

DIOCESAN NEWS

Jr. high students make fresh start

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

All Saints Catholic Academy in Gates has 97 more students than it did last year as well as a new building addition and new teachers, primarily because four Catholic junior-high programs in Monroe County closed last spring.

The school's enrollment increased from 175 last year to 272 this year, and principal William Davis said the school increased its faculty from 12 to 19 full- and part-time teachers to accommodate the influx of new students.

He added that the \$1.1 million addition — financed by the Diocese of Rochester — has two new science rooms, two language arts rooms, new lockers, and rooms for art, band and music classes, as well as two changing rooms for physical education. The school also updated its phone system and purchased a new computer network, he said.

Construction on the new north addition began last spring and was completed in August. He credited a handful of parent volunteers led by Dan Piehler, the school's facilities coordinator, for helping to clean up and prepare the new addition.

"A week ago, we still had boxes and desks in the hallways," Davis said, noting that Piehler's team worked up until the last minute.

In January, the diocese decided to close seventh- and eighth-grade classes at St. John the Evangelist, St. Charles Borromeo and St. Lawrence schools in Greece and at Sacred Heart Cathedral School in Rochester. The decision was motivated by a desire to offer enhanced educational opportunities at its centralized junior highs, as well as the fact that enrollment at the four schools had collectively declined by 38 percent in the last eight years, diocesan officials said.

Monroe County's other centralized Catholic junior highs also picked up new students as a result of the closings, with Bishop Hogan Catholic Academy in Irondequoit garnering about 30 new students, according to Vilma Goetting, the school's new principal. Goetting said the bulk of the new students came from the closed junior highs. Evelyn Kirst, principal of Our Lady of Mercy High School in Brighton said two students from St. Lawrence had enrolled in



Karin von Volgtlander/Staff photographer

All Saints Catholic Academy eighth-graders Scott Page and Sarah Quinn exchange "Making New Friends" sheets during an assembly on the first day of school Sept. 5. The junior-high programs at their previous schools — Sarah attended St. John the Evangelist and Scott attended St. Lawrence — closed last spring.

Mercy's junior-high program.

As of May of this year, five students from the closed middle-school programs had planned to enroll at Siena Catholic Academy in Brighton; eight had planned to enroll at Nazareth Hall Middle School in Rochester; and 22 students had planned to enroll in area public schools, according to Dominican Sister Elizabeth Meegan, diocesan schools superintendent. As of May, she added, 26 students were still undecided as to where they were going.

Davis said that 43 new students at All Saints came from St. John the Evangelist and 25 came from St. Lawrence, with the rest coming from other schools.

Of the 30 or so teachers displaced by the closings, Sister Meegan said 25 had found jobs either in the centralized junior highs or at other Monroe County Catholic schools. Davis said his school had hired four teachers from the junior-high programs.

Eighth-graders at All Saints expressed excitement at their new surroundings on the afternoon of Sept. 5 during a "mixer" in the gymnasium. Although all of them said they were sad when they learned they would have to leave their former schools, which were characterized by small numbers of students, they said they liked their new,

bigger school. For many, it was the first time they would be eating their lunches in a cafeteria rather than in their classrooms, and taking buses to school rather than walking or riding with their parents.

"I like all the kids here," said David Scheible, formerly of Sacred Heart School. "They're all very friendly and nice. Everything about the school just clicks."

Anthony D'Alonzo, who attended St. Lawrence last year, said he was still feeling out his new environment.

"I don't really know how much I like the school because I haven't been here that long," he said.

Lauren Giardina, who went to St. Charles last year, said when she and her classmates found out they couldn't attend eighth grade at St. Charles, they were "mad and sad."

"Everyone was kind of sad because most of us had been together since kindergarten," she said.

However, she said she found All Saints interesting because she will have separate teachers for each subject, as opposed to having the one teacher for more than one subject as happened at St. Charles.

"There are a lot more people to get to know," she added.

Appointments

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has made two appointments to fill pastoral leadership positions.

• Irene Goodwin to pastoral administrator, St. Mary of the Assumption, Scottsville, from pastoral associate, Holy Ghost, Gates, effective Sept. 22.

• Father Michael Murimi to pastor, St. Thomas Aquinas/St. Lucy, Leicester and Reiso, from parochial vicar, St. Cecilia, Irondequoit, effective Sept. 18.

Kelsey Abelein, who attended St. John the Evangelist, said she had mixed feelings when she learned she would have to leave her old school.

"I was kind of excited to go to another school and meet new people, but I was kind of sad because we'd be leaving all the people we knew for a long time," she said.

She sensed her new school would be "more hectic," but added that "it's just a really nice environment."

Students from the closed junior-high schools weren't the only new enrollees at All Saints. For example, Mercedes Mohammed came to All Saints after attending a Rochester city school last year.

"My mom wanted me to get a better education," she said, adding that even though she is a Methodist, her mother liked the fact that she will learn about God at All Saints.

Another bonus was the student body's friendliness, something she said she didn't experience in her last school.

"People used to treat you bad, and people treat you better here," she said. "When you used to bump into them by mistake, they used to give you an attitude."

Davis said that about 10 percent of the students at All Saints are non-Catholic.

Donna Mooney, a math teacher at All Saints, said the new students had energized the school.

"It's exciting having new kids from new places," she said.

Davis echoed that notion, saying that in years past, students seemed more anxious about starting the school year, whereas this year, a sense of opportunity pervaded the student body.

"I felt there was a lot of energy," he said after the mixer. "It wasn't more anxious, it was 'We're ready to go here.'"

Black Catholic Congress draws praise from local attendee

By Amisu M. Estrada
Catholic News Service

Approximately 3,000 African-American Catholics from across the nation celebrated the Labor Day weekend in downtown Chicago at the first National Black Catholic Congress of the 21st century.

Among the participants were 28 Catholics from the Diocese of Rochester, including Father Michael Upson, administrator of Rochester's Immaculate Conception Parish and newly appointed diocesan departmental associate director for Multi-cultural Services.

The theme of National Black Catholic Congress IX was "Black Catholic Leadership in the 21st Century: Solidarity in Action." The first congress was held in 1889 and the congress has been held every five years since 1987.

Although much has changed since the congress was initiated in the 19th century, the event's agenda remains strikingly similar. The 2002 congress listed spirituality, parish life, youth and young adults, Catholic education, social justice, racism, Africa and HIV/AIDS as issues of greatest concern to African-American Catholics.

Adrian Dominican Sister Jamie T. Phelps, a veteran teacher and one of the presenters at the congress, said black Catholics are concerned "that Catholic schools are closing in black communities and some parishes are being merged and

closed."

"We know that education is key to the black community in general, and research shows that black children who attend Catholic schools perform better in school and in society," she added.

In an interview with the *Catholic Explorer*, Joliet diocesan newspaper, Auxiliary Bishop Joseph N. Perry of Chicago, one of the nation's 11 active African-American Catholic bishops, discussed the distinguishing characteristics of African-American Catholic spirituality.

"African-American spirituality, I think, is fed or inspired a great deal by the sagas of capture, enslavement and discrimination," he said. "When the slaves were brought to this country, they already had a vibrant spirituality. When the missionaries gave them the Gospel, they found narratives in the Bible akin to their experience — Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers, Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt. These were very impressive narratives for people who had experienced anything similar."

Although Protestant ministers were the most active in evangelizing former slaves after their emancipation, Bishop Perry and Sister Phelps said it is inaccurate to assume that all African-Americans are Protestant, noting that more than 2 million African-Americans today are Catholic.

"The earliest foundations of the United States had black Catholics," said Sister

Phelps. "Catholicism is not culturally foreign to the black experience ... (despite the fact that) Catholics don't think we're Catholic enough and blacks don't think we're black enough. We occupy a middle ground, but it's been a fertile ground, we've made significant contributions to both the Catholic Church and the black community."

That's a lesson that was not lost on the family of Michael and Jackie Campbell of St. Bridget's Church in Rochester, who attended the congress with their daughters, Sasha, 19, and Jasmine, 17. Jackie Campbell said she and her husband wanted their daughters to see that being black and Catholic was not a unique experience. She also hopes the conference may have dissuaded both young women from leaving the church someday. She added that her daughters also attended World Youth Day with Pope John Paul II in Toronto in July.

"What they're saying now is a 180-degree turn from where they were prior to these events," she said of her daughters. She added that she was particularly inspired by the congress' youth activities, which included liturgical dances, singing and personal testimonials.

Jackie Campbell has sung in St. Bridget's choir, worked in youth ministry and taught religion classes, and said she came away from the congress proud that her parish already had implemented some of the ideas

others were suggesting. To illustrate her point, she said during small group discussions on social justice, some participants urged other Catholics to get their pastors to address from the pulpit such social issues as drug addiction and poverty.

"That was foreign to me because I worship at a parish where that was done already," she said. "It really made me see how blessed we were in our particular parish and how different things may be ... throughout the national church."

She added that she also enjoyed the participation of African Catholics, whose concerns were addressed in a keynote address Aug. 30 by Bishop Charles G. Palmer-Buckle of Koforidua, Ghana.

Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, the first African-American to be elected president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, urged study of the U.S. bishops' 2001 statement, "A Call to Solidarity with Africa."

"In the face of serious obstacles and very limited resources, the church in Africa does not shrink from the Gospel mandate to love, serve and witness to the power of the cross and resurrection," he said. "The church in the United States may draw inspiration from these communities of faith who are daily laying down their lives for one another."

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Contains reporting by Rob Cullivan and Mike Latona in Rochester.