

# Principals log lengthy tenures in Elmira

B11

Faith & Family  
Catholic Courier | Diocese of Rochester, NY | August 2004

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

If durability in education begins at the top, then Elmira's Catholic schools are rock-solid.

Four women enter the 2004-05 school year with a combined 74 years' experience in their principals' slots. They are Sister Mary Mary Walter Hickey, who has served 29 years at Notre Dame High School; Connie Brady, 21 at Holy Family Primary; Brenda Lisi, 12 at Holy Family Intermediate; and Elizabeth Berliner, 12 at Holy Family Junior High.

"We've been blessed with good health and we all get along together. It's interesting because we all taught in the (Elmira Catholic) schools. You have that history — you grow with it, you believe in it," Brady said of the three principals in the Holy Family School System.

Brady began teaching in Catholic schools in Elmira in 1971; Lisi in 1978; and Berliner in 1981. Lisi, an Elmira native, said she had sensed the call to serve in Catholic education all the way back in fourth grade, while attending the former St. Mary's School.

"I decided long ago I wanted to give back to the system that made me who I am. That's been my personal mission," she said.

Brady voiced a similar sentiment: "It's like your vocation to be here — I just felt I belonged in the Catholic schools, and that's where I remained. I guess I should feel fortunate that they wanted to keep me," she said with a laugh.

"I've never thought about not coming back. I always feel like I can't wait until next year," Berliner added.

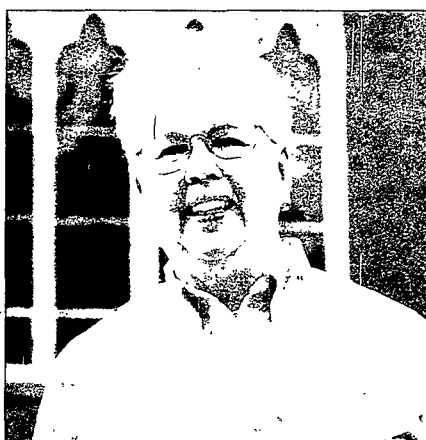
Meanwhile, Sister Hickey began her educational career in 1955 and has been at Notre Dame High School 32 years overall. "I've really had a wonderful experience. Every day is a surprise, but for the most part they're good surprises," she remarked.

Holy Family's principals conduct monthly meetings to discuss business and public-relations efforts, as well as scheduling — for instance,



Maria Strinni

Holy Family Intermediate Principal Brenda Lisi (from left), Holy Family Primary Principal Connie Brady and Holy Family Junior High Principal Elizabeth Berliner have been in their positions at the Elmira schools for a combined total of 45 years.



Sister Mary Walter Hickey has been principal of Elmira's Notre Dame High School for 29 years.

Brady said they arrange their events calendars so they don't conflict. And even though Holy Family's administration is separate from Notre Dame's, there's a clear sense of cohesion as evidenced by the more than 80 percent of Holy Family Junior High graduates who move on to Notre Dame. Sister Hickey said she has particularly close contact with Berliner, whereas Berliner said that

"every other day I speak with someone from Notre Dame."

The now-smooth infrastructure at Holy Family is the result of major changes to address declining attendance. Two waves of consolidation — in the early 1970s and mid-1980s — transformed Catholic elementary education in Elmira from seven parish-based schools to three buildings in a system where parishes share expenses. Each grade level is condensed into one building: Holy Family Primary (grades pre-kindergarten through 3) in the former St. Mary's School where Brady began as principal in 1983-84; Holy Family Intermediate (grades 4-6) in the for-

## Education

mer Our Lady of Lourdes School; and Holy Family Junior High (grades 7-8) in the former St. Casimir's School.

Sister Hickey recalled initial doubt as to whether Elmira would willingly cross the Chemung River, an unofficial dividing line, to attend Catholic school. Now, she says, the general opinion is that consolidation "has really served the community well."

"Any time you put in change in order to make things better in order to adapt to reality — you see it in your churches now — you go through stress and pain," Berliner added. "The schools do have the stability now that I think people feel very good about."

The Holy Family schools' combined enrollment was 495 in 2003-04 (grades kindergarten through 8) and will be approximately 480 for 2004-05. Lisi noted that enrollment figures are consistent with Elmira census projections.

Berliner, for one, expects that Catholic education will always be a strong draw based on the special environment it fosters: "It isn't just the students who bond, it's the parents and families who bond," she commented.

Sister Hickey readily identifies with that feeling as an administrator: "You do get to know the whole family — students as well as their parents — who are very much involved in the life of the school," she said. "It's a great relationship and a wonderful community."

**RNs** Your knowledge deserves the degree.

**Modular RN to BS Program**  
One night per week for 15 months

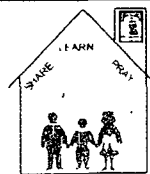


Apply now for  
Fall 2004 groups.  
For information meetings  
in your area call  
585.594.6073  
or 1.800.777.4RWC

**ROBERTS**  
WESLEYAN COLLEGE  
Education for Character Since 1866

2301 Westside Drive  
Rochester, NY 14624-1997  
www.roberts.edu

Serving Rochester, Dansville, Syracuse and  
Buffalo areas



Academic Excellence  
+ Religious Message  
+ Small Classes  
= Success!

**St. John the Evangelist School**  
- the perfect equation! -

2376 Ridge Road West Greece • Preschool through Grade 6  
Call for information **585-225-3450**