

# MISSOURI CATHOLIC CONFERENCE MESSENGER

The bishops of Missouri, speaking together on matters of public policy, form the Missouri Catholic Conference.



March 2009

## KEEPING FAITH IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

From founding the first school west of the Mississippi to bucking national trends and opening an urban Catholic high school in 2003 (St. Louis's Cardinal Ritter High School), Missouri Catholic educators have offered academic instruction and Christian formation to the children of Missouri no matter what their race, ethnic background, national origin or religion.

The state of Missouri officially recognizes this proud tradition in its state capitol. In the third floor rotunda in the Hall of Famous Missourians stands a statute of Saint Philippine Duschene, a mother superior of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart who offered schooling to Indian girls in the Florissant area the 1820s, just after Missouri had been admitted into the Union.

At present, Catholic schools across the nation face tremendous challenges. In an increasingly secularized culture some families no longer value religious education. Other families cannot afford the tuition and other expenses involved in sending their child to a Catholic school.

Repeated efforts by the Missouri Catholic Conference and others to provide even a small tax deduction for educational expenses borne by parents have been defeated through the concerted efforts of public school groups who too often view private schools as unfriendly rivals instead of partners in educating Missouri's children.

Business support has proved essential in keeping some schools open, especially in poorer neighborhoods, but the economics of operating Catholic schools remains a daunting task. As a result of these challenges, Missouri has followed a national trend of declining Catholic school enrollment. At its peak in 1965 Missouri's K-12 Catholic schools educated over 180,000 children. Today that number hovers just over 60,000.

In 2005 the bishops of the United States called for a recommitment to Catholic K-12 schools. The bishops stated that "Whenever possible, Catholic schools should remain available and accessible in all areas of a diocese for children who are from poor and middle-class families who face major economic challenges."

As the nation plunges into an economic downturn rivaled only by the Great Depression, keeping Catholic schools accessible to those of modest means becomes an even greater challenge. The task may seem overwhelming but encouragement can be found in the pioneering work of past generations.

Even before Missouri's admission into the Union, Father James Maxwell founded a school for boys and pastored the Catholics of Ste. Genevieve and the surrounding area. His school, established in 1808, became the first school chartered by the new American territory in the region. In St. Louis Father Francis Niel established a school that educated the children of old French families and newcomers like William Clark (later territorial governor of Missouri) and Alexander McNair (later governor of Missouri). When St. Louis formally incorporated in 1823, the city fathers decided to subsidize Father Niel's academy. It was the only school in the area.

In 1836 Bishop Joseph Rosati recruited nuns from France to come to Missouri to educate deaf children. The Sisters of St. Joseph responded, setting up a school for the deaf in Carondelet, a small village south of St. Louis. In 1839 the Missouri legislature appropriated two thousand dollars to assist the nuns in their work.

In central Missouri Father Ferdinand Helias, a Jesuit missionary from Belgium, founded a number of parishes in Osage County as well as St. Peter Church in Jefferson City. By 1851 he had established a school at Loose Creek.



*A student at St. Francis Cabrini Academy in St. Louis, Missouri receives Holy Communion.*

Helias High School in Jefferson City is named in his honor.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet pioneered education in western Missouri. In 1866 they established an academy for young ladies in Kansas City. The Sisters of Mercy brought Catholic schooling to southwest Missouri. In 1870 they founded Mount Saint Mary's Academy for young ladies.

All of the early Catholic missionaries understood the importance of establishing Catholic schools. They are "schools for the human person," the U.S. Catholic bishops declared in their 2005 statement. Catholic schools provide excellent academic instruction but ultimately they are about something more essential: the total formation of the person as a follower of Christ. It is this spiritual and moral mission that gives Catholic education its reason for being.

In this year of St. Paul it is fitting to recall how Catholic schools have played such a vital role in spreading the Good News of Christ throughout the state of Missouri. Like Saint Philippine Duschene and the other founders of Missouri schools, Catholic educators today face seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Yet, as St. Paul reminds us, "we walk by faith, not by sight," and the future of Catholic schools rests in the faith-filled hands of this generation.



*A bust of Saint Philippine Duschene resides in the 3rd Floor Rotunda of the State Capitol Building in Jefferson City, Missouri*





# CATHOLIC IDENTITY IS THE CORE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION

by Mrs. Jodi Briggs, Principal, Our Lady of the Presentation

## Diocese of Kansas City- St. Joseph

Our Lady of the Presentation Catholic School serves over 300 families and 450+ students in kindergarten through eighth grade. The teachers and staff of Presentation School are committed to educating students in a Christ centered atmosphere with high academic expectations. Through the support of our pastor, parishioners, staff and parents, Our Lady of the Presentation Catholic School is able to thrive and grow in a community with excellent educational opportunities.

In a community with a strong public school system and a private Christian school, it is important that people know Our Lady of the Presentation is truly a Catholic school. From school-wide Morning Prayer and daily saint of the month clues to a “mini mass” that begins each middle school religion class, Catholicity is at the core of the school setting. Being a Catholic school is more than learning prayers, attending Mass and having a daily religion class. It is providing the students opportunities to practice their religion by actively participating in weekly Mass, learning and praying the rosary and spending time with the Blessed Sacrament at Adoration.

Parents seeking a truly Catholic education for their children are looking for strong academics rooted in faith. Catholicity is taught throughout the curriculum, not just in religion class. During current events in a middle school social studies class, students are discussing moral implications of decisions made by others and how as Catholics our actions would be different. Social justice issues are discussed during writing assignments centered on Holocaust study and in elementary classrooms during class anti-bullying meetings. Each year, Our Lady of the Presentation School hosts a Respect Life Day for the middle school students. The day focuses on the many moral decisions young Catholics face in today’s society. This day reinforces the church’s teachings on all life issues and is wonderful opportunity for the students to build community with other Catholic students.

Scripture is taught and doctrine is learned, both of which are essential and important. However to truly see faith alive is to watch the school counselor walk with a child facing a difficult situation, embrace and pray with that child, witnessing the school secretary pray to St. Anthony with an upset child who has lost their binder, and listening to a teacher explain how Jesus lives in everyone’s heart, even the boy who tripped someone at recess. These daily occurrences truly exemplify what we as Catholics are all about. Being a Catholic school isn’t just about academic success, it is instilling in children a love of God; desire to grow in faith and knowledge, and providing opportunities to serve others.

At Our Lady of the Presentation service to others is a basis of faith formation. We believe that we are called by God to serve others in our parish, community and world. Annually, a baby shower is held on Mary’s birthday for various organizations that assist unwed mothers. Each Thanksgiving, student council sponsors a “Sack Mass” in which each student donates a sack of goods for Lee’s Summit Social Service. Our Lady of the Presentation was the first school to partner with the First Hand Foundation to make “Love Bags” for children entering foster care and has proudly done so for the



*A quote from St. Paul in Galatians adorns the wall in one of the classrooms at Our Lady of the Presentation Catholic School.*

last nine years. Service to the parish community is paramount and evident. Students work with the religious education students to serve at the Lenten fish fries, perform a journey to Bethlehem during Advent and sing in the Children’s Choir. The 5th grade students view their Friday night commitment to lead the Stations of the Cross as an opportunity to give back to the parish that supports their education. Through these actions of service, unity between school and parish is initiated.

Our Lady of the Presentation is fortunate to have a dedicated staff that is committed to Catholic education and the academic success of their students. Many staff members view their role as a ministry to the church and a service to God. Through their daily witness of faith and involvement in their church community, students have the opportunity to see many staff members actively participate in parish life. The same can be said for the parents who choose Our Lady of the Presentation Catholic School.

Each school day begins with prayer over the loudspeaker but continues in each classroom with special intentions and class prayers. Prayer begins each class as students move to different teachers for different subjects. It’s a testament of faith when a cafeteria of 150 students becomes silent before prayer after lunch; when the largest 8th grade class in the history of the school comes together to reverently lead the school in a living rosary, or when a classroom of students gathers in the grotto for prayer before a test. It’s amazing to see the middle school come together at the end of the day, drop to their knees

and pray the Act of Contrition before dismissal. Prayer is more than just what begins and ends the day.

Catholic identity at Our Lady of the Presentation Catholic School is best stated in a quote found in every classroom. Although the author is unknown, the message truly exemplifies what it means to be a Catholic school. “Let it be known to all who enter here that Christ is the reason for this school. He is the unseen, but ever-present teacher in its classes, the model of its faculty and the inspiration of its students”.



*Older students mentor younger students at Our Lady of the Presentation Catholic School.*



# FR. MCCARTAN MEMORIAL SCHOOL: “THE LITTLE SCHOOL WHO COULD”

*by Kelly Ott, Principal, Fr. McCartan Memorial School*

## Diocese of Jefferson City

In his recent visit to the United States, Pope Benedict highlighted the importance of Catholic education across the nation. His words addressed the unfortunate reality of parochial school closings due to the increase of financial pressures. Publications including the *Washington Post* and *NY Times* have reported various efforts across the nation to save our parochial schools. The closing of our Catholic schools will only displace students and create an added financial burden on our public school system. Catholic schools are a very real service to our communities and our society as a whole.

Fr. McCartan Memorial School has been referred to “The Little School Who Could” in the Diocese of Jefferson City. The school is part of the St. Bonaventure Parish and reaches out to Immaculate Conception Parish in Brookfield, St. Mary of the Angels in Wien, and St. Joseph Parish at Hurricane Branch. The school consists of a self contained preschool and kindergarten with combined grades (ex. 1st and 2nd grades are in the same classroom) for first through eighth grade. With an enrollment of 61 preschool through eighth grade students, the school has received top rankings on academic achievement in the Diocese of Jefferson City and Catholic identity for four consecutive years. Fr. McCartan Memorial School is located in Marceline, Missouri a small rural farming community and is an incredible example of a small parochial school that is able to continue its operation despite cultural and financial challenges.

At a time when many Catholic schools are faced with rising costs of operation, Fr. McCartan continues to excel due to faith, family and inspirational community commitment. The Diocese of Jefferson City is one of the few dioceses across the nation that continues to be tithing based. There is no tuition for Catholic students, provided the parent or guardian tithes to the parish within their means. With tithing based parishes, the entire community assumes financial responsibility of keeping the parish and school in operation. The school is a very important ministry of the parish. There is a general sense of pride, community-wide commitment and determination to continue Catholic education in the area. At a time when religious vocations are declining and smaller parishes are sharing pastors, St. Bonaventure parishioners recognize their role in supporting the faith formation of the youth in their community.

**Parent Participation and Support:** Parent participation is essential to the daily operations of the school. Volunteers are actively involved in multiple school programs including instruction of all special classes (art, music, physical education, computers, library), aftercare, and speech team. This time commitment not only helps reduce operation costs, it increases ownership and teaches the students the value of stewardship.

An active home and school association organizes and runs all the school’s fundraisers and provides direction for supplemental education services. Parents and parishioners assist throughout the school year with a variety of fundraisers and community activities. The Knights of Columbus and St. Ann’s Altar Society actively coordinate events that bring together the parish, school and secular community. Parents, parishioners and staff frequently refer to the school as “family”.

**Faith Formation:** Students at Fr. McCartan School scored within the top one percent on the standardized Assessment of Catechetical Religious Education in the

Four Pillars of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: profession of faith; liturgy and the sacraments; morality; and prayer. As catechists, faculty and staff not only teach the fundamentals of religion, they share that faith with the children as living symbols of God’s love. This is a continual practice throughout every aspect of the school day. The students not only receive a strong foundation in academics, but in spirituality as well. They reap the benefits of Christian role models for procreation of God’s word. Students learn how to be life-long active members of the church and how to live out their faith in their every day lives. The faculty and staff believe that their ministry as catechists is an essential component of the Church’s mission.

At Fr. McCartan School, setting a faithful example is a responsibility held in high regard. A child’s character develops over time and is the gradual formation of habitual ways of seeing, thinking, valuing and acting. The single most important factor influencing character development is “example”. At Fr. McCartan School, the students become people of character by being in the presence of people with integrity and faith. Staff knows that cultivating an attitude toward the Lord begins and ends with their own relationship with God. Staff believes that what they hope to instill in the children must first take root and grow in their own hearts and minds.

**Peer Role Modeling:** Students receive the benefit of small class sizes, combined grades, high teacher-to-student and student-to-student interactions. The learning opportunities are maximized by peer role modeling throughout the school. With small class sizes, students receive individual attention and are given repeated opportunities to practice skills. Instruction in combined grades offers preview, instruction, and review of curriculum. When students are among the youngest in the class, they are seeing “how it should be”. Older students in the class serve as role models and assist



*Older students are expected to set an example for younger students and assist them in various school activities.*

younger classmates with material already learned. This responsibility gives students greater confidence and a sense of pride in helping their peers. Instruction in double grades also promotes independent work habits, increased cooperative learning opportunities and hands on experiences. The support from classmates adds value to both the academic and social development of the students. Each class continues to build on the previous student’s accomplishments.

The upper grade students have many responsibilities. They serve at Mass, raise and lower the flag, serve and clean up lunch, help preschool and kindergarten at Mass, set up for special events, lead kindergarten activities and assist with babysitting during parent meetings. The older students feel a sense of responsibility, recognizing that their behavior should be consistent with what the school would want the younger students to imitate. Students hold each other accountable and this sense of responsibility helps to promote the “family” feeling of the school.

The secret of Fr. McCartan’s success is imbedded in the community. Parishioners and parents alike take the initiative to raise the standard of living to impact their surroundings. They are committed to help the children become the next generation of church and community leaders. This support allows students to become all that God has intended.

## A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITY AWAITS AT ST. FRANCIS CABRINI ACADEMY

*By Sue Brown, Director of Marketing and Community Relations, Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of St. Louis.*

## Archdiocese of St. Louis

The story of St. Frances Cabrini Academy is a significant one because it defies what we have come to expect of inner-city Catholic schools across the nation—shrinking enrollment and uncertain futures. It is an inspiring story of faith in, hope for, and service to a diverse community. What many view as challenges—new immigrant families, an economically distressed neighborhood, diversity of religious backgrounds—the Cabrini community view as strengths. In their marketing materials, St. Frances Cabrini Academy promises “A World of Opportunity Awaits You!” This is how they deliver on that promise...

### Cabrini offers a world for all...

St. Frances Cabrini Academy opened its doors in 2003, the result of a voluntary consolidation between two existing schools. Today, about half of its 190 students

come from those eleven parishes. The other half, most of whom are non-Catholic, live in the geographic boundaries of these parishes. A walk into one of the classrooms reveals a dynamic mix of African-American, Caucasian, African, Latino and Asian children—a patchwork of new immigrant families and born-and-raised St. Louisans, together creating a vibrant urban community. It is a unique place where a child of any background can easily feel at home. Sixty percent of Cabrini students qualify for free or reduced lunch and sixty-five percent receive scholarship assistance, yet all Cabrini families pay some tuition and are required to be involved in school activities in some way.

### Cabrini offers a world of learning...

In six years, Cabrini has become a school of choice  
*see Cabrini on next page*



CABRINI *continued*

in the City of St. Louis. With hard work, Cabrini has moved from barely surviving, to thriving! Cabrini “works” because students get what they need, and so do their families. Cabrini has applied an independent school model to a neighborhood parochial school. Students are invited to enroll as a follow-up to a personal interview, and parent involvement is mandatory. For Cabrini students, this means access to a high-quality education that is affordable and close to home. It means their friends at school mirror the diverse neighborhoods from which they come. It means every day is a rich learning experience for Cabrini children, as well as for Cabrini teachers and parents. Forty percent of Cabrini students do not speak English as the primary language at home, so English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are taught daily. The English Tutoring Project provides additional supplemental language and writing assistance, and all Cabrini students study Spanish in kindergarten through eighth grade.

One of the “twin pillars” of a quality Catholic school is a high-quality academic program. Cabrini’s curriculum emphasizes building core skills in reading, writing and math through application, real-world relationships, and cross-disciplinary learning. “A recent instructional program review utilizing two weeks of walk-through observations, found that over 70 percent of classroom instruction engaged students with thinking skills at the comprehension level or above,” said Dr. Karen Tichy, Associate Superintendent for Instruction K-12.

The arts are an integral part of the Cabrini Academy environment at all grade levels. Weekly visual arts instruction through a partnership with the St. Louis City Open Studio and Gallery for Children is offered. Weekly music classes culminate in the production of a musical in eighth grade, private piano lessons are offered as part of the school day, and students may choose to participate in a beginner band.

**Cabrini is a world of faith...**

If one pillar of a quality Catholic school is a strong



*A teacher interacts with students during lunch at St. Francis Cabrini Academy.*

academic program, the other must be equally sound—Catholic identity and faith formation. At Cabrini, the entire school community gathers for morning prayer—every day—for individual and common concerns, and, at times, for reconciliation. “At Cabrini, everyone gets a second chance,” says principal, Maureen DePriest. Though sixty percent of the student body is Catholic, all students are welcome to be a part of the Cabrini community of faith. At Cabrini, this religious diversity is the core around which the students, families and faculty develop a respect for people of all faiths. DePriest reports that social justice is one of the most prominent teachings of the Catholic faith lived at Cabrini Academy every day. Cabrini emphasizes putting faith into action. Students celebrate weekly Mass in the Catholic tradition and participate in community service projects that remind us that we are all people of God.

**Cabrini is a world of possibilities...**

Through the strong leadership of a Board of Pastors

representing the 11 sponsoring parishes, an Advisory Council of community leaders throughout the city, a strong principal and a full-time director of advancement, Cabrini Academy is focused on ensuring its ability to serve the community for the long-term. Cabrini’s success is due largely to a willingness to try new things—the creation of a five-year strategic plan for growth that addresses annual curriculum reviews, integration of technology, facility maintenance and improvement, faith formation, and expansion of community and donor involvement in governance. The plan also includes goals to stabilize enrollment near the 200 mark and to diversify the school’s funding sources so that more than half of their income is from tuition and grants designated for tuition assistance.

**Cabrini is a world of experience...**

Finally, no quality Catholic school can exist without a well-prepared, dedicated, faith-filled staff of teachers. Cabrini Academy recognizes that a school is only as strong as the teachers in the classroom. All Cabrini faculty have degrees and are certified to teach and receive regular performance reviews. DePriest emphasizes the importance of building relationships between the students and teacher, and with their families. “In a trusting relationship, almost anything is possible,” she says.

Students and teachers receive ample opportunity to be active learners together. Teachers model for their students what it means to be life-long learners by engaging in frequent professional development in technology, classroom management and instructional methodology.

St. Frances Cabrini Academy is a model for Catholic schools of the future. Cabrini has found a way to “do it all,” and to “do it very well.” Fourth-grader, Cierra, says, “...This is a school where kids really want to learn and be successful. St. Frances Cabrini is the most caring school in the world. They make learning happen.”



PARISHES WORK TOGETHER TO  
SUPPORT THEIR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

*by Mrs. Janet Kuper, Principal, St. Teresa Catholic School*

Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau

St. Teresa Catholic School lies in the rural southeast area of the state in Campbell, Missouri. The principal, Janet Kuper, a parishioner for St. Ann’s Parish in the neighboring city of Malden, credits the tight knit communities for the support of the schools. “We could not exist as a school, if it were not for each parish working together,” said Mrs. Kuper. “We administer to the students in a total faith community.” When asked how they do that, Mrs. Kuper stated, “We strive for them to do the best academically as well as spiritually, and not just for the students but for the teachers as well.” Mrs. Kuper knows that children learn by example and notes that St. Teresa has a great staff.

St. Teresa is one of 26 Catholic schools in the Diocese of Springfield/Cape Girardeau. The diocese has enrolled 4,563 students for the 2008-2009 school year of which 968 go to three of the diocese’s secondary schools. St. Teresa has 59 students enrolled from pre-K through eighth grade.

Saint Teresa School strives to pass on the Catholic faith by the daily interaction

of students with each other and with an adult faith community. Students, teachers, and staff are asked to dedicate all their work to God and to care for one another as if they were caring for Christ, and to learn all that we can about God’s world. This is a high and perfect goal which often is not realized, but in the frequent reception of the Sacraments we gain

the strength to continue to strive for perseverance. St. Teresa School is blessed with a pastor who encourages this.

It is in the Catholic faith community that the student sees how the Christian life is lived, but this is not totally accomplished in the school. The whole parish supports the family in striving to become more like Christ. This means that the family must be active in a parish or church community to fully benefit from the school’s instruction.

St. Teresa School constantly invites families to worship and work with us and instruct them in our weekly communications about the beliefs of the Catholic faith. God has blessed us in giving us saintly members of the community who support us by prayer, sacrifice, and finances.

St. Teresa School strives to prepare our students to be productive Catholic American citizens and good neighbors, but our main concern is instilling in them a deep love for God and longing to be with Him. Everything we do tries to direct students toward these goals. Our students give of themselves by being big brothers or big sisters for their classmates. This gives the students who come from single families or only children a chance to bond with another student and learn to give back to their peers. What is a soul worth? Can we ever put a price on that? The answer is no. As a community, we have the responsibility to work to our full strength to give these children the faith we have received!



*Students at St. Teresa’s Catholic School have the opportunity to participate in a traditional Seder meal for Passover to help them understand what Jesus Christ and the disciples experienced during the Last Supper.*