Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It is a great blessing to celebrate the apostolate of Catholic schools with you!

Our Catholic schools throughout central and southern Indiana are an integral part of the incredible foundation that, by the grace of God and the witness of many generations of the faithful, is our shared inheritance, responsibility and opportunity.

During the Second Vatican Council, the Holy Father, in union with the bishops of the world, proclaimed that Catholic schools are of the "utmost importance." Indeed, it is "abundantly clear in an unbroken list of statements" from both the Holy See’s Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education and from the bishops of the United States that Catholic schools are "the most efficacious means available to the Church for the education of children and young people."

Our Catholic schools are the "fullest and best" opportunity to "promote the integration of religious truth and values with the rest of life."

With Christ, the Master Teacher, as their cornerstone, these ministries of hope make the Gospels and the sacraments a way of life. They continue Christ’s own ministry as priest, prophet and king through their worship, faithful teaching and witness to the world.

Please join me this week in thanking and praying for all who have made, and who continue to make, the mission of our Catholic schools possible.

Please join me in praying for the future of this essential apostolate. The Church "earnestly entreats pastors and all the faithful to spare no sacrifice in helping Catholic schools fulfill their function in a continually more perfect way."

May our ministry in this generation be a "prophetic choice," ensuring excellent and accessible Catholic schools both for today and for the many tomorrows to come.

Yours in Christ, Our Teacher,

Archbishop Charles C. Thompson
By Natalie Hoefer

Megan Schaller and Ryan Sharr have become both students and cheerleaders when it comes to the STEM approach at St. Barnabas School in Indianapolis.

The two recently completed the Trusty Family STEM Teaching Fellow program through the Center for STEE Education at the University of Notre Dame. The program focuses on increasing student interest and learning in STEM disciplines through the support and growth of high-quality STEM teachers.

“A STEM lesson is when you take any two or more [from the acronym], and both are being used and graded in a project,” explains Schaller, the school’s assistant principal. “They’re given a problem with real-world effects, and use what they learn to work with other people. They have to collaborate, engage socially, take leadership roles.”

“The momentum didn’t stop there. Parents hear from kids [that] they love STEM,” says Schaller. “We wanted parents to see kids engaging in STEM challenges, and also themselves to do a [project] or problem-solve or test.”

“Here’s this void in the world today of problem solvers,” says Schäfer. “We’re doing our best at St. Barnabas [to see that] all of our students, regardless of gender or socio-economic status or cultural background, can work together to solve problems, to take real world struggles and brainstorm solutions.”

**STEM plants roots of ‘cool’ learning in New Albany Deanery**

**By Natalie Hoefer**

Laura Swessel, a high school science teacher at Our Lady of Providence Jr./Sr. High School in Clarksville, knows the importance of STEM fields first hand—she used to own an engineering consulting firm.

“Just working in a manufacturing environment now, you have to have some familiarity with computers, either on the user or the programming side,” she notes. “Regardless of what field you go into, the critical thinking you gain from STEM helps you with any Analytical you end up in.”

To provide students with more hands-on STEM experiences, Swessel started STEM camps in 2016 for youths throughout the New Albany Deanery in first grade through ninth grade.

During the camps, which are broken down by grade ranges, participants take part in projects ranging from basic computer coding and making a volcano to creating to storm-proof house—which she tests against a leaf blower she calibrated to simulate category one through four hurricanes.

To accommodate those on the summer camp waiting list, Swessel created a STEM club to meet five times during the school year. More than 110 students participated last spring.

Both the STEM club and the camp include visits by professionals in those fields. Among those who spoke to the youths were a dentist, an aerospace engineer, an electrical engineer, an emergency room director and a statistician.

In addition to getting students excited about STEM fields, Swessel uses the camp and club as an opportunity for high school students to serve as helpers. Not only do the older teens get experience mentoring, but it helps kids to see “it’s cool” to like STEM fields, she says.

Fourth-grader Lydia Cosper says she likes to learn about “my interests such as chain reactions, engineering, and freestyle math,” while fifth-grader Matt Wertzel says he “love[s] being able to experiment with creating my own video games. Both are members of St. John Paul II Parish in Sellersburg and attend the parish school.

And being deanery-wide and open to non-Catholics, the camp and club allow students to meet youths from other schools.

“I like meeting new people from throughout the deanery,” says Ginger Atingzer, a member of Holy Family Parish in New Albany who attends sixth grade at the parish school. “I love learning about the importance of STEM and how it affects how we live, and I like having something to look forward to after school.”

**Students ‘dig’ discovering new ways to see the world**

**By Natalie Hoefer**

The Thanksgiving feast at St. Bartholomew School in Columbus last year was particularly special: among the fare enjoyed by students and staff members was lettuce grown by the first and fifth-grade class at the school in an outdoor learning lab, an area containing a permanent greenhouse near 25 feet by 12 feet, in tilled beds and garden beds.

“We asked every grade level to plan a crop to use the outdoor learning lab to cover the science standards for their grade,” says principal Helen Heckman. “We might together use our school’s math and technology teachers so they can better collaborate and look at STEM initiatives.”

St. Bartholomew middle school science teacher Bridget Steele gushes about the opportunities provided by the outdoor learning lab.

“All middle school students will complete the Junior Master Gardener Program over the next two years and become certified,” she says. “[A] rocks and minerals dig site allows students to study the rock cycle while identifying rocks that they dig out themselves.”

The area also offers a worm farm where students learn about the importance of soil,” adds Steele.

Middle school students will collect temperature readings and collect data on decomposition rates to engineer the best composting system, and fourth graders will learn about the importance of native species and the interdependence of pollinators and flowering plants in the lab’s butterfly garden and monarch watch station.

Steele notes the importance of math in “evaluating data on growth measurements and other activities related to the greenhouse, but also on weather-related readings, data collection and graphing at our weather station.”

And the current integration of the new space into class curricula “is just the tip of the iceberg,” she says, noting that the outdoor learning lab is still in its first phase.

“Steele is not the only one excited about the outdoor learning lab.”

“We worked the dirt, then we planted the seeds by row,” says fifth-grader Amelia Fay of her class lettuce project. “It was really cool and fun. It was very delicious when we cooked it.”

Third-grader Ella Campbell, who joined her classmates in testing how plants grow in various soils, thought it was “cool because we could see how [the plants] grew each day.”

The students’ enthusiasm proves a point for Steele: “Kids learn best from doing authentic and relevant projects. The motivation and depth of learning are just two wonderful outcomes of project-based STEM-related content.”

The Outdoor Learning Lab naturally connects our students to our community partners and real-world problems. Our students discover a love of learning, and see that digging in the dirt, sorting seeds, handling bees and worms—this stuff isn’t gross, boring or scary, but real and amazing.”
By John Shaughnessy

The “aha” moment came for Lisa Vogel as the Catholic school principal dealt with two students who were constantly arguing on the playground a year ago.

Trying to find a way to change their attitudes, Vogel suddenly heard herself telling them, “We’re all on the same team. We’re all on Team Jesus!”

Just as soon as she said those last two words, Vogel knew she had the theme that she hoped would guide the students, the teachers, the staff and herself at St. Mary School in North Vernon during this current school year.

So on the first day of school in August, she gathered everyone in a big huddle—“because that’s what teams do,” she says—and shared the theme of “Team Jesus.”

Trying to add a concrete symbol to that theme, Vogel showed everyone that day a huge sports bag normally used for storing and carrying baseball bats. Then she asked the students what they should put into the bag to represent Team Jesus.

Soon, a Bible was placed into the bag. So was a crucifix. Then a rosary.

Vogel also told everyone that one of the things that teammates often do is give “high fives” to each other, so she encouraged everyone to adopt that practice too.

“I told them that each of the five fingers represents one of the words I wanted them to say to each other—‘I am here for you,’” Vogel recalls. “So when they see someone struggling on the playground or in the classroom, they should just offer them a high-five and they’ll know you are there for them.”

That practice has caught on at the school. Teachers high-five students. Students high-five students. And teachers high-five teachers.

“I love seeing our team having each other’s backs,” Vogel says.

That caring for each other has extended to a concern for others—a concern that’s reflected in the school’s monthly service projects that are led by a different class each month.

The eighth-grade class organized a collection of new and used shoes for the people of Haiti. The seventh-grade students went to the three Catholic cemeteries in Jennings County, grooming some of the gravesites and placing the silk flower arrangements that they had made on some of the graves.

When each service project has been completed, each class has put a symbol of their efforts into the Team Jesus baseball bat bag. So the eighth graders added a pair of flip-flops in there. And the seventh graders placed one of their flower arrangements in the bag.

The efforts for Team Jesus have left their mark on the students.

Fifth-grader Charlie Taylor confesses that he really didn’t think much about the concept of Team Jesus when Vogel initially shared it, but he saw the difference the approach made when his father, Brian, went into a hospital to receive a heart transplant.

His classmates rallied around him and another fifth-grader whose mother is battling cancer. The class focused its monthly service project on raising money to help school families reeling from such concerns.

“I like that it helps people who need it,” Charlie says.

Third-grader Aubree Crane shares how her class built a “rosary walk” on the lawn of the school during October—the month of the rosary—creating and coloring pictures that showed the beads and the mysteries of the rosary. Then each class in the school used the rosary walk daily to pray at least a decade for others.

“I thought it was a really good idea—and a good opportunity to pray for people who need it,” Aubree says. “I think it’s a good way to get closer to God, and do better things.”

That’s exactly what Vogel wants for everyone on Team Jesus. And sometimes the blessings of that approach come in ways that surprise even her.

“Before Christmas, I was a little distracted walking down the hall, and this second-grader was coming toward me,” she recalls. “As she approached me, she had her hand in the air, and she said, ‘I am here for you, Mrs. Vogel.’ And she gave me a high-five.”

“I said to myself, ‘I think we’re getting this.’”

“I want my students to have empathy for everyone. Jesus loved everyone. I want my students to not just love their best friends, but to love everyone.” †

The smiles of Karlen Hauersperger, left, Adylin Cox, Kaylen Cox, Brooklyn Woods, Eliza Kreutzjans and Drew Spurlock reflect their support for “Team Jesus,” the approach that guides students and staff members during this school year at St. Mary School in North Vernon. (Submitted photo)
High schools build relationships with nearby parish schools

By Sean Gallagher

Indiana’s state government has launched a series of initiatives over the last decade or more that recognize parents’ freedom to choose the best education for their children.

They include allowing children to enroll in public school systems beyond the one in which they live, creating charter schools, establishing tax credits for contributions to organizations that provide scholarships to private schools and, most notably, the state’s voucher program, which is arguably the most robust in the nation.

This empowerment of parents to use their freedom to ensure the best education for their children has created an educational marketplace in which schools must, in a sense, market themselves to parents and students while showing them how the educational experience they offer would be best for them.

Leaders in Catholic high schools across central and southern Indiana recognize this challenge and are responding to it:

“It is absolutely vital that we can get information on Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School out to the public,” said Kyle Powers, Cardinal Ritter’s director of admissions. “Our students do so many great things academically, athletically and in the community, and we want the city of Indianapolis to see how well prepared our students are for post-high school life.”

An important way that Cardinal Ritter lets the broader community know about the educational offers is by building up relationships with parish grade schools in the Indianapolis West Deanery.

This happens in a variety of initiatives, such as academic competitions among parish school students sponsored by Cardinal Ritter and having grade school students come to Cardinal Ritter on Halloween to go trick-or-treating from classroom to classroom.

Other Catholic high schools in the archdiocese seek in similar ways with nearby Catholic schools.

“Building community is at the heart of a great Franciscan Catholic school,” said Diane Laake, president of the Oldenburg Academy of the Immaculate Conception in Oldenburg. “We are committed to evangelizing, empowering and educating our youth in the best achieved in a K-12 educational experience. We build on the foundation of faith established in our nearby schools, and provide the essential tools as our young adults make those critical decisions about the next phase of their life journey.”

Among the partnerships that the Oldenburg Academy has established is a program where academic students tutor students of St. Louis School in Batesville.

Samantha Sheets, a junior at Oldenburg Academy, was a victim of the Oldenburg Academy’s Immature Conception when she was a student at St. Louis.

“I am extremely beneficial and helped me score higher on my tests,” Samantha said, adding that having been helped in her math class by a student now at Oldenburg Academy “made a special because I now have the opportunity to return the help that was given to me while I was a student at St. Louis.”

Laake said that having relationships with their neighboring parish schools and sponsoring academic competitions enhances the community it can offer.

“When students serve as an Oldenburg Academy ambassador in any of these programs with our nearby schools, they serve as role models,” she said. “This responsibility inspires them to always be and do their best.

Often, it also helps to reveal a skill or talent they may possess, such as public speaking, teaching, organizational skills or writing. It helps to ensure that they experience being part of a larger community of faith, too.”

Nancy Buening, principal of St. Mary Academy in Greensburg, appreciates the relationship St. Mary has with Oldenburg Academy, especially in the academic competitions in which St. Mary students participate, and thinks it is a way to help her students see ways to continue their Catholic education.

“Any time you can get students working with others or performing in front of an audience, you are building on skills that they will use for a lifetime,” Buening said. “We support Catholic education and want students to know that there are other alternatives. I feel like it is a way we can extend our mission even when they are no longer in our building.”

Building up community is a part of a Catholic school’s identity. So fostering relationships with nearby Catholic grade schools isn’t just a marketing ploy for Tyler Mayer, vice president for institutional advancement at Bishop Chatard High School in the Indianapolis North Deanery.

“It is our responsibility to reach out to as many families as we can and provide them with a genuine understanding of who we are, and what we are all about.”

Students from parish schools in the Indianapolis West Deanery pose with Cardinal Ritter Jr./Sr. High School students in Indianapolis on Oct. 31, 2017, when the grade school students came to Cardinal Ritter to trick-or-treat in its classrooms. Cardinal Ritter and other catholic schools have established tax credits and vouchers programs to assist deeney schools, and provide the educational experience it can provide to its high school students.

“Bishop Chatard, in large part due to the unique relationship with the North Deanery, parishes and schools, and, offers the strongest college preparatory program and faith formation experience for most students and families,” the school said.

At the same time, Mayer and other leaders at Bishop Chatard recognize that, with many other high quality private and public high schools close by, they can’t presume that families and students will choose their school.

“We have two goals for each student that comes to Bishop Chatard: college and heaven,” Mayer said. “There are many great choices in regard to high school. However, they are not the same. Each school has a different approach and focus and, therefore, a different culture. Bishop Chatard offers a genuine Catholic education.

“It is our responsibility to reach out to as many families as we can and provide them with a genuine understanding of who we are, and what we are all about.”

We were being what Jesus wants us to be,” Seton High School senior says

By John Shaughnessy

As one of 24 seniors at Seton Catholic High School in Richmond, Sarah Gray enjoys an extensive list of the ways that a Catholic education has enhanced her life.

“It’s let me get a well-rounded education while helping me stay on track with my faith. Being in a small Catholic school, we’re really close to our teachers. They really focus on you as a person and on your learning.

Plus we have theology class, we go to Mass at least once a week, and we pray in every class. That has helped me draw closer to God and my faith every single day.”

She also savors the friendships with her classmates, many of whom have been together since they began pre-school at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School 14 years ago.

“That’s made us really close. Plus we go on retreats every year in high school, and that’s made us even closer. I’ve definitely grown in my faith because of the community we have here.”

Sports camps are among the ways that Catholic high schools in the archdiocese try to make a continuing connection with students from nearby parish schools. Here, Josh Coons, a student-athlete of Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis, shares a tip during a football camp for third- to eighth-graders at the school in the summer of 2017.

The student-athlete in volleyball and basketball says she also appreciates the opportunities school has given her to live her faith, including a weeklong mission trip in the summer of 2017 when she helped in a homeless shelter in Virginia.

“It was cool seeing how we were being what Jesus wants us to be—being servants to people.”

Sarah Gray
A dream come true’ connects school community

Luz Caldera had the dream for a long time.

The dream connected her childhood home in Mexico, the Indianapolis Catholic school that has become part of her family, and the faith that has guided her life.

Caldera’s dream became a reality recently during a special celebration at Central Catholic School in Indianapolis on Dec. 12, 2017.

On that day, the school unveiled a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe during an emotional ceremony that struck to the hearts of the 243 students—and their families—who represent 86 percent of the school’s enrollment.

“I was close to tears,” recalls Caldera, the school’s administrative assistant who played a critical role in obtaining the statue that was made in Guadalajara, Mexico. “I felt a comfort, a peace, to have Our Lady of Guadalupe so close. Every time a parent walks into the school now, they look at the statue and their eyes shine. I believe it’s brought a new pride and joy to our school.”

Caldera knows well the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the special significance it holds to natives of Mexico—how the Blessed Mother appeared to St. Juan Diego in 1531 in Mexico, and how on Dec. 12 of that year, she filled his cloak with roses, a cloak that bore her image when he removed the roses.

“It’s the only big miracle we’ve known,” she says. When people ask for something, she’s the one we ask for help. Of course, we have to do our part always.

That’s exactly what the community of Central Catholic School did to give the statue a home.

When principal Ruth Hurrle arrived at the school for her first year during the summer of 2017, she talked to Caldera about the school’s traditions—and the traditions they should add.

“Luz told me how important the Guadalupe tradition and story is to the Hispanic community, specifically the Mexican community,” Hurrle says. “She talked about how much it would mean to have a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I said, ‘Let’s get one!’

“Luz’s mother was already planning a trip to Mexico to visit the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. So we thought it would be amazing to get a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe from Guadalajara, Mexico.”

So did the school community, which began a series of grassroots efforts to raise more than $2,000 for the statue.

Parents who worked at local businesses put up boxes by cash registers, asking for donations for the statue. The school sold suckers for a quarter and cups of horchata, asking a dollar for the popular Mexican drink.

“The largest donation we got was $20,” Hurrle says. “We did a basket raffle for each class that ended up raising several hundred dollars. That put us over the top.”

The large statue was unveiled at the school on the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe during a ceremony in which students in traditional Mexican attire paraded toward the statue. There, they placed roses at its base.

The statue was then blessed and dedicated during a Mass for the students and their families at the school, which is one of the five Notre Dame Alliance for Catholic Education Academies in the archdiocese.

“Our families are very faith-filled people,” Hurrle says. “They want their children to attend a Catholic school, and they’re grateful for a Catholic education. It gives me so much hope for the future of the Catholic Church.”

The statue also symbolizes hope for the present, Caldera insists.

“The students see her as part of our life now.”

Caldera says, “It’s hard to believe that we did it, that we have something like that at our school now. It’s like a dream come true.”

Luz Caldera cherishes having a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe inside the main entrance of Central Catholic School in Indianapolis because it represents the Hispanic culture of many of the school’s families. The school community used grassroots efforts to raise more than $2,000 for the statue which was made in Guadalajara, the community in Mexico where the Blessed Mother appeared to St. Juan Diego in 1531. (Photo by John Shaughnessy)

My class is just like a family

By John Shaughnessy

Leigh Anne Gamimde was 8 when she faced the kind of difficult transition that would have challenged someone much older.

She moved from the Philippines to the southern Indiana community of Madison to live with her mother—a transition that also included starting at a new school when her command of the English language was rudimentary.

Ten years later, Leigh Anne looks back on that time at Pope John XXIII School and still marvels at the reception she received from her classmates as a new third-grader.

“It was very scary for me because I wasn’t familiar with anything in America. I was expecting them to be mean because I was different from everyone else. But it wasn’t like that. I’ve never felt any discrimination, and no one bullied me because I wasn’t from here. I’ve just been welcomed since the time I came here. It just really eased my nerves, and gave me another look at people.”

That feeling has intensified during the past nine years, says Leigh Anne, now one of 28 seniors at Father Michael Shawe Memorial Jr./Sr. High School in Madison.

“My class is just like a family. We’ve helped each other grow.”

So has the Catholic education she’s received at the two Catholic schools in Madison.

“It’s helped me get closer to God and my faith. And it’s helped me discover myself more. At Shawe, we do things that challenge us and push us out of our comfort zone. It’s made me realize I’m capable of so much more than I thought. It’s made me more courageous and outgoing with people, too.

“Being with the same teachers, I’m much more comfortable talking to them. I’m not afraid to ask them for help. And being with the same people, I’ve made long-term friends. I know they’re going to be there for me even after we’re out of school. I’m really thankful for everyone. Being a senior, I’ve learned to appreciate everyone even more.”

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Catholic Schools Week Supplement  Page 5B
As Father James Wilmoth shares the story, it soon becomes clear that it captures the heart of everything that’s good about Catholic education.

After all, it’s the story of the students of one Catholic school reaching out to help the students of another Catholic school that was severely damaged by a natural disaster—the story of two schools that once weren’t even aware of each other coming together through a common bond of faith.

Then there’s the angle to the story that Father Wilmoth would be the first to downplay—the story of how this 78-year-old pastor of St. Roch Parish in Indianapolis once again showed his 53-year commitment to Catholic education by putting the needs of a devastated Catholic school community before the needs of his parish’s own school.

The story started in August of 2017 when Father Wilmoth watched televised news reports showing Hurricane Harvey roaring through Rockport, Texas—a hurricane that is believed to be the strongest to make landfall in Texas.

When Father Wilmoth watched televised news reports showing Hurricane Harvey in August of 2017. (Submitted photo)

As he watched, he thought about the strength, power, and devastation of the storm, which affected more than 3.6 million residents. All the while, father was thinking about the community affected by the hurricane and what he could do to help.

Father Wilmoth, who soon shared his plan with the children of St. Roch School.

“I told the kids I’d like for you to raise $20,000, and we won’t keep any of it. All the money will go to Sacred Heart School,” he recalls. “Then I talked it up at church one Sunday. The kids caught onto it, and it took off. We got to $20,000 and met our goal. So I said, ‘Let’s do a goal plus. Maybe we can get to $25,000.’ People really responded. We ended up sending them close to $26,500.”

The people of St. Roch School and Parish also ended up receiving a wealth of thanks from the community of Sacred Heart School, a school that re-opened on Jan. 4.

“I am so amazed at your awesome total donation to our school,” wrote Sacred Heart principal Kathy Barnes in a thank-you note to St. Roch. “You and your school, St. Roch, really ROCK!! I just can’t imagine how you raised so much money in having your Walk-a-Thon, but I am impressed.”

“Please, relay to your students, families and staff our gratitude and appreciation for not only your check, but for your prayers. Those heartfelt prayers are helping us, I’m sure. May God bless you all abundantly!”

God has, Father Wilmoth says. That’s why the school and the parish wanted to share their blessings.

“It didn’t surprise me that people in St. Roch would respond that way,” he says. “But the amount of money we got did surprise me. I was so proud of how they responded to other people. Those people needed to understand we are their brothers and sisters even though they didn’t know us.”

St. Roch’s efforts reflected one of his favorite Scripture passages, he noted: “Whatever you do for the least of my brothers and sisters, you’re doing for me” (Mt. 25:40).

He believes that passage is the essence of the Catholic faith and Catholic education.

“I’ve loved Catholic education during my 53 years as a priest,” Father Wilmoth says. “I look back on my life and see what it’s done for me. And Catholic education has been a terrific contributor to all of society, not just our Church. Thousands and thousands of people have benefitted from Catholic education.

“That’s what Catholic education is all about—the fact that Jesus is the focus of our schools. That’s what makes it so successful.”

As pastor of St. Roch Parish in Indianapolis, Father James Wilmoth has always had a close connection with the students at the parish school—a connection that led to the students raising more than $26,000 earlier this year to help a Catholic school in Texas devastated by Hurricane Harvey in August of 2017. (Submitted photo)

‘Catholic education has become fundamental to my life,’ student says

By John Shaughnessy

After two years at a public high school, Nick Ford is happy to be returning to his Catholic education roots by attending Bishop Chatard High School in Indianapolis.

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“The best as I can to what he tells me every day.”

His experiences at Bishop Chatard have helped him in that effort, he says.

“Every day, I’ve noticed that I’m just chipping away at any imperfections. I know I won’t be perfect, but I have to try. Being in this Catholic environment helps me not just as an academic scholar, but as an all-around person.”

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Research reveals the lasting influence of Catholic education

By Gina Kuntz Fleming
Archdiocesan superintendent of Catholic schools

Did you know that graduates of Catholic schools are more likely to vote, earn higher wages, be civically engaged, be more committed to service as adults, and even demonstrate more tolerance of diverse views than their peers?

Research over the past two decades continues to illustrate the favorable results produced through Catholic education and formation.

Catholic schools build communities that live and act the fundamental conviction stated so beautifully by Pope Francis: “The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free.”

This is our first and most important task in Catholic education in central and southern Indiana: evangelization. That is, proclaiming the love, mercy and grace of God. Pope Francis teaches us what this means: “Proclaiming Christ means showing that to believe in and to follow him is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful, capable of filling life with new splendor and profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties. There is an inseparable bond, our Holy Father teaches, between truth, goodness and beauty” (“The Joy of the Gospel,” #167).

This is why we need Catholic schools.

We need schools of the Gospel, schools of truth, goodness and beauty.

With exceptional Catholic school leaders and teachers, dedicated staff and volunteers, committed families and supportive pastors and religious, our Catholic schools continue to thrive and have room to grow further across the more than 13,000 square miles of our archdiocese!

Many thanks go to Archbishop Charles C. Thompson and all of you who support our Catholic schools as an essential ministry of our Church.

Through your prayer, leadership, volunteerism and financial support, our young people are grounded in the very principles of our faith that will aid them in proclaiming their love for God, and all that is good, right and just.

May God bless each of you and all those who serve in Catholic education today and in the future.

Educator sets high expectations for students—and herself

By John Shaughnessy

As an educator in a Catholic school, Christine Exline sets the standard high for herself and her students.

“Quality Catholic education models the life of Christ,” notes Exline, who was a finalist for the 2017 Saint Theodore Excellence in Education Award, the highest honor for an educator in the archdiocese.

“As teachers, we must be the body of Christ. We will hold our students to high expectations, but we will guide them along the path to meet these expectations.”

That combination of challenge and Christ-like concern marks Exline’s approach as she serves as the director of support services at St. Monica School in Indianapolis.

She shares the story of one of her most rewarding experiences in her 18 years of teaching in Catholic schools. It involves a former eighth-grade student and a conference she scheduled for him—a conference to develop an educational plan for him.

“As an eighth grader, students are welcome to be part of the conversation about their education,” Exline says. “He did not want to attend the conference. He was nervous, and did not want to hear what was said about him. I encouraged him to be part of his story; that while it may be hard to listen to strengths and weaknesses, I wanted him to really take part in the conversation.

“Reassuring him that it was completely his decision, I attended the conference without him. Five minutes into the conference, he knocked on the door, having left recess to join me. He was nervous and uncomfortable, but he showed up. He knew I was showing up for him. He wasn’t sure he would be a teacher, beyond a shadow of a doubt I was where he needed to be, doing what I needed to be doing.”

A few weeks later, the youth began a conversation with Exline, telling her he wanted to be like her when he grew up.

“He wasn’t sure he would be a teacher, but no matter what, he wanted to help people,” she recalls. “Tearing up in front of a small group of eighth-grade boys was a first for me, but I didn’t mind. That day, I knew how much I meant to them. I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt I was where I needed to be, doing what I needed to be doing.”

EASTSIDE CATHOLIC SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP
CELEBRATING CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK ON THE EASTSIDE OF INDIANAPOLIS

Our Lady of Lourdes
30 South Downey
Indianapolis, IN 46219
317.357.3316 • ollindy.org

OPEN HOUSE
Sunday, January 28
11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Catholic Schools

Little Flower Catholic School
1401 North Bosart, Indianapolis, IN 46201
317.353.2282 • lflowerparishschool.org

OPEN HOUSE
Sunday, January 28 • 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Holy Spirit Catholic School
7241 East 10th Street, Indianapolis, IN 46219
317.352.1243 • holyspiritindy.org

INFORMATION SUNDAY
Sunday, January 28 • 10:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. • Holy K and K Round Up at 10:30 a.m.
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS ARE …
- Centered in the person of Jesus Christ
- Contributing to the evangelizing mission of the Church
- Distinguished by excellence
- Committed to educate the whole child
- Steeped in a Catholic world view
- Sustained by Gospel witness
- Shaped by communion and community
- Accessible to all students
- Established by the expressed authority of the bishop

RESEARCH SAYS …
- Catholic schools tend to operate as communities rather than bureaucracies, which links to higher levels of teacher commitment, student engagement and student achievement (Marks, 2009).
- In Catholic schools, the student achievement gap is smaller than in public schools (Jeynes, 2007; Marks & Lee, 1989).
- Latino and African American students in Catholic schools are more likely to graduate from high school and college (Grogger & Neal, 2000).
- Graduates of Catholic high schools are more likely to earn higher wages (Neal, 1997).
- Catholic schools tend to produce graduates who are more civically engaged, more tolerant of diverse views, and more committed to service as adults (Campbell, 2001; Wolf, Greene, Kleitz, & Thalhammer, 2001).
- When a Catholic school closes, neighborhood disorder increases (Brinig & Garnett, 2009).

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Generations build on each other’s work to make saints and scholars

By Julie Stockman and John Shaughnessy

RIPLEY COUNTY—At exactly noon, the bells from St. Nicholas Church ring through the countryside near Sunman and echo through the parish school, leading the students to stand, face the nearest crucifix and pray the Angelus.

“The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary….”

That daily prayer by the kindergartners through eighth-graders is just one of the traditional Catholic rituals that mark their days at their school in the Batesville Deanery in southeastern Indiana.

Throughout the year, morning offering prayer begins each school day, and an act of contrition concludes it. Students say grace before and after lunch. And every Friday during Lent, they visit the Stations of the Cross in the church.

St. Nicholas’ 130 students also wear red shirts on the feast days that celebrate martyred saints. And they participate in the celebration of the Mass three mornings during the week, including Fridays when the pastor, Father Shaun Whittington, hosts a question-and-answer session after the Mass, letting students of all ages questions about the Catholic faith.

Father Whittington also makes the sacrament of reconciliation available to each grade a couple of times during the school year. And when a student wants to receive that sacrament individually, a teacher will send a text to the pastor to make that arrangement.

“It’s truly amazing,” says principal Daniel Swygart about all the reasons why the Catholic faith is a part of life for the students at St. Nicholas Parish. “All the different things we do are in support of that goal.”

Father Whittington says. “All the different things we do are in support of that goal.”

There is a stewardship model where they don’t charge tuition. And the second thing is they have access to a 24-hour eucharistic adoration chapel. It’s amazing how you feel when you’re here late at night and the eucharistic chapel is lit, and people are in there. It makes you feel you’re never alone.”

He also marvels at the efforts of parents, grandparents and friends of the school who volunteer in numerous ways to help the students. It’s an approach that beckons to the people who came together to build the current parish church in 1856, he says.

“They created the bricks from the sand and the clay of the creek bed,” Swygart says with awe in his voice. “Those bricks are still strong. We have the bricks and stones that show that commitment, and we have the ‘living stones’ that are still living out their faith today.”

“You surround these kids with people who have this dedication to their faith and it rubs off. It takes over.”

That commitment continues in the parish’s capital campaign called the Heritage Project. Since the archdiocese approved the campaign in the summer of 2017, the parish has raised more than $3.5 million, with 173 families making gifts.

That’s already enough for the campaign’s first phase which will create a new education center that will house the school and religious education programs, and create an endowment for ongoing maintenance of parish facilities. And the campaign’s success so far has provided a head start on the funds needed for the second phase—creating a new fellowship center that will include a gym, stage and cafeteria.

“The success of the campaign reflects the essence of the parish,” says Father Whittington, who offers a defining story about that commitment.

“A couple of months ago, I officiated at a wedding, and I was talking to the bride and groom,” he says. “The bride told me she was the fifth generation to be married at St. Nicholas. The long-term, multi-generational commitment to the parish is amazing. It’s a way of life.”

A way of life that is also evident in the school’s stewardship model, he insists.

“It creates a robust partnership between the church and the school’s families. There’s a lot of volunteering, and a lot of sacrificial giving.”

There’s also a deep commitment among the parish’s families to participating in the celebration of the Mass each weekend.

That combination “has given us the successes that God’s grace has allowed us to have” in the areas of religious formation, academics and financial stability, he maintains.

That combination also leads to the main hope that the parish and the school have for its latest generation of students.

“The motto of the school is, ‘Building saints and scholars,’” Father Whittington says. “All the different things we do are in support of that goal.”

Julie Stockman is a member of St. Nicholas Parish.

Celebrating National Catholic Schools Week

Brebeuf Jesuit is blessed to announce Fr. Bill Verbryke, S.J. as its 12th president.

“I am excited to serve Brebeuf Jesuit as its next president. I am humbled by the appointment and honored to help continue the life-changing educational experiences being delivered at Brebeuf.”

Fr. Bill Verbryke, S.J.

2801 W. 86th Street | Indianapolis, IN 46268
317.924.7050 | brebeuf.org

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“It’s truly amazing,” says principal Daniel Swygart about all the ways that the Catholic faith is a part of life for St. Nicholas students. “When I first came here three years ago, there were two things I was astounded by.

“There’s a stewardship model where they don’t charge tuition. And the second thing is they have access to a 24-hour eucharistic adoration chapel. It’s amazing how you feel when you’re here late at night and the eucharistic chapel is lit, and people are in there. It makes you feel you’re never alone.”

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Fr. Bill Verbryke, S.J.
Cherished note reveals the power of a teacher’s encouragement

By John Shaughnessy

The touching moment for Mary Alice Knott came unexpectedly during a high school football game. As a teacher at Our Lady of Providence Jr./Sr. High School in Clarksville, Knott was watching the Pioneers play when a former student approached her. He opened his wallet, recalls Knott, who was a finalist for the 2017 Saint Theodora Excellence in Education Award, the highest honor for an educator in the archdiocese. “He showed me the torn corner of his midterm which contained a note I had written to him as a freshman. “I am very humbled,” she says. “Being a Catholic educator has allowed me to be personal and prayerful in my profession.”

The initiative is “going to be a process,” he says. “The reason I wanted to take part in the initiative is to feel like we were doing everything possible so [Hispanic] families at our school feel welcome and [feel] that we want them to be part of our school and [that] we respect their heritage.”

Projects that St. Bartholomew has undertaken through the initiative include hiring more bilingual employees; starting a soccer team; updating signs to include Spanish; and offering professional development in cultural awareness to all staff. Even though the initiative is just getting underway, Heckman says she’s already noticed a difference. “Now that [Latinos] have seen the effort we’ve put in to better serving them, the benefit is that they want to give back more. They want to be more volunteers and more effort to help wherever they can.”

At Scecina, student Joseph Therber hopes the Latino Outreach Initiative will help the school to better serve “an increasing number of Latinos at the school, including a number of Latino families in the [Indianapolis] East Deanery parishes.”

The initiative has already led to three plans at Scecina: having a bilingual staff member translate documents and communications that displays reflecting Latino culture to the existing displays in the school’s main hall; and identifying a madrana—Spanish for “godmother.”

The latter plan reflects the Madrinas Model, which promotes schools in engaging a trusted woman from the Latino community to develop and strengthen the connection between the school and Latino families. Member schools participating in the Latino Outreach Initiative have learned about the Madrinas Model through a program the initiative requires them to take—the Latino Enrollment Institute through Notre Dame University. “At that institute, during three days, principals of each school sit down with a mentor, usually an administrator at a Catholic school in the country, who helps them write out an action plan.”

Gonzalez explains. After the institute, mentors continue to meet monthly by teleconference with small groups of principals from around the nation. Roncalli already has a madrina, says principal Charles Weisenbach. She provides “unbelievable help” with translating, setting up visits with Latino families, and helping answer questions when Weisenbach gives presentations at churches.

Plus, he says, since “two-to-three generations [of Latinos], if not living in the same house, are at least in constant communication, word of mouth will spread quickly.” He says that’s key to increasing Latino enrollment and meeting the needs of Latino students and families.

The archdiocese’s Latino Outreach Initiative was timely for Roncalli. Weisenbach says the school’s current 7 percent Latino enrollment is double what it was the past two years. And with several feeder schools having a high Hispanic enrollment—including one at nearly 90 percent—the necessity for the school to meet the needs of Latino students and families will grow.

Roncalli has also hired a bilingual from office secretary, made their website available in Spanish with the click of a button, and offered a college and career planning night in Spanish. While Weisenbach notes that implementing plans developed through the initiative is “going to be a process,” he says it will gain momentum. “I think in the next one-to-three years we’ll see improvement in both enrollment and engagement with the Latino community. What we see is we’re planting a lot of seeds that will bear good fruit.”

The Class of 2017 earned over $27 million in college scholarships.

Over 65% of the RHS Class of 2017 graduated with an Academic Honors Diploma or higher.

Roncalli awarded over $2 million in need-based tuition assistance to RHS families for the 2017-2018 school year.

In the past 25 years, Roncalli students have collected more than 2 million canned food items for the poor.

The Class of 2017 completed over 51,800 hours of community service during their four years at RHS, with every Roncalli student performing more than 170 hours of community service prior to graduation.

Roncalli Celebrates Catholic Education

The Criterion Friday, January 26, 2018 Catholic Schools Week Supplement Page 138

Students of St. Bartholomew School in Columbus participate in a Las Posadas procession on Dec. 16, 2017. The procession is a traditional Mexican Advent celebration that re-enacts Mary’s and Joseph’s search for a room in Bethlehem, and commemorates the nine months during which Mary carried Jesus in her womb. The procession is just one way in which the school, a member of the archdiocese’s new Latino Outreach Initiative, is seeking to invite and support their Latino students and families. (Submitted photo)
St. Lawrence pre-K program reaches out to peripheries near and far

By Sean Gallagher

A clarion call of Pope Francis since his 2013 election as bishop of Rome has been the Church to share God’s loving care and mercy with people on the peripheries of society.

St. Lawrence School in Indianapolis is responding to that call by reaching out to those in need close to home in the neighborhood that surrounds it on the northeast side of Indianapolis.

But it also follows the pope’s call by reaching out halfway around the world by inspiring and offering professional development to a pre-kindergarten school in China.

Surrounded by apartment buildings and rental properties, nearly 80 percent of the students at St. Lawrence meet the low-income requirements to qualify for free or reduced lunches.

Even though she had been a student at St. Lawrence as a child, Bishop investigated other pre-K programs in the area before enrolling her children in one. She found that St. Lawrence offered a quality early childhood program in its students.

“The programs and the tools that they use to serve the parish and the community are, from my profession, what excite me,” Bishop said. “And my kids are excited to come, too.”

Bishop also appreciates the cultural diversity found at St. Lawrence School, which attracts many students from the surrounding Hispanic and African-American communities.

“Anything to embrace,” she said. “It has a different population than when I was in school here. But as an adult, I feel that it’s something for me and my family to embrace and be a part of.”

That diversity has increased as Kids Care at St. Lawrence has developed a cooperative relationship with the Go Link Academy, a pre-K school in Shenzhen, China, just north of Hong Kong.

It began when the biological mother of a Chinese child adopted by Watson visited St. Lawrence three years ago. She was so impressed by what she saw that she worked with Watson to set up the program, visit with the Go Link Academy, a pre-K school in Shenzhen, China, just north of Hong Kong.

As a teacher, I plan lessons that educate the whole child. I teach children that they are gifts from God. I person that I know is within each of them.

“God has created every child to be a unique learner with a tremendous amount to offer to the world,” she says. “I want each child to be who God created them to be, and hope to push them to grow into that unique person that I know is within each of them.”

“We’re a family-oriented program. Last year, we had a mom and a dad with us. We accept the whole family into the program. That benefits our families and their children.”

Also Watson noted that language barriers can be a challenge for visiting Chinese pre-K students, she reflected that the children share another language that brings them together.

“Our students brought them right into the fold,” Watson said. “Kids speak the language of love and acceptance more easily than adults. They took them by the hand, brought them over and incorporated them into whatever they were doing. It was really a beautiful thing to watch.”

More visitors from China will come to St. Lawrence later this school year.

The Catholic faith is embedded in the Kids Care program at St. Lawrence in the way it reaches out to people in need both near and far.

And it would seem that this has an effect on the program’s staff.

“We’re evangelizing every day,” Kutan said. “Two of our pre-school teachers are converting this Easter and bringing their whole families in. We see it all the time. It’s just amazing. It gives me chills.”

The things that happen in our program every day are magical,” Watson said. “To me, it’s a blessing to work in a parish and school that is willing to serve the community around them. It truly embraces who we are as Catholics. We’re universal.”

Helping children make a connection with God guides teacher

By John Shaughnessy

BATESVILLE—The three words have always left a lasting impression on Janice Narwold in her 20 years of teaching in a Catholic school.

For her, they’re the three words from a child that let her know she is making a difference.

“It is such a simple statement, yet so impactful when expressed from a student to a teacher. In all my experience, this is the greatest compliment I have received,” notes Narwold, a second-grade teacher at St. Louis School in Batesville who was a finalist for the 2017 Saint Theodora Excellence in Education Award, the highest honor for an educator in the archdiocese.

That compliment reflects one of Narwold’s main goals as a teacher—to meet the needs of each student, and to make a special connection with each.

She also strives to help her students make a special connection with God.

“God has created every child to be a unique learner with a tremendous amount to offer to the world,” she says. “I want each child to be who God created them to be, and hope to push them to grow into that unique person that I know is within each of them.”

“The teacher, I plan lessons that educate the whole child. I teach children that they are gifts from God. I teach them that we need to take care of ourselves. I teach them that we each are special to God.”

Her teaching reflects her view that “quality Catholic education is educating the mind, body and spirit of each child.”

“Integrate Catholic teaching and doctrine in my curriculum by asking the Holy Spirit to guide my lessons and my students. We take time to make sure we put God in our lesson and thank God for the opportunity to learn in such a great school.”

“I also look for those ‘teachable moments’ where I can add God’s message to make for a more impactful Catholic education, and to help each student take one more moment to think about God.”

For more information about St. Lawrence School in Indianapolis, including its Kids Care pre-kindergarten program, visit saintlawrence.net/school}
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Catholic Youth Organization
Archdiocese of Indianapolis
Indiana’s only Holy Cross school celebrates its 100th birthday September 13, 2018!

Cathedral transforms a diverse group of students spiritually, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and physically to have the competence to see and the courage to act.