

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK

LEARN. SERVE. LEAD. SUCCEED.



Photo by Debbie Troy

Children at Good Shepherd School, Collingswood, have their picture taken on Jan. 17, a day set aside for service to honor the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. See page S13.

Our schools work, academically, spiritually, humanly

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Throughout my priesthood, and my 15 years as a bishop, Catholic schools have always been a priority for my ministry. Irrespective of the size of a Catholic school, each has an equally important role to play in society and for the Church. Our schools are about the business of education and they go about their business with excellence. Not only do our students benefit from them but so too does our church and our nation.

Though curriculums evolve, our fundamental values continue to withstand the test of time. While test scores, scholarships, college acceptance rates, and career paths all reflect the significant academic advantages of our schools, what truly sets us apart is our ability to infuse our Catholic faith and culture into every element of the school day, including extracurricular activities. Christian morality, ethics, and charity inform each subject area. Although the philosophy of Catholic education developed many centuries ago, it continues to inform our approach to education. In a nut shell Catholic education is an education of the whole person – mind, soul and body because this is how God created human beings. A student in a Catholic school grows in mind, in spirit and in body.

As Catholic educators, we have the freedom to bring values to our students and families through the message of Jesus. For instance, in Catholic schools we can publicly and proudly celebrate a culture of life, where students learn to engage, respect and serve others. The environment of the school is permeated by Jesus Christ, the Gospel, prayer, faith and by the Sacraments of



Photo by Mike Walsh

Bishop Dennis Sullivan has his photo taken on the first day of the 2019-20 school year.

the Catholic church. The school even looks beyond its doors to the world outside for which the student learns responsibility.

We often use the phrase “The Gift of a Lifetime” when we refer to our Catholic schools. In every facet, this is true. A Catholic school education is the gift a parent gives their child; it is the gift we offer the world by providing well-formed, intelligent and compassionate future leaders. I can personally testify that it is the gift I received

as a student in the fifties in a Catholic grammar school, in the sixties in a Catholic high school and in a Catholic college. It is the gift that helped me discern my vocation to the priesthood.

If you are looking for a school or know someone who is, I strongly encourage you to consider a Catholic school and offer your child and the world the gift of a lifetime. A gift that will form and inform your child. Catholic schools work and they are a success academically, spiritually and

humanly. In the Diocese of Camden we have a product of which I am very proud.

Sincerely in Christ,

**Most Reverend Dennis Sullivan,
D.D.**
Bishop of Camden

Schools provide academic excellence through the lens of faith

By Dr. William A. Watson

The national celebration of Catholic Schools has been an annual tradition since 1974. It starts the last Sunday in January and runs all week. From Jan. 26 to Feb. 1, 2020, South Jersey Catholic Schools will host Masses and open houses, sponsor academic challenges and exhibits, and hold other events designed to showcase and celebrate our school communities. We will focus on the value Catholic schools provide to young people and their contributions to our church, our communities, and our world.

In the Diocese of Camden, we believe a Catholic school education is



**DR. WILLIAM A.
WATSON**

the Gift of a Lifetime. By inviting the grace of God into everything we do as a community — from academics, sports, and other extracurriculars to religious formation, celebrating the sacraments, and serving others — we help students get ready to shape the world with knowledge, integrity and compassion. These are qualities our students bring to higher education, careers, relationships, vocations, and their home communities and parishes throughout their lives.

The dedicated principals and teachers in South Jersey Catholic Schools are empowered by our shared values to do more for the students they serve. For example, when middle school

teachers discuss reproduction, they are not limited to the explanation of what happens to cells. They can go further by exploring life lessons around morality and consequences. First grade teachers talk about the Solar System in conjunction with books about the beauty of God's creation. In theater and music, teachers help students appreciate their talents and the talents of others as gifts from God and to recognize how each of us is called to share our talents with others. Math teachers draw on the faith lives of their students to help them discover how math, like faith, has a role in everyday life.

Our schools are filled with teachers and leaders who are committed to doing more — providing an outstanding academic experience through the

lens of faith in a community of love.

This week, I offer my gratitude to the thousands of parents who choose Catholic school for their children and invite those who are discerning the best environment for their children to join in our celebration and consider a Catholic school education. You can learn more and find a nearby school at www.southjerseycatholicschools.org. Or visit our South Jersey Catholic Schools page on Facebook and, through our video series highlighting how Catholic schools do more, meet some of the many principals and teachers who make Catholic schools the Gift of a Lifetime.

Dr. William A. Watson is superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Camden.



Photo by Mike Walsh

Father Robert Hughes distributes Communion during a Mass at Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Glassboro, last year. It was attended by representatives of 35 Catholic elementary and high schools throughout southern New Jersey. The celebration of the Mass, prayer services and other devotions are part of school life at Catholic schools in South Jersey.

School culture is inseparable from its Catholic identity

By Peter G. Sánchez

Saint John Paul II once called the Holy Eucharist, sacrament and sacrifice, “the source and summit of all Christian life.” And it’s no surprise that South Jersey’s Catholic elementary and secondary schools see frequent participation in the Mass as essential young minds in Christian formation.

“One of the great gifts of a Catholic school education is that we orient everything toward God, and nothing is more oriented to God than the liturgy,” said Bill Watson, Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Camden.

Whether celebrated at a nearby church, or in the school’s chapel or auditorium, “The liturgy sets the overall tone for who we are. It’s the fountain from which the rest of the school’s Catholic identity flows,” he continued.

The Directors of Catholic Identity, serving in diocesan high schools, agree with Watson.

“Mass is the highest form of prayer, and in the Mass, Jesus is truly present in body, blood, soul and divinity,” says

Father Josh Nevitt, Director of Catholic Identity at Absecon’s Holy Spirit High School. At the school, he says, in addition to the Masses celebrated during such events as the senior graduation and National Honors Society induction, a liturgy for the entire Holy Spirit community is celebrated at least once a month.

Also, sports teams will gather in prayer and petition during pre-game liturgies.

To encourage participation of his youthful congregation, he says, the liturgies will include contemporary Christian music, and video screens will display Mass responses for students.

At Camden Catholic High School in Cherry Hill, the daily 7:45 a.m. Mass for students and faculty “helps to focus the day, and put one in the right mindset,” says Father Ed Kennedy, the school’s Director of Catholic Identity.

He sees that not only are his students attending the liturgy, but are also embracing it, and taking ownership of the sacrament and of their faith.

“Students want to be a part of the liturgy, whether serving as lectors, altar servers, or assisting with the offertory,” he says.

His counterparts at Paul VI High School, Wildwood Catholic and Gloucester Catholic say the same of their communities.

Father Dexter Nebrija at Paul VI, Haddonfield, hopes to celebrate a Mass for each individual class before the year is out.

In addition to the liturgy itself, students “assist with the set up and breakdown” of the Mass, in preparing the altar or lighting the candles, said Father Steven Pinzon of Wildwood Catholic.

“Students’ participation in Mass is an opportunity for them to connect with God, and thank him for the blessings they receive,” said Father Philip Ramos from Gloucester Catholic.

At the elementary level, the younger students are no less enthusiastic about the liturgy.

“Each month, one of our grades takes charge of the monthly liturgy, and students pick out the theme and the readings, and eagerly sing in the choir, read from the pulpit, or provide the petitions,” said Linda Pirolli, principal at Mays Landing’s Saint Vincent de Paul Regional School.

“These students feel like it’s their

own Mass, and they take ownership.”

For Joe Saffioti, principal of Merchantville’s Saint Peter School, “the liturgy is the driving force of an authentic Christian culture ... we should try to encounter Christ as often as we possibly can.” To accomplish this, Mass is celebrated every Friday morning in Saint Peter Church.

Watson is pleased with the work the schools are doing in bringing “heaven on earth” to students, as Vatican II called the liturgy.

“We are interested in kids being and becoming who God wants them to be, and the only way they can do that is by drawing close to God, and one of the best ways they can draw close to God is by experiencing His presence in the Eucharist.”

Superintendent Watson sees the benefits not only at school, but at home. His 11-year-old son, Owen, has recently become an altar server, which has changed and deepened his appreciation for the Mass. For Owen, there’s no more sleeping in on Sundays.

“He’s never been more enthusiastic about going to Mass, and he’s keeping his family on schedule on Sundays,” the proud father says.

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A tree, for Aidan, grows in Williamstown

By Mary Beth Peabody

WILLIAMSTOWN — As Joey Rouse tells it, he and his classmates were looking out for Aidan Eberhardt long before third grade.

“We were helping him out in Pre-K,” said the exuberant Joey, now in seventh grade at Saint Mary School in Williamstown. “He was so shy. We helped him out of his comfort zone. Even in kindergarten I’d see him and just yell out, ‘Hey buddy.’”

And it worked. By first grade, the two were fast friends, best friends, bound by a love of Marvel and all things superhero. Joey described how their first sleepover turned into an all-night Marvel marathon, sealing the kind of friendship that lasts forever. And then came the third grade roster, with the crushing revelation that Joey and Aidan would be in different classrooms.

That was the summer of 2015. At the time, no one could anticipate the separation the entire grade would face just after Christmas, when Aidan was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor. He spent the rest of the school year at home, much of the time in treatment.

Being at home didn’t keep Aidan apart from Joey and his other friends or the school and parish community. Those ties grew stronger. During his homebound days in third grade and the ups and downs of fourth and fifth, the school welcomed Aidan whenever he could make it, on his terms. He took part in holiday celebrations and often joined his mom, Chris, when she volunteered at the school.

“Even when he didn’t feel well he could take part. It can be alienating to be sick,” said Aidan’s father, Glenn.

“We supported them for whatever they needed to do for all three of their children,” said Saint Mary’s principal Patricia Mancuso. “It was so easy to get everyone on board to really root for this family and pray for this family.”

And root they did. At the end of third grade, Aidan entered the school



Saint Mary School students Joey Rouse (kneeling), Michael Audio, and Stephen Khoper with the school’s Ginkgo tree planted in memory of their friend and classmate, Aidan Eberhardt, who died from cancer in August 2018.



Aidan Eberhardt, left, received a hero’s welcome from the Saint Mary’s community on Superhero Day.

one day to find 450 students lined up along the hallways to greet their own superhero. Dressed in their favorite superhero costumes, they clapped as Aidan made his way to the decorated cafeteria where he was greeted by a stiltwalker and ate lunch with his classmates.

The Eberhardts’ extended families were an integral part of their support system, but not close enough to be there on the spot in an emergency. Chris and Glenn credit the Saint Mary’s community for jumping in

when they needed to shift gears unexpectedly.

“It was easier to relinquish control of the other kids knowing I could pick up the phone, no questions asked,” said Chris. She said she could call the school with no notice and her younger sons, Connor and Owen, could stay late or other parents would help out. “It was so different from a large school, where there are five or six classes [in each grade]. It gave me a level of calm,” she said.

Chris and Glenn are connected to other parents who share the journey with critically ill children. They described some of the comments parents have made about their school experiences — from impersonal, insensitive requests for absence notes, to sick children being bullied at school. The Eberhardts have seen nothing but kindness from other students and said even their doctor was amazed by the support they received at Saint Mary’s.

“Aidan’s class has a special place in my heart,” said Chris.

Aidan died in August 2018, just

before the start of sixth grade. Nearly 18 months later, tears, sadness, joy and laughter flow freely from his parents and school friends when they talk about him — how he loved the attention of superhero day, despite his quiet personality, or the way a downward glance could yield a new Lego set from his fans at CHOP.

When Aidan’s friends were asked about ways they remember him, Joey scrunched his face and said, “It’s not remembering Aidan. It’s knowing him. I don’t need to remember him because he’s always here. Every time I see a superhero or Legos I see Aidan. He was the greatest friend I ever had — no offense to you two,” he added, looking at his buddies Stephen and Mikey.

Glenn said he believes being in a Catholic school has helped students, including his other sons, deal with Aidan’s death. “It helps that they learn about God, heaven, and Jesus’ love. They are immersed in faith. They know [death] isn’t the end.”

The Eberhardts remain active at Saint Mary’s. They said they still benefit from a supportive community where teachers who know and understand the family’s history watch out for Owen and Connor, who are now in third and fifth grades.

Aidan’s presence continues to bloom at Saint Mary’s. When his classmates wanted to plant a tree in his memory, the family chose a Ginkgo tree. Glenn said they chose the Ginkgo for its perfect form, long life span, and resilience to disease and pests. The real beauty, he described, is in its leaves, which shed in a short timeframe to create a beautiful yellow blanket.

Principal Mancuso said the school bought a birdfeeder to go with tree, but they moved it this year so it would still be visible to Aidan’s classmates. When they rise to eighth grade, the birdfeeder will go with them. And as they watch the free wings of Aidan’s spirit come and go, his friends will continue to see the message etched at the top of the birdfeeder: Love grows here. Live with purpose.

Priest recalls three-year journey with Aidan and his family

By Mary Beth Peabody

WILLIAMSTOWN — In a recent interview, Father Chris Bakey reflected on the time he spent with the Eberhardt family, whose son Aidan died from a malignant brain tumor in August 2018, just days before he would have started sixth grade. Aidan’s parents, Chris and Glenn, took part in the conversation, along with

Saint Mary School, Williamstown principal Patricia Mancuso. Father Bakey recalled his first visit to the Eberhardt’s home, just after Aidan was diagnosed.

“I felt like I was going to be seen as the Grim Reaper,” he said, admitting he was nervous about going to the Eberhardt’s, about how Aidan would feel with a priest showing up. What he found was a warm and wel-

coming home, where he would spend a good deal of time over the next three years. He described Aidan’s room, an ordinary kid’s room filled with action figures and Legos. “That room held so much life,” said Father Bakey.

“I tried to get to know him, to meet him where he was,” he added, recalling Aidan as quiet, brave, “a great kid.” It made him laugh to talk about

the way Aidan would sit near him at Bingo, hoping for an advantage when Father was calling the numbers. Maybe there was an occasional advantage.

Father Bakey is quick to insist he gained far more from his journey with the Eberhardts than they did.

“It was an honor to be with them, and I am blessed,” he said. “It was truly sacred.”

Visit and be sure to like, follow and share

By Mary Beth Peabody

Facebook and other social media outlets occupy a lot of time for a lot of people. These outlets can be sources for breaking news, battling views and building communities.

For South Jersey Catholic Schools, social media connects families and individuals with schools. It's where you will find communities invested in academics, out-of-classroom experiences and spiritual growth. It's a place for posting reminders, sharing photos and preserving memories. A place where parents and visitors can get a snapshot of daily life at school.

Following is a glimpse of what you might find if you visit a South Jersey Catholic school's Facebook page.

Student spotlights

Some schools, like **Bishop Schad Regional School** in Vineland, introduce students with a photo and quotes from an interview.

"When new kids come to BSR I always welcome them to our [school] family. Family is very important - they're our support, our safety, and our security. Our family should inspire us to be the best people we can be... I want to be an inspiration to others too." *Leighanna, Grade 6*

"I like being a role model. It feels good to be looked up to." *Carson, Grade 7*

"I transferred this year from public school. I wanted a new environment and really like the smaller class size. I was really shy at first but it was easy to make friends here. Bishop Schad kids have a true understanding of friendship. I feel like we're all a big family, like I've been here forever." *Leylani, Grade 6*

Parent testimonials

Parent testimonials are a great way to find out about a school. **Saint John Paul II Regional School** in Stratford features parents on its Facebook page.

"Lisa and I wanted a faith-based education for our Mia. We made our decision after visiting a Saint John Paul II Open House. For a Catholic school of 300 students it has everything we desire for Mia; a challenging curriculum, a caring but disciplined atmosphere, and a diverse student body that we feel is an integral part of our daughter's education."

"We decided to send our daughter, Katie, to Saint John Paul II Regional School when she was eligible in Pre-K-3 because we wanted to build upon the Catholic faith that is part of our family. We are active members of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish and have experienced a strong sense of commu-



Gianna Ritz, Art teacher at Saint Teresa Regional School in Runnemede, celebrated her wedding day with her students, who lent their voices in song on the special day.



Saint Joseph Regional School, Somers Point, held a sweet day for its community: high tea and a cake auction.

nity and commitment between the parish and school. The bond was even more paramount to me being a member of the U.S. Army and deployed for a year in the Middle East."

Comments and replies

When you see comments and replies on a Facebook post, scroll down so you don't miss the chatter.

"Assumption opened up the doors to opportunity in so many ways and now my daughters have walked through those doors and feel successful, thanks to their Catholic grammar school education. When high school teachers want to know where my daughters attended grammar school/junior high, we proudly say 'Assumption in Galloway.'"

Parent of former students at

Assumption Regional Catholic School, Galloway

"I cannot say enough good things about the experience my grandson is having in preschool at Saint Vincent's. He has learned so much and it's only October. He loves it and as a teacher myself for 44 years I am very impressed."

Grandparent of a student at Saint Vincent de Paul Regional School, Mays Landing.

Unique experiences

South Jersey Catholic School Facebook pages offer an inside view of academic experiences, faith journeys, community building events and random fun.

Here are just a few examples of stories you might find on a school's

Facebook page.

Celebrating faith in school isn't limited to learning about the Catholic faith. Seventh and eighth grades at **Saint Joseph Regional Elementary School** (Hammonton) visited a synagogue and the Sam Azeez Museum of Woodbine Heritage to learn about the settlement of Russian Jews and their contributions to the growth of Woodbine.

What do vaping and the Lincoln-Douglas debate format have in common? Students at **Saint Joseph High School** in Hammonton used the format to debate the topic of vaping as a public health hazard in Contemporary Moral Issues, a course taught by School President and Principal Father Allain Caparas. Students who take the class can receive college credits through Seton Hall University and Saint Peter University.

If you want to see an extraordinary collection of cakes — and a committed, coordinated community — visit the **Saint Joseph Regional School (Somers Point)** Facebook page. More than 120 people came for tea (with real china) and the chance to bid on a cake. School supporters baked and bought cakes to donate, and local bakeries donated cakes as well — more than 60 cakes for the auction. Photos show the cakes just kept on coming.

A Personal Touch

On Christmas Eve **Assumption Regional School** Principal Joan Dollinger posted a Christmas wish with a photo of her decorated tree. The warm greeting prompted many families to do the same in reply, creating a virtual gallery of beautiful trees and showing how one small gesture can welcome others into a circle of love.

Guardian Angels Regional School (Gibbstown) Principal Sister Jerilyn Einstein shared a photo of herself as a young Catholic school girl, complete with Barbie lunchbox and saddle shoes. Her uniform may be different now, but her smile is unmistakable.

Who sang at the wedding? When **Saint Teresa Regional School** (Runnemede) Art teacher Gianna Ritz got married, she invited her students to sing in the ceremony.

Find us on Facebook

It's easy to find South Jersey Catholic Schools or any one of our individual schools on Facebook and other social media outlets, like Instagram and Twitter. Many of our schools have YouTube channels as well. So come and visit, and be sure to like, follow and share.



Brenda King, third grade teacher at Saint John Paul II Regional School, Stratford, has her hands on the shoulders of Matthew Salamon, who recently enrolled in the school.

‘I was never so proud to call myself a teacher’

By Brenda King

“God has truly smiled on me.” This is always my answer whenever I am asked, “How do you like teaching in a Catholic school?”

I was a teacher for 28 years before taking a job at a Catholic school, but it is truly a blessing to walk through the doors of John Paul II Regional School in Stratford each morning where I now teach third grade.

Recently I was told that I would be shadowed by a potential student. As teachers, we all know that being the “new kid” can be unnerving, to say the least. So on the day of the shadowing I was worried. How would my students treat him? Would he be ostracized? And what would I do if these things happened?

During prayer that morning I prayed for God’s guidance, to give me the words that would help this

new child and all of my students show acceptance.

As it turns out, all of my worries were unfounded. Every student in my classroom welcomed the prospective student with open arms. Throughout the day, my students could be heard not only helping our new friend but also telling him what a great job he was doing. I was never more proud to call myself a “teacher.” The boys and girls taught me a lesson that day. The values and love that we learn in our

school are a part of them.

Our shadow, Matthew Salamon, decided that John Paul II was the school for him and is now a part of our class. He was supposed to shadow at another school, but told his parents that he wanted to be in our classroom because we made him feel so welcome.

Brenda King teaches third grade at Saint John Paul II Regional School, Stratford.



Photos by Peter G. Sánchez

Laura and Donald Diezmos smile at Moe, who they have raised since he was days old and adopted on Jan. 10. Moe’s Holy Angels pre-school class attended the proceedings.

Moe is adopted, and his whole class celebrates with him

By Peter G. Sánchez

WOODBURY — On the morning of Friday, Jan. 10, at the Gloucester County Superior Courthouse here, Holy Angels School’s PreK-3 class celebrated the legal adoption of their classmate, Moe Diezmos, by his parents Laura and Donald.

Beginning when he was 12 days old, Moe spent 1,339 days in foster care in the Diezmos home. He now has a permanent home with his legal parents and 4-year-old brother, Zachary.

As Judge John J. Mattheussen presided over the proceedings and declared the adoption, whoops and hollers came from his classmates and family who packed the courtroom. Afterward the students and educators posed for group photos with the happy family.

The day has “finalized the love” his



Judge John J. Mattheussen gets a high five from Moe Diezmos on Jan. 10, his adoption day.

family and school community have for Moe, said his teacher, Yvette Verticelli.

“We’re his second family,” she continued, referencing a boy who loves coloring and building blocks.

How to follow a beautiful morning? With bowling and lunch, Donald Diezmos said.

“It’s a great, memorable day,” the emotional father said.

Compassion meets the arts and ecology

By Joan Dollinger

Last year while on Facebook, I noticed that a friend posted several pictures of mats that she helped to create for persons who are experiencing homelessness. The mats were made from plastic shopping bags and put together with a loom. I remembered thinking, what a great idea to give to persons who are experiencing homelessness.

The mat can be placed on their sleeping bag or box for extra warmth and support. This was personal for me because I serve on the Board of Directors of Cape Hope, a faith-based organization in Cape May County whose mission is to assist those desiring to overcome the physical, emotional and financial barriers that keep them from permanent housing and guide them to achieve their goals to re-enter the community.

My mind started to ponder if the Assumption Regional Catholic School community might be able to make these mats during Catholic Schools Week 2019. I reached out to our art teacher, who thought it was an amazing idea and one that we could manage. We sent out word to the parents to send in plastic shopping bags (which they did in massive number), and then Mrs. Giardina got to work building the loom.

During Catholic Schools Week, each student had the opportunity to weave several rows to create the mats. It was a beautiful sight to go into the Art Room and watch our students working. Each student used his/her hands in weaving the mat in order to help improve the life of a person experiencing homelessness. The project continued after Catholic Schools Week and so far we have completed four of them. We will continue this project during Catholic Schools Week 2020.

The "Sleeping Mat" project has many benefits: students using their hands, working together, assisting persons in need, and an opportunity to "recycle" plastic bags. It is truly a project where compassion meets the arts and ecology. Whatsoever you do the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me. Jesus' words are definitely a part of this project!

Cape Hope is forever grateful to have been gifted the mats, and distributed them to those most in need. They look forward to even more mats being completed during Catholic Schools Week 2020.

Joan Dollinger is principal of Assumption Regional Catholic School, Galloway.



Students of Assumption Regional School, Galloway, hold a mat they helped create. At press time, four mats have gone to the homeless, and the project will continue throughout this year's Catholic Schools Week.



The mats are made on a loom that was created by the school's art teacher. "It is truly a project where compassion meets the arts and ecology," said Joan Dollinger, Principal of Assumption Regional.

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SERVICE WITH A SMILE —

Good Shepherd School in Collingswood honored Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., with a day of service on Friday, Jan. 17. After a prayer service, students in grades 6 through 8 left the building to do volunteer work at two locations. Some went to Saint John of God Community Services in Westville Grove, a nonprofit, non-sectarian agency providing educational, therapeutic and vocational programs for people with disabilities. Other students went to LUCY Outreach, which offers multi-lingual services to low-income Camden County teens and young adults ages 12-25, and their families. The younger students stayed at the school and worked on projects for Ronald McDonald House.



Photos by Debbie Troy

‘Catholic education is priceless,’ parent says

By Marianela Nuñez

“Lord, why you did not enlighten me to send my girls to Catholic school from the very beginning?”

That was Daysi Rodríguez’ response when asked why she chose a Catholic school for her daughters Dajeleen, age 11 and Dayleen, age 13.

The Rodríguez family arrived at Saint Peter School in Merchantville in 2018 looking for a school that would give them more than an academic education. Although Daysi went to a Catholic elementary school, she thought Catholic school would be financially impossible for her family.

Saint Peter principal Joseph Saffioti said the family was passing the school one day and Daysi dared to enter. She attributes her boldness to the Holy Spirit.

“The Holy Spirit took me to the building and made it work,” said Daysi, who describes herself as a woman of strong faith. She said she and her husband, Francisco, have always tried to give their best to their two daughters.

Daysi and Francisco were both born in La Vega, Dominican Republic. He grew up there, but Daysi came to the United States at age 4 with her mother. She and Francisco both grew up Catholic.

“Everything about the school has impacted me.”

Daysi Rodríguez, parent
Saint Peter School, Merchantville

“I have a strong faith. I preferred my daughters to be in a Catholic school so that apart from academics they would also have the spiritual aspect,” she explained. “I went to a Catholic school and had a very good experience. For me, it is very important that my girls go to Mass and have adoration and pray the rosary, which they do at the school on a regular basis.”

For this Hispanic family with Dominican roots, faith is an integral part of their daily lives.

“Everything about the school has impacted me,” said Daysi. “One feels peace upon entering the building. There is a great presence of God. I love that before and after each class, they pray. Without God there is nothing.” She said that in Principal Saffioti she sees a man of God, a spiritual and faith-filled person who integrates religion and prayer

throughout the curriculum.

“My girls went to a public school, and the education was very different. Catholic schools are quieter and more organized. I also find that the Catholic school is more advanced academically,” Daysi said, adding that she wanted her girls to be able to speak openly about God, which they now have the freedom to do.

Principal Saffioti believes the Rodríguez family and the school are a great fit. “This family is wonderful. They are an example of anything we hope for in any Catholic family that comes to us,” he said.

While Daysi said the most important difference in a Catholic school is faith formation, she shared that Dajeleen did not feel academically challenged in her prior school. At Saint Peter she is taking all honors classes and, as a fifth

grader, is in the sixth grade accelerated math program. Dayleen is also flourishing academically, and both girls are happy in their school community. Saffioti could not speak more highly about the sisters, whom he describes as bright, dedicated and hardworking.

Dayleen will move on to high school in the fall. Daysi said that, through the application process, some of the Catholic high schools have complimented Dayleen’s writing skills, comparing them to college level. Daysi attributes Dayleen’s mastery to the school’s strong focus on writing skills.

Daysi said she participates in what she can and she feels that the Rodríguez family has always felt welcomed in the Saint Peter community. They find the children in the community to be polite and respectful, and school events beautiful and welcoming.

“I advise any parent to make this sacrifice for their children, because it is something that is given to them for a lifetime. Catholic education is priceless. It is worth the sacrifice to spend less on material things and put that money toward your children’s education,” she said.

Marianela Nuñez is Field Consultant for Latino Enrollment, Diocese of Camden.

Weekly Convocation is family time at Camden Catholic

By Mary Beth Peabody

It takes about six minutes to get the entire Camden Catholic High School community assembled in the school auditorium. That is where they go on Wednesdays for Convocation, right after first period. It's like an all-school homeroom, starting with prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. Next up is the news team, delivering in person the announcements, weather and sports recap that are otherwise broadcast during homeroom.

When school Father Joseph Capella, rector of the Cherry Hill School, gets up and says, "God is good," students reply in unison, "All the time," without missing a beat. To his "All the time," they proclaim, "God is good."

Introduced by Father Capella during Catholic Schools Week 2019, Convocation lasts 20 minutes most weeks; a bit longer when the program includes Mass. "My vision was to build on our sense of family and unity, for everyone to be in the same room at the same time hearing the same message," he said.

Father Capella admits that when he initiated the program he didn't have a long-range plan for content. But creating an agenda hasn't been a problem. He and principal Heather Crisci have mapped out a schedule for the remainder of the school year. Where they once hoped they could get enough students to lead some of the presentations, they are now getting as many as three requests a week from students who want to play an active role. By all accounts, Convocation has exceeded Father Capella's expectations.

On a recent January Wednesday, sophomore Gabe Tillman accepted Father Capella's invitation to speak about a major health challenge he faced freshman year and how it ties to the pro-life movement.



Gabe Tillman speaks about pro-life issues and a health challenge he faced at a recent Convocation at Camden Catholic High School, Cherry Hill. The school encourages students to give presentations at its Convocations, and many have responded.

"My vision was to build on our sense of family and unity, for everyone to be in the same room at the same time hearing the same message."

Father Joseph Capella,
Rector, Camden Catholic High School

"Wow. That's a lot of people," said Gabe from the podium, looking into the sea of students, teachers and administrators.

He spoke about the craniopharyngioma — a benign brain tumor of the pituitary gland — that kept him out of school for more than a month during the second semester of his freshman year.

"When you normally think about pro-life you think about the war on abortion," said Gabe. "Well, this may be a very important issue but it's not all [the pro-life movement] stands for. To be pro-life is to be supportive of all people in need."

Gabe expressed gratitude for his good health and for all the support he received from the Camden Catholic community. He also announced a toy drive he is initiating for other patients at CHOP. "I wanted to help the place that helped me," he said later.

"Every step we take is a pro-life movement if we treat people with charity, with love. Pro-life is how we interact with one another," said Father Capella to the community after Gabe spoke. "Gabe is going to do something with his experience to help other kids. That's being pro-life."

Father Capella also reminded students about the importance of self-care and seeking help from others. "Be pro-life by caring for yourselves so that you can give to others what God has given to you," he said.

Father Edward Kennedy, Director of Catholic Identity for the school, ended Convocation by blessing the approximately 50 Camden Catholic students who planned to participate in the National March for Life in Washington, D.C. on Jan. 24.

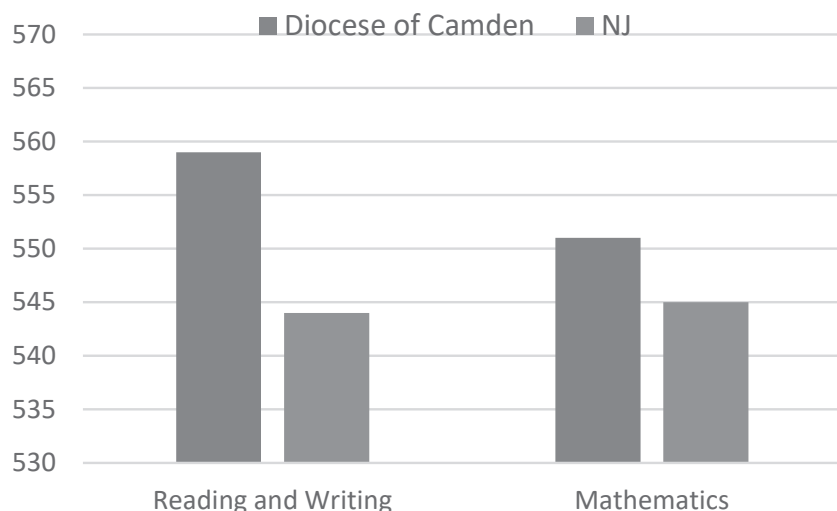
Student body president Harry Keller sees Convocation as a positive new tradition at Camden Catholic. "It's all-encompassing for students. It brings everyone together ... helps the student body recognize each other," he said. Harry used Gabe's presentation as an example. "I didn't really know Gabe's story until today. I wouldn't normally get to see sophomores."

Principal Crisci explained that, in addition to adoration, benediction and Mass, Convocation is a great forum for previewing plays and concerts, welcoming outside speakers, and celebrating cultural events like Black History, Hispanic Heritage and Women's History months. The topics are lined up in advance, and students can ask to present on a given topic. "It's a great opportunity for public speaking, presentations and performance," said Crisci.

She and Father Capella agree that recognizing students' accomplishments is particularly special at Convocation. "When someone in a family accomplishes something, all in the family should share it," said Father Capella.

Crisci added, "That is how we live as members of the Camden Catholic Community."

Average SAT Scores: Class of 2019



Class Profile: South Jersey Catholic High Schools Class of 2019

- 1,101 graduates
- \$200,453,035 combined academic and athletic scholarship offers
- Almost 97 percent enrolled in college
- 7 National Merit Commended Scholars

- 1 National Merit Finalist
- 574 (52%) took Advanced Placement courses
- 3 West Point and 2 Coast Guard military academy appointments
- 3 ROTC scholarships
- 6 enlisted for military service

Catholic schools called ‘essential, integral’ to church’s ministry of evangelization

By Sydney Clark
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The mission and foundation of Catholic education are directly related to evangelization, said the head of the National Catholic Educational Association.

Catholic schools are obligated to evangelize simply because that is the core and mission of the Catholic Church, according to Thomas Burnford, president and CEO of the NCEA.

“The apostles told the good news of Jesus Christ, and Catholic schools are an essential and integral ministry of the Catholic Church,” he told Catholic News Service.

Nationwide, 1.8 million students are enrolled in 6,300 Catholic schools, he noted. Additionally, 80% of students are Catholic, and the remaining 20% are non-Catholic.

Despite the percentage difference, the mission of Catholic education is the same for Catholic and non-Catholic students, Burnford explained.

“The teaching of the faith, the way we witness the Catholic faith fully to Catholic students is the same for all students. All students are invited and welcomed to participate fully in the whole culture of the school, the formation of the school and the life of the school,” Burnford said.

Evangelization is present within schools because students are presented with a Catholic worldview that reveals the reality of God and the Gospel through the curriculum, he said.

“In that way, we are evangelizing students by giving them a real understanding of the world and society. Everyone in a Catholic school is being moved along in the process of evangelization and outreach,” Burnford said.

Acknowledging the inherent relationship between Catholic education and evangelization in the presence of faith, community and identity, Pope Francis in a June 2018 address said: “Schools and universities need to be consistent and show continuity between their foundational mission and the church’s mission of evangelization.”

He delivered the address to members of the *Gravissimum Educationis* Foundation, which he established in October 2015 at the invitation of the Congregation for Catholic Education to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Christian Education.

In that same address, Pope Francis



Photo by Mike Walsh

Students provide the music during the diocesan-wide school Mass on Dec. 9, 2019, at Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Glassboro.

“I think Catholic schools have a unique opportunity to provide hope in a world that is increasingly beset by hopelessness.”

Elisabeth Sullivan, executive director of the Institute for Catholic Liberal Education

proposed a challenge to members of the foundation, which aims to renew the church’s dedication to Catholic education, saying: “To fulfill your mission, therefore, you must lay its foundations in a way consistent with our Christian identity, establish means appropriate for the quality of study and research and pursue goals in harmony with service to the common good.”

Elisabeth Sullivan, executive director of the Institute for Catholic Liberal Education, identified roles within Catholic schools that help bring Catholic and non-Catholic students together. “I think Catholic schools have a unique opportunity to provide hope in a world that is increasingly

beset by hopelessness. A world without God is a world without hope,” Sullivan said.

Sullivan believes that Catholic education is uniquely distinct from other education systems due to its long tradition of conveying the inherent and inseparable relationship between faith and reason. Consequently, Catholic schools “restore what the industrialized model of education has stripped from the classroom — an understanding of the meaning and purpose of things,” she told CNS.

Catholic education asks the deeper questions, regarding the nature of something and its purpose, according to Sullivan. “Secular education can’t

offer that, can’t decide on a meaning or a purpose, so it has to stay away, and therefore, it’s incomplete,” she explained.

Mary Pat Donoghue, executive director of the Secretariat of Catholic Education at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, expressed a similar viewpoint regarding evangelization efforts within Catholic schools. Donoghue said because formation in a Catholic school is integral, students are not solely taught religious doctrine in a religion course.

“What we seek to do is bring forward the church’s intellectual tradition and form their minds in all of the content and areas that they study. This is an excellent tool of evangelization because it exposes kids not just to Catholic practices, regarding prayer and liturgy, but also to a Catholic understanding of reality.”

Donoghue is hopeful that Catholic schools will continue to fulfill their mission of bringing children and young adults into a relationship with Christ.

As populations shift, she said, many Catholic schools will be located in new areas, creating a changing landscape. However, Donoghue said that Catholic education in America has been around for centuries and “will renew itself by turning toward the church’s own tradition and that can be the way forward in the future.”

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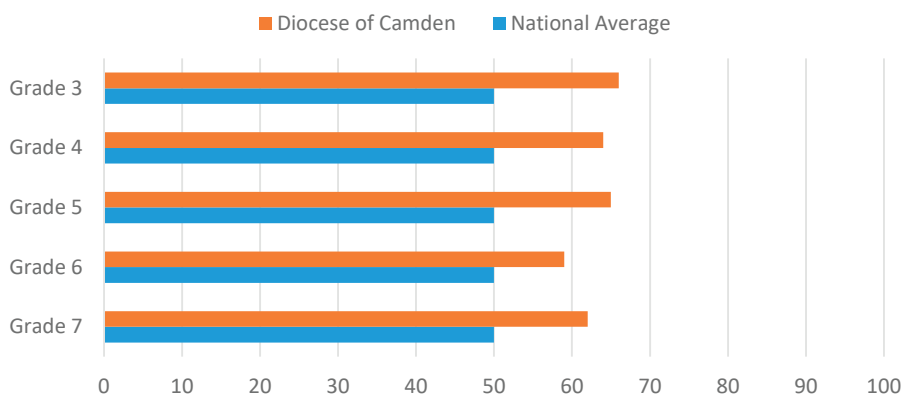
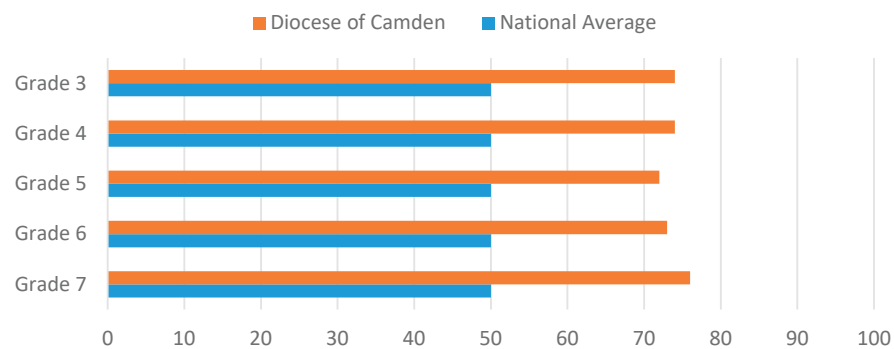
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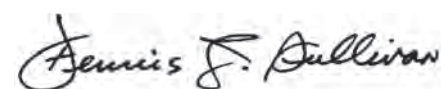
nuestros estudiantes y familias a través del mensaje de Jesús. Por ejemplo, en las escuelas Católicas podemos celebrar pública y orgullosamente una cultura de la vida, donde los estudiantes aprenden a participar, respetar y servir a los demás. El ambiente de la escuela está impregnado por Jesucristo, el Evangelio, la oración, la fe y los sacramentos de la iglesia Católica. La escuela incluso mira más allá de sus puertas hacia el mundo exterior del cual el estudiante se responsabiliza.

A menudo usamos la frase "Un regalo de por vida" cuando nos referimos a nuestras escuelas Católicas. En todas las facetas, esto es cierto. Una educación escolar Católica es el regalo que un padre le da a su hijo; es el regalo que ofrecemos al mundo al proporcionar futuros líderes bien formados, inteligentes y compasivos. Puedo testificar personalmente que es el regalo que recibí como estudiante en los años cincuenta en una escuela primaria

Católica, en los años sesenta en una escuela secundaria Católica y en una universidad Católica. Es el don que me ayudó a discernir mi vocación al sacerdocio

Si está buscando una escuela, o sabe de alguien que está buscando, le recomiendo que considere una escuela Católica y ofrezca a su hijo y al mundo un regalo de por vida. Un regalo que formará y educará a su hijo. Las escuelas Católicas funcionan y son exitosas académica, espiritual y humanamente. En la diócesis de Camden tenemos un producto del que estoy muy orgulloso.

Sinceramente en Cristo,



**Reverendísimo Dennis Sullivan,
D.D.**

Obispo de Camden

‘La educación católica no tiene precio’

Por Marianela Nuñez

¿Señor, por qué no me iluminaste antes para haberlas puesto desde el principio en una escuela católica? Fueron las palabras de Daysi Rodríguez al responder por qué eligió una escuela católica.

La familia Rodríguez llegó a la escuela St. Peter en Merchantville en el 2018 buscando una escuela que le diera algo más que educación académica a sus dos hijas Dajeleen 11, y Dayleen 13. Daysi fue a una escuela católica primaria pero nunca se atrevió a indagar en las escuelas católicas del área porque pensaba que era financieramente imposible para su familia.

El director de la escuela, Joseph Saffioti, dice que la familia pasaba por la escuela un día y Daysi se atrevió a entrar. Ella le atribuye su osadía al Espíritu Santo. “El Espíritu Santo me llevo al edificio” dijo Daysi, quien se describe como una mujer de fe fuerte y que junto a su esposo Francisco han tratado siempre de darle lo mejor a sus dos hijas.

Francisco creció en La Vega R.D. y Daysi tiene raíces del mismo pueblo, aunque ella vino a los EE. UU. con su mamá a los 4 años. Los Rodríguez son católicos activos. Las niñas han servido de monaguillos de la iglesia y Daysi es lectora y ministro de la Eucaristía.

Para esta familia hispana con raíces dominicanas la fe es parte integral de la familia y es por esto que se sienten tan bendecidos. “A mí me ha impacta-

do todo de la escuela. Uno siente una paz al entrar al edificio. Siente que hay una presencia grande de Dios. Me encanta que antes y después de cada clase hacen oración. Sin Dios no hay nada”, dijo Daysi.

“Tengo una fe firme, así que prefería a mis hijas en una escuela católica para que aparte de una educación académica tuvieran también una educación espiritual. Yo también fui a una escuela católica y tuve una muy linda experiencia. Para mí es muy importante que mis niñas vayan a Misa y que tengan adoración al Santísimo y recen el rosario, reflexionó.

“Este es el segundo año escolar de mis niñas en St. Peter y he podido ver que el director es una persona de Dios y de mucha oración, y esto es lo que se respira en la escuela St. Peter. La espiritualidad y la oración son actividades integradas en el currículo de los estudiantes”, añadió.

Cuando Daysi reflexiona acerca del cambio dice: “Mis niñas iban a una escuela pública y la educación es muy diferente. Yo encuentro que la escuela católica está más avanzada en lo académico y yo quería que mis niñas pudieran hablar libremente de Dios, es un ambiente más tranquilo y organizado.” La fe de Daysi y su familia es palpable y el director de la escuela comenta que no podría hablar mejor de ellos: “Esta familia es maravillosa y son un ejemplo de lo que esperamos de una familia católica que llega a nosotros”, dijo Saffioti.

Es claro que para Daysi lo más importante de una escuela católica es



**DAYLEEN Y DAJELEEN
RODRÍGUEZ**

la formación en la fe, sin embargo, en la entrevista ella expresó también que su hija menor Dajeleen no se sentía lo suficientemente estimulada académicamente en la escuela donde asistía anteriormente. En St. Peter descubrieron que ella necesitaba clases más avanzadas. Ahora Dajeleen está tomando todas las clases de honor ofrecidas en St. Peter y aunque está en 5to grado está tomando matemáticas de 6to

grado en el programa acelerado de matemáticas. Así mismo, Dayleen progresa increíblemente en la escuela y ambas son muy felices en su comunidad escolar. Saffioti piensa que las hermanas son muy brillantes y dedicadas y se siente afortunado de tenerlas en su escuela.

Dayleen pasará a la escuela secundaria en el otoño. Daysi dijo que, durante el proceso de solicitud, algunas de las escuelas secundarias católicas han felicitado las habilidades de escritura de Dayleen, comparándolas con el nivel universitario. Daysi atribuye el dominio de Dayleen al fuerte enfoque de la escuela en las habilidades de escritura.

La familia Rodríguez ha encontrado más de lo que buscaban en St. Peter. Para Daysi el ambiente escolar es muy organizado, encuentra que los niños son muy educados y respetuosos. Los eventos son muy bonitos y acogedores. Ella trata de participar en lo que puede y siente que como familia hispana han sido bienvenidos por la comunidad.

Daysi culminó diciendo: “Yo le aconsejo a cualquier padre o madre que haga ese sacrificio por sus hijos, porque es un regalo que se les da para toda una vida. La educación católica es algo que no tiene precio y vale la pena dejar de comprar tantas otras cosas materiales para utilizar el dinero para su educación”.

Marianela Nuñez es Consultora de Inscripciones Latinas en la Oficina de Escuelas Católicas de la Diócesis de Camden.



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