

Schools share ideas on technology's accessibility

DAYTON, Ohio (CNS) --Three Catholic educators from New Bern, N.C., were discouraged at first to see how far ahead some Catholic schools from across the country are in bringing technology in their classrooms into the 21st century.

"We were depressed in the beginning to realize what some other schools were already doing," said Immaculate Heart of Mary Sister Mary Ellen Coyne, a first-grade teacher at St. Paul's School in New Bern. "But we came away very hopeful when we realized they started in the same boat we are in. We brought back some good ideas."

Educators from 11 schools across the country and Canada came together last month for the first New Frontiers for Catholic Schools conference at

the University of Dayton.

Sister Angela Ann Zukowski, a member of the Mission Helpers of the Sacred Heart, said the goal of the New Frontiers project is to assist Catholic educators in re-thinking Catholic schools' mission and curriculum and creating a network of mentors to offer budgetstrapped Catholic schools free and low-cost ways to train teachers in technology, evaluate new software and equipment,

and find ways to learn to use it. The three-day conference was co-sponsored by the National Catholic Educational Association and the University of Dayton. 'Catholic schools feel they

are behind in technology, but the reason is they work so independently," said Sister Zukowski, director of the University of Dayton Center for



Religious Telecommunications.

"It's almost impossible to teach in the traditional way. The world is not mirrored in our present school system," she said. "Part of our challenge is not just to look at technology, but to look at the role of a teacher — the role of a facilitator in learning is radically different. Technology is a tool that makes learning exciting and effective."

During the conference in-

dustry representatives showed films on the use of videodisc players with computer links, video cameras and television production, that left principals and teachers in small Catholic schools wondering how they could afford such extravagant equipment.

But they also heard from teachers who have been integrating technology into their teaching. They demonstrated practical steps for also using existing technology available in the community.

Natalie Krupka from Holy Cross School in Garret Park, Md., said the school started out with a few computers that few instructors knew how to use.

Now the school has a computer lab, all grades are learning Word Perfect and even primary students are learning the fundamentals of programming language. They have plans for adding laser discs with computer links, modems and telecommunications, Krupka said. "And we're still just beginning," she said.

Sister Žukowski said at the meeting schools shared how they raised money to purchase equipment. She added that schools "can write for grants and local community support is available."

Catholic schools need to look ahead or they "will not be able to communicate in the language of the 21st century and could become obsolete," the sister added.

St. Paul's teachers and the school principal left the meeting with a plan for using technology, training teachers and conducting an inventory of software and other equipment in the school, Sister Coyne said.

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