Dear Friends of Catholic Education:

As we prepare to celebrate Catholic Schools Week, it’s hard to believe that we’re at the halfway point in the school year, and I’m sure you’re as amazed as I am at the many accomplishments our students have achieved in their classes, friendships and extracurricular activities since they began in September. This is the first time I’ve had the pleasure to celebrate Catholic Schools Week in my role as superintendent, and I’m looking forward to the many Masses, open houses and special events that showcase the best and brightest of Catholic education around the diocese.

This year’s theme—Catholic Schools: Communities of Faith, Knowledge and Service—certainly fits particularly well with the mission of our 22 schools. Whether you’re a teacher, a parent, an alumnus or any of the thousands of others who show their support for Catholic education in our diocese, you understand how important these attributes are to our schools and the more than 5,000 students in Pre-K through 12 who fill their halls every day.

Here on the pages of Pillars magazine, you will see fine examples of how these qualities thread through every aspect of our school community and help make Catholic education the unique experience and valuable investment in the future of every one of our children. You’ll read of the sacrifices a refugee family makes to keep their children in Catholic schools, as well as the partnership another very special family formed with one of our elementary schools to ensure the success of a child with autism. You’ll see some of the benefits of our working partnership with Le Moyne College under the leadership of its recently-appointed president, Linda Le Mura, a true champion of Catholic education; and you’ll marvel at the ways in which our schools continue to embrace the digital age in the classroom. In addition, you’ll see how the seeds of service are planted in the story of a community giving garden at one school and a commitment to water conservation at another. These are just examples of what goes on in and around our Catholic schools every day, thanks to so many who are committed to ensuring that Catholic education continues to thrive in the Diocese of Syracuse.

I thank you for your faith, knowledge and service to our Catholic schools, and ask for your continued support as we continue this important mission.

Prayerfully,

William Crist
Superintendent

MISSION STATEMENT

The Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Syracuse carry out the mission of Jesus Christ, bearing witness while proclaiming the Gospel message. Together with families and parishes, our schools provide an education rooted in the Gospel that is “living, conscious, and active” including values and ideals that are in accordance with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. We empower our students to live their faith with compassion, integrity and respect for all life and the diversity of our world.

Our schools are faith-centered communities focused on promoting academic excellence while developing a strong moral conscience and embracing Catholic principles to enable students to meet lifelong challenges and demands in our rapidly changing world.
Dear Friends,

It pleases me to hear a sense of pride when people talk of their days in one of our Catholic Schools. In my role as bishop, I have the great pleasure of traveling throughout the diocese and speaking to current students, alumni and families who share their Catholic school stories of community, faith, and yes, even a winning athletic season or two. I cannot explain it in words, but there is something in their voices and in their gestures that express their sense of belonging, and no matter how many years it has been since their graduation day that feeling does not fade.

If I were to reflect on what drives that feeling among so many, I would say that as Catholic school students we are part of something greater. Through the years of the old parochial league and even today in our 22 Catholic schools, each school has a different set of traditions, practices, teachers, sports and electives. We do, however share one Lord, one faith and one baptism. Our faith in Jesus Christ and sharing the good news of the Gospel is what brings us together. It is at the very core of who we are and what we believe. Some may not recognize it right away, but it shapes and molds us into who we are and who we will become in the future. Certainly for me, my life long journey in Catholic schools through seminary shaped who I have become as Bishop of Syracuse.

As you read through these pages of Pillars, you will find stories of faith, innovation, family, service and community. These are truly the hallmarks of our Catholic schools. They are also essential components for the new evangelization. Our schools fulfill a primary role in the church’s mission of evangelization. They need the support of the entire ecclesial community—not only parents who support our schools through tuition, or parishes and regions that maintain a school through generous financial support, but parishes without schools and indeed all the faithful of our community.

We hope you will continue to offer your support and thank you for helping us carry out the mission of Jesus Christ.

Sincerely yours,

Most Reverend Robert J. Cunningham
Bishop of Syracuse
Le Moyne President, Diocesan School Alumna Promotes Catholic School Pipeline

By Caroline K. Reff

Linda LeMura, Ph.D., fondly remembers her days as a student at Bishop Grimes High School, where she not only achieved in the classroom but also on the basketball court, in the folk group, and in student government. Looking back, she appreciates the sacrifices her parents made to send her—and her five siblings—to the former Our Lady of Pompei School and Bishop Grimes. Today, she continues to draw on the faith and values of her Catholic education, not only as Le Moyne College’s newly-elected president but also as the first laywoman president of any Jesuit college in the world.

“A Catholic school education gave me so many opportunities—to lead my peers, to form a spirit of teamwork, to learn to communicate,” LeMura said. “I continue to use those skills every day and rely upon the ethical dimensions and sense of community that come out of a foundation in Catholic education.”

With roots in the Syracuse Diocese and a philosophy built around the Jesuit tradition of educating the whole person, LeMura is committed to furthering Catholic education not only on the Le Moyne campus but through a “K-16 pipeline” that will help to ensure the passage of faith and knowledge from the start of kindergarten to the day of college graduation. It is a philosophy she sees as beneficial to the more than 5,000 students in Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the diocese, as well as nearly 4,000 students currently studying at Le Moyne College.

“From our campus to any of our 22 diocesan Catholic schools, we’re giving students a comprehensive education centered around faith and a love of learning,” she said. “As Catholic educators at every level, it is embedded in our ministry to nurture this spirit of discovery and community in our schools.”

LeMura cites Pope Francis as a particular source of inspiration for collaboration, as the Jesuit pontiff has been vocal about the need to support Catholic education.

“Acknowledging that Catholic education is under immense pressure, Pope Francis is inspiring us to consider alternative models that will allow Catholic institutions to thrive through the sharing of resources in our communities, stimulating dialogue, and the encouragement to think in new and different ways,” she said. “Critical thinking is in the DNA of Catholic education, along with collaboration, ethics and integrity. Our Catholic leaders need to be in
dialogue with one another—not existing in silos—to best prepare our students for a challenging 21st century.

Le Moyne already has a long history of sharing its resources with diocesan Catholic schools, including the Loyola Scholars Program, where Catholic high school students take college-level courses in the summer for a reduced rate; the Le Moyne-Diocesan Graduate Program, where the college contributes to the cost of tuition for Catholic school faculty completing advanced degrees at Le Moyne; and an initiative at Cathedral Academy at Pompei, where student-teachers from Le Moyne gain experience in the classroom and provide much needed resources to the school that serves a primarily immigrant population. These are just a few examples, however, and LeMura has no shortage of other ideas she hopes will continue to keep Catholic elementary and secondary schools’ enrollment strong while drawing students to higher education at Le Moyne College.

“We acknowledge that sometimes our Catholic high school students consider Le Moyne too close to home when they are making their decisions as to where to attend college, but we’re creating greater pathways and partnerships to give them more options and more reasons to seek out all that Le Moyne College has to offer,” LeMura said.

To this end, Le Moyne continues to offer an expanded curriculum, more study abroad opportunities, and a variety of dual degree programs where students begin their college years at Le Moyne but can later transfer to complete advanced degrees at places like Fordham University College of Law, Syracuse University’s College of Law, Maxwell School of Citizenship and the L.C. Smith College of Engineering, and the Cornell University College of Hotel Administration. LeMura is currently exploring other collaborative options with Georgetown University and Boston College.

There’s no denying that this former Bishop Grimes student has certainly made the most of her Catholic education, and she is just getting started with a level of commitment that is certain to benefit students seeking a Catholic education at every level in the Diocese of Syracuse.

“Together, we have a responsibility to prepare students for life beyond the classroom. We are doing this well in our Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the Diocese of Syracuse, and we are certainly doing it well at Le Moyne College,” she said. “I’m excited about the possibilities, as we pass on faith, knowledge and love of learning to the next generation.”

Caroline K. Reff is a freelance writer and the marketing consultant for the Catholic Schools Office.

DRIVING GENEROSITY

Students at Immaculate Conception in Fayetteville present a check for $3,300 to Kevin Frank from the Brady Faith Center. The funds came from the school’s 7th annual car raffle. While money raised benefits school programs, a portion is given to a local charity annually.
Naywel Ayeil says the most important lesson she’s learned at Cathedral Academy at Pompei (CAP) in Syracuse is the Golden Rule.

“It’s treating others the way you want to be treated,” the fifth grader said at her Syracuse home.

That’s just the kind of lesson Naywel’s father, Bang, and mother, Adit Meukuir, hoped their children would learn when they chose a Catholic education at CAP for Naywel and her younger brother, third grader Deng.

“Back home, we went to Catholic schools, so it was important for our kids to,” Adit said.

Bang and Adit are originally from South Sudan.

“We abandoned our country because of the war,” Bang said, recalling the nearly two-decade civil war that left millions of Sudanese dead or displaced. Both Bang and Adit sought refuge in Egypt, where they met and married in 2001. The couple was resettled in Syracuse in 2004, joining Bang’s sister in the city.

“It was difficult moving around and ultimately leaving family and friends in Sudan behind. “But the U.S. is home. America is home. We have been welcomed. Our American friends opened their doors and schools and churches to us,” Bang said.

Naywel was born not long after the Ayeils came to Syracuse. When it was time for her to go to school, Bang and Adit said their relatives and friends encouraged them to choose a Catholic school.

“First, the faith is most important for my kids to grow in,” Bang said. The family chose CAP because “my nieces and nephews went there—it’s kind of a family school,” he said. “It is close to our home, and we’ve been welcomed by the principal and teachers.”

“The school is a multicultural school,” Bang added. “It is Catholic, but they have many different backgrounds there. And that’s a good thing!”

CAP is located on Syracuse’s North side, an area that has been home to newcomers for generations. Today, about 40 percent of CAP’s student body come from refugee families; another 26 percent come from immigrant families. Students trace their roots to Ghana, Haiti, Laos, Liberia, Puerto Rico, Sudan, Tanzania, the U.S. and Vietnam.

The diversity of the student body “represents the world we’re in,” said CAP Principal Sr. Helen Ann Charlebois, IHM. “If we can get the kids to get along with each other in this school building, the rest of the world should be able to get along, too.” She tells the children that CAP is a “peace site” and encourages them to take peace out from the school and into the community and world.

Both Naywel and Deng have made good friends in the school and share a love of gym class. Reading is another of Deng’s favorite subjects, especially the Black Lagoon series. Naywel also loves science, particularly the experiments, like the one that involved dissolving gummy bears in vinegar. She said she wants to be a veterinarian or doctor when she grows up.

Bang and Adit want that for her, too. Their dreams for their children are Catholic high school, then college, where they can get a good education and earn their degrees.

The Ayeils are working hard to give their children those opportunities. Adit works at Syracuse University. Bang worked at St. Joseph’s Hospital Health Center before enrolling at Onondaga Community College, graduating with an associate’s degree in business administration last year. He plans to begin work on his bachelor’s degree at Syracuse University this spring. He also works as the youth minister at St. Vincent’s Church in Syracuse. And, like many other families at CAP, the Ayeils sacrifice to be able to provide their children with a Catholic education.

“There are a lot of parents that are struggling to pay tuition,” Bang added. “We’re so grateful that we
have organizations like the Guardian Angel Society that try to help and minimize the tuition.”

Formed in 1997 by the late Msgr. Joseph Champlin, the Guardian Angel Society is “dedicated to providing tuition assistance, mentoring and tutoring services to help build a path to success for students in financial need from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds.”

The sacrifice is worth it, however, for Bang and Adit. “In the end, it’s worthwhile for me to have all this hardship for my kids now,” Bang said. “They’re getting a good education and they’re in good hands.”

Katherine Long is the editor of The Catholic Sun.
St. Margaret’s School Principal Amanda Hopkins was sitting on the bleachers at a basketball game when she decided the school’s families needed a mobile app. “You see all of the parents with their phones, taking pictures, and I immediately realized that this is a population that needs that information at their fingertips,” she said.

At Immaculate Conception School (IC), Principal Sally Lisi came to the same conclusion. “We’re in a society now where everything is mobile,” she explained. “I just wanted to make it easy for our parents to access information.”

Now both schools have apps, available via iTunes, that put important school information at users’ fingertips. The app, designed by Glyph Mobile, shows school lunch menus, a calendar of upcoming events and students’ grades and homework assignments, among other helpful bits of information.

These schools are riding a social media and technology wave that is becoming part of their overall mission. “It’s definitely a trend and something they’ve been asked to embrace,” said Danielle Cummings, assistant chancellor and director of communications for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse. She cited a call from the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops to all who “provide ministry or service or are employed by an entity associated with the Catholic Church” to use the conference’s social media guidelines.

In fact, that edict comes straight from the top. In his June 2014 message for the 48th World Communications Day, Pope Francis gave his blessing to social networks as outlets for spreading the Gospel: “Communication is a means of expressing the missionary vocation of the entire Church; today the social networks are one way to experience this call to discover the beauty of faith, the beauty of encountering Christ. In the area of communications too, we need a Church capable of bringing warmth and of stirring hearts.”

In addition to mobile apps, diocesan schools communicate via Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, Cummings said.

To expand her St. Margaret’s Facebook audience, Hopkins has used Facebook’s post boost option, which allows page owners to pay for greater exposure on the social network. “Part of the push for that was to have weekly updates and doing them at a key time for families, like that eight o’clock time when parents have time to go on social media,” she said.

Sixth graders at IC now have Chrome Books that they use both in class and at home. Students in lower grades and all faculty have iPads. At St. Margaret’s in Mattydale, teachers are using a digital science textbook that students access with Nook tablets.

“They live it every day. They’re digital natives,” said Chris Zapf-Longo, IC’s technology coordinator. “We don’t know what the technology will be ten years from now. So what we’re trying to do is expose them to as much technology as possible, so that they are comfortable with whatever’s coming down the road.”

Christy Perry is a freelance writer in Syracuse, New York.
Parent-School Collaboration Creates Positive Environment for Second Grader with Autism

BY CHRISTY PERRY

The bright-eyed, blond boy in the white polo shirt is a second grader at Blessed Sacrament School in Syracuse. He plays baseball and football and is a good speller. Hand him an iPad and he'll touch the screen to play word games.

This description paints a picture of Zachary Morphet as a typical 8-year-old boy. Because he is both autistic and a Catholic school student, however, he is unique among his classmates. His school principal says Zach's parents' involvement in his education has made his parochial schooling successful.

Although there have been recent efforts in U.S. Catholic education to expand its outreach to children with special needs, many schools struggle with the cost of serving those students. The National Catholic Education Association's website states that "Since Catholic schools do not receive any direct federal aid (or state aid in most cases) to provide for all kinds of disabilities, some needs are too costly for the schools to be able to provide."

Zach's parents, Leanne and Steven Morphet, describe finding the right learning environment for their son as a long and often difficult journey. Zach was diagnosed with classic autism at 24 months at Yale Child Study Center in New Haven, Conn., after Leanne and Steve noticed changes in his behavior. Before that time, he had some speech skills, made eye contact and socially engaged appropriately with others.

"He lost all communications," Steve said. Leanne added, "He used to dance. He used to call me 'Mommy.' He used to call [Steve] 'Daddy.' I came home one day and looked at Steve and I said to him, 'When's the last time Zach called you Daddy?'"

The experts at Yale recommended a specific therapy, applied behavior analysis (ABA). ABA appealed to the Morphets because it is very data-driven, and they both come from science backgrounds. Although she quit her job to care for Zach and his 10-year-old sister Sophie, Leanne is an electrical engineer. Steve is a computer scientist.

But when the family returned to Central New York, they found no educational system that provided ABA therapy, so Leanne studied the ABA course curriculum herself.

Since that time, they have found and paid out of pocket for ABA-trained therapists to work with Zach. But there were other obstacles once he reached school age. "We tried to work within our school district to have consultants come in, and it just wasn't very collaborative," Leanne explained. "That's one of the reasons why [Blessed Sacrament] has been really beneficial for us. We've been able to get ABA consultants to come in there."

"We didn't feel like we were part of the team for him," Leanne said of Zach's public school experience. "I didn't know what Zach was doing on a day-to-day basis." Now his school aides and teachers communicate frequently and give him data sheets on his daily progress.

"When there is course work to do, they will write down the tasks that need to be done and present them to him in such a way that he can take little bites out of the task to complete it," Steve said. "To keep him on task and focused is important."

His parents believe exposure to typical classmates at school is key to his success in mastering skills that are impedied by his autism. Some students volunteer to be his "peer for the day," interacting with him and helping him work on specific skills. A group of them taught him on the playground, for example, how to pump his legs and swing for the first time.

Principal Andrea Polcaro said Blessed Sacrament's students benefit from having Zach there. "He brings a richness to our school community that we were missing," Polcaro said.

"The number one thing I wanted was people saying they wanted him, they wanted to do it," Leanne said. The Morphets expressed the hope that Zach will continue to thrive at the school and believe they have found a place where teachers and students genuinely care about him and are also learning more about developmental disabilities as a result.

Christy Perry is a freelance writer in Syracuse, New York.
The Parochial League: After 40 Years, Players Are Still Having a Ball

BY PAT SHEA

Ask Chuck Haven, one of the original forces behind the creation of the Parochial Basketball League for elementary school students in the Diocese of Syracuse, just when the league actually started, and he'll start to laugh.

“My wife says it was over 100 years ago, but I think it’s somewhere around 30 to 40 years ago,” he said. Haven, 78, recalls at the time he helped start the league in the 1970s, he was the father of an elementary school student attending St. Rose of Lima School in North Syracuse, New York.

“Father Esposito approached me and asked me to check if other schools had an elementary basketball league. There was a Parochial League in place for the high school kids, but there really wasn’t anything for the grammar school kids. After doing a little research, we found out no one else had a league for this age group, and we decided to start our own. The funny thing is Father Esposito is now retired [from the league] but I’m not,” laughed Haven.

Although Haven did eventually retire from his full-time job at General Motors, he is still actively involved in the Parochial League, helping to coach along with the talents of Mark Baker and Gary Dembkowski.

Baker played for the league when he attended St. Joseph’s School in Liverpool, New York, and was actually coached by Haven. Baker now returns the favor as a volunteer coach for the league.

“I got involved as a coach because my children wanted to play in the league,” explained Baker. “I have three boys, ages 11, 13 and 15, who were all attending St. Rose at the time. A cousin of mine was running the league, so I figured I would volunteer to help while the kids were in the school. Now, my oldest is now at Bishop Grimes, but I’m still coaching the league,” said Baker.

Dembkowski, the athletic director at St. Rose and a coach at Cicero North Syracuse High School, also volunteers for the league, helping to coach over 300 players from nine diocesan Catholic schools in the sport of basketball, as well as teaching them the art of good sportsmanship. Like Baker and Haven, Dembkowski became involved in the league when his oldest son wanted to play over 25 years ago.

“I was involved in basketball and running a program in the town of Cicero and offered to help with the Parochial League,” said Dembkowski.

“It’s amazing to look back and see that Chuck had this vision of a league and put it all together and it’s still going. He still puts in about 60 hours a week, although he’ll tell you he’s just ‘helping out.’ He’s like everyone’s grandfather, and all the kids in the league are lucky that he’s still around and involved,” Dembkowski said.

The Parochial League has three levels: A and B divisions for boys and girls in Grades 4, 5 and 6, and a C division for younger students (kindergarten through Grade 3), which combines both boys and girls on a team. Tryouts are held each October and practice begins in November. Games are played Sundays from December through January.

For the younger players, coaches focus on teaching the basic skills of the game such as dribbling, shooting, and learning the positions on the court, as well as...
putting an emphasis on making friends and being a good sport. As they move up in the divisions, coaches emphasize to players the importance of teamwork.

“Athletics helps build character. It teaches a player how to win and lose—it teaches life lessons and values,” explained Baker. “When we were kids, we would just play. It was fun, and I met a lot of great kids—some of them I’m still friends with today. We didn’t worry about anything except the game, but it’s not how it used to be. Kids today have pretty hectic lives, and they have a lot on their plate. It’s important to keep them focused.”

Haven points out that the strong friendships created over the years between players in the league have been largely due to the fact that Catholic schools were, and still are, all about faith and family.

“Back in the day, every parish was connected to a school, and there was a commitment as a faith-based organization to provide fun activities for the kids. That’s what still keeps this legacy going: the commitment to the kids.” Haven said.

The schools that currently participate in the Parochial League are St. Rose in North Syracuse, St. Margaret’s in Mattydale, St. Mary’s Academy in Baldwinsville, Holy Family in Fairmount, Most Holy Rosary in Syracuse, Cathedral Academy at Pompei in Syracuse, Blessed Sacrament in Syracuse, Holy Cross in DeWitt, and Immaculate Conception in Fayetteville.

“The league has changed a lot in 25 years. When it was first formed, we had so many teams because there was no other option for these kids. Today kids are spread thin, playing everything from soccer to karate, not to mention electronic games,” Dembkowski said.

Despite their hectic schedules, the kids involved in the league are still making friends and having fun, just as their parents did 40 years before.

Fifth grade Holy Cross student, Stella Vinal, 10, has played in the league since 2nd grade and loves the game of basketball. “It’s a lot of fun to play,” said Stella. “We learn to do drills, make friends and learn different plays.”

Michael Schaefer, a 6th grade student at Immaculate Conception School has been playing in the league since 4th grade. “It’s really fun. I get to have my friends from my school on my team, and I get to meet some of the others kids from other schools too.”

Michael, who plays point guard, wants to be a basketball player when he grows up and credits the league to helping him learn how to play the game. “The coaches are really nice and help me with my game. When I was little, my cousins were in the league and now this is something fun I can do too. And my parents always come to the games… they are probably my biggest fans,” he said.

Ben Volissis has played for the Parochial League for the past two years and is also a 6th grade student at Immaculate Conception. “I like playing in the league. It doesn’t even matter if you don’t win because you get to play with your friends,” he said.

Ben also feels the league has helped him develop skills that will pay off even more when he is in high school. “The league helped me improve my ball handling skills and rebounds when I shoot. I’ve been playing basketball since I was a little kid, and in the future, I want to play (in high school).”

When Haven looks back at all the league has accomplished since its beginning and all the students it has taught, he is proud but still believes there’s more work to be done.

“I wish there was even more I could do,” said Haven. “The league gives an opportunity for any kid, boy or girl, to become involved and make friends. That’s why we’re here… and that’s why we stay.”

Pat Shea is the associate editor of The Catholic Sun.
Valedictorians Credit Catholic Education for Foundation of Success

BY CLAUDIA MATHIS

It’s no easy feat to finish first in your class, but Michael Powell, Matthew Lambrych, Claire Sheen and Maggie Sehring made the grade—one at each of the Syracuse Diocese’s Catholic High Schools. These 2014 valedictorians are now pursuing their academic dreams in college. While two chose higher education at Catholic institutions and two chose public universities, they all have one thing in common: the strong Catholic educational background that helped to get them there.

MICHAEL POWELL
SETON CATHOLIC CENTRAL

Powell, 2014 valedictorian of Seton Catholic Central, is thankful for his Catholic education, which began with St. John the Evangelist School in Binghamton, New York. Powell is attending the University of Scranton, a Jesuit University in Pennsylvania, which he said ensures that Catholic values are central in the learning experience and are evident in the atmosphere around campus.

“Now that I am in college, I am very appreciative that my prior education taught me to understand—rather than just memorize—what I was learning, to manage my time and to have a passion for what I do,” he said.

When deciding on a college, Powell, whose faith is very important to him, liked the feeling that he could continue to be close to his faith at the school even though college would be such a new experience for him.

Powell has been accepted into the Special Jesuit Liberal Arts (SJLA) honors program at the university. The program’s courses encourage skills such as rhetoric and critical thinking, and teach Jesuit mentality to create well-rounded individuals.

“I am really enjoying my classes in this program, and I look forward to learning more about these fascinating subjects,” said Powell.

Powell is majoring in biochemistry/cell molecular biology and is hoping to pursue a minor in philosophy. He is not sure what profession he wants to pursue.

“I have an interest in health care and am currently in a health profession track, but research and teaching are also very interesting to me,” he said.

MATTHEW LAMBRYCH
BISHOP GRIMES JR./SR. HIGH SCHOOL

Lambrych, 2014 valedictorian of Bishop Grimes Jr./Sr. High School, is attending Binghamton University.

“I chose Binghamton University for many reasons, chief among them that it was the most financially sound option available, and it also has an incredible level of academic excellence. I was also accepted into the Scholars Program, which seemed a fantastic opportunity, and one that I wished to take advantage of,” said Lambrych.

Before enrolling at Bishop Grimes, Lambrych attended St. Matthew’s School in East Syracuse, New York, (and later St. Daniel/St. Matthew Academy when the two schools merged) for his elementary school education.

“Catholic school was an incredible experience,” said Lambrych. “Both of these schools taught me the importance of living as God intends, strengthened and reinforced the importance of a strong work ethic, and demonstrated to me the meaning of living a moral, Christian life.”

Lambrych attributes a large part of his scholastic success to his Catholic schools and teachers. He said he also took advantage of the Honors and Advanced Placement courses offered at Bishop Grimes and took as many classes as he could fit into his schedule.

“All of this helped to strengthen my knowledge in the various subjects and, though the workload was strenuous, it helped me to grow as a person and scholar,” he said.

Lambrych is undecided on his major at this point, but he is interested in medicine and said he will probably focus on biological sciences.

“I am also very passionate about history, which is perhaps my favorite subject, and will pursue a major or minor in that as well,” he added. “I wish to go into
medicine and intend to specialize in neurology. I feel that, even in, or maybe especially in, medicine, the strong ethical code inspired within me through my time at Grimes will serve me well in my chosen profession."

CLAIRE SHEEN
BISHOP LUDDEN JR./SR. HIGH SCHOOL

Sheen, 2014 valedictorian of Bishop Ludden Junior/Senior High School, is attending the State University of New York at Geneseo where she is double majoring in biology and anthropology. A recipient of many scholarships, Sheen attributes her academic success to her trusting and supportive family and her Catholic education.

“My Catholic education gave me the strength I needed to get to where I am today,” she said. “Because of my Catholic education, and the loving and guiding support the teachers at my Catholic schools provided, I knew where to turn for help. Bishop Ludden is such a close environment that I felt like I constantly had the support of one large family.”

“I hope to continue on to get my master’s degree and Ph.D. in forensic anthropology,” Sheen said. “I hope to work for either the government or for the U.N. Additionally, I also hope to receive grants, so that I have the opportunity to perform research on ancient remains all over the world.”

“I chose SUNY Geneseo for three reasons,” Sheen explained. “First, it is a school with an amazing academic record. The science department here is respectable. Secondly, it is affordable. College these days is getting more and more difficult to pay for and SUNY Geneseo is an incredible college at a practical price. It was one of the few colleges that I could attend without being in debt at the beginning of my higher education. Finally, the campus is beyond gorgeous. The first time I saw it I knew I would feel at home here.”

MAGGIE SEHRING
NOTRE DAME JR./SR. HIGH SCHOOL

Sehring, 2014 valedictorian of Notre Dame Jr./Sr. High School, is attending Boston College in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, and majoring in math and physics. Sehring said she felt at home the first time she visited the campus and that several things influenced her decision to enroll. She was attracted to the fact that BC is a university known for its academic excellence and its roots in Jesuit traditions.

“The strong Jesuit traditions had a great influence on my decision to attend Boston College,” she said. “It was important for me to be able to continue the incorporation of religion into my studies, as I had done through elementary and high school. A strong sense of community among the students, faculty, and Jesuit society is created through the religious foundation and rich traditions.”

Sehring attended St. Peter’s School in Utica, New York, before attending Notre Dame and believes the values she learned in school have helped her in college and will later assist her in her career.

“Catholic schools have taught me the principles of self-discipline and responsibility, which have been very important in college and will continue to hold great significance when I begin a career,” Sehring said. “Also, my involvement in sports and clubs has highlighted the value of commitment in order to succeed.”

Sehring said the transition from high school to college has been smooth. “My Catholic education challenged me to be a well-rounded individual dedicated to my studies, while also being involved in the community,” she said. “These aspects have eased my transition into Boston College, as the same principles are encouraged here.”

Claudia Mathis is a staff writer for The Catholic Sun.
One of the reasons the Catholic Schools Office publishes Pillars magazine each year is to share just why “Catholic Schools Work.” It’s not just a tagline in our advertising. We believe it—and each and every article in this issue explains why it’s true. We asked students, faculty, alumni and other proud supporters of Catholic education to tell us why they think Catholic schools work, and here are some of the answers we received.

“I like Catholic School because we are all friends. Also, our teachers are really smart, so we learn a lot. My dad went to Catholic school, so I am following in his footsteps.”
— Lyla McIntyre, Grade 2, Holy Cross School

“We are teaching our Kindergarten students from an early age to give to others. One way we accomplish this mission is to make sandwiches for the Catholic Charity men’s shelter each month. You can see on their faces that the children know they are answering the question, ‘What would Jesus do?’ and letting their light shine.”
— Karen Sparkes, Kindergarten Teacher, Holy Family School, Syracuse
“Catholic schools are able to teach about God, so we have a stronger relationship with God. We have a community of families and kids who are more respectful. We practice virtues and hold fundraisers to help others.”

— MATTHEW BRANCATO, STUDENT COUNCIL PRESIDENT, TRINITY CATHOLIC SCHOOL

“My teachers and my principal are the best and they help me. And we do lots of fun things—the whole school together. And we pray together—the whole school.”

— JACE GATTARI, GRADE 1, ROME CATHOLIC SCHOOL

“As a religious sister, teaching the various academics is a joy and mission in a Catholic school. I easily include our God in science (look at the awesome chemistry). In history, we know that He walks with us in our choices dealing with other cultures. Even in English, we realize the beauty of words that can inspire us and have a positive effect on people in today’s world.”

— SR. BERNADETTE JOSEPH, 6TH GRADE TEACHER, ST. MARY’S ACADEMY, BALDWINSVILLE

“For my birthday, I asked my friends and family to bring things for the food pantry at St. Rose instead of giving me presents. We learn in school how important it is to give, not get, and it made me feel good to help.”

— BENJAMIN ROSE, GRADE 2, ST. ROSE OF LIMA SCHOOL
“I like that I can pray to God before snack and lunch.”
— SERAFINA DE SOUZA, GRADE 1, ALL SAINTS CATHOLIC SCHOOL

“Catholic schools are individualized for the needs of the children. We are getting a super education along with religion. There are guidelines and rules and everyone works together. My children tell me the rules at home, and we can’t eat dinner if we haven’t remembered to say grace!”
— DIANA D’ARGENIO, PARENT OF ALUMNUS AND GRANDMOTHER OF CURRENT STUDENTS AT ROME CATHOLIC SCHOOL

“Catholic schools are a safe and nurturing environment where my children are taught the values that I subscribe to as a Catholic.”
— SUSAN LOCKE, PARENT, ALL SAINTS CATHOLIC SCHOOL

“Imagine your life as a building. Catholic schools are like the foundation. Would you rather build your life on rock or sand?”
— SAMUEL MOHEIMANI, GRADE 8, ST. MARY’S SCHOOL, CORTLAND

“It’s important because we learn about God and Jesus. We learn how to act and to treat others in a kind and caring way. We learn to behave with respect, responsibility and safety.”
— LESLIE LONGO, GRADE 6, NOTRE DAME ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

“To my way of thinking, there was never a choice when I was deciding where to send my children to school. I wanted them to have the best education and to learn good socialization skills. Most of all, I wanted the faith formation that Catholic schools provide! I certainly found the best available in the Catholic school system.”
— CINDY FORTE, TEACHER’S AIDE, NOTRE DAME ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
“Our Catholic schools work in partnership with parents to promote academics enriched by values and faith formation. Our mission statement calls for ‘academic excellence’ and enabling ‘students to meet lifelong challenges.’ We recognize that excellence in all areas of Catholic school education does not happen by chance but by design, the Middle States accreditation process guides the development of strategic planning that supports our efforts to fulfill our mission.”

— BARB MESSINA, INTERNAL COORDINATOR FOR ACCREDITATION, CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE.

“I value my Catholic education because it taught me the respect of self, other students and faculty, which was lived out through the Catholic values taught throughout each and every school day. A strong sense of community helped me to cultivate lifelong bonds between myself, fellow students, faculty and school administration. The entire school community knew who I was and cared about me, and I about them.”

— BRENDAN KEENEY, ’10, ALUMNUS, ST. MARY’S ACADEMY, BALDWINSVILLE

“As an alumnus of Broome County Catholic Schools, I believe that the education I received prepared me to live my faith, not just know my faith. Academically, I sailed through college because of the solid foundation I had in Catholic school. As a faculty member of 30 years, Catholic education has been my life’s vocation. To teach, love and nurture as Jesus did has been the driving force in my life. The Catholic school system gives me the opportunity to do this.”

— CELESTE SAVAGE, 2ND GRADE TEACHER, ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST SCHOOL

“Catholic schools work for many reasons, but I believe one of the primary reasons is family. Our families are very involved in all we do in our schools—from Masses and prayer services, to homework help, to all the necessary fundraisers. The students could not even be here if not for the sacrifices that families have made to send their children to Catholic school. The success of Catholic schools is tied to our families at home and also to our family here at school. We are not just a cluster of classrooms, but we are a school family. Everyone knows and cares about everyone! The closeness that the students feel allows them to be comfortable so that they are able to work to their potential.”

— KAREN REYNOLDS, 3RD GRADE TEACHER, TRINITY CATHOLIC SCHOOL
The New Kids on the Block: Principals Share Goals for Success

By Pat Shea

In September, Jennifer Petosa and Lee Brenner were sent to the principal’s office to begin a new phase of their careers. Petosa is the new principal at Most Holy Rosary in Syracuse, and Lee Brenner is the new principal at Holy Family School in Norwich, New York. Both women have impressive teaching and administrative skills and are beginning efforts not only to grow enrollment at the two diocesan schools but also to help support a faith-filled environment for their students and school communities.

“LET GO AND LET GOD”

Jennifer Petosa, a parishoner at Holy Family Parish in Fairmount, spent 28 years in the Rochester public school district. She has worked in a variety of teaching and leadership positions that included being a mentor for new teachers coming into the district and providing support to veteran teachers adapting to new procedures and curriculum. Petosa was also a faith formation teacher in Pittsford.

“I grew up Catholic,” explained Petosa. “I went to St. Joseph’s Elementary School and then Notre Dame High School in Batavia, and I think, looking back, Catholic school helped prepare me spiritually for life’s challenges as an adult.”

Petosa had plans at some point to leave the Rochester school district but the timing never seemed right. “Each time I thought it was time to leave the district another door would open with a different position. Many of these schools were poor and working with them became a mission for me,” explained Petosa. But five years ago, Petosa, who was a single parent with two children, met and married a man with three children from Camillus, New York, and quickly found herself not only part of a new blended family but part of a new city.

“Oh I knew I was moving to Syracuse, I kept thinking how much I wanted to be a Catholic school principal,” said Petosa. She had received her administration certification from SUNY Brockport and began searching for an academic job that would utilize her skills. Instead, a position at Crouse Hospital opened up and Petosa took the job.

“I loved my job at the hospital,” explained Petosa. “I wasn’t aggressively searching for a new job, but I continued to read the classifieds— I guess just being nosy. One day I saw that Most Holy Rosary was searching for a principal, and I applied thinking it would take a few years to get my resume across the right desk and get the right position in the diocese.”

Instead, Petosa was surprised to receive an interview. “It was like divine intervention on steroids,” said Petosa. “Everything moved quickly because the timing was right and [the job offer] just came together. My mantra has always been, ‘Let go and let God,’ and I asked God to use me where I was needed most. When I was offered the position at Most Holy Rosary I knew God was placing me exactly where I was meant to be. I love what a special place this is. The school building itself is beautiful and everyone in the community is connected somehow either to the school or the parish. Every day I come to work I think how lucky I am to have a job where I start and end my day with prayer, attend Mass and deepen my faith. I’m so excited to be here.”

BUILDING ON A STRONG FAITH FOUNDATION

In Norwich, Holy Family School Principal Lee Brenner, a recent transplant from Buffalo, New York, is enjoying the change of the seasons. Brenner, who has been a school administrator for the past ten years, sent out an email to the parents of the 149 students in grades Pre-K through Grade 8, commenting on the beauty of the area. “It’s a very pretty time of year here,” said Brenner.

Brenner, who has more than 25 years of teaching experience and who has worked in both public and private elementary, middle and high schools in the Buffalo area, is glad to be working once again in a Catholic school.

“I was raised my whole life as a Catholic and even
attended a Catholic college in Cleveland, Ohio," explained Brenner. "I started teaching in Catholic school, and it's always been something very close to my heart. I love that I get to speak about my faith and about Jesus in my job. It's not something that many people get to do in their workplace."

Brenner has enjoyed getting to know the staff, students and parents of Holy Family School, which is the only Catholic school within a 55-mile radius of Norwich, New York. "It's a thriving school and integral part of the community," said Brenner. "Some of the staff has been together for ten years or longer, and everyone gets along well and supports each other."

Looking toward the school's future, Brenner's goal is to find more space to expand the school's internal programs, especially for the older children. "We are very crunched," said Brenner. "But our goal is to continue to grow in a Christ-like manner and be faith-focused as we continue to achieve high academics. The challenge is we don't have a big staff here, and we all need to wear a lot of hats to help the children. But we have a great school, and our teachers are focused on giving the students a good quality education with a strong emphasis on our faith. Given what our students are facing out in the world today and what they will face in the future, we are thankful that we can provide them with a strong faith foundation to build upon for years to come."

Pat Shea is the associate editor of The Catholic Sun.

BY CAROLINE K. REFF

Update: Kelleigh's Cause Soars to New Heights

Last year's edition of Pillars included a story about Kelleigh Gustafson, a young woman who has been living with arteriovenous malformation (AVM), a life-threatening vascular disease, since the age of 4. Kelleigh, however, has never been one to focus on herself. Instead, she has chosen to help others through Kelleigh's Cause, an initiative aimed at both raising funds and awareness about AVM.

To date, Kelleigh's Cause has raised over $94,000 — almost double the amount reported in Pillars at this time last year — through an annual dress down day at many of the diocesan schools, a number of fundraising events, and many generous donations, particularly from the Catholic community. The past year has brought ups and downs for Kelleigh and her family, but this young woman continues to be blessed with a positive outlook and an unflinching commitment to helping others.

Kelleigh graduated from Bishop Grimes Jr./Sr. High School in June 2014 and is now enrolled at Le Moyne College — an experience she describes repeatedly as "awesome." She is enjoying dorm life, her classes and new friends.

"I've made friends here at Le Moyne, including those who have gone through various illnesses or are cancer survivors," she said. "It's weird how you find connections with other people. We might not have been through exactly the same thing, but we all know, for example, what it's like to have had an IV or be in the hospital. We share a lot of similar experiences, and it has brought us closer."

Last fall, Kelleigh's Cause was included in Le Moyne's annual Involvement Fest, which introduces students to campus activities. Kelleigh's hope was to simply raise awareness at Le Moyne about AVM. Instead, she was surprised to have 75 students volunteer to help with upcoming fund-raising events. "She has certainly been embraced by the Le Moyne community," said mom, Lori Gustafson.

There have been disappointments this year, too. Doctors recently told Kelleigh that her disease continues to progress, and she will have to undergo another difficult surgery in January 2015. True to form, however, Kelleigh is determined to continue her studies at Le Moyne as a biology major. Ultimately, she hopes to enter the medical field in some capacity where she can support those battling not only AVM but other serious illnesses.

"I've had a lot of people support me through all of this, and I want to make sure others have someone there for them, too," she said.

Kelleigh credits the solid support system of her parents, siblings and Catholic faith community for helping her through the rough times and inspiring her to reach out to others. She enjoys speaking to groups about her experience and is currently working with Jasmine Gray, a graduate of Syracuse University, who is making a documentary about young women with AVM.

In addition, an updated website is in the works for Kelleigh's Cause thanks to a generous donation from the Jim and Juli Boeheim Foundation.

"Kelleigh's goal has always been to help others," said her mom, Lori. "A lot of that has come from growing up in Catholic schools. She has an outlook that says, 'Don't feel sorry for me. This is the way God made me, and this is how I'm going to help somebody else.'"

For more information on how you can support Kelleigh's Cause, go to www.Kelleigh.org or Kelleigh's Cause on Facebook.

Caroline K. Reff is a freelance writer and the marketing consultant for the Catholic Schools Office.
Notre Dame Schools Celebrate the Presence of Religious Faculty, Staff

BY DYANN NASHTON

Catholic school alumni are often sad that priests, sisters or brothers are not found in our schools like they remember. Today, Catholic schools in the Diocese of Syracuse embrace the rare, but valuable, presence of a member of a religious order among faculty and staff.

Sr. Anna Mae Collins, CSJ, has spent more than a quarter of a century at Notre Dame Jr./Sr. High School in Utica, New York, serving the past eight years as principal. Her roots in Oneida County reach back to 1974 when, as a second-year teacher, she taught at St. Mary’s School in Clinton, New York.

As a 2012 recipient of the Syracuse Diocese Catholic Schools Witness of Faith award, she was quoted as saying, “I’ve always been respectful of the students and open to them.” That is a standard she lives by and what she expects of the entire Notre Dame community.

Notre Dame Schools Chief Financial Officer Kenneth McCoy said he and a colleague were discussing a particular disciplinary incident with Sr. Anna Mae one day after school.

McCoy said Sr. Anna Mae told them how she asked the student, “What is the one thing you need to have here at Notre Dame?” McCoy said that he and the colleague, both relatively new to the school, looked at each other and hesitantly responded in unison, “Respect.” As Sr. Anna Mae nodded and went on to explain how she illustrated this point to the student, McCoy and his co-worker breathed a sigh of relief knowing they got the answer right. “We surprised ourselves that we came up with the same correct answer. But more than that, it reassured us that we are all on the same page here, especially under Sister’s direction.”

Even when discussing how lucky Notre Dame is to have religious in the building, Sr. Anna Mae is careful to be respectful to other schools that may not have this luxury. “It’s not better, just different,” she said.

Notre Dame schools currently have four religious orders represented by six individuals. Besides Sr. Anna Mae, a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph Carondelet, Sr. Paula Gallant, DC, and Sr. Helen Gertrude Carroll, DC, both members of the Daughters of Charity, provide support services for junior and senior high students. As a Xaverian Brother, Br. Leonard Wojtanowski, CFX, manages alumni relations for the former St. Francis deSales School. He maintains the presence of the order that not only served St. Francis deSales School but founded Notre Dame in 1960. The most recent addition to Notre Dame Jr./Sr. High is Sr. Jacqueline Johnas, CSJ, another Sister of St. Joseph Carondelet, who has taken the school’s fledgling international program under her wing by providing support to a number of new Chinese students. In addition, Sr. Therese Marie Kodz, CSSF, a Felician sister, teaches religion and remedial math at Notre Dame Elementary School.

“What is good is that they, in particular, have the opportunity to share their gifts in small groups. The students really get to know them and they make strong connections,” Sr. Anna Mae said.

It is this personal approach that Sr. Anna Mae also uses to reach out to individuals right where they
are. For instance, she explained, during Vocations Week students have some very frank questions regarding the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. She said they find it interesting to learn that for the religious, poverty is not simply about living without material items.

“I tell them how I receive a small stipend that covers my living expenses, but that the vow of poverty is about much more than that. It is about using your resources to help the poor and to have the ability to educate and help people make a better life for themselves and their families,” she said.

Sr. Anna Mae explained that for people of all ages today the distinction is blurred between religious and lay people. This is especially so with smaller numbers of people called to religious life, fewer parishes and fewer differences in dress.

The broadening of the religious and cultural diversity in our schools also makes the distinction of lay and religious educators unclear. Sr. Anna Mae added, “While some of our students recognize the term ‘Sister’ from their own Christian denominations, they do not always understand why I’m called Sr. Anna Mae but their math teacher is referred to as Mrs. Smith. They know there’s a difference, but they just don’t know what the term ‘Sister’ means.”

The personal relationships built by the religious in the Catholic schools of the Syracuse Roman Catholic Diocese help students and families learn about this distinction and build bridges not just for the educational environment, she said, but for learning about and respecting each other along the way.

Dyann Nashton is the development director of Notre Dame Schools.

Good Works at St. Patrick’s

Kindergarteners from St. Patrick’s School in Oneida wrote to retired Bishop Thomas Costello and “adopted” him as their prayer pen pal for the school year. Below, students were excited to receive their first response from Bishop Costello.

St. Patrick’s students pay a monthly visit to the nearby Hazel Carpenter Home, an assisted living residence.
Students at Bishop Ludden Jr./Sr. High School have been benefitting from seminarian Dane Connelly’s presence at their school. Beginning in January 2014, Connelly spent his pastoral year at St. James Church in Syracuse and also helped out at Bishop Ludden two days a week.

“It’s been great,” said Connelly, of his time at the school. “It’s been a fun time working with the teachers—they have a lot of fun and they have a lot of energy. It’s good to do something new.”

Connelly works in tandem with Bishop Ludden’s campus minister Amanda Webster and faculty member Fr. Dan Muscalino. He also serves as chaplain to the school’s soccer team—even practicing with the squad as time allows. Connelly said he wants to be as present as possible at the school. “I’m open to meeting with students who have questions,” he said.

Connelly’s personal struggles with his discernment to become a priest make him a great resource for the students. Born in Waterbury, Connecticut, and raised in Chittenango, New York, where he is a member of St. Patrick’s Church, Connelly graduated in 2006 from Chittenango High School where he played soccer, lacrosse and volleyball.

“I first started to become personally interested in my faith when I was in high school,” said Connelly,
who notes that his participation with his parish's youth group greatly influenced the development of his faith.

Connelly attended the Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio, where he majored in history and theology and intended to be a teacher. As a freshman, he developed a deeper prayer life, mostly from the influence of his Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam men's household. "It was Ignatian in spirit," said Connelly. "I was drawn to their spirituality and accountably to one another—it was a deep brotherhood. They pushed me to a strong life of prayer."

In his junior year of college, he spent a semester in Austria and travelled throughout Europe. After meeting Fr. Kim Shreck from the Diocese of Pittsburgh while in Rome, Italy, Connelly asked the priest to serve as his spiritual director. At that point, he became interested in the priesthood.

Connelly admired Fr. Shreck because "He was very genuine and was deeply honest. He understood who I was and what I was going through. He saw everything on my heart. He saw it in the discipline in my spiritual life, and he brought to life what being a priest is like."

After graduating from college in 2010, he attended St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore, Maryland. In 2013, Connelly took a leave of absence from the seminary. He went to live with his grandmother in Connecticut, where he worked as a substitute teacher and a Starbucks barista.

"Formation is such an intense thing," said Connelly. "I started to lose perspective."

Connelly had misgivings and fears. He worried that he wouldn't be a good priest, that he would be disliked and that he wouldn't be faithful to his calling.

While living in Connecticut, Connelly found another spiritual director. "He was a very holy priest," said Connelly. "If it weren't for him, I probably wouldn't have come back. He made me focus on putting God first before myself.

Eventually, Connelly did come back—and landed at St. James Church and Bishop Ludden. Connelly hopes he has encouraged students to consider the call to the religious life by sharing his story and showing them that the journey to answering God's call is not always a straight path. It can include times of both doubt and great faith.

"I thank God every day for the experience at Bishop Ludden. It's been an encouragement to my becoming a priest," he said "As long as I continually let the Lord carry me through this, for every day I'm able to turn my life over to Christ, then I have no fear of failing because Christ does not fail, ever."

Claudia Mathis is a staff writer for The Catholic Sun.
Five-year-old Caleigh Heslin, a student in Theresa Armstrong’s kindergarten class at St. James School in Johnson City, New York, already knows why Christian service is important.

“It’s helpful and respectful,” she said matter-of-factly.

Service is an integral part of education in all of the Catholic schools in the Syracuse Diocese and St. James is no different. From participating in monthly dress-down day fundraisers for charities to raking leaves for homebound neighbors or collecting home goods for Samaritan House, the students at St. James are no strangers to lending a helping hand.

Since last spring, St. James students have been getting their helping hands dirty through a new kind of service project: The John Donnelly Memorial Garden. Located right in the school’s backyard, the garden provides fresh produce for St. James Church’s food pantry, part of the Community Hunger Outreach Warehouse (CHOW) network in Broome County.

“Food pantries are always so low on fresh produce—it’s really hard to come by for most people,” said Lynette Errante, youth minister at the parish.

So in 2012 when Errante learned about Catholic Campaign for Human Development grants being offered through the diocese’s Catholic Charities office, she applied for funding to start a community garden. With that initial grant, she and others from the St. James community established a 20-by-20 foot garden at Otsiningo Park and harvested a “pretty good crop” for the pantry. The success of that program encouraged some bigger thinking.

A house on Laurel Street, directly behind the school, went up for sale, and the owners—St. James parishioners—asked the pastor, Fr. John Donovan, if the church would be interested in buying it. With an eye to expanding the parish’s borders and planting a community garden in the lot, Fr. Donovan ultimately said yes.

“It’s something I’ve wanted to do for many years,” he said. “As far back as when I was in seminary, I actually wrote a paper about using empty lots in inner-city neighborhoods [as gardens], getting people involved and having fresh produce for the local pantry.”

The house was purchased and the plot cleared. Errante was awarded a 2013 CCHD grant and, with the help of parish staff and numerous community volunteers, a 104-by-40 foot garden of 14 beds was designed and planted last spring and tended throughout the summer. St. James students were able to participate in special ways.

“In May, I had the kindergarteners plant pumpkins,” Errante said. “The third graders made all the signs [identifying what was planted]. I was able to go into the classrooms and teach the kids about the vegetables and why it’s important to give to the food pantry.”

In its first harvest—despite the best efforts of some hungry woodchucks—the garden produced tomatoes, lettuce, a variety of beans and peas, potatoes, yellow squash, peppers, watermelon, spaghetti squash, onions, carrots, zucchini, cabbage, pumpkins and blueberries.
For two and a half years, Hope Matthews has overseen the pantry at St. James Parish. In that time, she’s seen the number of visitors double. Today, the pantry serves about 140 to 150 families per month. Having fresh produce available for visitors has been a wonderful addition. “Everything goes fast!” she said.

Service is a core part of the St. James curriculum, and the garden has been an excellent example. “Service teaches kids to give back to the community,” said Principal Matthew Martinovic. “Being in Upstate New York, all the communities are very small. [Given] how much need is in these local communities, this shows the kids how they can effect and make change themselves.”

In October, a group of kindergarteners visited the garden to harvest beans, peppers and potatoes. Caleigh was there to help again, along with classmates JJ Elliott and Emily St. John. All said they liked helping out in the garden because it was a way to help people who don’t have food. Caleigh added, “It’s good to do.”

Katherine Long is the editor of The Catholic Sun.
Eastern Region Leads Development of Localized Business Models

BY DYANN NASHTON

Decentralization, regionalization … by any name it means a new direction for the Catholic schools of the Syracuse Diocese. The joint effort of the diocese and local communities has been reinventing the way Catholic schools operate. All diocesan regions and schools are at different stages of the business model transition. Now schools within a region will begin to work together as smaller, more independent systems where decisions can be made closer to home.

Notre Dame in Utica, New York, is, in many ways, the trailblazer for the Eastern Region. A transition committee began discussing the business model with the diocese several years ago and drafted a Statement of Strategic Vision in 2011. It articulated core values of the committee to create a vision for the restructured schools and outlined strategic goals, governing principles and identified critical challenges.

Vin Gilroy, a Notre Dame alumnus and former member of the transition team, sits on the new board. "There was no manual to tell us how to go about this entire process. We're still in the process with board development and working more closely with our region's schools. There have been growing pains and we've learned a lot along the way. Today, we've got a better, stronger school because of it," he said.

The pieces of the transition puzzle include newly-crafted and adopted by-laws and recruitment of a professional, more autonomous board of trustees. These nine business, education and church leaders are authorized to make key decisions on school policy, organization oversight and finances. The voting board members bring accounting, marketing, religion, technology and educational skills to the table where vision for the schools is articulated and strategies are formulated.

Under the board’s guidance, key management positions have been created or expanded, and the reporting structure is illustrated in a new organizational chart. Local professionals were recruited to enhance the management team. Sr. Anna Mae Collins continues to take the academic helm for both the junior/senior high school and the elementary school with Mary Rossi in place as elementary principal. In a newly created position, Chief Financial Officer Ken McCoy handles all financial and many operational matters directly from his office just inside the front doors of the junior/senior high school.

Jim Jones, former development director from St. Peter's Elementary in Utica, shifted to Notre Dame Schools where his role grew to include the areas of enrollment, marketing and development. Jones now focuses directly on enrollment. On his watch, the school exceeded its target of 4 percent enrollment growth to reach 7.5 percent and instituted an international program bringing students from three different countries, including China, to Notre Dame. By the time the new by-laws were in place, Dyann Nashton, a former Catholic school advancement coordinator, stepped in to take the position of development director and is coordinating a $10 million capital campaign. The management team is supported by several new staff members. A second experienced communications professional, Kari Puleo, was hired to provide marketing and alumni support, and in the past year, Jake DerCola brought college level athletic experience to assume the role of athletic director.

“The creative enthusiasm that has surrounded the decentralization model has been exciting and impressive to witness. There is a passion within each of the buildings moving toward more autonomy and local decision making,” said William Crist, superintendent of Catholic schools. “This model has proven successful in other areas of the country. Success can be defined here by providing a growing and sustainable Catholic choice in our junior-senior high schools. I am confident this will only bring further success to the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Syracuse.”

Dyann Nashton is the development director of Notre Dame Schools.
MHR Students’ Commitment, Sacrifice Result in Clean Water for African Villagers

BY MICHCA BALLARD-FORTIN

As its mission states, “At Most Holy Rosary School, Jesus is our model; students are our focus... we develop strong Christian character for all who embrace our philosophy. Through partnerships with parents and the community, we prepare our students for lifelong success.”

What better way to develop strong Christian character and prepare students for lifelong success than to encourage students to be stewards of God’s creation and help others?

It is with great pride, that Most Holy Rosary 1st grade teacher Katherine Rossi recently shared how her class came up with its service project last year. “While teaching a lesson about needs versus wants, the students created a list of things we need to survive: food, shelter and water,” she said. “When it came to ‘needs’ the discussion was eye-opening. The children began to understand that families, children their own age, in different parts of the world, do not have some of these basics, like safe, clean water.”

Rossi used her classroom iPad and SMART board to help the children research communities in need, and they found The Water Project. This non-profit organization works closely with local in-country partners in Africa to facilitate basic water needs in small villages.

The first graders and Rossi embraced their project and worked diligently throughout the school year. The students learned that by making some small changes in their behavior and working to put others first, they could make a positive difference for others. Many of the students took a two-week Water Challenge, drinking tap water instead of pricey drinks. In a video they created, the children told viewers the types of beverages their families were giving up: soda, sports drinks, coffee, lemonade, etc. All of the money saved by drinking tap water was donated to The Water Project.

By participating in the Water Challenge and in conjunction with an active fundraising web page, the classmates surpassed their original goal and raised $1,912 within one school year.

Rossi explained, “Over the summer, The Water Project kept the class informed about which project they funded and its progress. A water pump was installed to fix a broken well in the Lungi community of Sierra Leone. This rehabilitated source of safe clean water serves 200 people and greatly improves their everyday lives.”

The Water Project organization has a five-step process, which includes community engagement, education, installation of project, follow-up and evaluation. Newly appointed Most Holy Rosary Principal Jennifer Petosa said, “The Water Project organization and these steps explained to our students that service is more than just digging a well. The children got to experience in a real way, that if you respect, listen and teach others to help themselves, you are giving a hand up for a better life. I am so inspired by what these young children have done and by the faith-filled guidance they have received from Miss Rossi.”

The students at the Syracuse, New York, school were recently informed that their project has been completed and that the villagers have received education on how to maintain their new well and water pump. The Water Project website quotes community member Chief Pa Adikalie as saying, “I am very glad for the new pump. This well has given us a lot of good use, but when the pump isn’t functioning properly, we have to go to the waterside. This will help us a lot. Thank you very much!”

Michca Ballard-Fortin is the administrative assistant to the Catholic Schools Office and the proud parent of two students in diocesan schools.
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<td>Diocesan Catholic Schools Office</td>
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<td>Holy Cross School</td>
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