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Palette of past and future: The NCEA turns 100

You may have never heard of it, but it's the largest professional organization in the world. And if you're Catholic, chances are you know some of its members.

It's the National Catholic Educational Association, marking its centennial this year.

NCEA members include Catholic-school administrators and teachers; parish religious-education ministers; university academics; and seminary leaders. Overall, the NCEA represents more than 200,000 educators serving the nation's Catholic schools, colleges, universities, religious-education programs and seminaries.

The NCEA has held several events over the last several months to mark its 100th year, and these celebrations will culminate in Boston April 13-16, when more than 13,000 delegates and exhibitors are expected to attend the group's annual convention.

The story of the NCEA is rooted in the story of American Catholic education, which has achieved astounding feats, according to Bishop Wilton D. Gregory, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. The bishop made his observation during a speech at the NCEA's centennial kick-off celebration last April in St. Louis, Mo., where the NCEA was formed in 1904.

"Today, the church in the United States is educating almost 11 million women and men in its elementary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, and parish reli-

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Holy Rosary School first-grader Joseph Houck, 6, rinses off his brush while working on a watercolor painting Jan. 22 during Douglas Schneider's art class.

Story by Rob Cullivan • Photos by Mike Crupi