

MISSION STATEMENT The Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Syracuse share in the evangelizing mission of Jesus Christ to love and be of service to God and one another. Together with our families, communities, and parishes, our schools provide an education rooted in the Gospels that is "living, conscious, and active." Students witness and are taught values and ideals that are in accordance with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. We empower our students to live their faith with compassion, integrity, and respect for all life and the diversity of our world. Our schools are faith-centered communities focused on promoting academic excellence while developing a strong moral conscience and embracing Catholic social teachings that enable our students to meet the lifelong challenges and demands of our rapidly changing world. Images used in this publication were taken or submitted at various times, some of which were pre-pandemic. More current photos were taken under the guidelines of the CDC and the Catholic Schools of the Syracuse Roman Catholic Diocese for mask wearing and social distancing at the time.

Lessons From A Challenging Year: A Conversation with Bishop Lucia

BY RENÉE K. GADOUA

uring a fall visit at Bishop Ludden Jr./Sr. High School, students asked Bishop Douglas J. Lucia about the disrespectful and combative tone of the recent presidential debates. The discussion led the bishop to wonder: "What kind of example and values are we leaving for future generations?"

The exchange highlights a central question raised during an extraordinary year that saw a highly partisan election season, a global pandemic accompanied by economic crises and nationwide protests challenging racial inequality and police brutality. The challenges of 2020 touched on concerns relevant to Catholic school students, faculty and staff and Catholic schools' purpose and ethos, according to the bishop.

"One of the lessons for students is flexibility, that sometimes we have to roll with the punches and at times everything in life is not going to be perfect," Lucia said. "That's a good challenge for young people today."

School closings and stay-at-home orders that started in March 2020, and the subsequently canceled graduations, proms and other school traditions, taught another lesson. "Everybody thinks everything has to be perfect," the Bishop said.

That expectation "includes getting married and stuff," he continued. "Everything has to be perfect before I can settle into my job or settle into my vocation, like marriage or even priesthood."

Disappointment and frustration are understandable, but losing control of their life's script teaches young people that "most likely, things aren't going to be perfect," he continued. "But that doesn't mean that it won't be fruitful. That doesn't mean that it won't be a blessing. It's just that sometimes we have to work through things and learn to be flexible.

Lucia – in an interview conducted via Zoom – pointed to technology as an unexpected blessing. "The one thing I've learned, and I think I could maybe do better at, is this

whole thing with technology and computers and long-distance learning," he said. "I think the kids have done a wonderful job with that."

He praised teachers, students and parents for patience and determination during the early days of online learning. Out of crisis could come new procedures and tools to enhance learning even when the health emergency eases, he said.

While church and school communities were mostly unable to meet in person during the pandemic's early days, Zoom Masses and classes offered another blessing.

continued on page 2





"Before the pandemic, sometimes it seemed like we were all in our own little worlds," he said. "And one thing that the pandemic has taught us, I think, is we are part of a bigger world... and so how we care for the environment, how we care for one another, makes a big difference."

He hopes the family time many rediscovered continues. He also hopes for renewed attention on the environment.

"When the world had to shut down, some places, like in India, had the cleanest air they've had in years and years," he said. "We can't forget those lessons."

He has visited diocesan schools — all of which opened in September to full-time, in-person, socially distant learning — and "found the young people in very good spirits. They were like, 'We're not going to let this get us down. We can adapt to this; this is fine. We're not going to stop living."

As life goes on, young people "are beginning to see what we do does affect one another," he continued. "So yes, I need to wear my mask. Yes. Follow the directions that are given. If we do those things, if we just make that extra effort to love our neighbor, to care for one another, we'll get through this together. And I'm sensing that the kids are seeing that. It's such a potent metaphor about loving thy neighbor."

Not all life lessons of the pandemic are positive, though. The long-term effects of months of distance learning remain unknown, and the circumstances highlighted economic inequality and access to resources. Not every student's family possesses skills and time to support schoolwork; others may lack reliable technology or internet access.

"As much as I'm concerned about the spread of COVID, I'm also very much concerned about our young people just getting the support they might need," the Bishop said. "It's not because mom and

dad are doing anything wrong, Sometimes it's that mom and dad have to work, so they're left alone."

Remote learning, he added, "places a lot of responsibility on young people to follow through with things. Responsibility is a good thing. But if I look back, I'm grateful for being given a few years to grow up. Sometimes I do worry right now that the kids might feel like they're having to grow up too fast."

Some students excelled at remote learning, but others "need the teacher to be there, sort of as the taskmaster, keeping them accountable," he said.

Partisan politics and worldwide protests that began after the killing of a Black man at the hands of Minneapolis police create learning opportunities, as well. Seton Catholic High School in Broome County, for example, is reviewing its curriculum to update how the school addresses race and racism. That's an initiative the bishop would like to see in all diocesan schools. He's also committed to ensuring that all diocesan schools are welcoming to Black families.

The bishop worries that divisiveness, disrespect and dishonesty of Washington politics will continue to trickle down to young people.

"Our faith should influence how we act in daily life, not just because of an election year," he said. "Our faith — if we say we believe in God, if we believe in Jesus, if we want to be a follower — affects how we treat one another."

He points to the unlikely friendship between the late Supreme Court Justices Antonin Scalia and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Despite sharply different ideological views, "They had the greatest respect for each other, and that respect went a long way," he noted. "One of the great lessons is that, no, we might not always agree on how we approach issues. But if we agree on how we treat one another, we'll go a long way."

It's hard "to preach love of neighbor and even tolerance when you have both religious leaders and civil leaders who really aren't doing that," he added. "I'm afraid this behavior has influenced other people in this country to think, 'Well, it must be OK for me to act this way.""

Can Catholic schools counter those tendencies? "It's a start," Lucia said. ■

Renée K. Gadoua is a freelance writer and editor and a frequent contributor to The Catholic Sun. Follow her on Twitter @ReneeKGadoua.



Superintendent Discusses Pandemic, Decision to Open Schools and Faith in What's Ahead

n March 2020, Superintendent of Catholic Schools William Crist faced a challenge that he could have never fully prepared for: a global pandemic. When schools across New York State were told to shut down and online learning became the most reasonable option, Crist and his administrative team had to make hundreds of decisions almost overnight. At that time, he would have guessed that things would have returned to "normal" by now, but that was not to be. Still, the 22 Catholic schools of the Syracuse Roman Catholic Diocese have prevailed, and the students, whether in the classroom or online, have continued to thrive. Pillars magazine asked Crist to discuss the many challenges he's faced in the past months, as well as how he is preparing for what may or may not lie ahead in the months to come.

Looking back over the past nine months, what challenges have stood out the most? It seems so long ago that we made an almost seamless transition to teaching online and creating virtual classrooms for the students across the Diocese of Syracuse. In March, we thought we might be experiencing a short pause — a minor inconvenience — and wondered how we would make it through. Back then, we certainly anticipated starting the 2020-2021 school year as we always do. But it was not long before we realized that the world was turned upside down. So, we began this school year with a very different set of norms, many of which are still being refined on a daily basis, as we continue to try to stay ahead of the pandemic by adapting and innovating in order to ensure that we're educating our students in the ways of the Catholic tradition, while keeping faculty, staff and students healthy and safe, too.

continued on page 4

v

That's the larger picture, of course, and one that I'm looking at in hindsight. What specifically stood out to me, however, was the courage of the members of our Class of 2020 in our four high schools. The pandemic certainly robbed them of so many traditions that are a rite of passage for high school seniors, and, for that, I am truly saddened. If that wasn't enough, these same individuals started their young adult lives this fall in ways that can only be described as unimaginable — choosing colleges often sight unseen, quarantining in new dorm rooms, trying to make friends from beneath masks, and, in some instances, changing plans completely. However, having spoken to some of these students, it is my belief that their faith has served them well through this tough journey and that they are thriving despite it all!

"But it was not long before we realized that the world was turned upside down. So, we began this school year with a very different set of norms, many of which are still being refined on a daily basis, as we continue to try to stay ahead of the pandemic by adapting and innovating in order to ensure that we're educating our students in the ways of the Catholic tradition, while keeping faculty, staff and students healthy and safe, too."

Our Catholic schools were able to open this fall with most students in the classroom, while many other schools in our area could not make this happen. How was this possible, and why were you comfortable with this decision?

Our schools were able to open due to many factors — from prayer to discernment to hard work and determination. I am so proud of our educational professionals who worked tirelessly and gave up so much of their usual summer vacation to develop plans that allowed us to confidently provide a safe and educationally comprehensive opening of our schools this September. Teachers, administrators and support staff collaborated with each other, as well as those in the community, including our local health departments, to make sure the doors were opened for the start of the school year.

Another key to our re-entry was the support of our parents. They are partners and stakeholders in our school community, and we listened to and worked with them on this decision. With the overwhelmingly collective interest to open for in-person instruction, we felt charged to bring that opportunity to our families. We had the space and benefit of small, individual classrooms to make this happen safely, although we still were required to make many adjustments in our classrooms in order to provide access to all our students, including some new students who opted to join our in-person Catholic school family this year. In fact, we continue to have waiting lists at many of our elementary schools for in-person instruction. While that is one silver lining, the choice to open our schools this fall was not made lightly. Every day that goes by is one where we continue to plan and adjust to the unknown. But, we are blessed to have the support of our families, our parishes and pastors, and, of course, our leader, Bishop Douglas Lucia.

During this difficult time, can you assure families that their children are still getting the first-rate education that Catholic schools are known for?

Absolutely. Our schools are formed on our faith as Catholics and on a long history of academic excellence, as well as service to others. These are what I believe sets our schools apart from others in our area. We are confident that our programs remain first-rate this year for our in-person instruction and virtually superior for those few families who decided to keep their children at home during this pandemic.

How have your initial plans had to pivot for practical reasons since they were put into place in September?

Since the school year began, we have already experienced what we knew would be the inevitable — the resurgence of the coronavirus within many of our schools. As we continue to forge ahead this year, we are working more closely than ever with our health departments and our communities in this new world of education. We've also implemented a new, single log-in dashboard to allow students and teachers to easily pivot to online instruction if necessary — whether that be for a

day or two or longer. We are literally able to roll to online instruction with 1:1 hardware for students and teachers at a moment's notice. In the end, all we can do is prepare for every scenario and put ourselves in the Lord's hands, as we continue through this academic year.

This has certainly been an unsettling time for families and students for so many reasons that have to do with more than just school. How can our Catholic schools be a place of faith, hope and comfort at such an unsettling time?

I look forward to the time when both schools and parishes will be able to again be true gathering places to celebrate our faith. We are social beings, and we function best when we are able to come together in community. However, despite a less than optimal situation due to the pandemic, we are still able to pray together, share the hope of knowing that we are all a part of God's greater plan and be comforted in knowing that He is watching out for us and would never put us in a situation where we cannot find comfort and solutions. This will be our guiding mission for the academic year — to remain hopeful and faithful in the face of strife and uncertainty.

While anything is possible in the months ahead, what are your top three goals for the rest of the academic year?

I would say, one: prepare for the unknowns and unexpected turns that are before us. We have a great responsibility to educate our students in our faith by bringing them into a closer relationship with Jesus Christ. We plan to do this, whether we stay in the classroom until summer vacation or whether some of that time is spent remotely. We will continue to educate and comfort our students no matter the circumstances, just as Jesus did.

Another goal would be to continue to be mindful that our parents, students, teachers and principals are in an uncertain place. No one has ever lived through a pandemic like this in their lifetime, so there's no handbook to follow. Instead, we will move forward knowing that a greater offering of flexibility, compassion and open-mindedness will be essential for the foreseeable future.

Finally, although it might not seem so, there is other business to attend to despite the pandemic.



We are approaching the end of our current accreditation for the schools in our diocese, and that means we have to prepare for re-accreditation that will take place in December 2022. That seems like it's such a long time from now, but, given the task, it is not. The work before us is determined and strategic, and we will need to be focused and intentional in our steps towards re-accreditation over the next 18 months.

Any final thoughts?

I hope to look back on this time in our history — sooner, rather than later and think, "Wow, how did we get through that?" I have faith that that day is coming soon, and, until then, God will see us through this trial, protect our children and give us the wisdom to make the best decisions for our students, as they continue to learn in the ways of the Catholic faith. As we make this journey, I ask all of you to keep in your prayers our students, our teachers and all of those who make a Catholic education in the Diocese of Syracuse possible.

CAP Principal Visits Students, Families During COVID Shutdown

BY CHRISTY PERRY TUOHEY



CAP Principal Tina Seymour and some of the students at Cathedral Academy at Pompei walked the school grounds and talked about the difficulties of the pandemic.

s a single parent and sole provider for her family, Sebila Duku was caught in a real bind when her son's school, Syracuse's Cathedral Academy at Pompei, turned to virtual instruction to avoid a shut down due to the coronavirus threat.

"I work for this company that makes computer software, and we still have to work," said Duku, mother of fourth grader Malachi Duku-Collins. "And with school changing to virtual at that time, it was like, 'OK, what am I supposed to do?""

Duku, like a majority of CAP parents, came to the United States from another country. She is originally from South Sudan but has been in the U.S. for a number of years and speaks fluent English. Other refugee parents, many of whom don't speak much English yet, were shut off from the school in spring 2020 due to language, lack of transportation and other barriers — so the school came to them.

"We did a lot of home visits," CAP Principal Tina Seymour said. "From computer issues to counseling needs with my counselor [Janet Driscoll]." Seymour went door-to-door, from March through the end of June with teachers and other staff, visiting students and checking in on them.

Oftentimes she and her team would find children at home alone or in the care of older siblings. Refugee parents are highly likely to be essential workers, and some travel as far as New York City to work. Approximately 70% of CAP families come from 17 different countries. Finding reliable childcare during the COVID-19 shutdown has been a struggle for most.

CAP staff members delivered Chromebooks and food on their home visits. The school was left with surplus breakfast and lunch items when classes stopped. "We delivered it all," Seymour said. "We had tons of frozen food, so I divided that all into freezer bags. I would just get it together with another adult and drop it off."

Communicating health information to non-native English speakers has been a challenge for CAP educators during the pandemic, but, with the support of the Syracuse Roman Catholic Diocese, translators have been hired. The diocese received a grant from the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation, which provides funds "to improve the health and well-being of vulnerable New Yorkers," and CAP is one of eight schools receiving aid for educating families about good physical and mental health. The grant covered the cost of nutrition pamphlets printed in five different languages and, now once school returned to in-person learning, an extra day of gym per week.

On one fall afternoon at school pick-up time, Seymour spoke with a CAP parent who came to Syracuse from Myanmar/Burma. Beh Mee has two children at the school, and she told the principal that her fourth and fifth graders were doing well with their return to the classrooms. "It's better for them now that school is back," Mee said.

Seymour empathizes with parents who worry their children may be exposed to the virus at school but sees a marked change in many she visited last spring and summer. "They're thriving," she said. "They're smiling and their behavior's better. They need to be here."

Christy Perry Tuohey is an author and a freelance writer in Syracuse, New York.

School Nurse Brings a Little Happiness by Making Masks for Every Student

BY CHRISTY PERRY TUOHEY

athedral Academy at Pompei's school nurse was among the staff members who reached out to students and their families during the coronavirus shutdown last spring. Paula Grant spoke to parents of children with certain medical conditions, like asthma, a couple of times a week and made home visits, as well.

With school closed, Grant came up with the idea to make cloth masks for her colleagues. She found a pattern for a three-ply cotton mask and sat down at her sewing machine. At one point, she was turning out 10 or 15 a week. "I'm thinking about all these masks I'm making, and I'm like, 'Why not make them for the kids?" she said.

Principal Tina Seymour gave Grant a list of all CAP students, 77 in total. "She put their initials on them so that they knew whose mask it was," Seymour said, picking up a mask. "This is one of their masks that they keep here at school. Our teachers wash them in Woolite, dry them out, and they have them for the next week."

The masks' outer layers are bright, fun designs, the middle layers non-woven interfacing and the inside layer is always a batik print. Grant cuts up cotton T-shirts into one-inch strips for the straps.

Grant orders fabric online and chooses patterns that appeal to children of different ages. She held up one made for a second grader with Alice in Wonderland and other Disney characters printed on the front. "The kindergartners have Care Bears," she explained. "First grade was Dr. Seuss. And then third grade has all different Mickey Mouse ones — Mickey or Minnie."

Fourth grade masks display either emojis or candy brands like Dots and Sugar Babies. Fifth graders get Harry Potter-themed masks, and sixth graders can choose from sports themes or fashion designs.

"I was hoping that that would somehow rub off on them, that just this little symbolic thing might help improve their day or improve their happiness with being back in school. And maybe even [make them] a little less anxious," Grant said.

CAP's nurse also makes specialty masks for each adult who works at the school. She pays for all of the mask materials herself and waves off a compliment about her



School nurse Paula Grant made bright, fun masks for all of the students at Cathedral Academy at Pompei.

generosity, saying it's her pleasure to make them. In fact, the sewing was a therapeutic activity for her. "I realized how this helped me get through the shutdown, you know?" she said.

She held up the mask she made for Seymour. "If you can see, it's a superhero mask, and there's a woman on the side of it," Grant said. "And that is going to be for her."

Christy Perry Tuohey is an author and a freelance writer in Syracuse, New York.

First Time Teacher Embraces Support from Her Alma Mater in the Midst of Pandemic

BY CAROLINE K. REFF

hen Hannah Heppeler was a little girl, she would go into her basement with some chalk and a textbook from her grandmother's fifth grade classroom and teach her imaginary students.

She took it seriously, even sending notes home to the imaginary parents.

"I have basically wanted to be a teacher my whole life," said Heppeler, who in the fall of 2020 not only saw that dream come true but made it happen within the walls of her alma mater, Blessed Sacrament School in Syracuse.

"I've always wanted to work at Blessed Sacrament because I loved my teachers and the community there," said Heppeler, noting that the school's current principal, Lisa Coppola, was once her first grade teacher. A graduate of St. John Fisher College, Heppeler earned a degree in education and is certified to teach both general education and special education in grades one through six. Over the years, she worked at Blessed Sacrament's summer program and kept in touch with both the former principal, Andrea Polcaro, and the current principal, Coppola. While substitute teaching in Rochester, New York, after graduation, she heard about an opening for an intervention teacher at her alma mater. Soon after, she was hired for fall 2020, but, when the pandemic hit, the school was not able to move forward with the position. Luckily, a fifth grade teaching opportunity opened up soon after, and Heppeler headed to Blessed Sacrament School after all.

She was especially excited to teach fifth grade, as Heppeler comes not only from a long line of teachers,

Hannah Heppeler started her career this year teaching fifth grade at Blessed Sacrament School.



T

but specifically a long line of *fifth* grade teachers — her grandmother, several aunts and cousins, and even her boyfriend's mom. "I was so excited to have my own fifth grade classroom," she said.

Of course, with the excitement also came some stress, as Heppeler had to start her first teaching job in the midst of the COVID-19 outbreak. "As a new teacher, there was a lot to adjust to quickly. I not only had to plan for the regular curriculum, but there was so much technology I needed to learn because of the pandemic. And, I had to teach my students how to use the technology, too," she explained.

Heppeler started in September with 12 students in the classroom and four online students. She admits that teaching in a hybrid format class was

a challenge, particularly at first, as she figured out ways to make sure those students online were engaged in the class and learning each day's lessons. Remote learners typically use Google Meet to join the class from home with assignments done on Google Classroom. Fortunately, Heppeler's classroom is large enough so that all of her in-person learners can safely socially distance throughout the day.

Despite the unusual circumstances, she hopes to help her students create the happy memories that she has of her days at Blessed Sacrament School.

"I grew up just a few blocks away, and many of my Blessed Sacrament friends are still my friends today. Our parents are still friends, too. It's always been a great community," said Heppeler, who moved back to her old neighborhood when she accepted the teaching job.

"I remember the fun things we did in school, like the rock-a-thons — where we would all go dance in the gym, and 'tag days' — where we didn't have to dress in uniform and, of course, all the great things that Principal Andrea Polcaro did to motivate us to read," added Heppeler, who shared that her former principal was one of the first people to congratulate her when she accepted the fifth grade position.



Hannah Heppeler as a student at Blessed Sacrament School.

"I grew up just a few blocks away, and many of my Blessed Sacrament friends are still my friends today. Our parents are still friends, too. It's always been a great community."

— HANNAH HEPPELER

Heppeler appreciates the support of her current principal, too. "When I first started, she would call me every night to make sure I was doing OK," said Heppeler of

Coppola. "It has been so nice to be in such a caring environment where people are looking out for me."

She credits her years of Catholic education — from elementary school through college — for leading her back to Blessed Sacrament School and keeping her faith strong. Heppeler hopes to instill not only that kind of faith in her students but also the lessons of caring for one another and treating each other with the same kindness that she learned as a child in school.

"I want them to understand that God is looking out for all of us even though we're living at a time when things can be hard or scary," she said.

Starting her first teaching job has been "exhausting" for Heppeler with a lot of late nights, planning and putting things into place, but it's also been a dream come true for the little girl who used to play school in her basement.

"This has been such a supportive place to start my career," she said. "I love my class and the Blessed Sacrament community. They've made this all worth it."

Caroline K. Reff is a freelance writer in Syracuse, New York, and is also the editor of Pillars.

True Heroes: Pair of Custodians Keep School Safe, Clean for Students

BY CHRISTY PERRY TUOHEY

uietly, mostly behind the scenes, a two-man team keeps Bishop Ludden Junior-Senior High School clean and safe. Joe Aldrous, who took a job at Ludden in 2002, and his colleague, Tom Liggett, an employee since 2007, are the school's custodial staff. They are also good friends who share a love for sports.

In the past year, Aldrous and Liggett have tackled challenges unprecedented in their pre-2020 work lives. When community spread of the coronavirus reached Central New York and local schools shut down, they kept working at the school, but their jobs were dramatically transformed.

According to Liggett, they spent days disinfecting the entire facility. "At first they said they [students and staff] were coming back," he remembered. "But when May came, they said no, and the governor said no, so then we started doing the rooms."

Their adapted method of cleaning classrooms introduced a tag-team approach. Aldrous explained that each takes a room, removing desks and cleaning and waxing floors. "While I'm doing that, he's [Tom] in the next room," Aldrous said.

When the students returned in September, their approach changed once again. As they brought the cleaned desks back into the classrooms, they carefully spaced each 6 feet apart to adhere to social distancing guidelines.

"It's a whole different ball game now," Aldrous said.

"Because you can only have so many kids in the classroom."

As of fall 2020, 240 students were attending Bishop Ludden full-time and in-person, and 30 were learning remotely online.

Classrooms, bathrooms and the cafeteria have all been rearranged, and the custodians installed hand sanitizers around the building.

"We've got about 15 of them," Liggett said. "We had to drill them into the concrete... you know, put 'em up on the walls"

The cafeteria, as Aldrous puts it, "isn't what it used to be." Tables were taken out and desks brought in to be safely arranged. "The tough part is when the kids come in and you have to tell them, 'You've got to stay safe." Aldrous said. "'You can talk, but you still can't linger.' It's tough."

The school's bathrooms are locked and can have only one person at a time inside. The custodians are kept busy with bathroom requests, delivered via a walkie-talkie Liggett

Tom Liggett, left, and Joe Aldrous, right, work tirelessly behind the scenes to keep students and faculty safe.



carries. Toilets have dividers, but urinals and sinks have to be blocked off to create space between users' coming and going.

Bishop Ludden Principal Leo Cosgrove is grateful for Aldrous and Liggett's readiness to adopt strict safety measures, including wearing personal protective equipment. "They've got to change what they do into some different routines, which is taxing at best," he said. "I know it was an adjustment for everybody to put masks on, but these guys are great with it."

Unforeseen supply shortages have also made their jobs tougher. In the early days of the pandemic, they replaced school furnace filters with special antibacterial ones. They had only a limited supply on hand in spring 2020; the next shipment was back-ordered due to other large facilities, like shopping malls, needing them immediately.

Winter brings new challenges for Liggett and Aldrous, not just because of the usual heavy snowfall. They are concerned about keeping windows open around the building to improve ventilation, a tricky task during the year's coldest months.

Their jobs are also made tougher because they are both in a higher-risk age group. In Aldrous' case, he has a family history of cancer. Liggett has grandchildren he couldn't see for months because of potential virus transmission. But early on, they both tested negative for the coronavirus and were able to continue working.

"It's tough to find people like [Tom and Joe] with the loyalty for this building and the love they have for the children," Cosgrove said.

Cosgrove calls the two "a special pair," not only for their complementary work style but their camaraderie. They both enjoy setting up for and watching Ludden athletic events, and, in the past, watched softball games together. Pre-COVID, Aldrous even took tickets at football games.

The danger of COVID-19 has restricted school sports indefinitely. "I used to go to the games and watch them play," Aldrous said of the Ludden students. "I'd go on the road to watch the kids play soccer, football, golf, too. Maybe next year. I don't know."

Future scheduling for both academics and athletics is still very much up in the air. But the tag-team of Aldrous and Liggett look forward to the day when they can once again sit in the bleachers and know that the only thing up in the air might be a fly ball.

Christy Perry Tuohey is an author and a freelance writer in Syracuse, New York.



D

R

Thanking Faculty and Staff

oly Cross School in Dewitt, New York, has been truly blessed by the parents of its PTA, who provide a monthly luncheon to thank faculty and staff for all the work they do, according to faculty member Judy DeLorenzo. "This year, with all of our COVID-related rules, regulations and limitations, the lunches are especially appreciated," said DeLorenzo. "Holy Cross is truly blessed to have such a supportive parent group."



Mask Up!

he theme for the 2020-2021 school year at St. John the Evangelist School in Binghamton, New York, was an appropriate one: Don't Mask Your Love ...for Jesus! The theme helped students remember the importance of loving their school community by wearing masks and staying socially distant during the pandemic.

HONORING THE CLASS OF 2020

Congratulations to Valedictorians and Salutatorians

The members of the Class of 2020 had the distinction of completing their high school years in the midst of a pandemic. And, while that meant the cancellation of many senior traditions, as well as conventional graduation ceremonies, it still did not take away from the many accomplishments these students achieved over the course of their academic careers. Congratulations to all of those students who graduated with the Class of 2020 from the four Catholic high schools in the Syracuse Diocese!

The following were the 2020 valedictorians and salutatorians of their respective schools:

BISHOP GRIMES JR./SR. HIGH SCHOOL, E. SYRACUSE, NEW YORK

Valedictorian: Colby Evans, who is attending Le Moyne College to study communications.

Salutatorian: Matthew Tarby, who is attending Le Moyne College to study business, as well as to play baseball for the Dolphins.

BISHOP LUDDEN JR./SR. HIGH SCHOOL, SYRACUSE. NEW YORK

Valedictorian: Emily Bouchard, who is attending the University of Maine to study food science and human nutrition.

Salutatorian: Katelyn Oswalt, who is attending Hobart and William Smith Colleges to study psychology.

NOTRE DAME JR./SR. HIGH SCHOOL, UTICA, NEW YORK

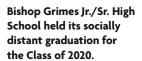
Valedictorian: Danielle Cresci, who is attending Boston College on an Army ROTC Scholarship to study nursing.

Salutatorian: Hannah Bushey, who is attending the University of Rochester to study biomedical engineering.

SETON CATHOLIC CENTRAL SCHOOL

Valedictorian: Wyatt Breese, who is attending Dansmarks Tekniske Universitet in Denmark to study material engineering.

Salutatorian: Tomoyoshi Kimura, who is attending the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign to study chemical engineering.





Grimes Alumna Volunteers for the Frontlines of NYC During Pandemic

BY CORY SCHAD



Jillian Tucci, a 2008 graduate of Bishop Grimes and nurse at Upstate University Hospital, volunteered to travel with colleagues to Stony Brook University Hospital in New York City during the early days of the pandemic.

illian Tucci, Bishop Grimes Class of '08, has been a nurse at Upstate University Hospital in Syracuse, New York, since 2011. She has spent her time there working in hematology/oncology, orthopedic surgery and, most recently, in the emergency room as a trauma nurse. Despite her expertise and experience, nothing could have prepared her for working on the frontlines of health care during a pandemic.

During the peak here in New York State, no area was impacted more by COVID-19 than New York City. The city needed immediate assistance from anyone willing to lend a hand. Tucci, along with 21 of her colleagues, answered the call and made the decision to volunteer at Stony Brook University Hospital to provide aid during this crisis.

Tucci recalled her immediate hesitation. "I feared walking into the unknown. No one was sure how serious the virus was at the time. Would I catch it? Would I bring it home to my family?" she said. "They played such an important role in my decision, and I think we all knew deep down this was something I needed to do."

Her fear of the unknown quickly faded as she walked through the hospital doors at Stony Brook Medical Center for the first time. Tucci and her team of volunteers were working 12 to 18 hour shifts in what she described as "war zone style nursing." She vividly remembers the mental and physical exhaustion that ensued, treating anyone in need of their help.

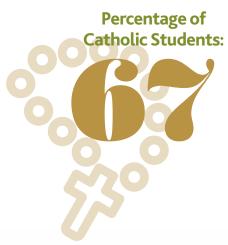
Tucci is no stranger to volunteer work within the medical profession, having spent three weeks in Ghana, Africa, in the town of Kumasi early in her career. It was a volunteer experience for nurses and medical professionals to help those less fortunate, setting up daily clinics at multiple locations.

"I remember people walking for days just to receive basic medical care, ranging from dental work, breast screening, basic vital signs, wound care, etc.," Tucci said. "I think in total we saw over 1,000 patients that month."

When asked if she would make the same decision to go to New York City if given the opportunity, Tucci replied, "Absolutely I would. To be honest, I almost extended my trip down there. It was such an eye-opening and humbling experience, one that I am extremely proud to be a part of."

Cory Schad '05 is director of communications and alumni relations at Bishop Grimes Jr./Sr. High School.





STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS (PRE-K - 12)*

Black/African-American:	5.8%
American Indian/Native Alaskan:	<1%
Asian:	4.2%
Bi-Racial:	5.5%
Hispanic/Latino:	<1%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander:	<1%
Two or more races:	<1%
White:	75.3%

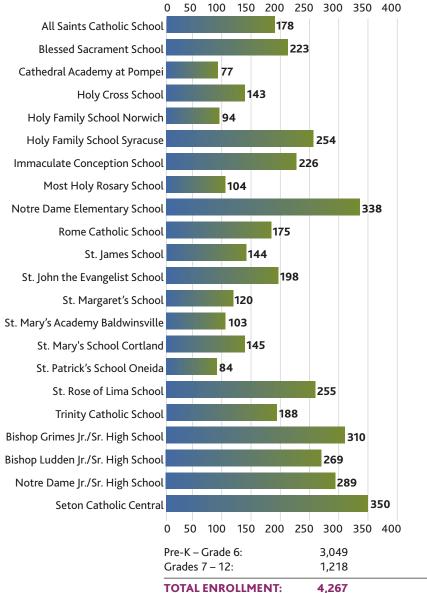
^{*}Voluntarily self-reported data

Average Class Size:





Enrollment



TOTAL ENROLLMENT:

^{*}Based on 2019-2020 NCEA data, Sept. 2020

Students Attending **College:**

94%



High School **Graduation Rates and Diplomas**



Christian Service Hours

SCHOOL NUMBER OF SE	RVICE HOURS*
All Saints Catholic School	3,000
Bishop Grimes Jr./Sr. High School	6,376
Bishop Ludden Jr./Sr. High School	11,577
Blessed Sacrament School	2,492
Cathedral Academy at Pompei	702
Holy Cross School	548
Holy Family School Norwich	110
Holy Family School Syracuse	4,500
Immaculate Conception School	548
Most Holy Rosary School	1,800
Notre Dame Elementary School	5,132
Notre Dame Jr./Sr. High School	7,083
Rome Catholic School	2,150
Seton Catholic Central	6,500
St. James School	315
St. John the Evangelist School	1,350
St. Margaret's School	1,850
St. Mary's Academy Baldwinsville	2,500
St. Mary's School Cortland	840
St. Patrick's School	1,200
St. Rose of Lima School	116
Trinity Catholic School	1,169
TOTAL	61,858

^{*}Note: These numbers reflect only six months of the school year due to COVID-19 restrictions.

2018–2019 Professional Teaching Staff

FULL-TIME

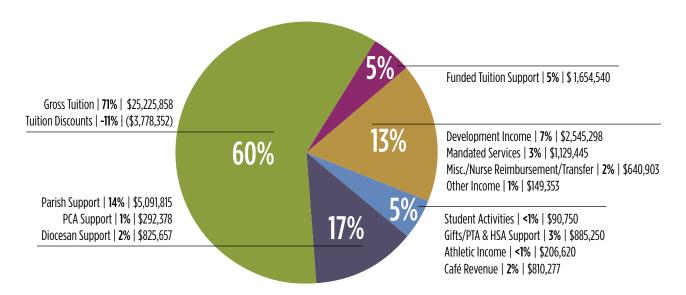
	RELIGIOUS	LAY	CLERGY
-1	_	207	•
Elementary	3	207	0
High School	3	120	1
Full-Time Total	6	327	1

PART-TIME

	RELIGIOUS	LAY	CLERGY
Elementary	0	71	0
High School	0	17	1
Part-Time Total	0	88	1



2019–2020 Budgeted Income and Expenses



Total Budgeted Income

\$35,769,792

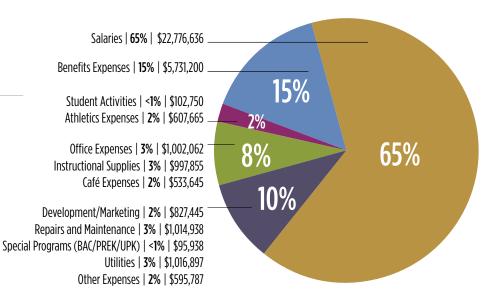
Total Budgeted Expenses

\$35,302,818

Budgeted Net Income/ All Schools:

\$466,974

NOTE: Does not include bad debt or depeciation



2019-2020 Average Budgeted Cost/Tuition/Subsidy Per Pupil

Average Cost Per Pupil

Average Net Tuition Per Pupil



Average Subsidy

Average Net Tuition & Subsidy Support Per Pupil



\$9,970

\$7,042

\$7,903



\$5,821

\$4,377

\$4,801

- \$4,149 (+4.87%)* \$7,018 \$2,665 (+3.29%)* \$5,586 \$3,102 (+3.91%)* \$6,007
- *Increase over previous year

- < High School (7-12)
- < Elementary School (K-6)*
- < All Schools (K-12)*

^{*}Includes Pre-K enrollment and related expenses



2019–2020 Diocesan School Parish Support Budgeted

WESTERN REGION

Total Western Region	\$1,533,672
(SMS/IC/St.R/HC/SMA/HFS)	\$259,536
Parish School PCA Support	
Financial Aid/Educational Support	\$100,000
Urban Education Support (CAP/BS/MH	R) \$465,000
Bishop Ludden Jr./Sr. High School	\$354,568
Bishop Grimes Jr./Sr. High School	\$354,568

NORTHERN REGION

Trinity Catholic School \$239,182

SOUTHERN REGION (Broome County combined)

All Saints School, St. James School, St. John the Evangelist School, Seton Catholic Central School

Total Southern Region	\$1,250,000
-----------------------	-------------

EASTERN REGION

Total Eastern Region	\$1,241,952
St. Patrick's School	\$197,252
Rome Catholic School	\$236,350
Utica Notre Dame Elementary School	\$399,175
Utica Notre Dame High School	\$409,175

* Diocesan School Parish Support

\$4,264,806

Financial Aid 2019–2020

CENTRALLY FUNDED AID

	HOPE APPEAL TAP A	SCUDERI FUND	HERITAGE FUND	TOTAL BY REGION	PERCENTAGE
West	\$353,000	\$65,093	\$125,611	\$543,704	57%
North	\$7,500	\$1,376	\$2,657	\$11,533	1%
South	\$126,300	\$23,186	\$44,749	\$194,235	20%
East	\$132,600	\$24,345	\$46,983	\$203,928	21%
TOTALS* **	\$619,400	\$114,000	\$220,000	\$953,400	100%

^{*} Allocations based on parent financial aid application and calculated need

^{**} Does not include local aid from individual schools



^{*} Excludes parish school support



Alumnus Credits Catholic Education on Journey Toward the Priesthood

BY RENÉE K. GADOUA

uring six years at Bishop Ludden Jr./
Sr. High School and five at Le Moyne
College, Dennis Walker didn't seriously
consider the priesthood. But he clearly
remembers reciting the Memorare daily
at Bishop Ludden.

"We would do that right before the last period," he said. "It was a beautiful prayer about the Blessed Mother. Some days you felt you were in a regular high school. But with that prayer, it was certain that we were at a Catholic school."

The 2006 Bishop Ludden graduate was ordained a transitional deacon on June 19, 2020, one of three deacons Bishop Douglas J. Lucia ordained last year. Walker expects to be ordained a priest in June 2021. He is one of six of the Syracuse Diocese's 12 seminarians who attended diocesan Catholic schools.

Walker was among about 120 students who attended the junior-senior high school all six years. "The biggest class I had was 20 people," he said. "It helped you be more immersed in the learning."

He played soccer and ran track — not terribly

well. "They wanted everyone to play," he said. "That's kind of formative, being part of a team, building your interpersonal skills and being part of an organization bigger than yourself."

In soccer, "There wasn't really a star on the team," he said. "There were guys who were the best on the team, but we believed, 'We're a team and we all have strengths' and we built on that."

The school "had a home-town feel," he said. "It was like you were part of the community. Not only did you know everyone, everyone knew you."

Walker grew up in Syracuse's Valley neighborhood where his family belonged to Our Lady of Hope (previously St. James). He attended Syracuse's Danforth Magnet School from kindergarten through sixth grade before his parents decided to enroll him at Bishop Ludden. His younger sister, Diane, also graduated from Ludden.

"When we were younger, we didn't have the money," he recalled. "We went to an open house, and (my parents) were impressed with the education in general. They liked that there was care for students.

The class size seemed like students had the attention they needed."

At Le Moyne College, he studied accounting and earned a bachelor's degree in 2010 and an MBA in 2011.

He remembers Rev. Joe O'Connor, a 1995 Bishop Ludden graduate and director of the diocesan Office of Vocation Promotion, sharing his vocation story at the school. "They were always encouraging us to think about the call, but it wasn't anything I had put a lot of thought to," Walker said.

"I see the importance of sending the young priests out there to anyone who is thinking about the priesthood," he said. "They need to hear that it's a possibility, and it can be a beautiful and fruitful life."

His path turned toward the priesthood after college, when he learned about Theology on Tap, a young adult program. "I went there and met some people," he said. "That gave me kind of a place where I had a shared faith with those my own age."

Walker acknowledges his ordination will come amid numerous challenges for the church and society.

"I see this as a calling," he said. "That's made it easier to see that, despite all the challenges, I have a role I can fulfill as an ordained priest. I'm called to be a conduit to God."

While that won't always be easy, "You have to tell them what a beautiful life it is," he said. "Despite all the difficulties, this is a good life. It's a fun life. It's one where every day is an adventure. Whatever vocation you are called to do, the Lord gives you the strength and grace to do it."

Renée K. Gadoua is a freelance writer and editor and a frequent contributor to The Catholic Sun. Follow her on Twitter @ReneeKGadoua.

Westhouse of

Inspirational Tree Helps Patients, Families

tudents in Pre-K through grade six at Most Holy Rosary School in Syracuse created an inspirational tree for Sarah's Guest House, which offers lodging for adult patients and families traveling to Syracuse for medical care and is located across the street from the school. Inspirational messages and favorite verses were written on leaves attached to the tree. Patients and families staying at Sarah's House could remove the leaves and carry the messages with them as inspirational reminders that they were in others' prayers and God was

with them during difficult times.



Pictured, left to right, are Abby Mosotti, student council representative, Executive Director of Sarah's Guest House David Hass and Andrew Fox, student council president.

v

ADA-PEP Counselors Provide a Resource for Struggling Students

BY KIRA MADDOX

hile schools in the Syracuse
Roman Catholic Diocese returned
to in-person class instruction in
September, anxieties still lingered
in children and parents alike
about the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and what it
may hold for the future.

While the Alcohol-Drug Abuse Prevention Education Program, more commonly referred to as ADA-PEP, seems like it predominantly deals in substance-abuse prevention, its trained counselors are available as a resource to help cope with a variety of problems and concerns a child may have. ADA-PEP is stationed in 16 school districts in Onondaga and Madison counties, including schools within the Diocese of Syracuse.

Janet Driscoll works in Blessed Sacrament School, Cathedral Academy at Pompeii and St. Margaret's School. Jacqueline Musto works at Most Holy Rosary, St. Mary's Academy and St. Rose of Lima. And, new to the team, Lyndsey Creed is working at Immaculate Conception School.

Every year for an ADA-PEP counselor looks different, depending on the particular needs of the students, Driscoll said. Sometimes a main concern is family life, with many students dealing with separation or divorce at home. Other years, there may be a wave of students struggling with a certain curriculum.

ADA-PEP counselors are equipped to handle a little bit of everything, Driscoll said. They meet with students individually and can talk about things like anxiety, issues in the classroom, bullying, family issues and grief, to name a few. Group counseling is also available for students who may prefer not to speak one-on-one.

Counselors will also help parents or guardians find outside resources and support for their student, if they need it, Musto said. This ensures students are supported even when the ADA-PEP counselors are not available, like over school breaks and summer vacation.

When COVID-19 began to get serious in Central New York and schools moved to virtual learning, Musto said counselors worked alongside teachers and administrators to reach out to disengaged students to keep them on track. This was especially crucial for already at-risk students, who in some situations were already dealing with issues at home — such as inadequate access to food or financial instability — and now had to contend with the fears of a global pandemic, too.

According to Driscoll, the ADA-PEP counselors stepped in to connect struggling students and families with necessary resources to be successful, from financial support to help getting nutritious meals.

"Whatever came up, we were trying to respond the best we could," she said.

Parents and caregivers should keep an eye out for changes in behavior as an indication that a student may be struggling emotionally, Musto suggested.

"It's about keeping the lines of communication open," she said. "We're here as a school support. We can't provide everything, but we can certainly provide a certain piece and work with other professionals to collaborate on how we can best support students in school, as well as what they need outside of school," Driscoll said. "It's all about keeping the lines of communication open during these tough times."

Kira Maddox is a freelance writer in Utica, New York.

Encouragement in "Ruff" Times

tudents from Trinity Catholic School in Oswego, New York, couldn't get enough of Sophie, a therapy dog from ARISE that visited the children in November. Sophie's visit was part of Operation Santa Paws, a community service project through Cabrini Team Health that urged students to assist in gathering items for local shelters. Sophie's visit encouraged the children to participate.





Immaculate Conception's video message included reading teacher Beth Bonacci encouraging students to read while spending time at home.

Keeping in Touch Through Video Messages

ast March when schools turned to remote learning, the hardship of not being able to see students in person had everyone at Immaculate Conception School in Fayetteville thinking about how to make connections and let families and students know they were thinking of them. The faculty and teachers put their creativity into action and decided to make a video clip of dances and messages to send to their school families. The video included a message from Immaculate Conception Parish's Pastor Rev. Thomas Ryan sending God's love to all IC families and students.

IT Trainer Helps Faculty, Students Keep Pace With Virtual Learning

BY CAROLINE K. REFF

hether you're a teacher, a student, a parent or just someone trying to successfully navigate the brave new world of living in a pandemic, most of us would admit we have a love-hate relationship with technology. We use it, and we know we need it like never before, but keeping up with it can often be overwhelming.

Thankfully, there are experts like Rebecca Edsall, instructional technology teacher trainer, to make things easier. Contracted through the OCM BOCES model school team, Edsall has supervised technology training for the 22 Catholic schools in the Syracuse Roman Catholic Diocese for three years. Over the past nine months, however, she's never been in more demand, as schools work to keep students learning and thriving while COVID-19 continues to loom.

"Last spring, when the pandemic hit, we were all in crisis mode," she said of the sudden pivot to online learning for schools across New York State. "Our Catholic schools had some digital systems in place, but schools weren't set up to meet our immediate needs. At that point, administrators, teachers and support staff were working as quickly as we could to integrate technology in the most efficient way possible."

"At that time, it was 'emergency teaching,' but our faculty rolled up their sleeves, and they just did it," she added, noting that the Catholic schools did an excellent job of communicating with students and families during this trying time. "Even some of the faculty who didn't consider themselves terribly tech savvy did remarkable things to make our kids feel that school was as normal as possible."

As the 2019-2020 academic year ended in June, Edsall and others on the model school team began to plan for every scenario, as they had no way to predict what September would bring. The team offered teachers from all area schools a variety of resources,

such as one-hour asynchronous videos, webinars and workshops, to educate them in Google Workspace and Google Tools. Other important information emphasized emotional learning techniques that would enable students "to survive and thrive," whether they returned to the classroom or participated in online learning. Edsall also held daily virtual office hours throughout the shutdown, giving teachers one-on-one opportunities to ask questions about the technology they were learning.

"We had a lot of nerves over the summer months, which was completely understandable given that we were trying to operate during a pandemic with so many unknowns out there," said Edsall, who, herself, was a classroom teacher for many years. "I tried to reassure everyone that it's a journey. It's about how you move forward. Don't worry; you'll get there."

And they did get there, after what Edsall can only calculate as "an impressive number of hours" of training during what was supposed to be a relaxing few months of summer vacation.

As September approached, the Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Syracuse made the decision to open for in-person learning, as most of the schools had small class sizes and adequate space to safely social distance throughout the day. While the majority of students returned to the classroom, some opted for a hybrid format (attending in-person some days and online on others). A few also elected to join classes entirely online. This meant that teachers had to put their IT know-how to the test, as well as make sure their students, and often parents, also knew how to use the technology needed to navigate the school day.

"It was an overwhelming task to welcome students back," said Edsall. "But, interestingly, students were the ones who were the more malleable. Sometimes it was the adults who had the harder time adapting."

As the school year progressed, and students and teachers settled into a routine, there was still a



Instructional technology teacher Rebecca Edsall works to train and assist students with the technology they need both in the classroom and for online learning.

constant barrage of things to figure out. How would school open houses be handled? What about parent teacher conferences? How could schools prepare in the event that students had to move fully online again?

"Administrators definitely have decision fatigue," said Edsall. "But they pull their boots on day-afterday and keep going. They have a Plan A, Plan B and Plan C for every scenario, and all of those include some form of technology."

Another important issue that Edsall helped teachers address was good digital citizenship. "Technology is a wonderful tool for learning," said Edsall, "but we also have the responsibility to make sure students know how to be digitally smart and digitally safe. That's an important lesson in any given year, but it took on a greater meaning this academic year, given the increased access to technology that students have."

Edsall will continue to assist faculty and staff with IT issues throughout the academic year, no matter what form of learning is used.

"I'm working virtually more than ever before, which is tough, but I make an effort to keep training short and meaningful. I try to put out tech tips on a regular basis and model what things should look like for them. Going back to my own days as a classroom teacher helps guide me in figuring out what works best," she said.

Edsall is pleased with the way the Catholic schools have handled the incorporation of technol-

ogy this academic year. While she can't predict what the coming months will entail, one thing is for certain — there will be more challenges, more questions and more technology to be learned as teachers work tirelessly to keep students engaged, well-educated and healthy.

"I think every faculty member in our schools feels like a first-time teacher this year," Edsall said. "But, in the end, this experience will not only enhance their IT know-how but will make them even stronger teachers. That's a benefit for everyone."

Caroline K. Reff is a freelance writer in Syracuse, New York, and is also the editor of Pillars.

Heritage Grant Helps Provide Technology

hile many school districts have struggled to make sure that students have proper access to computers or adequate Wi-Fi, both in the classroom and at home, the Catholic Schools of the Syracuse Roman Catholic Diocese have enough devices (e.g., Chromebooks) to provide to those in need. Much of this technology was procured for the schools prior to the pandemic through funds provided by the Heritage Grant, as well as funding through the New York State Smart Schools Bond Act.

Student Contributes to School with Safety and Style

t started out with a mutual obsession over scrunchies between Holy Family Norwich teacher Mrs. Raina Douglass and fourth grade student Iris Bagnall-Graham. Then a pandemic hit last March, sending teachers and students home for the remainder of the school year.

Unable to watch from the sidelines, Iris's mother set out to help by sewing masks for co-workers when she was called back to the office in April. The project began to mushroom, as Iris often sat keeping her mother entertained with stories and conversation. Eventually, Iris asked if she could sew, too. As a beginner sewer, she mentioned how amazing it would be to sew scrunchies — her favorite ever since her teacher, Douglass, had gifted her one!

Iris Bagnall-Graham, a student at Holy Family School in Norwich, displays one of the scrunchies she created to match masks her mother was making. She sold the coordinating sets as a community service project that resulted in a donation of \$250 to her school's PTO.



Using the scraps from the masks her mother had been working on, Iris learned how to sew her first scrunchie. Quickly using it to pull her thick curls out of her face, she set out to make another — for her teacher, of course! Suddenly, Iris couldn't get enough of the scrunchie craze, but mom was eager to get back to sewing the pile of masks that had been previously cut out. So, Iris reluctantly sat nearby chatting as she organized the masks mom was finishing.

It was then that mother and daughter realized that they could create matching sets that others kids might enjoy. Iris has always been quite the fashionista. If students had to wear masks to school in the fall, there was no reason they couldn't be stylish, as well. Together, they collaborated to create sets that would later become a community service project to help out the Holy Family School PTO. Iris decided she would like to try and sell the sets online. Not sure if it would be successful or not, she created a goal of raising \$100. That's a lot of money for a 9 year old!

Underestimating the popularity of Safety with Style: Scrunchies by Iris, she sold out in less than two days. With a few additional masks and scrunchies made for special requests and some additional donations from the community, Iris collected \$250 to donate to her school's PTO. For Iris, quarantine was a difficult time. She missed her friends and teachers at school, but her project allowed her to look forward to the fall, when classrooms reopened and she had contributed to her school community's safety — and style!



Reading Along with Miss Sondra

ffectionately known as "Miss Sondra," Sondra Nassar is the school librarian at Notre Dame Elementary School in Utica, New York, as well as an active member of the school's liturgical planning committee who shares her gift of music during school Masses and prayer services. Nassar began reading to Notre Dame students through the school's Facebook page when the school went virtual last spring and continued to do so over the summer and into the 2020-2021 academic year. Each week, she purposely chooses a book of interest to all grade levels, and, on Sundays, she shares the weekly Gospels and sometimes leads the Rosary. The videos are made from a cozy spot inside her home, and, when the weather is nice, she reads from her porch. Often, special guests — dogs Carlo and Sophia — join her to say hello to the students. The students are familiar with both dogs, as they were frequent visitors to the Notre Dame campus before COVID, helping with socialization and encouraging reluctant readers. "We are extremely blessed to have this extraordinary individual as part of our faculty at Notre Dame Elementary School," said Principal Mary Rossi.

"The Sew Must Go On"

student at All Saints Catholic School in Endicott, New York, Annie Kate Myers, adopted from China, was born without her right hand, but that has never kept her from backing down from a challenge — golf, tennis, lacrosse, water skiing and even sewing. Learning from her mom, Kim Myers, Annie Kate jumped right in to help health care workers who were fighting COVID-19 by sewing masks for those at Ascension Lourdes Hospital. "Annie has one hand, and she can move mountains with it!" said her proud mom.



v

\$1 Million Mother Cabrini Health Foundation Grant Assists Low-Income Students with Education, Health

BY RENÉE K. GADOUA

he Mother Cabrini Health Foundation awarded the Syracuse Diocese's Catholic Schools Office a \$1 million-plus grant in January 2020. The timing — shortly before school closings and stay-at-home orders related to the novel coronavirus pandemic — highlighted Cabrini Team Health's mission.

"When the Catholic Schools Office wrote the grant, it was right in line with the foundation's mission to help poor, underserved individuals in New York," said Director Joan Spector. "The mission is highlighting exactly the kinds of support households and families need, especially during COVID."

Cabrini Team Health's mission is "improving the education and health outcomes of low-income/poverty level students and families of all denominations in Diocesan Catholic schools," according to the program's website. "Guided by faith and values consistent with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, our mission is to positively impact the circumstances of students and families by fostering programs and educational experiences that improve their lives."

"The genesis of the grant was to impact the circumstances of students and families who are really struggling and are affected by the social determinants that lead to health disparities," said Spector, who started as program director in June.

"Research has provided a mountain of information that shows if children do not receive support and nutrition when they're young, they could have mental health issues and physical health problems later in life," she said. "It greatly affects their lifespan."

Cabrini Team Health offers programs at Cathedral Academy at Pompei, Most Holy Rosary School and Blessed Sacrament School in Syracuse, Trinity Catholic School in Oswego, St. Mary's School in Cortland, Holy Family School in Norwich, St. Patrick's School in Oneida and Rome Catholic School.

"When we started, it became apparent we might need to begin with a smaller number of schools and expand," said Spector who hopes the program will soon operate at all 22 schools in the diocese.

The \$3.2 billion Cabrini Foundation was formed

in 2018 by the sale of Fidelis Care, a nonprofit health insurer created by New York's Catholic bishops. The foundation is named after Sr. Frances Xavier Cabrini, an Italian immigrant who helped create 67 institutions, including schools, hospitals, nursing homes and orphanages around the world. She was canonized as a saint in 1946.





Cabrini Team Health was among more than 500 programs statewide awarded a total of nearly \$150 million in grants in the foundation's initial disbursement in January 2020.

The programs are virtual for now. The agenda has included nutrition workshops for students, a parent workshop with ARISE, a Syracuse agency that provides mental health and disability services; and one-on-one and group mental health counseling for students and families in participating schools.

Team Health is working with schools on dental health education, nutrition, and professional development. ARISE counselors work one-on-one or in small groups of students to discuss topics, such as stress or well-being. Support is also available to teachers. Another aspect of the program is also assisting nursing staff in schools with no full-time nurse.

Additionally, the grant has support in place for families. "One component of the grant is a rapid response team with a principal, nurse and counselor, if a family is experiencing difficulty with housing or employment," Spector said.

Team Health also focuses on the big picture of students' well-being. "Part of the grant is educating teachers in the diocese to make sure they understand what social determinants of health are, how to spot children who might be struggling, and how to help families move forward or get the help they need," Spector said.

Programs are open to all students in participating schools. "It's our hope if we offer this to all students, we'll get to the ones who need greater help," she said. "Our greatest hope is the help they receive at this time will provide something positive so they can move forward in life."

Renée K. Gadoua is a freelance writer and editor and a frequent contributor to The Catholic Sun. Follow her on Twitter @ReneeKGadoua.

Dress Down to Spread the Good News of Jesus

n November, students at St. James School in Johnson City, New York, participated in a dress down day for Operation Christmas Child, a project of Samaritan's Purse, an international relief organization that supplies shoeboxes filled with small toys, hygiene items and school supplies as a means of reaching out to children "with the Good News of Jesus Christ." Students donated items like toothbrushes, socks, picture books, pens



and pencils, yo-yos or monetary donations to reach the school's goal of 50 shoeboxes to send to the organization. While the students needed no reward for their generosity, they did enjoy the chance to come to class in play clothes instead of their usual school uniform on this special day.

100 Years and Going Strong!

t. Patrick's Elementary School in Oneida, New York, is one of the oldest Catholic elementary schools in the state. Founded in 1921, the school is excited to honor everyone — administrators, faculty, staff, students, alumni, parishioners, community members — who has contributed to the success of this school over the past century. The Guardians Foundation of St. Patrick's School is planning a celebratory event, tentatively scheduled for spring 2021. If you'd like to help with the celebration, please send an email to guardiansfoundationofstpats@gmail. com. The school is also looking for alumni contacts. Please send those along to Principal Kristin Healt at khealt@syrdiocese.org.







Social But Socially Distant

eachers from many of our schools went out of their way to make sure their students stayed connected to school during shut-down. On days when the weather was warm and pleasant, Christine Isbell from Holy Family School in Fairmount made short, socially distanced visits outside many students' homes, which the kids seem to really enjoy. Isbell read to the children, gave them a kit to make a set of Rosary beads and even used chalk to write some words or sentences in the driveway. "It was so nice to see their smiling faces in person," said Isbell, who teaches Kindergarten. Many teachers throughout the Catholic schools made similar visits to their students.







Pillars

A Publication of the Catholic Schools Office of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Syracuse

Editor:

➤

R

Caroline K. Reff, Inkwell Creative Services, Syracuse, NY

Graphic Design:

Colleen Kiefer, Kiefer Creative, Liverpool, NY

Photography:

Chuck Wainwright, Wainwright Photo, Syracuse, NY

All Rights Reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced without written consent. Copyright © 2021. For information on our Catholic schools, e-mail csoinfo@syrdiocese.org or call 315-470-1450.

On Our Cover:

Cathedral Academy at Pompei Principal Tina Seymour and students wear masks per proper guidelines in order to stay safe and healthy during the school day.

CITY	PHONE	WEB PAGE	
Endicott	607-748-7423	setoncatholicallsaints.org	
E. Syracuse	315-437-0356	bishopgrimes.org	
Syracuse	315-468-2591	bishopludden.org	
Syracuse	315-463-1261	blessedsacramentschool.org	
Syracuse	315-422-8548	capsyracuse.org	
Syracuse	315-470-1450	syracusediocese.org	
Dewitt	315 446-4890	hcschooldewitt.org	
Norwich	607-337-2207	hfsnorwich.org	
Syracuse	315-487-8515	holyfamilyschoolsyr.org	
Fayetteville	315-637-3961	icschool.org	
Syracuse	315-476-6035	mhrsyr.org	
Utica	315-732-4374	notredameutica.org	
Utica	315-724-5118	notredameutica.org	
Rome	315-336-6190	romecatholic.org	
Binghamton	607-723-5307	csbcsaints.org	
Johnson City	607-797-5444	stjamesschooljc.org	
Binghamton	607-723-0703	sjebing.org	
Mattydale	315-455-5791	stmargaretschoolny.org	
Baldwinsville	315-635-3977	smabville.org	
Cortland	607-756-5614	smscortland.org	
Oneida	315-363-3620	stpatricksoneida.org	
North Syracuse	315-458-6036	stroseny.org	
Oswego	315-343-6700	oswegotrinitycatholic.org	
	Endicott E. Syracuse Syracuse Syracuse Syracuse Dewitt Norwich Syracuse Fayetteville Syracuse Utica Utica Rome Binghamton Johnson City Binghamton Mattydale Baldwinsville Cortland Oneida North Syracuse	Endicott 607-748-7423 E. Syracuse 315-437-0356 Syracuse 315-468-2591 Syracuse 315-463-1261 Syracuse 315-470-1450 Dewitt 315-446-4890 Norwich 607-337-2207 Syracuse 315-487-8515 Fayetteville 315-637-3961 Syracuse 315-732-4374 Utica 315-732-4374 Utica 315-732-4374 Utica 315-336-6190 Binghamton 607-723-5307 Johnson City 607-797-5444 Binghamton 607-723-0703 Mattydale 315-635-3977 Cortland 607-756-5614 Oneida 315-363-3620 North Syracuse 315-458-6036	



her station keeping