The Good News of Catholic education spreads through deep faith, strong academics and compassionate service

By Harry Plummer

When the florist would drop off two dozen roses in a glass vase at the school office, no one had to look at the card to know where to deliver them. Every teacher—myself included—knew that they were for the first-grade teacher, Sister Margo.

The lesson she planned began when the delivery came to her classroom door. She would get very excited about the roses and so would the children. She would put them on her desk, and let the students come up row by row to touch, smell and comment on their beauty. She would talk about where roses grow, share some poems about roses, and ask the kids to draw and write about them.

She also used them for a science lesson, teaching the children to observe and note the differences between plant and animal life, and even doing a simple experiment with food coloring to demonstrate the rose’s vascular system.

Later, while the students worked at their desks, Sister Margo would make some noise that was sure to attract their attention and, never looking up, would take the roses out of the vase, walk over to the sink, dump out the water, return the roses to the empty vase and resume her desk work.

Invariably, the shock that would run through the classroom at this action would quickly precipitate into a hand going up or a call-out asking, “Sister Margo, why’d you do that?”

She would then ask what was wrong with what she did, and always received the same reply, “But if you take the water out, the roses will die!”

She would then get up, refill the vase and say, “You’re right. Now we’re ready to talk about baptism.”

Later in the week, Sister Margo would complete the lesson by marching her students down to the parish’s weekly lunchtime soup kitchen, where the roses ended up as centerpieces or gifts handed out by the children to brighten the day of the homeless guests.

Do you think anyone in Sister Margo’s class ever forgot that lesson? I know I haven’t because it offers such a vivid snapshot of how Catholic school teachers light fires in the hearts and minds of students.

Her pedagogical method illustrates both the importance that Catholic school educators place on demonstrating interdisciplinary links between subjects, and bringing religious awareness into all human learning.

It also contains each of the elements of Catholic school education that we are celebrating this year—faith, academics and service. Let’s take a brief look at each of these as they are lived out in our Catholic schools.

• Faith—Catholic schools celebrate our Catholic faith in word and sacrament, in service and in the ongoing development of a community spirit animated by the belief that Jesus Christ is Lord. As one of the privileged environments for the new evangelization, they have a missionary thrust and are often catalysts for bringing families into a renewed, life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ and his Church.

• Academics—In category after category, the performance of our Catholic schools on academic assessments is remarkable, often significantly exceeding the performance of other Indiana school systems.

Our Catholic high school graduation rate is 99.2 percent. The percentage of our Indiana Core 40 graduates is 98.5 percent. And our Catholic schools have the highest number of National Blue Ribbon School Awards of any diocese in the country. Many other academic accolades could be mentioned so if you are interested in them or other information about our Catholic schools, contact the archdiocese Office of Catholic Education at 317-236-1430 or 800-382-9836, ext. 1430.

• Service—In a U.S. bishops’ pastoral reflection from 2002 titled “A Place at the Table,” our bishops remind us that too often the call of the Gospel and the social implications of the Eucharist are ignored or neglected in our daily lives.

Our Catholic schools respond to this call by working with families to reach out to the poor and needy in a great variety of ways, completing 164,251 service hours during the 2010-11 school year. Wow!

So let’s celebrate these three inseparable pillars of Catholic school education—faith, academics and service. Like certain chemicals, when blended together they ignite a fire.

And that’s just what happens in the hearts and minds of the youth placed in the care of our Catholic schools, one spark at a time.

(Harry Plummer is executive director of the archdiocese’s Secretariat for Catholic Education and Faith Formation.)

Understanding Tax Credit Scholarships and Indiana School Vouchers, pages 7B and 10B.
Little Flower students look to Jesus to become servant leaders

By Sean Gallagher

When the faculty and staff at Little Flower School in Indianapolis wanted to give their eighth-graders an opportunity to serve others, the choice for a role model for them was obvious. Jesus Christ.

But in using the example of Jesus to help the students become good leaders, Little Flower principal Kevin Gawrys didn’t just look to Scripture and the Church’s teachings. He also took advantage of the writings of Ken Blanchard, a secular author known for promoting effective methods of business leadership.

In his book, Lead Like Jesus, Blanchard argues that servant leadership is the most effective way to lead others in a common task, and that the best example of this form of leadership is found in Jesus Christ.

The past three eighth-grade classes at Little Flower School have taken a Catholic version of Lead Like Jesus developed by Owen Phelps and learned how to become better leaders in their school and to lay the foundation for being good leaders as teenagers and adults.

Gawrys meets with the eighth-graders once a month for an afternoon to study the leadership qualities of Jesus, and how they can use them in their everyday lives.

“I think most Catholic school [administrators and teachers] tell their eighth-graders, ‘Hey, you’re the leaders of the school.’ You’ve got to be the leaders,” said Gawrys. “But we don’t always give them the tools to be the good ones. And this has really helped them understand that they are called to look out for everybody. Leadership is every time you have an interaction with another person.”

The leadership that Little Flower’s eighth-grade students show isn’t just in school-wide events such as Masses or athletic activities. It happens in ordinary events in the classroom and the cafeteria.

“They’re more willing to include everybody in the classroom,” said Theresa Slaton, Little Flower’s eighth-grade teacher. “I’ve seen a lot of inclusion and not leaving people out. At lunch, nobody ever sits by themselves. I’ve actually seen people get up on their own and go find someone who didn’t have to sit alone at lunch.”

Wesley Moss, an eighth-grade student, appreciated the way that Lead Like Jesus has changed his and his classmates’ perspective on various aspects of their lives.

“I’ve noticed that we have become better leaders at home and at school, and even with people in day-to-day life outside of school,” Wesley said.

“I’m more willing to watch my twin sisters or help them with homework.”

Little Flower’s faculty and staff have also started encouraging students at all grade levels to become servant leaders.

This occurred last September at the start of the academic year when Little Flower had a “service-a-thon” instead of a walk-a-thon to raise funds for the school. Students elicited pledges for the amount of hours they would give in service.

“It sends a whole new message,” Gawrys said. “I’m not going to go walk. I’m going to do things for other people. That’s what we’re about here.”

And, starting this year, it’s what the whole school is about. Each grade at Little Flower is working to pair up with a service organization in the broader community.

The second-graders have reached out to the residents of St. Paul Hermitage, a retirement home and nursing home facility in Beech Grove.

Eighth-grade students have spent time volunteering at the Pratt-Quigley Food Pantry of the Indianapolis Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

Wesley said that going to the pantry to meet and help provide meals is more powerful than simply donating food items in order to be able to have the privilege of not wearing his school uniform.

“They’re really thankful that you’re there and willing to help them,” Wesley said. “When you do this, you feel more rewarded than getting out of uniform once.”

Gawrys shares Gilbert’s hopes.

“It’s letting them see another way of life. We live in a cold or indifferent.”

Gilbert said. “They’re not going to be insensitive to suffering. They have passionate hearts in them so that, when they see suffering, they’re going to be moved to try to do something about it.”

Gawrys said, “That seems like a huge thing, but I think these opportunities of service show them how to do it. They come back here realizing that they did that day. They changed the world. They dealt with people and changed their world that day.”

(For more information about Little Flower School in Indianapolis, log on to www.littleflowerparish.org/school )

Award-winning Spanish teacher shows students a different world

By John Shaughnessy

When Paula Owen takes her students to a Mexican restaurant, it’s not just an occasion to savor burritos and enchiladas. It’s also a teaching moment to help the children practice Spanish, work on math skills and open their minds to seeing different things and doing different things.

“How can we communicate with other groups of people if we don’t speak their language?” Owen asks her students.

“It’s also an easy way to bring in a little bit of math. We figure the tax and what the tip will be. Plus, there are some students that haven’t been to a Mexican restaurant. We’ll take about what a quesadilla, an enchilada and a burrito are. So they’re anxious to try something and share something they normally wouldn’t have.”

It’s all part of a bigger dish that Owen wants to serve her students.

“Your students to be open to the world means Owen is always open to different ways of teaching them.

Twice a year, St. Malachy School has children’s Masses in “Spanglish”—half the celebration in Spanish and half the celebration in English.

When the Latino community celebrates the Day of the Dead—Nov. 1 (All Saints Day) and Nov. 2 (All Souls Day)—in the United States, Owen leads the school’s kindergarten students to the nearby St. Malachy Cemetery.

“We walked down to the cemetery to honor the lives of the in-laws of one of our kindergarten teachers,” she recalls. “We carried unlit candles and left flowers on the gravesite. Some weeks after we did that, a kindergarten student’s mom had a parent die. The kindergarten student tried to help his mom overcome her sadness by telling her what he learned from our Day of the Dead celebration.”

Trips to a nearby Mexican grocery have a different impact on kindergarten students and their families.

“Our job is to change the world,” Owen said. “That seems like a huge thing, but I think these opportunities of service show them how to do it. They come back here realizing that they did that day. They changed the world. They dealt with people and changed their world that day.”

Spanish teacher Paula Owen leads a language exercise for kindergarten Gordon, left, Nathan Flores and Ellyse Callin, second-grade students at St. Malachy School in Brownsburg.
The joy of Catholic education connects generations

Student learns life lessons in classroom of sports

By Dillon Bennett

I am so fortunate to be blessed with the privilege of attending a Catholic school. Many opportunities have been presented to me, one being Catholic Youth Organization sports, which I have participated in since third grade. I have gained more through my experiences playing football than I ever would have imagined when I first walked out on the field over five years ago—experiences that have taught me qualities such as sportsmanship, piety, loyalty, diligence and teamwork.

When my team was winning a game by a reasonable margin, I witnessed my coach taking a more conservative approach in play calling, trying not to run up the score. Never once did a game end without shaking the hands of the opposing players. We prayed before and after games, praising God for the talents he had given us. We routinely knelt and held hands in respect for an injured player and prayed for his return to good health.

I built loyal, long-lasting relationships with my coaches. My teammates and I bonded so well through winning and losing. After our first loss, we noted the things we did well and embraced the things we needed to work on during practice. Hard work between the lines translated to diligence in my studies.

The Catholic Youth Organization has made a positive, lasting impact on me. I will cherish my memories of playing football, and I will hopefully pass the virtues I learned to embrace to future generations.

(Dillon Bennett is an eighth-grade student at St. Luke the Evangelist School in Indianapolis.) †

Parent finds a sense of community for her children

By Sara Graf

When searching for a school for my children, my number one goal was to find a community that would support our children’s emotional, religious and educational growth. St. Paul School in New Alsace has exceeded my expectations.

Matthew Graf, left, and his brother, Nathan, pose for a picture at St. Paul School in New Alsace with Father Scott Nobbe, who is both the parish priest and the principal of the school. School secretary Millie Kraus watches in the background.

Graduates celebrate their Catholic school’s timeless influence

By Dennis Brake

Playing kickball, marching in the May Crowning procession and saving entire villages of babies with mission collections are just a few of the many reasons to attend a Catholic grade school. But the best reason is that, contrary to what Thomas Wolfe said, you can “come alive” for our children.

One of the highlights during the reunion weekend was a tour of the school. As we walked through the halls and stepped into the classrooms, the most common question heard was, “How did we ever fit 55 kids into this tiny room?” The bigger mystery was, “How did one nun control 55 of us kids?” The answer was “Providence,” as in the Sisters of Providence. They truly were a rare breed, and we were most fortunate to be the beneficiaries of their devotion.

Members of the 1961 graduating class of St. Joan of Arc School in Indianapolis share a group photo with Father Guy Roberts, pastor of the parish, during their 50th reunion at the school in June of 2011.

Staff member gives thanks for an invaluable gift of faith

By Katie Buck

There are two things that come to mind when I reflect on the joys of working at a Catholic school. One is the first all-school Mass I attended with the student body. Even though I was excited about my new job at St. Malachy School in Brownsburg, I was also feeling anxious because it required some sacrifices from me and my family. That first Mass gave me such a sense of peace and gratitude.

The second memory that comes to mind is from this past Advent. I was shelving books and listening to a class of first-graders work on their computer lesson. Mrs. Wagner had asked the class to brainstorm Christmas words. Our students’ answers made me laugh and also touched my heart: “Jesus! Santa! Bethlehem! Presents! Angels!”

Listening to the class compile this list, with words about Jesus and the Nativity coming as naturally as words about Christmas trees and presents, made me so proud to work at St. Malachy School. The truth of our Catholic faith is shared and reinforced each day, and that is an invaluable gift.

(Katie Buck works in the library at St. Malachy School in Brownsburg.) †

‘I have also personally grown in my faith through talking to my children about what they have learned in school.’

—Sara Graf
Cardinal Ritter students focus on care for God’s creation

By Mary Ann Garber

“Reuse. Recycle. Rejoice.” The sign in Mary Pat O’Connor’s ecology classroom, Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School in Indianapolis reminds students of the importance of caring for God’s creation.

Cardinal Ritter students are doing their part to protect the environment and lower their carbon footprints with a number of ecology-related projects at the Indianapolis West Deeney campus.

“Students focus on care for God’s creation. We clean up the area near our school as one way to lower our carbon footprint with a number of ecology-related projects at the Indianapolis West Deeney campus,” said the faculty, staff, and students.

As a science teacher, O’Connor enjoys helping the students learn ways to connect biology, faith and respect for the environment.

At Cardinal Ritter, he appreciates how the students are focused on recycling, and the faculty and administrators are open to implementing the students’ ideas about ways to improve the school environment.

During this school year, O’Connor centered, helps seniors Charlie Elliott, from left, Claire O’Shea, and Vanessa Lynn, collect water samples from Crooked Creek in Indianapolis during an ecology class field trip in January 2011. The students graduated on June 3.

Right, Cardinal Ritter High School seniors Emily Carr, left, and Ashley Mejar gather samples of insect larvae from wet rocks taken out of Crooked Creek in Indianapolis during an ecology class field trip last spring. The type of larva helps to indicate whether the stream is clean or polluted.

“Students are focused on recycling, and the faculty and administrators are open to implementing the students’ ideas about ways to improve the school environment.”

At Cardinal Ritter, O’Connor carpool to swim team practices with four other students as one way to lower her carbon footprint on the environment.

As a science teacher, O’Connor enjoys helping the students learn ways to connect biology, faith and respect for the environment.

“Cardinal Ritter has promoted paper recycling for years,” she said, “and the school began recycling aluminum, glass, plastic and cardboard last year.

During the school year, O’Connor said, the faculty, students and staff increased the amount of recycled paper weight by 30 percent more than last year.

Ecology class assignments include field trips, school and community service projects, and studying environmental regulations to make the students aware of legal protections for natural resources.

“We talk about ‘Where does this object end up if we aren’t recycling it?’” she said. “We clean up the area near the [Major Taylor] Velodrome every time that we go to Crooked Creek, which is about five minutes from the school. You would not believe what kinds of things we have found there—shower doors, grills, tires, all kinds of litter and trash.”

The good news, O’Connor said, is that “the water really is of good quality” in the creek, which runs through Marian’s campus then past the Velodrome and Lake Sullivan into the White River.

Field trips offer “fantastic teaching moments for the kids,” she said.

“One year, we participated in the city’s cigarette litter clean-up campaign. We pulled out cigarette butts along 30th Street and by the creek.”

The students learned that toxins from the cigarettes wash into the water supply,” O’Connor said. “They talked to business owners about putting containers outside their stores to collect cigarette litter. They realized that they could affect a change by trying to correct the source of the problem and they could tell they were making a difference.”

O’Connor begins the ecology curriculum each fall by asking the students to choose an environment project to focus on all year, which empowers them to work harder to improve their community.

“Last year, we studied water quality and that evolved into discussions on water as a right of life,” she said. “We started looking at places in the world where people did not have enough water or they had flooding and didn’t have clean water.”

That research led the students to sponsor a fundraiser on March 22—which is World Water Day—to help pay for a $3,500 water purification system provided by Fountains of Hope and St. Malachy Parish in Brownburg for St. Margaret’s Parish in Port Margeot, Haiti.

The fundraiser also built school unity as students graduated on June 3.

“It was a combination of science and our Catholic social teachings, which made it a perfect project,” O’Connor said. “We are continuing that fundraiser again this March to send more funds to Haiti for water purification.”

Last semester, students wrote essays on how climate change affects the water cycle worldwide and our responsibilities as Christians to take care of the environment.

Cardinal Ritter’s most recent ecology project on Jan. 18 resulted in donations of nearly two truckloads of electronics and other recyclables.

This semester, students are studying more ways to conserve natural resources, create more green spaces and protect the environment.

Those educational efforts will give them a head start on celebrating Earth Day on April 23.

For more information about Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School’s recycling program, contact Mary Pat O’Connor at mpatrick@cardinalritter.org.

For more information about the Green Ribbon Schools program, log on to www.greennibbonschools.org.
A teacher at St. Louis School in Batesville, Kyle Jolly receives a check to help with the health expenses for his first child, Landon. Students at St. Louis School raised the money, which included a donation from one girl who emptied her piggy bank. The check was presented to Jolly by St. Louis students, from left, Calvin Shenk, Jack Tonges, Sarah Meer, Abby Roell and Molly Weigel.

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She also connects with the children through their interests. She does Tai Bo exercises with the school’s youngest children. After school, she joins students as they dance to a Michael Jackson video game. She tries to attend their Catholic Youth Organization games. And she is always smiling Pillow as she sits in her office where her door, shelves and window sills are decorated with items from her extensive collection of angels. “When I get the phone call from Connie, it was another moment when the angels were watching over me.”

In her second year as principal, Pillow tries to be an angel for the 132 children at the school that serves students from kindergarten through the sixth-grade. She views the fact that she is black and from the neighborhood as an advantage in connecting with Holy Angels students, who overwhelmingly come from black families.

“The one thing that the kids at Holy Angels may have not had in the past is someone who looks like them who is a role model,” says Pillow, the mother of two teenagers. “They know I came from this area. They look at me and say, ‘She’s a hands-on principal who cares, who listens and who gets involved,’” Morton says. “They don’t accept bullying. And if you have a concern, she always has time to sit and talk with you and solve it. She’s a blessing. I wish more parents are a little more comfortable with me, too. “I want to build relationships—-with high expectations. I believe someone is watching over me and guiding me.”

She says. “I go home exhausted, but I’m still happy. I truly believe someone is watching over me and guiding me.”

By John Shaughnessy

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There are moments when teachers learn just how special their students are. For Kyle Jolly, that understanding came in the midst of a difficult time for him and his wife, Kimberly, shortly after the birth of their first child, Landon.

When their son was born on July 22, 2011, it was soon determined that he would require surgery on his right hand, where some of his fingers had grown fused together.

Even more of concern was that he had a very severe club foot on his right leg, and he was born without one of the main bones of his right leg. So doctors have determined that it will be best to amputate Landon’s right leg at the knee and fit him with a prosthetic limb—a process that will begin this spring.

So at times, it’s been overwhelming for Kimberly and Kyle, who teaches physical education and third-grade math at St. Louis School in Batesville. There have been concerns about paying for the surgeries that Landon needs—concerns that family and friends have tried to help with, including the “family” of St. Louis School.

“A couple of teachers came to me at the beginning of the school year and asked if the kids could bring in some of their loose change to help Landon,” Kyle, 29, recalls. “I’m thinking in the back of my mind, ‘This is nice. They’ll collect a couple hundred dollars, and this will be a way for the kids to feel a part of it.’”

Yet, Kyle’s view changed later when St. Louis School principal Chad Moeller told him that the students had raised more money than anyone had expected.

“He also said they wanted to make a presentation the next week with the whole school coming together,” Kyle says. “I’m still shocked by what they did. They gave me more than $1,500.

“One of the teachers told me later that one girl came in with a bag of money that was filled with bills and coins. The teacher said, ‘That’s a lot of money. Do your parents know you brought this in?’ The girl said, ‘Yes. I emptied my piggy bank and told my mom what it was for.’ And my mom said it was the best decision I could make.’”

Months have passed since Kyle first heard that story, but he still gets emotional when he tells it. “When I heard that someone had emptied their piggy bank for my little boy, I was overwhelmed,” he says. “What everyone else and did for me and my little boy showed the kind of families, the kind of kids and the kind of community we have at our school. It’s really amazing.”

Heavenly direction

Belief in angels spurs educator to guide children

By John Shaughnessy

It could be just a terrific coincidence—but try to sell that explanation to Sherlynn Pillow, who believes that angels protect and watch over people.

In June of 2010, Pillow was depressed because her nearly 30-year career in education seemed to be coming to an end due to budget cuts and the closing of the school where she had worked for the past 12 years, Craig Middle School in Indianapolis.

During her last days at the school, Pillow received an unexpected phone call from Connie Zittman, executive director of the Mother Theodore Catholic Academies in the archdiocese. Pillow had previously applied for an education position with the archdiocese, but wasn’t contacted. So the call from Zittman about a job opening for a principal caught her off-guard.

“Connie even told me that I probably never heard of the school, that it was a little school on the west side of Indianapolis called Holy Angels,” Pillow recalls. “I bursted out laughing. Connie asked me why I was laughing. I said, ‘I was baptized at Holy Angels. I grew up a block from the school. It’s the area I know. It’s my home.’

After a few days of interviews, Pillow had the job. “I tell people that it was God calling me home,” says a smiling Pillow as she sits in her office where her door, shelves and window sills are decorated with items from her extensive collection of angels. “When I got the phone call from Connie, it was another moment when the angels were watching over me.”

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Spirit of family inspires students to help teacher’s baby
Lesson in empathy connects students to homeless people

By John Shaughnessy

Abby Wuenisch realized how much she had changed when she saw a man on the street holding a sign that read, “Homeless. Need food.”

In similar situations in the past, the 16-year-old sophomore at Bishop Chatard High School would have looked past the man, believing that he had chosen to live on the streets, thinking that he was someone to avoid.

Yet this time, she and a friend approached the situation differently. “We got him a piece of pizza,” recalls Abby, a member of St. Simon the Apostle Parish in Indianapolis. “I think he was in a state of shock when we did that, but I think he was thankful, too. I’ve had my eyes opened. I’ve learned that I shouldn’t be around homeless people. I should give them a smile.”

Abby’s change in attitude came from an immersion program about homelessness that each of the 170 sophomores at Bishop Chatard High School has experienced this school year—a program started by Benedictine Sister Kathleen Yeaton, one of the school’s sophomore religion teachers.

Her idea to start the program developed last spring when the bishops in the United States decided that sophomore religion classes at Catholic high schools should focus on the Paschal Mystery, the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. “If the students don’t have an understanding of suffering, the Paschal Mystery wouldn’t make sense to them,” Sister Kathleen says. “So I thought the best way for them to experience suffering was to go into the inner city and encounter people who suffer. The whole purpose was to try to give them an understanding of what it is like to be homeless.”

A humbling moment

The program exposed the students to real life situations they had never experienced. They stood and slugged through a pouring rainstorm at the American Legion Mall in downtown Indianapolis—a place where homeless people can be found during the day.

They met a homeless person named Stanley, who shared his life story filled with mistakes, told them to stay in school and led them in prayer, asking God to keep the students safe and let them realize their blessings.

They walked through a shelter with homeless people, ate meals with them and listened to their stories. They visited a room inside a shelter where everyone had their lives fit into a plastic container.

“It’s a humbling room,” recalls Nick Rulong, an 18-year-old senior at Bishop Chatard High School, who helped Sister Kathleen with the immersion program. “It made me think about everything you have in your life, and how unfortunate some people are. Since then, if I see a homeless person, I’ll give them something. Seeing that room keeps me grounded. It makes me think about how small my problems are.”

The experience also added substance to what Nick and the other students have been taught about service at the archdiocesan high school for the Indianapolis North Deanery. “We’re called to serve,” Nick says. “We’re supposed to serve God first, others second and then ourselves.”

“Christ comes in many disguises”

It’s a message that Sister Kathleen was able to bring to life with the help of about 25 social service agencies that work to help homeless men, women and children—including the archdiocese’s Holy Family Shelter, Cathedral Soup Kitchen, St. Vincent de Paul Society and several parishes.

“Each time they came, the students really worked hard helping to make casseroles, making fruit salads or making meals we would freeze for later,” says Margie Pike, director of the Cathedral Soup Kitchen. “I think it was a great experience because it was really hands-on.”

“Many students have preconceived ideas about the poor. Most of them are surprised at how nice and polite they are. The students also see the struggles of people. We always talk here about St. Benedict and how he always said to welcome all as Christ. We tell them that Christ comes in many disguises.”

That lesson has even changed the attitude of Bishop Chatard teachers who have helped Sister Kathleen with the program. “It was very real for me,” says Abby Funk, who teaches English and theater at the school. “Every time I would see someone on the side of the road, there was a frustration.—Yeah, they’re homeless. Why don’t they get a job?—Then we went to the Central Library, and it was busier than any library I’ve ever been in. I talked to the librarian. She said the homeless people don’t have the resources we have at home—the computers to do research, the clothes for interviews.”

Funk then shared the main benefit of the immersion program for her. “It made me see the human dignity in everybody. It’s made me smile at people. I recently saw a homeless man. I said, ‘Hello. How are you?’ His face just lit up, and he said, ‘I’m fine. You have a blessed day.’ He didn’t ask for anything.”

Against incredible odds

That connection, the understanding of homeless suffering and the appreciation of human dignity were the goals that Sister Kathleen sought for the sophomore students.

“One of the big things we worked on was not judging people,” she says. “I think they definitely saw the connection between people’s passion, the love of God and how God is calling them.”

The joy of Catholic schools: ‘You never sit alone at lunch’

By John Shaughnessy

As a fourth-grade teacher at St. Roch School in Indianapolis, Dick Gallimore asked his students, “What do you like about going to a Catholic school?”

Here are some of their answers:

• “I like going to a Catholic school because we get to learn about God and the saints.”—Lillian Egan
• “I like going to a Catholic school because there are prayer partners.”—Beau Laeufer
• “I like going to a Catholic school because people give you a job.”—Isabella Battiston
• “I like going to a Catholic school because you never sit alone at lunch.”—Riley Prewitt
• “I like going to a Catholic school because we collect food for the poor. We do many things for others. I enjoy doing that!”—Bean Larreque
• “I like going to a Catholic school because they have nice teachers.”—Miles Marshall
• “I like going to a Catholic school because we have a priest like Father James Wilmot. He is my favorite priest!”—Lance Brand
• “I like going to a Catholic school because they have nice teachers.”—Beau Laeufer
• “I like going to a Catholic school because we all fit in.”—Malachi Davis
• “I like going to a Catholic school because I get help when I need it.”—Aaron Lotko
• “I like going to a Catholic school because we have prayer partners.”—Kaye Reed

Helping to prepare a meal for homeless people, sophomore students at Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis cut vegetables at the Cathedral Soup Kitchen in Indianapolis.
HOW CAN I POSSIBLY AFFORD CATHOLIC SCHOOL?
Understanding Tax Credit Scholarships and Indiana School Vouchers

TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP

What are Tax Credit Scholarships?
The Indiana Tax Credit Scholarship Program provides scholarship support to families who want to enroll their children in the private school of their choice. Qualifying students in grades K-12 can receive a minimum of a $500 Tax Credit Scholarship.

Who qualifies for a Tax Credit Scholarship?
- A student whose family meets the income eligibility guidelines for the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program (see chart on next page), AND
- A student who is entering Kindergarten or 1st grade, AND/OR
- A student who is coming to a private school after attending at least one year (two semesters) in an Indiana public school.

Why should I apply now?
If your family qualifies for assistance, but you do not apply when your child first enters school, you may lose the opportunity for a Voucher or Tax Credit Scholarship for the next 13 years. Kindergarten and 1st grade students CAN receive a Tax Credit Scholarship, making them eligible for a Voucher the following year.

How do I apply for a Tax Credit Scholarship?
1. To see how much tuition assistance you are eligible for, first register at your Catholic school of choice.  
2. To apply for funding, visit choicetrust.org/apply.

INDIANA SCHOOL VOUCHERS

What is an Indiana School Voucher?
A Voucher is a state-funded scholarship that helps cover the cost of tuition at a private school. Qualifying students in grades 1-8 can receive a maximum of $4,500 per school year. High school students can receive up to 90% of the local per-student state funding amount.

Who qualifies for a Voucher?
- A student whose family meets the income eligibility guidelines for the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program (see chart on next page), AND
- A student in grades 2-12 who is coming to a private school after attending at least one year (two semesters) in an Indiana public school, AND/OR
- A current private school student in grades 1-12 who has received a Tax Credit Scholarship in a prior year.

Why should I apply now?
If your family qualifies for assistance, but you do not apply when your child first enters school, you may lose the opportunity for a Voucher or Tax Credit Scholarship for the next 13 years. Kindergarten and 1st grade students CAN receive a Tax Credit Scholarship, making them eligible for a Voucher the following year.

How do I apply for a Voucher?
1. To see how much tuition assistance you are eligible for, first register at your Catholic school of choice.  
2. To apply for funding, visit doe.in.gov/schoolchoice.

archindy.org/schools

WHAT AM I ELIGIBLE FOR?
See the charts on page 108 to see if you qualify for Tax Credit Scholarships and Vouchers
WHAT AM I ELIGIBLE FOR?

Follow the chart below to see if you qualify for Tax Credit Scholarships and Vouchers.

I’m enrolling my child in Kindergarten or 1st grade at a Catholic school.

I meet these eligibility requirements:
- Indiana resident
- My family is between 150% and 200% of the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Income Level (see chart).

TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP

I’m moving my child in grades 2 – 12 to a Catholic school.

I meet these eligibility requirements:
- Indiana resident
- My child attended public school the previous year (two semesters) OR received a Tax Credit Scholarship, or Voucher, the previous school year.

AND one of the following:
- My family is between 150% and 200% of the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Income Level (see chart).
- My family is at 150%, or below, the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Income Level (see chart).

SCHOOL VOUCHER

Contact your local Catholic school or for more information about schools, contact:

Archdiocese of Indianapolis
The Church in Central and Southern Indiana

Office of Catholic Education
(317) 236-1430
(800) 382-9836
www.archindy.org/ocel/
The Joy of Catholic schools: Simple tools offer lasting lessons about relationships

**By Emerson Wolf**

At St. Luke the Evangelist School, students are privileged to have the opportunity to participate in many special events. The eighth-graders’ trip to Camp Rancho Frasmas in Brown County offers a unique opportunity to bond with classmates in an outside setting away from school. The activity that I cherished the most was the marshmallow roast. When we first arrived, we laughed and sang camp songs led by Mrs. (Tara) DeWitt and Mrs. (Tara) Strohl, but soon the chatter became quiet when the darkness of the evening grew serious.

Mrs. DeWitt passed out tubes of toothpaste and paper plates to several people. The partners were instructed to squirt out all of the toothpaste onto the plate. All the partners were able to squeeze their toothpaste onto the plate without a problem. Then Mrs. DeWitt told us to put all the toothpaste we had squirted out on the plate back into the tube. This task seemed nearly impossible, and none of the groups were successful in their attempts. The significance of the toothpaste, Mrs. DeWitt told us, was that it represented our words. It is easy to quickly say hurtful and unkind words, but much harder to clean or mend the damage that these words can cause.

We can never take back the hurtful words we have said to our peers just like we couldn’t put the toothpaste back into the tube.

Later, Mrs. (Pam) Scheck shared with us her personal experiences on bullying. She gave the analogy that words can cause an arrow through your heart. She then proceeded to hand hurricane victims. This helps us realize that we can do those things when they leave our doors, I think we’ve made our mark.

The joy of Catholic schools: We can make an immense difference together, student says

**By Katie Pankow**

At Our First Monday Celebration, the whole student body gathers in the gym to embrace our faith and to celebrate what our predecessors did previously to help those in need. First Monday is started with the usual prayers, pledge and birthday announcements. One of the greatest parts, though, is when we recognize all the people who did wonderful things for our community.

Some examples are when students have guest donations money for those in need instead of getting birthday presents or when a family goes to another country to help build houses for hurricane victims. This helps us realize that we can help the world individually, and that we can make an immense difference together.

To end First Monday, the middle school choir sings uplifting songs. The voices of the choir echo through the gym and remind us that singing is one of the highest forms of prayer.

First Monday is one of the countless reasons why I am thankful that my parents sent me to St. Luke the Evangelist School.

**Jill Mires, left, principal of Pope John XXIII School in Madison, speaks with sixth-grade students Summer Martin, Leigh Ann Gamide and Erin Cooper on Jan. 11 about a presentation board created for the CLASS (“Connecting Learning Assures Successful Students”) program.**

**The Criterion Friday, January 27, 2012**

**Catholic Schools Week Supplement**

**Page 11B**

**MADISON—Philip Kahn and Jill Mires were classmates for 12 years at Pope John XXIII School and Father Michael Shawe Memorial Jr./Sr. High School in Madison. Although they spent much of their childhood and teenage years together, they never imagined when they graduated from Shawe in 1987 that, 21 years later, they would work together to ensure the future of the schools that are a ministry of Prince of Peace Parish in Madison. Mires is in her fourth year as Pope John’s principal after previously teaching there for 17 years. And Kahn is in his third year as president of the two schools.

“It’s been fun,” Mires says with a laugh about working with her classmate. “We talk about how things have changed so much. Things that we go through together. And now things that we don’t want our kids to be thinking of doing.

“But we both just want these schools to be so successful. That’s the goal, to make them successful and sustainable for our children and grandchildren.”

Kahn and Mires are leaders at Pope John XXIII and Shawe, making their high school diploma in 1983. Just as the three graduates returned to Madison and the setting that they love, many of the teachers who taught them are still on the staff at Pope John XXIII and Shawe.

Father Craig also graduated from Pope John XXIII and Shawe, earning his high school diploma in 1983. Just as the three graduates returned to Madison and the setting that they love, many of the teachers who taught them are still on the staff at Pope John XXIII and Shawe. And they work together with Father Christopher Craig, Prince of Peace’s pastor, in making the schools as good as they can be and in promoting them in the wider community.

Craig, Prince of Peace’s pastor, in his third year as president of the two schools.

“In it and they know that they’re interested in making it happen.”

—Chelsea Sims

“Successful Students.”

For “Connecting Learning Assures Successful Students.”

“Connecting Learning Assures Successful Students.”

At the closing ceremony, we described each other not just in classmate, but as a family. We all made a pact to make this last year our best ever.

(Emerson Wolf is an eighth-grade student at St. Luke the Evangelist School in Indianapolis.)
Small school systems provide new approach to Catholic education

By Mary Ann Garber

Three small “school systems” in the archdiocese are enhancing the way the Church provides its ministry of Catholic education to students of all ages during this challenging economic time.

In 2009, St. Gabriel the Archangel School and St. Michael the Archangel School in Indianapolis were consolidated by the archdiocese to form the West Deanery Unified Catholic Schools Inc. with nearby Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School.

The merger of the elementary schools on the St. Michael Parish campus next to the deaconery and junior high school enabled the archdiocese to better serve the students from those adjacent parishes by sharing administrative and academic resources as well as governance by one board of directors.

This parish partnership helped to resolve some longstanding financial and enrollment concerns affecting both elementary schools.

Two other small school systems already in place in the archdiocese are achieving similar successes for parishes and families in east-central and southern Indiana.

Seton Catholic Schools in Richmond and Prince of Peace Schools in Madison also share a governance structure and a variety of resources with their elementary schools and high schools.

G. Joseph Peters, associate executive director of Catholic education for the archdiocese, said the St. Gabriel and St. Michael consolidation resulted from a 2009 study of the Indianapolis West Deanery schools approved by Archbishop [now emeritus] Daniel M. Buechlein as the best use of educational resources and facilities for the two parishes, which are only three miles apart.

“It’s a success story, but it wasn’t easy,” Peters said. “There were some struggles getting there … Elementary enrollment is up by 27 students this year.”

Sarah Watson, principal of the consolidated elementary school, brings a unique perspective to her ministry.

She graduated from St. Michael School, returned to her parish years later as a youth minister then was appointed principal of St. Gabriel School, where she served for seven years and assisted with the transition duties for the merger.

“Both schools were performing well academically, but both suffered from declining enrollment,” Watson said. “This year, our [combined] enrollment is 280 students in pre-kindergarten through the eighth grade. Our school serves both parish communities as well as a number of other church communities. … We are a very diverse school religiously and ethnically.”

Last July, with the assistance of Catholic School Management Inc., the board of directors of Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School was reconfigured to include the elementary school.

“Because of the partnership with Cardinal Ritter High School, we are able to expand what we can offer to our students on a daily basis,” Watson said. “The academic possibilities that have opened up between the two schools really benefit the students and families.”

“We have seventh-graders and eighth-graders who take advanced language and math classes at the junior high as well as a number of other curriculum offerings at a high level at Cardinal Ritter,” she said. “Most of our eighth-graders will graduate at the end of the year with dual credits in language arts, composition, digital communication and honors algebra.”

The elementary school and Cardinal Ritter also share faculty members, she said, who teach classes at both schools.

“We provide an extended education for our students,” Watson said. “But this was not an easy process for the two parishes because it required sacrifices. We are grateful for their support. We also are grateful to the board and committee members that worked through this partnership process for two years. We would not be here today without their help. We have some tough times, we are unified and we are blessed to have each other.”

Greg Perkins, Cardinal Ritter’s president and administrative officer of the West Deanery Unified Catholic Schools Inc., oversees the principals of both schools.

“Jo Hoy and Watson—who work together with Perkins as a team on administrative matters … I think the most important aspect of this is that it is a different approach to managing our Catholic schools,” Perkins said. “It is a different governance model. … It helps relieve the parishes of some administrative burdens because running a school is not easy. … It is a very practical, resourceful and efficient approach that allows for more central organization to focus on the needs.”

Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School students represent West Deanery parishes from Indianapolis, Avon, Plainfield and Brownsburg.

In Richmond, Seton Catholic High School principal Rick Ruhl said collaborating on planning, curriculum and student life issues as a small school system has many benefits for the students at the high school and two elementary school campuses.

“We now have a single board of directors for governance of the entire Seton Catholic Schools system,” he said. “The exciting thing that we are finding in our work is that our students have much more flexibility in their academic possibilities that have opened up between the elementary school and the high school.”

Three years ago, Seton Catholic Schools—Seton Catholic Jr./Sr. High School and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Elementary School—began a four-year strategic planning process with assistance from Catholic School Management Inc. and the archdiocesan Office of Catholic Education to reconfigure the board, develop long-range goals and identify areas for possible growth as a Catholic school.

“We promote a family environment, high school students serve as mentors for elementary school students, he said, and occasionally help teach elementary classes. We work hard to provide a family atmosphere, safe environment and great Catholic education.”

High school students serve as mentors for elementary school students, he said, and occasionally help teach elementary classes. We promote a family environment, high school students serve as mentors for elementary school students, he said, and occasionally help teach elementary classes. We work hard to provide a family atmosphere, safe environment and great Catholic education.†

†Sharing resources helps keep the cost of Catholic education affordable, he said. “We are always looking at how we can benefit from sharing resources, whether it is copy machines or assigning teachers to different roles at both schools. We work hard to provide a family atmosphere, safe environment and great Catholic education.”

Sarah Watson, principal of the consolidated St. Michael and St. Gabriel elementary schools in Indianapolis, helps kindergartner Mia Rodriguez with an assignment in teacher Lisa Zetzl’s class on Jan. 12 at the Indianapolis West Deanery school.

Jansen Clark, a fifth-grade student at the consolidated elementary school, listens to a class discussion on Jan. 12.

Patrick Global Jr./Sr. High School senior Chloe Storm, from left, senior Taylor Davis and junior Joe Nichi of Madison share basic information about the French language during a presentation to Pope John XXIII School students in Shawe teacher Aline Schater’s classroom.
First education summit marks new era for Catholic schools

By John Shaughnessy

It was a defining moment for Catholic education in Indiana—a moment when the issues of the Indiana school voucher program, the future of Catholic schools in the state and the importance of Catholic identity in schools were addressed in a historic education summit.

For the first time, educational leaders from the state’s five dioceses met at an education summit to discuss the different ways they can collaborate to make Catholic education even stronger statewide.

When the two-day summit at Marian University in Indianapolis ended, education leaders from the five dioceses—Evansville, Gary, Indianapolis, Lafayette and Fort Wayne-South Bend—had established the groundwork for a new marketing campaign and several other initiatives that could “allow even more students to experience the great, quality Catholic education.”

“We all have the same mission in the state of Indiana,” said Kathy Mears, an assistant superintendent of schools for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, who wrote the executive summary of the Catholic Education Summit 2011 that was held on Nov. 29-30. “We haven’t been maximizing, through collaboration and cooperation, all the gifts we’ve been given. With this approach, the possibilities are endless.”

A main factor that led to the summit was the Indiana school voucher program that became law on July 1, 2011—a program that offers state-funded, financial assistance to families of certain income levels to help them select a school of their choice for their children. (For information about the program and how to apply, see pages 7B and 10B in this supplement.)

While the voucher program connects the school systems of the five dioceses even more and offers opportunities for increased enrollment, it also creates the challenge that the Catholic identity of these schools is not lost as they “become more involved in the educational reform movement in Indiana,” Mears noted.

“We want to make sure our faith is integrated into the standards of what we teach,” Mears said. “If we’re going to teach about the civil rights movement, in addition to talking about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., we’ll talk about Cardinal [Joseph E.] Ritter and how he became integrated Catholic schools in Indianapolis 15 years before Brown v. Board of Education. In Biology, we’ll talk about the sanctity of life.”

Another challenge is to continue to develop teachers and administrators who can teach the faith and lead students to academic excellence—while also finding ways to better compensate those Catholic educators.

“The gap between a Catholic school teacher’s pay and a public school teacher’s pay continues to widen,” Mears said. “I don’t think the average parent knows the difference in compensation. We’re looking at different compensation models.”

Holding the first summit at Marian University also showcased the benefits and possibilities of connecting Catholic elementary schools and high schools to nearby Catholic colleges.

“The state of Indiana talks about P-12 education [pre-kindergarten to 12th grade],” Mears said. “We think it needs to be P-16. There’s expertise at the college level that we can use. I believe other Catholic universities will come on board for the next summit.”

The summit has already led the school systems of the five dioceses to embrace the same marketing theme that will be used by Catholic schools in Indiana—“Catholic Schools: The Good News.”

“We hope it comes to mean Catholic education in Indiana,” Mears said. “The Good News means the Gospel, which is our evangelization. The Good News also means Catholic schools are good for kids.”

Plans to continue the education summit among the five dioceses are also good news for the future of Catholic education in Indiana, according to Mears.

“If the summits will help make our Catholic schools strong and viable,” she said. “Together, we’re going to consider a lot more ideas than we did before. The result will be that we Catholics will come together in community to develop our students into faith-filled adults.

That’s the real goal.”

2011-12 facts about Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis

Catholic schools:

| Catholic: | 68 |
| Non-Catholic: | 15 |
| Total preschool-12: | 72,908 |
| Elementary schools: | 58 (26 in Marion County) |
| High schools: | 11 (seven in Marion County) |
| Preschool programs: | 44 (Pre-K programs for 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds) |
| Extended care programs: | 58 (Pre-K-8 before and after-school care or both) |

Religious composition:

| Catholic: | 85 % |
| Non-Catholic: | 15 % |
| High school graduation rate (Class of 2011): | 99 % |

Percent of graduates entering college (2011): 97 %

NOTE: All figures above this line include private Catholic high schools.

Average tuition rates, first child (est. 2011):

| Catholic | $3,809 |
| Non-Catholic | $5,053 |

NOTE: Catholic tuition is set at the parish level and varies greatly. School receives parish subsidies except for private Catholic high schools, which are not included in these figures.

Estimated Operating Costs of Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese (est. 2011):

| Elementary schools: | $4,900 |
| Interparochial high schools cost-per-pupil: | $8,813 |

Total operating cost of archdiocesan schools (est. 2011): $110 million

Annual savings to Indiana taxpayers (estimated): $200 million

(Estimated using 2011 enrollment excluding capital costs and private high school costs)

Saint Mary’s College ranks among the top 100 “Best National Liberal Arts Colleges” in the U.S. News & World Report 2012 College Guide.

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Sacred connections
Students’ outreach creates special bond with senior citizens

By John Shaughnessy

FRANKLIN—Ryan Long and Sarah Barnard shared the same feeling of being nervous and overwhelmed as they entered the Franklin United Methodist Community for senior citizens with the other students.

The two eighth-grade students from St. Rose of Lima School in Franklin hadn’t had the opportunity in their young lives to interact with senior citizens who have Alzheimer’s disease. So school counselor Nikki Kirch thought the experience could help the fifth- through eighth-graders make a difference to the senior residents. She also hoped the experience would make an impact on the students.

“At first, it was an overwhelming experience, but when we began the game, I saw the smiles on their faces,” said Ryan, 13. “It was like they were getting their inner-kid out. It was a lot of fun. By the end, the experience seemed rewarding for all of us.”

While community service for students has always been a significant focus at St. Rose of Lima School, the visit with the senior citizens who have Alzheimer’s disease was also designed to lead the students to a deeper understanding of their faith.

“We spent all of October talking about the value and sacredness of life,” said Estelle Britner, eighth-grade teacher at St. Rose School. “We talked a lot about babies, but most of them don’t have the experience of seeing older people being sick. This let us talk about the sacredness of life at both ends of life.”

The visits also offered the students the opportunity to look beyond the images they had of the senior citizens, and personally connect with them.

“It was an eye-opener for the kids to see that these aren’t people they should be afraid of,” Britner said. “One of the ladies told the kids that her grandson is playing volleyball in college so our volleyball players were excited about that. And one of the women said her grandson was playing football in college so our football players were excited about that. The whole experience was great for so many of the kids.”

That result was also true for the senior citizens, according to Jack Cronin, activities director at Franklin United Methodist Community in Franklin United Methodist Community.

“The residents talked about the visit for days,” Cronin said. “The students exercised with them, and they were singing songs and playing games with balloons and a parachute. About a week after the final visit, we got about 25 to 30 cards from the students. We passed them out, and the residents really cherished those cards. We’re looking forward to doing it again.”

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Providence graduate embraces faith in home, life and business

By Christa Hoyland
Special to The Criterion

It took 15 years, but the faith that was nurtured in Katie Butt Beckort’s heart while she was a student at Our Lady of Providence Jr./Sr. High School in Clarksville finally blossomed. Raised in the Presbyterian faith, Beckort came to Providence in seventh grade because her mother, a public school teacher, wanted her to have the education that Providence provided. But she learned so much more.

“The teachers made a good impression on me, especially my religion teachers,” said Beckort, a 1995 Providence graduate. “My religion classes and learning the history of the faith built an appreciation for traditional religion in me.”

Still, she had stopped attending church in recent years. And when her mother encouraged her to return to Sunday services, Beckort instead chose to attend Mass. In the spring of 2011, she was received into the full communion of the Church at St. Michael Church in Bradford.

“What I was taught at Providence just stuck with me,” she explained. “I’ve always been intrigued by it. As I grew older, I had a lot more respect and understanding of the Catholic faith, and I wanted to be a part of it.”

Now a member of St. Joseph Parish in Corydon, she plans to have her three sons—Blaine, 5, Duke, 4, and newborn, Henry—baptized in the Catholic faith.

“I have a strong passion for Catholic education, and I want my children to experience it,” she said.

Beckort said it’s amazing that she ever became a Providence student. Her childhood home in Corydon was about 30 miles from the school. Besides, no one else in her family is Catholic, and her father, Thomas Butt, was reluctant to send her to Catholic schools because he feared alienating his independent-pharmacy customers.

Despite those obstacles, a good education for Beckort was the primary concern of her mother. At Providence, she worked hard to meet the high expectations of her teachers and learned the need for community service. As she developed her strong work ethic and commitment to serve others, the then shy seventh-grade student began to grow in confidence.

“Not only did the educational experience change my life, but it was the atmosphere and the respect level that students were expected to maintain that made a lasting impression on me,” she said.

Today, she is a successful businesswoman who owns two Corydon-based businesses—the Real Estate Co. of Southern Indiana, which she co-owns, and Butt Drugs, the independent pharmacy founded by her late grandfather, William Butt, in 1952. She also is the bookkeeper for her husband Brian’s auction business.

And she gives back to Providence as a member of its marketing committee.

Beckort said she never intended to take over the family business after earning a business degree at Indiana University. Yet, after helping at the store during a break between jobs, she has never left.

Her business and marketing acumen has helped the independent pharmacy compete with popular chain stores by offering such services as free curbside pick-up and delivery. She also modernized the store by installing a pharmacy automation system that fills, labels and caps each prescription bottle—technology not often found in small, independent stores.

Still, Beckort keeps the personal touch and knows many customers by name. Just as she learned at Providence, she treats each customer like they are the most important person in the store.

“At the end of the day,” she said, “you see what you do for a lot of people.”

(Christa Hoyland is director of communications and alumni relations for Our Lady of Providence Jr./Sr. High School in Clarksville.)

Archdiocesan students succeed at high levels on assessment tests

Third- through eighth-grade students at Catholic elementary schools in the archdiocese took the Indiana Statewide Test of Educational Progress in the spring of 2011. The Indiana Department of Education has a goal that 90 percent of all Indiana students will pass ISTEP+ by 2012. More than 90 percent of archdiocesan Catholic school students passed both the English/language arts (93 percent passing) and mathematics (92 percent passing) portions of the test for 2011 as compared to 73 percent of students at all Indiana schools taking the test.

On a related measure, 93 percent of archdiocesan schools compared to 51 percent of all Indiana public schools earned the top 2 percent Public Law 221 performance categories on ISTEP+ scores and annual improvement, while 1 percent of archdiocesan schools and 20 percent of all public schools placed in the bottom two categories. Archdiocesan schools have steadily increased students’ performance since 2007.

The archdiocese was recently honored by the College Board as an “AP District of the Year” for the increased number of high school students taking advanced placement (AP) classes and for the high marks that students are earning (3 or higher on the AP exams).
Principal overcomes challenges to lead high school students

By John Shaughnessy

In every child’s life, seeds of doubt and seeds of inspiration get planted.

Sooner or later, one of those seeds takes root, making all the difference in how a life blooms.

Just look at the life of John Hegarty, principal of Father Thomas Scecina Memorial High School in Indianapolis. His story could serve as a guide for any student who has ever wondered and worried about overcoming the challenges to a dream.

When Hegarty was a teenager, the seeds of doubt were spread for him when college advisers in both the United States and Ireland recommended that he shouldn’t pursue a career in education because he had a speech impediment that caused him to stutter noticeably. 

Doubt stemming from Hegarty’s speech impediment kept him from following his dream. Nine years passed before he had the strength to look within and told himself that smile, that inner peace.”

Mother’s hometown in Ireland when he was a child. “It made him, that smile, that inner peace.”

In the United States before his family returned to his mother’s hometown in Ireland when he was a child. “It made him, that smile, that inner peace.”

Friends squeezed into a tiny Fiat 850 and drove through the United States and Ireland recommended that he shouldn’t pursue a career in education because he had a speech impediment that caused him to stutter noticeably. 

When Hegarty was a teenager, the seeds of doubt were spread for him when college advisers in both the United States and Ireland recommended that he shouldn’t pursue a career in education because he had a speech impediment that caused him to stutter noticeably.

It would take another two years—and from following his dream. Nine years passed before he had the strength to look within and told himself that smile, that inner peace.”

In the United States before his family returned to his mother’s hometown in Ireland when he was a child. “It made him, that smile, that inner peace.”

It was 1990, and two guys came down to the bar where I was working as a bartender, and asked me if I would coach the boys’ soccer team at Scecina,” recalls Hegarty, who played Gaelic football and semi-pro soccer in England in the 1980s. “As I began coaching, the desire to teach came back.”

In the 1990s, Hegarty married his wife, Patricia, welcomed two sons into the world, continued to work and pursued his degree in education at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. He earned his degree in 1999, the same year he started teaching at Scecina. A short while later, the severity of his speech impediment faded significantly.

“It started to go away the first year I was teaching,” he says. “I noticed that the kids didn’t care. I felt if the kids didn’t care, then I shouldn’t worry about anyone else. In the 20 years I’ve been at Scecina, I’ve never heard a child mock me because of my speech impediment. That’s amazing. I came to the realization that it’s part of who I am, that’s how God made me, and if you have a problem with that, talk to God. It’s not totally gone, but that approach has helped it to go away.”

It also helped Hegarty to realize he had found a home at Scecina. In 2005, he became the vice principal. In 2010, he became the vice president of student life. He started as principal this school year.

“Strengths are academics, teacher development and a student-centered approach to education,” he says. “At Scecina, we have a huge cross-section of society. Every child comes in with a different set of strengths and weaknesses. And we’re small enough [343 students] that we’re in a position to know what those strengths and weaknesses are, and direct our attention to them.”

One of the strengths of the school—its foundation of faith—led to one of the most memorable moments that Hegarty has experienced at Scecina. It came on the morning of the terrorist attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York on Sept. 11, 2001.

“I had an Honors English class that morning,” he recalls. “We started praying the rosary in the classroom. That was so powerful a moment when those students got down on their knees and prayed. It helped us get through it. It’s a blessing to teach in a Catholic school.”

Fans of Hegarty believe it’s a blessing that he’s an educator at a Catholic school. “The Catholic faith is at the core of his identity,” says Joseph Thber, president of Scecina High School. “John recognizes the unique gifts and strengths in every student. He’s a hard worker with a great sense of humor. John values our traditions, values and mission. He has been a significant factor in Scecina Memorial’s growth and success for many years.”

It was 1990, and two guys came down to the bar where I was working as a bartender, and asked me if I would coach the boys’ soccer team at Scecina,” recalls Hegarty, who played Gaelic football and semi-pro soccer in England in the 1980s. “As I began coaching, the desire to teach came back.”

In the 1990s, Hegarty married his wife, Patricia, welcomed two sons into the world, continued to work and pursued his degree in education at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. He earned his degree in 1999, the same year he started teaching at Scecina. A short while later, the severity of his speech impediment faded significantly.

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It started to go away the first year I was teaching,” he says. “I noticed that the kids didn’t care. I felt if the kids didn’t care, then I shouldn’t worry about anyone else. In the 20 years I’ve been at Scecina, I’ve never heard a child mock me because of my speech impediment. That’s amazing. I came to the realization that it’s part of who I am, that’s how God made me, and if you have a problem with that, talk to God. It’s not totally gone, but that approach has helped it to go away.”

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Hegarty had such an influence on Francisco Gomez that the 1998 Scecina graduate became a teacher after he played soccer for Hegarty and served as an assistant coach with him.

“His type of person who puts kids first,” Gomez says. “When he coached me, everyone on the team played hard for him because he cared about us, and we cared about him. He’s just a wonderful human being.

For Hegarty, it all comes down to a motto that guides his life, a motto that dominates a wall in his office: “May you live every day of your life with faith, hope, love.”

It’s an Irish blessing from an educator who overcame the challenges to live his dream.

“I feel very strongly that I’m a role model for kids,” he says. “I have an impediment, but it’s not a rock, it’s not a wall. I want to tell people that whatever they have, you can get around it. It may slow you down, but it can’t stop you. We have some kids here who have speech impediments. I tell them they can do whatever they want—especially teach.”

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