lerch.

“It’s a marvelous tool,” said Most Holy Rosary principal Brenda Reichert. “I love it [the iPad].” She believes that the use of the iPad benefits the students by affording them quick access to various medias and cited the example of the children having access to *The Post Standard* articles about Mother Marianne Cope’s recent canonization.

Reichert said the iPad is also used for development purposes at the school. Videos have been recorded, photos have been taken and information has been added to enhance the school’s website and Facebook page.

The new technology tool has caught on in a big way at Blessed Sacrament School, too. “It’s fantastic,” said Principal Andrea Polcaro. “The teachers are really into it, and they’re researching apps right now.”

The teaching staff has begun to incorporate various apps into the school’s curriculum. Several apps, like Splash and IXL, have been added to the mathematics roster. “It engages the students,” said Polcaro. “Learning the math facts — it kicks it up a notch from using flash cards.”

In addition, the Ticket to Read app has been added to the curriculum, so that students can practice reading and compete with students from around the world.

Patrick Long, a 4th grade teacher at Blessed Sacrament, said the iPad offers students alternatives. “Some kids need a more interactive way to learn,” he said. “It’s good for kids who can’t sit still to read. The app uses graphics as opposed to a book. It’s more engaging to a student.”

*Claudia Mathis is a staff writer for The Catholic Sun.*
Schools Go Wireless, Offer Faculty and Students Latest Technology

BY CAROLINE K. REFF

St. James Principal George Clancy will never forget the look on the face of one of his kindergartners who won the use of an iPad for the weekend. “He was so excited,” said Clancy. “I can’t tell you how cool he thought he was. I could read his face that he was thrilled that we trusted him to take home the iPad. It made my day!”

The iPad is one of many at St. James School in Johnson City, NY. All core subject teachers have an iPad in the classroom, and Clancy has five in his office – purchased with help from the school’s annual fund – as a reward for those students selected as “Student of the Week.” Each teacher also has his or her own laptop with regularly updated software, and ‘every corner’ of the school now has wireless capabilities.

St. James is just one example of the great strides made in technology over the past two years, as part of a diocesan-wide initiative to prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of 21st century technology, according to Dominick Lisi, director of educational technology for Catholic schools.

“Technology is moving in fast forward, and, one-by-one, we are preparing our buildings, faculty and students for that reality,” he said.

Handing iPads and computers over to the students is not the first step, however, as all schools must have the infrastructure and faculty training to utilize the technology effectively. Over the past two years, Lisi has introduced an initiative to make that happen, starting with assessing the viability of each school’s networks with a focus on preparing them for the future.

“It took some time to do it, but, at this point, all of the schools have wireless capability,” he said. “We have focused our budget and efforts on wireless and technology infrastructure to give our faculty and students the best technology and resources, as well as help support diocesan-wide initiatives like MyStudentsProgress.”

In addition, the initiative aims to give teachers the necessary professional development and training in the use of classroom technologies so that they are best equipped to use these resources effectively in the classroom. “We can’t expect our teachers – most of whom are ‘digital

Digital natives at Notre Dame learn new technology skills as part of the diocese’s technology initiative.
immigrants’ – to teach the ‘digital natives’ if they don’t have ample opportunities to develop their skills in using new technologies, Lisi said. “We have as our goal, and feel it’s our obligation, to make those resources available both on location and online.”

To that end, the Catholic Schools Office is working with each school in an effort to provide every teacher in the diocese with a laptop and iPad for use in preparing lessons, use of interactive whiteboards and other related classroom technology resources.

“Professional development, reliable technology and effective support are key in providing our students and learning communities with the tools necessary to be competitive in the 21st Century,” Lisi said.

In addition, the Catholic Schools Office has introduced a number of technology-driven initiatives for faculty, including the use of Google Apps, the standardization of school websites, the use of technology to allow distance learning opportunities, and the inclusion of a cyber ethics curriculum in every classroom.

“While we have an obligation to offer our students the opportunity to access technology, we also have the obligation to make sure they use it safely and responsibly, so we’ve introduced a new cyber ethics & safety curriculum,” Lisi said. “Today, every student gets lessons in how to stay safe online and use technology appropriately. It’s important and another chance to foster our Catholic identity and values into the classroom.”

Holy Cross School in Dewitt, NY, recently completed the technology initiative. In addition to a total redevelopment of its network infrastructure, the school added 30 computers to its lab at the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year. Each classroom and the computer lab were also equipped with an interactive whiteboard. Teachers at Holy Cross came in over the summer to train on the new equipment, including iPads. All were eager to jump right in to using the technology with their students when school opened last September. More recently, the school purchased a set of iPads, including enough to outfit an entire class. While some of this technology was funded through the diocese, other items were made possible through the school’s development efforts.

“Our computer classes have really changed focus this year,” said Holy Cross Principal Mary Conroy. “They are being co-taught by our computer teacher and the grade level teacher to ensure that the technology is integrated into the curriculum instead of the computer skills being taught in isolation.”

“The technology we are now able to offer our students has been a real plus for Holy Cross School,” she added. “We are able to use state-of-the-art technology as a marketing feature for our school, which is especially effective at a time when public schools are cutting these items from their budgets.”

Over the next couple of years, all 22 schools in the diocese will complete the initiative, giving every student and faculty member access to the necessary technology.

“Our students and faculty get more and more comfortable with using technology as the months pass by,” said Principal Clancy. “Our kids are educated, entertained and excited to learn new things — especially when it comes to technology. With this kind of upgraded technology, teachers and students are more willing to give something new and different a try. If technology can support or further enlighten how a student relates to an important educational concept, then by all means — let’s jack up the technology!”

Caroline K. Reff is a freelance writer based in Syracuse, NY, and a marketing consultant for the Catholic Schools Office.

“Professional development, reliable technology and effective support are key in providing our students and learning communities with the tools necessary to be competitive in the 21st Century.”

—DOMINICK LISI, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY
Long-time Rivals Join Forces on the Field

BY DYANN NASHTON

The Oxford dictionary provides the following two definitions for the word “collaboration”:

1. The action of working with someone to produce something.
2. Traitorous cooperation with the enemy.

The juxtaposition could mirror Bishop Ludden Junior/Senior High School and Bishop Grimes Prep’s decision to join forces for the sport of lacrosse despite a long-standing rivalry. But in this case, the second definition is wiped away by the positive effects of the first.

“Historically, there was an innate rivalry between the schools,” said Bishop Ludden Athletic Director Laura Norris, “but these kids like to work together.” And with social media and electronic communications, the students have forged bonds off the field as well. “It’s easier to keep your finger on the pulse of what’s going on,” she added.

Born from necessity, the collaboration mutually benefits both schools and students from 7th grade through 12th. The boys and girls lacrosse programs at both the modified and varsity level have a nearly equal ratio of Bishop Ludden to Bishop Grimes players, according to John Cifonelli, Bishop Grimes athletic director.

“I would daresay that both schools would have a difficult time fielding teams on their own,” Norris added.

“It’s a numbers and economics issue, and as we move forward it is a means for us to keep and add activities,” Cifonelli said of the two schools that are just 12 miles apart on either side of the city of Syracuse, NY.

According to Cifonelli, the concept of partnering to provide extracurricular activities is not completely new. Some time ago, Bishop Ludden students traveled to Bishop Grimes to train and compete with the cross country team.
Rome Catholic School and Notre Dame Junior/Senior High School in Utica, NY, are well versed in this kind of reciprocal athletic arrangement, too. Notre Dame Athletic Director Gene Leuthauser said their partnership began several years ago, and today one or two vans deliver Rome student athletes daily to the Notre Dame campus. Parents provide transportation for the athletes’ return trip home.

Leuthauser said the students seem comfortable with their teammates from the neighboring school. “I don’t think a Rome child is treated any differently from a Notre Dame child. No distinction is made about which school you come from. The big thing that people need to realize is that in general the kids worry about today and being able to compete. The old rivalries are something adults hang on to,” he said.

Rome students are members of Notre Dame’s high school soccer, football and cross country teams, including younger students who make the 15 minute trip for modified basketball, baseball and softball. Two Rome graduates who trained and played with Notre Dame have gone on to play college level football. “It would’ve been much more difficult for them to have been seen by college coaches without the benefit of being able to play football all the way through high school,” Leuthauser said.

“If you look at the economic landscapes and the education budgets, you would see that in the future there will be some different opportunities for many schools, not just Catholic schools,” said Cifonelli, who noted that the on-field relationship between Grimes and Ludden is thriving.

“Now, we’re where we want to be and where we belong,” Cifonelli said. “We are one school district, and when we can help each other in this sort of a way, everyone’s a winner.”

Dyann Nashton is a freelance writer based in Oneida, NY.

Two diocesan schools debuted new logos recently. Above, students from Holy Family School in Syracuse show off uniforms emblazoned with the new crest designed by art teacher Mary Babble. Below, Immaculate Conception School in Fayetteville recently unveiled its new school logo designed by Morrow Graphics.
New Ad Agency Offers Modern Take on Traditional Values

Catholic Schools Work. While this might be stating the obvious to some, the Catholic Schools Office is working with a new advertising agency to make sure audiences around the diocese get the message loud and clear. This tagline is at the heart of a new marketing campaign for the 22 schools of the Syracuse Roman Catholic Diocese.

Last year, Catholic Schools Superintendent Christopher Mominey and his team, which included Director of Communications and Assistant Chancellor Danielle Cummings and Catholic Schools Marketing Consultant Caroline K. Reff reviewed proposals from several reputable advertising agencies. The goal was to find a fresh approach to effectively marketing diocesan Catholic schools as a unified system with outstanding educational opportunities. They found the right fit with Stew Koenig, president of Koenig Advertising/Public Relations of Syracuse, NY.

“We were immediately impressed with the ideas Stew presented, and, even more so, the enthusiasm he had for our account,” said Reff. “He worked hard to gain our business and our confidence in his agency’s ability to develop a new and vibrant approach to our schools. We liked the Koenig agency’s professionalism and sense of humor, and we are excited to work with Stew and his creative partner Linda Egerton to better brand our schools and solidify the message that ‘Catholic schools work.’”

The Koenig team went to work developing a new logo to represent the diocesan schools as a unified system. After careful consideration, a design was selected that incorporated Mominey’s “pillars” of Catholic education concept, while also integrating a cross to clearly represent the Catholic identity of the brand.

“I never realized how much effort goes into a logo design, but we are very pleased with the results,” said Mominey. “This new logo is not meant to replace individual school logos, but it is designed to be included in school materials across the diocese as a reminder that we are working together.”

A second step was to develop a media campaign to market the schools and draw new students. In August 2012, Koenig introduced a late-summer registration campaign with humorous radio spots and online advertising that drove potential families to the diocesan website for information. Reaction was positive, and, according to Mominey, seemed to factor into an increase in enrollment just before school opened in September.

The bulk of the campaign, however, focuses on the traditional late-winter/early-spring registration period beginning with Catholic Schools Week. Koenig has developed a movie-trailer-themed television spot, complete with a booming announcer’s voice and video clips of Catholic school students. The spot is tailored for the three markets diocesan schools serve and emphasizes the “Catholic Schools Work” message. Television advertising will be complemented by online ads, billboards, radio commercials and other marketing opportunities.

“We know how well our ‘Catholic schools work’ and this campaign is going to ensure that everyone else gets that message, too,” said Mominey. “It’s an exciting project that is going to benefit each of our 22 schools and drive future enrollment across the diocese.”

Submitted by Inkwell Creative Services, Syracuse, NY.
Keeping our Catholic schools financially sound is a team effort, and recently the team has been expanded with the establishment of a Catholic Schools Finance Committee. At the request of the Bishop, the School Finance Committee became part of the Diocesan Finance Council in 2011. Chaired by Steve Gorczynski, this group of alumni, local business leaders, higher education experts, attorneys and clergy reviews school budgets and monthly financial results, discusses school direction and addresses issues of the diocesan school system. As part of the Finance Council, the committee provides advice to the Finance Council and the Bishop.

Gorczynski worked throughout 2012 to establish a solid committee membership tasked with adopting sound fiscal practices and increasing development opportunities at the individual school level.

"Schools are best run locally," said Superintendent Christopher Mominey. "It is our intention to give the individual schools the skills and leadership training needed to create sound, independent financial practices, targeted strategies and innovative ideas that will keep our Catholic schools thriving long term. The School Finance Committee provides the Bishop, the Finance Council and me with the expertise to ensure that these things are being executed."

Committee Chair Gorczynski is a product of area Catholic Schools, including Notre Dame High School and Le Moyne College, and an avid supporter of Catholic education. He brings with him his expertise as administrative vice president of commercial banking at M&T Bank and a certified public accountant. Gorczynski has been working to gather a committee of "outstanding individuals" from the greater community (see sidebar), while also working with individual schools to establish their own boards.

"Steve has really taken the bull by the horns," said John Barsanti, COO of the Syracuse Diocese, of Gorczynski’s efforts. "He is out at the schools helping them form their own strategic goals and encouraging them to be more autonomous in order to succeed. We at the diocesan level realize — and encourage — schools to be more focused on the local boards in the decision-making process, and Steve is really driving that."

"The more we allow our schools to be entrepreneurs, the better they will be. It’s impressive to see how passionate and committed some of the boards have become," added Barsanti, citing Seton Catholic Central School as an excellent example of progress. "We can’t properly execute without these people. We have their commitment, and now we need to let them run with it."

While Gorczynski acknowledges that the diocese will never completely step out of school operations, he knows that future success depends on a much greater level of ownership at each of the diocese’s 22 schools.

"It’s a cultural change, of course, and a balancing act. We can’t change just for the sake of change, but we can’t be afraid to change either," said Gorczynski. "Our challenge is to balance a degree of patience while these ideas take hold, while also acknowledging the reality that the dollars are real and we can’t wait forever."

Gorczynski hopes the Catholic Schools Finance Committee will help individual boards see the need to maximize our resources, and trust that individuals schools can or will develop the know-how to make the best decisions for their students and their futures.”

—JOHN BARSANTI, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

continued on page 24
for increased development efforts and encourage schools to use college and university-based models to drive fundraising and alumni support. He believes this will require the laity to “step up” and support the schools at the local level with their expertise and commitment to Catholic education, and there is an overall expectation that pastors will get involved as active participants at the local level.

“We need to maximize our resources, and trust that individual schools can or will develop the know-how to make the best decisions for their students and their futures,” he said.

While there is work to be done, there are positive financial signs, as parish assessments have come down and schools are embracing the need for a greater level of fund development to offset expenses not covered by tuition. In addition, Barsanti reported no loss of market share in 2012, as last year’s Catholic school enrollment in the diocese was down only one percent. This is a loss that Mominey considers a positive. “Ten years ago, we were looking at enrollment drops of 8 to 10 percent. Today our enrollment is stable and our enrollment numbers are in keeping with the national population trends for both Catholic and public school,” he said.

Gorczynski is confident that the Catholic School Finance Committee will provide schools with the support and resource they need to thrive and become more financially independent.

“I hope we create a system that puts me and my committee out of business one day,” he said. “With the right people and a commitment at the local level, we can make this happen – ensuring our schools will continue to thrive.”

Caroline K. Reff is a freelance writer based in Syracuse, NY, and a marketing consultant for the Catholic Schools Office.

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CATHEROLIC SCHOOL FINANCE COMMITTEE:

STEPHEN GORCZYNISKI, CHAIR
Administrative Vice President, Commercial Banking, M&T Bank

BASIL ARIGLIO
CEO, Rome Hospital

FRANK CALIVA
COO, CenterState CEO

REV. CHRISTOPHER CELENTANO
Pastor, St. Agnes & St. Michael Church

STEPHEN CHABOT
Vice President, Operations, INFICON

ANDREW HAGEN
Financial Advisor, AXA

JONELLE BASKIN-KELLEY
Controller, ASC SUNY Cortland

PATRICK KILMARTIN
Attorney

DR. LINDA LEMURA
Provost, Le Moyne College

REV. JOHN MANNO
Pastor, St. James Church

CARL SPEICHER
Vice President, Business Banking, M&T Bank

continued from page 23
BOLD INITIATIVES

Schools Share Enrollment Success Stories

BY DYANN NASHTON

Peter Meyer, former editor of *Life* magazine, commented on the statement that Catholic schools have to become expert fundraisers. Meyer noted that more than that was required. He added marketers, promoters and lobbyists to the necessary roles of today’s Catholic schools.

All of our Catholic schools excel in providing a strong Catholic education. But several in Central New York have mastered the tasks mentioned above and are enjoying an increase in enrollment as a result. They attribute this to keeping a keen eye on the environment around them while making an important investment — in themselves.

According to Jim Jones, enrollment director for Notre Dame Junior/Senior High School and Elementary School, Utica’s Catholic schools have experienced growth at both the elementary and high school levels. “We’re up 23 kids at the high school, and we have two more students shadowing current students in the next two weeks. It hasn’t slowed at all since summer,” he said, adding that both the elementary and the high school are “bottom heavy” and younger classes are seeing the biggest jump in numbers.

“But even the best efforts and grassroots can only take you so far,” he noted. Jones said that approximately 10 months ago, Notre Dame’s marketing committee mobilized and together with the administration made a three-pronged commitment to strengthening the schools. Thanks to strong leadership, the group was able to move efforts to the next level.

The first part of the commitment included hiring a full-time enrollment director, a position that Jones himself assumed. “It was a huge step in the right direction,” he said. “It offers consistency with someone here on a day-to-day basis.”

In the past, prospective families were provided tours by the assistant principal, the guidance counselor, campus minister or anyone else available on a given day. Now there is a system in place that provides one point of contact and more of a flow with contact sheets and follow-up processes.

The committee members began familiarizing themselves with what universities and other private educational institutions were doing in recruitment. “Colleges and private schools consider it a science and know you have to make a significant commitment to reap the results,” Jones said.

The second part of the commitment at Notre Dame involved building a concrete marketing program. “Last April, we committed serious dollars to a comprehensive marketing campaign that essentially runs year round, not just during Catholic Schools Week,” Jones said, noting it included working with a professional consultant. “It’s been an instrumental stepping off point.”

Bishop Ludden High School in Syracuse, NY, has found results with similar strategies, according to Development Director Gallagher Driscoll. The development committee members “challenged each other and then challenged us to make a financial commitment to growth,” he said.

Driscoll spent 16 years in collegiate basketball and said the recruitment strategies directly translate to Catholic schools. “When you meet parents, you want to earn their trust. They want to make sure their child is in good hands and that you’re looking out for them,” he explained.

Part of the approach includes alumni from Bishop Ludden who are invited to help engage new families. Successful graduates from all walks of life write letters to potential students describing their positive high school experience. “When it’s coming from someone else, it means something more,” Driscoll said.

For Seton Catholic Central School in Binghamton, NY, a strategy for nudging enrollment involves

“...we’re breaking new ground for potential growth and expanding the range of Catholic education in the Southern Tier.”

—RICHARD BUCCI,
PRINCIPAL, SETON CATHOLIC CENTRAL SCHOOL

continued on page 26
literally broadening its horizons. “We’re looking at branching out in a number of directions,” said Principal Richard Bucci, who noted that the school has set its sights on finding a way to provide continuing high school education to Catholic school students in Chenango and Tioga counties.

“Both of these communities have families that, because of distance, have been kind of boxed out of continuing with Catholic education,” he said. Seton started by looking at ways to bring Holy Family students from Norwich, NY, to its building.

“We’re all in it for something different,” said Holy Family Principal Steve Bradley. “The diocese wants to promote Catholic education, Seton wants to increase its numbers, and I want to have something to offer our families who want to continue.”

Bradley invited Bucci to meet with several families who expressed an interest in continuing Catholic education in the area. “It looked like an insurmountable wall, and we really had to explore a feasible way to get them here. So, we said where there’s a will, there’s a way,” Bucci said.

With logistical details worked out, today four students climb into a car together every morning at Holy Family for the drive to Seton Catholic, and they return together at the end of the day.

“We’re breaking new ground for potential growth and expanding the range of Catholic education in the Southern Tier,” Bucci said.

Besides the partnership program with Seton, Bradley added that Holy Family has seen some leaps in its early childhood education programs. The school was quick to respond to a loss of other early childhood services in their area. “Being in a small area, we didn’t have to go out and research. It was right in our newspaper,” he said.

The increase in students meant adding an additional class for 4 year olds and some reworking of room use and schedules.

At Trinity Catholic School in Oswego, NY, Principal Barbara Sugar said that the growth her school is experiencing is due to a combination of elements. Like Notre Dame, the growth has been bottom heavy with increases most obviously in the pre-school through 4th grades.

She attributes part of the growth to the changing environment of public schools. “Parents see what is going on in their communities and are beginning to look for the structure and religious basis for their children,” she said, noting that the majority of the new students at Trinity are public school transfers.

Parents of current Trinity students are now looking at holding their children’s spots for next year and waiting lists are being established. “That’s a problem we haven’t had in a number of years, but a good problem,” Sugar said. “And the existence of a waiting list, in and of itself, attracts more families.”

Dyann Nashton is a freelance writer based in Oneida, NY.
Demand for Montessori Pre-K Grows at Notre Dame

**BY CLAUDIA MATHIS**

Graceann Quinn is thankful for the education that she and her three sons received at Montessori Pre-K at Notre Dame Elementary School in Utica. Quinn was a member of the school’s first class in 1974. It’s an experience that she won’t forget. “Thank God my parents passed it on to me, so that I could pass it on to the boys,” she said. “Montessori is a wonderful program. The way that things were laid out to learn life skills — it was a lovely way to learn.” Her sons have since gone on to elementary and high school.

The Montessori Pre-K at Notre Dame consists of two classrooms of 3, 4 and 5 year olds. The children are taught through a program based on the principle that the senses should be educated first and then the intellect. The program follows the educational principles of Maria Montessori. Born in 1870, Montessori became the first female doctor in Italy. Although she was interested in childhood diseases, Montessori developed a teaching program that enabled children who were classified as unteachable to learn how to read and write. She believed that skills should be learned by providing exercises that prepare students to discover things for themselves.

The classroom at Notre Dame is purposely designed to create an atmosphere where children are free to learn at their own pace. Assistant Principal and Director of Pre-K Carol Polito said there is a growing interest for the Montessori program in the Utica area. Enrollment has increased so much over the years that the school has opened a second classroom. In addition, Notre Dame’s kindergarten teachers have noticed that the children who have studied under the Montessori program have a different attitude and behavior when compared to the other students. They exhibit a quiet, focused attitude about learning.

Polito explained that the children progress at their own pace while working one-on-one with the teacher and assistant. “The children have a choice to work at whatever they are able to do or are interested in,” she said.

Religion, language arts, science, math and geography are part of the curriculum. The classrooms are organized into sections. The first is a practical life skills area where the children learn such things as how to pour, cut, zip, measure and sew. Other sections in the classroom include science, mathematics and reading areas. Enrollment has increased at the Pre-K from 30 students to 50. The school’s goal is to open a Montessori kindergarten in 2013-2014.

*Claudia Mathis is a staff writer for The Catholic Sun.*
"Project Grease Away" Wins Earth Day Contest, Becomes Official City Resolution

BY JENNIIKA BAINES

Using technology, teamwork, and tenacity, 6th grade students at All Saints Catholic School in Endicott took on a tough challenge: kitchen grease.

Despite the humble topic, the students' project ended up earning them first place in the Project Earth 2012 Earth Day Contest for Best School Project for grades six through eight. The students were also named second runners up in Disney's Planet Challenge school competition.

The All Saints "Project Grease Away" team worked under the supervision of Christine Horowitz, former technology integration specialist for Broome County Catholic Schools.

The students were looking for an environmental project when a parent brought up the problem of used cooking oil that is poured down kitchen drains. The oil has a nasty effect not only on home plumbing but also on sewage treatment plants, rivers, and wildlife. When students learned that this oil could instead be gathered and transformed into biodiesel, they decided to take on the task of getting the word out to bring about real change.

The students worked with other teachers at the school to further the project. Through the science department, students gained an understanding of the properties of oil and what happens once it is poured down the drain. And, they learned of cooking oil's effects on the city and the environment from a representative from the Chenango County Farm Bureau and from the city's sustainable development planner. Through the English department, students came up with a marketing plan, created and maintained a website, designed brochures, made digital comic books and a PowerPoint presentation. And, they also put together a petition and sharpened their public speaking skills.

Then, fully prepared, the class made presentations to the Binghamton City Council to propose that the city offer drop-off points for used cooking oil. This oil could then be collected and transformed into alternative fuels. The council unanimously approved the idea and made it an official city resolution.

Projects like these encourage kids to engage with ideas using their own problem-solving skills, Horowitz said. “I hardly ever had an issue with kids not doing their assignments because they were always excited to do it,” she said. “They need structure, and when you give an assignment you say ‘You have to do this,’ but then you can also say, ‘But you can do it any which way you’d like.’ It’s exciting for them to be able to take ownership and know that ‘This is mine.’”

Anne Ziolkowski was a 6th grader during the project but attends 7th grade at Seton Catholic Central School now. She said the class was broken into groups and, using their own "Google Docs" account, they were able to send and share files, coordinate work, and comment on each other's portion of the project.

"I think our class worked really well together," she said. "We were really close-knit, so if somebody needed help with something we could always ask someone, and they'd know what we needed."

Classmate Finbarr Huff was also in the class last year. He said he enjoyed the project and thinks that it made a real difference. “We really worked together as a class and really got out into the community to help people make good decisions,” he said. “You’re having fun in class at the same time you’re helping the environment and learning how you can make a difference.”

Both Ziolkowski and Huff said their favorite part was speaking to the government officials. “That’s something that doesn’t really happen to 6th graders very often,” Ziolkowski said.

She said the experience taught her not only about technology and teamwork, but also that she really does have an important role to play.

“I learned that I can change the world, even though I’m really young,” she said. “I can do big things, too.”

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

In October 2011, through his Apostolic Letter “Porta Fidei,” Pope Benedict XVI announced the Year of Faith, which began October 11, 2012, and will end on November 24, 2013. The beginning marked the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, as well as the 20th anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

This Year of Faith calls all of us to do three things: to know, to live and to share our Catholic faith. The Year of Faith is an opportunity for Catholics to experience a conversion — to turn back to Jesus and enter into a deeper relationship with Him. Our Holy Father has described this conversion as opening the “door of faith” (see Acts 14:27). The “door of faith” is opened at one’s baptism, but during this year Catholics are called to open it again, walk through it and rediscover and renew their relationship with Christ and His Church.

Our Catholic schools provide an excellent venue for providing the foundation of our faith to our young people and to their families. In every classroom, from Pre-K to 12th grade, our students become better acquainted with Jesus Christ and the tenets of our Catholic faith. Students not only receive instruction but are challenged to live out what it means to be a Catholic in today’s society, which is often not an easy task.

It is my hope as we continue in this Year of Faith that you will join me in opening your hearts and those of your children to what Pope Benedict XVI refers to as “time of spiritual grace the Lord offers us in recalling the precious gift of faith.”

Thank you for entrusting your children to our Catholic schools. May God bless you and your families.

Cordially yours in Christ,

*Most Reverend Robert J. Cunningham*

Bishop of Syracuse
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Syracuse Diocese Catholic Schools