



Spring 2016

SHAPING TOMORROW'S LEADERS:

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EDUCATING YOUTH FOR A LIFE OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP AND SERVICE

A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT



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Sue Smith and Brandon P.

“Thank you for your ongoing support and for being part of this exciting journey with us.”

In December, we were honored to welcome the Rev. Thomas A. Lawler, S.J., the provincial for the Wisconsin Province of the Society of Jesus. Father Lawler led a very special prayer service to renew the Jesuits’ sponsorship of Nativity Jesuit Academy and commission me as the school’s new president. I will never forget the love and hope I felt as our school community gathered in the chapel that evening to call for God’s blessing upon our school and my work as its leader.

Father Lawler described Nativity as “a beacon of hope and light to the Milwaukee community, witnessing to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the tradition of Catholic education, forming men and women of faith, scholarship, leadership and service.”

It is this sacred mission that drives our work and fuels our enthusiasm at Nativity every day. It’s also why we need your support to continue Nativity’s growth, so that we can make an impact on even more lives. The Latino community is the fastest-growing in the U.S. Catholic Church, and yet it’s also the most underserved by Catholic schools. The neighborhood surrounding Nativity is home to a large concentration of young people under 18, and we have a responsibility to offer a strong school for those families that desire a Catholic, Jesuit education. A Nativity education is often a pathway out of poverty.

Milwaukee, like so many other cities across the nation, offers many quality Catholic school options. But with Nativity’s recent expansion into the lower grades, Milwaukee students have the rare opportunity to start their Jesuit education in K4 and continue, if they choose, to Jesuit high schools (Marquette University High School or Cristo Rey Jesuit High School) and on to Marquette University. We’re proud that Milwaukee can be a national leader in offering a full, kindergarten-through-college education in the Jesuit tradition, a rich, centuries-old tradition of forming men and women for others.

We’ve come a long way from Nativity’s humble beginnings with just 14 boys in 1993, and we have a long way to go. Today our enrollment is nearly 160 boys and girls in grades K4-K5 and grades 4-8, and we will continue to fill in additional grades as our youngest students matriculate. This isn’t a decision driven by Nativity alone: It’s in response to parents and community leaders who have asked us to serve more students. But we’re making a conscious decision to grow slowly and thoughtfully, so that we can continue to preserve and nourish the Jesuit identity and community atmosphere that are key pieces of Nativity’s success.

By 2024, we expect to have 378 students in grades K4-8. Our plan is to teach boys and girls in coed classes from 4-year-old kindergarten through 4th grade and to continue our highly successful single-gender middle school model, eventually including separate middle-school classrooms for boys and girls in grades 5-8.

Accommodating those additional students will require changes to our school facilities and academic summer camp facility in Mercer, Wis. We’ve engaged an architectural firm to analyze our renovation options and how we can best improve our facility creatively and cost-effectively

to enhance learning. We already know that we will need to create new classroom space. The architects are also evaluating Camp Thunderhead, which is an important part of the Nativity experience.

We are so grateful for the many families and supporters who make a Nativity education possible. We know that their investment is worth every dollar. ACT scores for Nativity alumni are significantly higher than the national average for Latino males, and with a 100 percent high school graduation rate and college acceptance rate in the past two years, our graduates are going on to top universities, including Marquette, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Northwestern University, Harvard University, University of Notre Dame, Boston College and University of Michigan.

There’s no doubt about it: The Nativity model works. Now it’s time to answer God’s call to bring that transformational education to even more Milwaukee youth.

Sincerely,

SUSAN M. SMITH
PRESIDENT

THE START OF SOMETHING BIGGER...

Look for signs of Nativity Jesuit Academy's growth and you'll find obvious evidence in the basement, where former storage space has been transformed into two colorful classrooms for grades K4 and K5. Together, boys and girls — many of whom arrive speaking only Spanish — learn how to read, write their names, add and subtract, and just as importantly, the tools of Christian leadership and service.

With the addition of kindergartners and fourth graders, Nativity has doubled its enrollment in the past two years, to nearly 160 students. It's a big change from Nativity's inaugural class of 14 sixth-graders who first met at St. Patrick's Parish more than 20 years ago. But the school's evolution into a K4-8 academy has also brought big opportunity for Milwaukee's Latino community — and more is on the way as Nativity continues its plan to expand to 378 students by 2024.



Chris Banach

"It's been really exciting to see," says Christopher Banach, Nativity's dean of students. "There's no shortage of kids who need a strong education on the south side of Milwaukee. The more seats we have and more lives we can impact, the better the community is."

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Parents have been delighted to enroll

their youngest children at Nativity for the first time, notes Vanessa Solis, who teaches K4 and who will serve as director of elementary school programs next year. "We all know that a really good education levels the playing field, especially in urban communities. Families know that, and teachers know that, and the folks who are leading the charge at Nativity really, really believe that," she says. "For families to be able to afford, from kindergarten through eighth grade, a Catholic, Jesuit education, and a quality one at that — it's like winning the lottery."

Teachers are also excited about the possibilities as Nativity's youngest students progress through the school.

"For faculty, it's been great to have the whole spectrum of ages," Banach says. "We're already talking about how our middle school academic program is going to need to change just because of the amount of rigor that our 4- and 5-year-olds are experiencing. We can push our kids every step of the way now. When these 4- and 5-year olds who are the trailblazing elementary school class get to middle school, academically, socially and morally, they're going to be in a different place than we've ever had in the past."

The growth has benefited more than just the newcomers. The addition of



Vanessa Solis

younger students gives older students opportunities to become mentors and practice their leadership skills.

"Our older students recognize that importance of passing it forward, and even though Nativity is changing and growing, they can see there's real benefits to being that role model for the younger students," says John

Meuler, Nativity's director of programs. "It was a little



John Meuler

different when we were a fifth through eighth grade school. That sense of brotherhood was very real, but you didn't have that sense of taking care of a little one who is walking the halls with you."

Meeting the needs

Historically, Welcome Back Night has taken place in the cafeteria, but this year it had to move to the larger gymnasium to accommodate the approximately 350 students and family members. "It was a new kind of energy with so many families coming on board and such a different scope," Meuler says.

It was also a hint of the sorts of changes that may be required once the student body grows even more. Fortunately, Nativity's current home — a solid, three-story 1950s building that used to be a convent for the School Sisters of St. Francis — offers room for expansion. Most of the school is concentrated on the first and second floors, and there's additional room in the basement and on the third floor. Nativity has enlisted the help of an architectural firm to

assess its building needs as the school expands, and the Board of Trustees will review the report in April.

But the growth requires more than additional classroom space: It means more student services and more teachers. "We're looking at hiring new teachers every year for close to the next decade," Banach says.

Class sizes have also grown. Previously capped at 20 students, the average middle school class is 26, though younger classes remain at 20 students. Up until now, Nativity hasn't had a counselor or social worker on staff, but that may be something for administrators to consider as the school grows, Meuler says.

Other changes will likely be necessary. The sixth grade class has 30 boys, significantly larger than the current seventh and eighth grade classes.

"Our high school mentoring program is a huge part of how we support the students and families once they get to high school," Banach says. "When that class of 30 boys graduates, we're going to need to recruit more mentors than we ever have before."

MAINTAINING NATIVITY'S CULTURE

Faculty, staff, students and parents have wondered how Nativity's growth would affect its traditionally intimate atmosphere. To address that issue proactively, a new committee meets monthly to brainstorm ways that Nativity can build and maintain a one-school mentality.

"The teachers are very committed to making sure that Nativity is growing in the right way and staying true to its identity, to its mission, so that all of its students can experience educational success," Meuler says.

This year, Nativity launched Leaders of the Pack, a student council that includes representatives elected from grades 4-8. During Catholic Schools Week in February, students dressed for various spirit days and met for a school-wide assembly, where they showed off their costumes for "Dress Like a Saint Day." Fourth and fifth graders do art and walk to Mass with their assigned buddies from K4 and K5, and the eighth graders recently presented their projects from the Future Cities competition to the fourth graders. The first faculty vs. students basketball game was also a hit.

Nativity's teachers continue to focus on developing the "Grad at Grad" qualities used by Jesuit high schools nationwide, ensuring students are open to growth, intellectually competent, religious, loving, and committed to doing justice. "That's where we rely on our Jesuit identity to help form that whole person," Meuler says.

Banach adds: "If we keep that mission of trying to educate youth for Christian leadership and service front and center, I think only great things can come from this growth."



John and Katie Mehan's connection to Nativity began in the school's early days after two friends encouraged Katie, an active community volunteer, to help out in the school's business office. Katie kept coming home raving about Nativity, and it wasn't long before she'd persuaded John to get involved, too. For about a decade, John served on the Board of Trustees as a member of the Finance Committee, and he recently took over as Chair of the Board.

"It gives us a real satisfaction to see the successes of the school, how the school has grown, the commitment of other volunteers, the staff, and the parents, and to see how the graduates have progressed. It works," says John, who is a managing director at Robert W. Baird & Co. "That's the real satisfaction. It's not a new attempt; it's been very successful."

The Mehans, who are both Jesuit educated themselves, have been longtime supporters of Catholic education.

"We know what our parents did to put kids through Catholic schools, and we understand the need of Catholic schools to get support through time, talent and treasure," John says. "It's our way of being able to give back. We're doing what we were brought up to do."

Katie adds: "I believe that a strong foundation is vital to a child's education, and I believe the best place to get that is a Catholic school."

Nativity's high level of parental involvement has always impressed the Mehans. "Parents are always there, and they're so appreciative. They know this is the best place for their children, and they want a better future for their children," Katie says. "It's nice to feel that we're partners with parents and many, many other supporters of Nativity. That's part of the partnership with Catholic education."

They're also wowed by the commitment and longevity of the staff, including some who have been there a decade or more. "The teachers and staff are so great," Katie says. "It's a mission for everyone involved."

Considering Nativity's successful track record, the Mehans have been thrilled to watch the school grow and bring its mission to even more families.

"Nativity is going to continue to grow because there's a need, there's a community that we can serve, and the families want us to grow. Families want us to provide these educational opportunities for their kids," John says. "Things are going to continue to be strong as the school grows. There are even brighter days ahead."



left to right - Mike Kinateder, (son-in-law), John Mehan, Meg (Meban) Kinateder, Katie Mehan, Jack Mehan

Nativity hosted its annual scholarship dinner at the school on October 29th. We are thrilled the event raised more than \$115,000 for scholarship support.

Highlights included Nativity's Choir entertaining guests as they entered the transformed gymnasium- turned-dining hall. Guests were inspired by the stories of alumni Rigo Macias '96 of the Trailblazer class, and Adan Asad, '12. Rigo spoke about his desire to give back as Adan's mentor and Adan spoke of his respect for Rigo

and how Rigo's education has influenced the choices he is making as he prepares for his college experience. President Sue Smith also shared her thoughts about Nativity's unique mission, why Nativity is growing and how bright Nativity's future looks!



Katherine Birk and Bridget Coffey



Bob Monday, Dave Murphy



Dalila Diaz-Dirnbauer, Ida Martinez, Eleazar Lopez



Contreras's emcee event

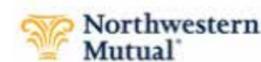


Katie, Meg and Carole Fox have a laugh with Fr. Krall, S.J.

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SAVE THE DATE

- Nativity's 15th Annual Golf outing will be held on Aug. 1, 2016 at Blue Mound Golf and Country Club. CHECK OUT DETAILS ON BACK PAGE
- Nativity Annual Scholarship Dinner, Thursday, October 27, 2016



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SAVE THE DATE!

TEEING OFF FOR SUCCESS



**Nativity Jesuit Academy's
15th Annual Golf Outing
Monday, August 1, 2016
At Blue Mound Golf and Country Club
10122 W. North Avenue, Wauwatosa, WI**

Registration Prices:

\$325 Single Golfer

\$1,300 Foursome

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