

# Teacher, crossing guard personify spirit of St. Augustine's

By Teresa A. Parsons

All year long, St. Augustine's School community has been celebrating the special spirit of the place. It has been hard to define, but when pressed, people point to the long struggle to keep the school open; the balance of religions and races that comprised the student body and linked the school closely with the surrounding neighborhood; and of course, the dedication of faculty and staff.

Graduation is traditionally a time to celebrate students' achievements. But at St. Augustine's last graduation Monday, June 23, Sister St. Luke Hardy, the principal, took a few moments to recognize some of the other people who had come to personify the school over the years.

Mary McMahon, for instance, who taught there for 25 years. And Joan Mayer, a crossing guard who saw the children safely to school for 10 years.

Both women sent their own children to St. Augustine's School. In fact, McMahon went there herself. Her first-grade teacher, Sister St. Clare, was one of five sisters who founded the school.

McMahon recalls a time in the 19th Ward when moving out of the neighborhood was like falling off the edge of the earth — it was just not done.

"It used to be so stable here. People never left," she said. "You were born, you lived, got married and died all in the same place."

For her, that place was the neighborhood around St. Augustine's Parish. "I was born here, baptized here, my children went to school here, my daughter got married here," she said.

"It seems like every time you meet someone, they've done a little stretch at St. Augustine's."

McMahon began teaching right out of high school at Holy Apostle School and Nazareth Academy. Then she married and had five children.

In 1959, she started studying for her college degree at Nazareth College. In 1960, she began teaching at St. Augustine's, handling two classes of 50 kindergartners each day. Twelve years of night and weekend classes later, she earned her teaching degree. Meanwhile, she taught a variety of grades, but mostly fourth. Reading was her favorite subject because "if they can't read, they can't do anything."

Back then, each grade had two classrooms, and most schools had a waiting list. "I told Father John F. Duffy, 'Don't take any more children — all the tables and chairs are filled,'" she remembered.

"He said, 'We'll get more tables and chairs.'" There was still a waiting list to enroll at St. Augustine's when Joan Mayer moved to the neighborhood. "When my son graduated, there were 80 students in his class," she said.

Because it was part-time, she took a job as a crossing guard. "In those days, it was a little taboo to go full-time. That meant you weren't a good mother," she said. "With that job, I could be off when the kids were off. . . . It was one of those things where you thought, 'I'll do this for six months' and you're still there."

Nowadays, she said, "my kids on the corner are bringing their kids up to me." The ones in high school wave as their buses go by.

Employed by the Rochester Police Department,



Mary McMahon



Joan Mayer

Mayer first worked at School #44 for seven years, then began double duty, adding St. Augustine's to her schedule. At 7:40 a.m., she'd be at Chili and Gardner. At 8:40 a.m., she'd head over to Chili and Genesee Park Boulevard. By 11:15 a.m., she'd return to her first station for lunch, then on to her second station. Her work day would finish up at 3:50 p.m. with dismissal. "It's a lot of running

around," she said.

Nevertheless, she had time to learn the names of every student each year. "If a child's running by the street and you know 'em by name, you can stop them a lot quicker with their first name than if you yell, 'Hey you,'" she explained.

With approval from Sister St. Luke, Mayer introduced monthly awards to her safety patrol members for good work. "There's nothing wrong with giving a kid a little reward," she said. "There were some hard-nosed kids with real big chips on their shoulders, but they were out there doing their time," she said. "When they got a certificate, you could see in their eyes how much it meant to them. They never scoffed it off."

"You watch them change from kindergarten to eighth grade, watch them grow, and like to think you had a part in it," she said.

Next year, Mayer will continue work for School 44. McMahon, who retired from full-time work in 1976 to teach remedial reading in the school's learning center, will continue sharing her favorite subject through Literacy Volunteers.

Both will miss St. Augustine's, but they credit Sister St. Luke with easing the pain of the loss. "Her main concern was always with the children, with their well-being," Mayer said. "She wasn't soft. She was a strict disciplinarian. But I'd say she has a heart as big as a full moon."

From a teacher's standpoint, McMahon said, she was "marvelous to work with."

"This last year was the greatest. We were actually celebrating what we had, and we really went overboard so the last year would be a memorable one," she said.

## St. James Mercy Hospital undertakes hospice program

St. James Mercy Hospital and Southern Tier Hospice, Inc., recently formed a cooperative arrangement to provide support and care for persons with terminal illnesses.

A community-based program providing residents of Chemung, Schuyler and Steuben counties with complete hospice service, Southern Tier Hospice provides an interdisciplinary team to meet the needs arising out of the crisis of terminal illness for both the patient and family.

Sister Augustine Malley, director of pastoral care at St. James Mercy Hospital and a member of the hospice's board of directors, said that St. James is now able to provide a wider range of services to meet the special needs of the patient at home or in the hospital. "We want to make the patient and the family as comfortable and as normal as possible," Sister Augustine said, adding that the hospice is a program of care to meet the physical, emotional, spiritual and social needs of the patient during his last stage of life.

Some of the services provided under the hospice program are: home care nursing service, training of family members in patient care, dietary consultation, management of pain and other distressed symptoms and support for the family during bereavement.

Sister Augustine said six area hospitals are participating in the program, and are represented by persons serving on the hospice board. According to Southern Tier Hospice, admission to the program is based on need rather than the ability to pay, and charges depend on the services provided.

For information on the hospice program, contact the Pastoral Care Department at St. James Mercy Hospital or Southern Tier Hospice in Elmira.



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

Barry Castrechino, left, and Andrea Dias join hands with other members of the congregation during the Lord's Prayer.

## Spirit entrusted to students at school's last graduation

"The happiest years of my life."  
"An ending, but also a beginning."  
"The best year ever."

At this time of year, these are thoughts common to graduates of all ages and from all schools. But they were almost unbearably poignant words for the students, teachers and parents of St. Augustine's School who celebrated the school's final graduation ceremony Monday, June 23.

This year, everybody — from kindergartners to the principal — was a graduate with more than academic experience.

"You've got experiences and ideas that other people haven't. Most of them haven't had their school close," said Father Thomas Helfrich, OSFS, homilist for the graduation Mass. "Don't become quite like everyone else. Don't ever forget how

you did things here. You're sent out on a special mission to carry your spirit to everyone else."

Each student was called by name to the altar to receive a St. Augustine's spirit button and to be "missioned" to a new school.

Eight eighth-graders received diplomas. American Legion Good Citizenship awards were given to Chinetta Hart, president of student government, and Andrea Dias, class valedictorian. Hart, the captain of the safety patrol, was also honored with the Universal Safety Merit Award and gave the students' address.

"The memories of this school stored in my mind are more than you could ever know," she told the crowd that packed the church. "As we leave this place, we should allow a feeling of peace to be in our hearts."

Parents, teachers and staff helped to build the spirit of St. Augustine's. Sister St. Luke recalled the words of one parent who told her: "It hurts to know that the school will not open next year. The doors may be closed, but the spirit can never be closed. We will take it with us."

Father Helfrich also urged adults not to despair. "Please don't listen to your broken hearts — don't give in to your disappointment," he said. "Please start again. Don't abandon the dream and say no next time someone asks for help."

Despite many tears of joy and sadness, overall the evening was what Sister St. Luke had hoped for — a celebration. "We come here tonight thankful for what has been and hopeful for what will be," she said. "It has been a very, very good year."

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