

# New teachers find help from mentors

Hilary Anderson/CNS

CHICAGO — Katie Konieczny followed her heart and changed careers. She left her advertising job, returned to school, received her certification and joined the teaching ranks at St. Malachy Catholic School in Chicago.

"I've always had a desire to teach," said Konieczny, who this June was completing her first year of teaching seventh grade. "I wanted some life experiences first."

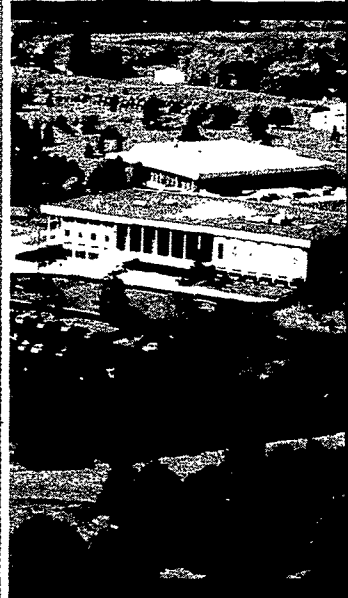
Although new to the field, it has been a successful year for Konieczny, due in large part to a special mentoring program for new

## Education

teachers at St. Malachy made possible by a grant from the Sisters of Mercy.

The mentoring program is the brainchild of Mercy Sister Virginia Peacock, a preschool teacher at the school.

"In the ideal world, an experienced, full-time teacher is supposed to mentor a new teacher," Sister Peacock said. "We tried but there wasn't enough time to spend with the new teacher and give the necessary help to make the experience truly effective."



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## DeSales celebration

Peter Karski (center), a student at DeSales High School in Geneva, participates in a 90th-anniversary celebration Mass May 17 at St. Stephen's Church in Geneva. Bishop Matthew H. Clark celebrated the Mass, which was followed by a dinner dance and silent auction.

ive."

Sister Peacock's community, which had set aside an endowment to fund two-year programs that might help women, children, the poor or education, financially backed the program based on her proposal.

Two experienced St. Malachy teachers, Sue Jolie and Erin Zuccaero, who had left their full-time positions for maternity leave, were hired as mentors.

"Both were successful teachers here, the students liked them and they knew the school," Sister Peacock said. "The two already had come back part-time to teach gym, art and work in the office. With the grant we were able to buy more of their time."

Principal Bridgid Miller, a 24-year veteran, said the grant helped enhance the new teachers' success.

"Teaching is hard, especially during those first couple years," she said. "It's important they (new teachers) fall in love with teaching despite the challenges. New teachers need someone to hold their hands and help over the difficult bumps in the road that may occur."

"Teachers need mentors," Jolie told *The Catholic New World*, newspaper of the Chicago Archdiocese. "I was coming home crying my first year of teaching (at another school). New teachers need a support structure regardless of whether it's a young person just out of college or an individual who just changed careers. I would never have survived without my mentor."

Jolie and Zuccaero, who met with the new teachers at the beginning of

the school year, made observations in the classrooms, modeled their approach for the new teachers, had discussions of discipline issues and parent communication, and suggested how to effectively move from one subject to another.

"Their feedback was very helpful," said Maureen McIntyre, another new teacher. They taught us ways to explain the lessons better and keep students' attention. They gave us ideas for resources like where to find markers, push pins for the board, sand for a science project."

Konieczny said Jolie and Zuccaero taught her how to gain control of the classroom when students were losing interest. "They taught me to shorten the lessons and have students work on group projects instead of individual ones," Konieczny said.

Meg Goethals, who spent her first year teaching fourth grade at St. Malachy's, said the mentoring program helped her learn more about herself. "It challenged me as a person. I learned more compassion, more patience. I also learned about my strengths and what kind of teacher I want to be."

While the mentoring program has proven successful, the funding expired at the end of this past school year. Miller said she is looking for other sources of funding, but she is grateful to the Sisters of Mercy for getting the program started.

"The Sisters of Mercy and Sister Virginia in particular have helped our new teachers be successful," she said. "In turn, they have helped the community."

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