Sisters Minister in Education

Education has long been one of the ministries of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit. In the early days of the congregation, after the community was first established and settled in their first Motherhouse in Donora, PA, Sisters served as teachers to the people of the Mon Valley. Later on, our Sisters continued to teach in many schools throughout the Pittsburgh and Greensburg dioceses in Pennsylvania, and in the Youngstown and Steubenville dioceses in Ohio.

This issue of our newsletter will feature some areas of our present-day ministries in education and some of our Sisters who serve there.

Dependence on the Holy Spirit is at the heart of each of our ministries. When our Sisters teach, they do so with the intent of helping others to know how great God's love is for them. This awareness can help them to be open to allow a relationship with God to develop and grow. This relationship with God can then enable and prompt their students to use all the gifts God has given them for the welfare of others.

We ask for your prayers that our efforts to help others will bear good fruit, and we ask that you pray for vocations so that we may continue to serve God's people. May God bless you and all the people that God has sent to you to be recipients of your goodness which springs from your relationship with God.
Women Religious as Educators, Our Gift to the World

Religious communities have a purpose in education; the Jesuits have a very strong mission and ministry in the field of education. Father William J. Byron, SJ, stated in “Review for Religious” January 1979, that he would make a case for the educational apostolate that it is an exercise of stewardship and an instrument of justice.

I agree with Father Byron’s statement, “We religious educators as members of a religious community possess a tradition, a history, a style, some physical assets, and an impressive array of spiritual and intellectual resources. We own none of them absolutely; all of these we hold in trust.” p.4

As Sisters of the Holy Spirit our history has been strong in the field of education. For almost one hundred years we have shared our resources by educating our sisters to be teachers.

Presently, we find ourselves in the same situation as many religious communities. We are faced with a decline in numbers of both sisters and Catholic Schools that remain open. We have sisters ministering in two Catholic Schools that remain open. As I observe the work and ministry that takes place, I am grateful to God for the gifts he has given to these sisters. Even though few in number, they continue to carry out the heritage of education entrusted to the community. These sisters are true apostolic stewards.

Sister Mary John Cook, principal of Immaculate Conception School in Bloomfield, would give her life for that school. She is a positive role model for the students. I know that she has the gift of knowledge and understands the importance of knowing her teachers and students. Sister has the ability to move minds and hearts with her gift of motivation. I believe her gifts make it possible to stimulate teachers and students, and that is the reason for her success.

For many years Sister Agnes Cecilia Tutisie taught the third grade at Immaculate Conception. During those years I heard many excellent things about her ability to get the best out of her students. Sister had a way of keeping the young students very active in her classroom. Each time they had a fundraiser, her class came out on top. Even though Sister Agnes Cecilia could now be sitting back and taking life easy, I understand that she still teaches religion. What she does for these young people is worth a lot of praise.

One of our newer members, Sister Teresa Baldi, is ministering as the third grade teacher. Sister Mary John has been a mentor for Sister during the last few years. Sister Teresa possesses many fine qualities; she is outstanding in her gentleness and soft-spoken ways of handling individuals. Before entering the community, Sister Teresa worked at St. Bernard’s parish in Mount Lebanon as a youth minister.

When I think of the Sisters at St. Agnes School, I find it hard to believe that the school is still open and is growing in student population. Last evening I heard the news report of the USA statistics showing that in 2009 the birth rate was at its lowest in the last century. In West Mifflin the school is growing due to the efforts of Sister Cynthia Wessel. Last year she received the Golden Apple Award. I am amazed at the energy given by Sister Cynthia to keep that school thriving. Sister Cynthia, like Sister Mary John, wears two hats. number one, school administrator; number two, fundraiser.

When I was a student at St. Agnes many, many years ago, the tuition was almost free. That is not the case in Catholic schools today. Our community heritage states that we work for the poor. Years ago the advantaged students and the disadvantaged sat side by side in Catholic schools. In our economic times today, I find our sisters striving to keep this reality alive and continue our mission and ministry as educators in Catholic schools.

Father Byron writes in his article that “If that should happen justice will not be served and the religious purpose in education will have lost its salt.” p.11

Religious communities have always aimed to serve the poor. Schools alone are not capable of doing that service in this day and age, however, if schools are forced to close, much good will be left undone.

I love this Chinese saying, quoted by Father Ben Wren, SJ, on page 11. “A person planning for a year should plant rice; a person planning for a decade should plant a tree. But the one planning for a century will surely want to educate people.”

Sister Bridget Miller, SHS
General Superior
Outstanding Performance Awarded

Sister Cynthia Wessel has been principal at St. Agnes School in West Mifflin, PA, for the past 18 years. Recently she was honored as a recipient of the Golden Apple Award.

Outstanding Performance Awarded

This award is granted to educators who possess certain outstanding qualities and who have been nominated by a student, parent, or other person connected to the school where the nominee serves.

June first marked the 19th year of the Golden Apple Awards Dinner. It was held at the Westin Convention Center Hotel in downtown Pittsburgh. Sister Cynthia was one of three principals and seven teachers who were each awarded $5,000 for excellence in having demonstrated making a positive impact on students.

Sister Cynthia was nominated by a parent who stated in her article: “Sister Cynthia is an amazing woman. She puts our school, our children and our families first even before anything in her personal life. I have never seen a more dedicated, positive, and loving woman in a leadership position. We consider St. Agnes a school that is a Molder of Christ-Centered Youth. But there is not a person that lives by this as strongly as Sister Cynthia Wessel.”

Concerning this award, Sister Cynthia had this to say: “I am a principal in a Catholic school because I enjoy working with our leaders of tomorrow. As principal my goals have always been to entice the students to be excited about their faith, and to see to it that the Catholic identity is very visible within the school, exhibited by every faculty member and student. I expect my students to exhibit this type of behavior outside of the school, at all activities and in their neighborhoods. Being a principal is a very demanding yet rewarding ministry. I thank God daily for the opportunity I have had to serve as principal.”

Sister Cynthia visits with Sister Anne.

Rev. Joseph R. Grosko, administrator of the parish, wrote,

“...I have been impressed by Sister Cynthia’s continual and insightful ways in which she has engaged the student body.”

Father Grosko stated that Sister Cynthia’s motivating the students to be “all that they can be” has shown itself in the number of awards the student body has received in this past school year. He went on to say, “Another hallmark of Sister’s quality is her excellent and authentic relationship with the teaching staff, expecting and receiving the best of their professional skills for the good of the students as well as for our School. This endeavor has endeared her to the parents of our School and as well in our Parish faith community.”

Sister Cynthia feeds the hungry.

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Sisters Combine Talents To Serve

One of the strengths of community life in religious congregations is the giftedness of each of its members and their willingness to help out wherever help is needed.

At St. Agnes in West Mifflin, Sister Cynthia is fortunate to have two such Sisters who help her to make the school such an outstanding one.

Sister Janelle Banko is a creative and dynamic teacher. Having earned a Masters degree in Elementary Education and a Certification in Middle School Math and Social Studies, Sister Janelle uses her education quite well to motivate and inspire her pupils. The seventh and eighth grade students profit much from her teaching of religion, math, social studies and line arts. Her innovative K through 8 music classes are quite popular with the students, some of whom participate in the Parish Folk Group which she trains and directs. This folk group serves not only in parish liturgies but in other settings as well. Sister also directs plays at the school, and frequently she is asked to play the guitar and flute at special Masses at the Motherhouse.

Sister Janelle’s efforts have awarded her the Golden Apple Award, the Manifesting the Kingdom Award, and Walmart’s Teacher of the Year (an award given by West Mifflin’s store).

Sister also uses her gifts of sewing and gardening to enhance community life. In early spring, Sr. Janelle can be seen putting in the first of the herbs and vegetables that will be harvested and shared throughout the summer. The beauty of the convent is enhanced by the wide variety of flowers she has planted.

This blossoming of the flowers reflects the blossoming of the students whose lives she continues to inspire.
The Sisters would like to acknowledge and thank the following people for their donations to SPIRIT ECHOINGS:

Stan Adaamski
Mell & Kenneth Andrejasik
Anonymous
Joe Banko, Jr.
Ms. Dorothy Barbour
Theresa A. Gennell
George & Mary Hein
Elizabeth M. Jedrzejewski
Frances C. Kach
Walter & Theresa Kiec
Peggy Laur
Anna M. Lunz
Stephen S. Mahofski
Ms. Margaret Monroe
Theresa M. Neiderer
Gerald O’Brien
Janet & Edward G. O’Connor
Mr. Louis A. Olaszewski
Sandra A. rains
Jean C. Ray
Rose Marie Rossi
Dolores C. Russell
E.J. & F.M. Steindl
Suzanne Stuart
Regina Sulinski
Mrs. Margaret Todd
Henrietta A. Witkowski
Joan C. Witkowski
Stella E. Yanik
Rev. Paul J. Zywan

Pittsburgh is a long way from Iinya, Nigeria. For Sister Nebechi Chukwu, her journey has taken her, by way of a number of interesting experiences, to our community which she entered in 2004. Sister Nebechi has completed her novitiate and is now a Junior Sister (a member who has made the first profession of vows.)

Sister Nebechi has ministered as a teacher of religion for the past two years at Holy Rosary School located at St. Charles Lwanga Parish in Pittsburgh. While there, application for the Margaret A. McGillick Sisterhood Fund was made and received. This fund assists those in religious formation by granting them scholarships to pursue further studies. For the past two summers, Sister has traveled to New Orleans to participate in a 5-year program designed to give her a Masters in Divinity degree. Sister feels very honored to have received this scholarship.

We are very proud of Sister Nebechi, and we ask God’s blessings on her as she continues her ministry and her studies so that she may continue to serve God’s people.

For the past 140 years that St. Agnes School has been in existence, Sisters of the Holy Spirit have been privileged to serve there for 73 years. Our hope is for the Sisters to continue there in ministry for many more years to come.

A graduate of Duquesne University with a B.A. in Education, for many years Sister Edward held positions as teacher and principal in schools in the Pittsburgh and Greensburg dioceses. She also served in North Canton and Harrisburg, Ohio, which are located in the Diocese of Youngstown. Sister’s devotion to her spiritual life and to her praying for others was recognized some years ago when she was appointed novice director for the community.

When Sister Edward first retired from teaching at St. Agnes School, she continued to tutor students. She also visited parishioners who were confined to their homes. For sixteen years, Sister had also cared for the church altar linens, and she was also engaged in doing fine needle work for the community. Today, Sister Edward keeps the convent clean and tidy; this relieves the other two Sisters so that they are free to pursue their responsibilities.

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Celebrating our Jubilarian

Celebration Honors Sister

Sister Patricia Eleanor Myers was feted May 1st on her 25th jubilee of religious profession as a Sister of the Holy Spirit at the congregation’s Motherhouse.

The event began with the celebration of Mass where Rev. Robert Guay, celebrant, was joined by Fathers LeRoy DiPietro, Robert Miller, Joseph Sredzinski, and John Sweeney who served as concelebrants.

In his homily, Father Guay remarked: “... Sister Patricia Eleanor has opened her heart and her life to the call, the love, and the service of God and others. With a listening and joyful heart, ever humble and ever open to the Holy Spirit, she has faithfully lived and shared Jesus’ vision of love as a religious sister for 25 years — a love that is kind, gentle and all-embracing. Sister Patricia Eleanor received this love as a gift and unselfishly and tirelessly she has given this gift of love to others ...”

Sister Patricia Eleanor’s parents, the late Harold and Joanna Eleanor Kunz Myers, were fondly remembered in prayer. In life, they had been two of Sister’s greatest supporters, especially in one of her ministries as vocation director.

Following the Mass, the congregation enjoyed a lovely dinner in the community’s retreat center. Debbie Schaefer and Joanie Burgard, sisters of Sister Patricia Eleanor, and their families as well as many friends, joined the Sisters to share in the celebration.

Celebrating our Jubilarian... Sister Patricia Eleanor has opened her heart and her life to the call, the love, and the service of God and others...
Mission Statement

We, the Sisters of the Holy Spirit of Pittsburgh, declare our mission is to be joy-filled disciples of Jesus, prophetically witnessing to the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit, aware of our call to work for the transformation of society into a Gospel community, reconciled with God and with one another.

Is God calling you to religious life?
Would you like to join us in our work of Love and Joy?

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Published by Sisters of Holy Spirit
Editor Sr. Marita Juras
Design PARK Creative
Photography Paul Marcucci
mjuras2003@yahoo.com
phone 412.931.1917
fax 412.931.3711
sistersoftheholyspirit.com

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