Value of Catholic education

By nature and design, Catholic schools embody, proclaim, teach, witness, inculcate and promote Jesus Christ and the church he founded.

Our diocesan and parish Catholic school system begins at the primary elementary level, providing for the early formative years of our students learning at school, church and home about Jesus and his message, initial perspectives on human life, and how to pray and to love. They help develop an interior disposition to God and God’s love. The upper elementary level of developmental years deal with deeper questions of faith and experience.

During adolescence, when our faith should mature from older child to younger adult, students are challenged to more developed questions about God and the church, life and after-life, themselves and others. Catholic schools provide an environment and means to grow in the understanding of and reasons for faith. At the college level (Our Lady of the Lake College), Catholic institutions of higher learning help students face the perennial and fundamental issues of “Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?”

I acknowledge, affirm and thank Dr. Melanie Verges, Diocesan Superintendent of Schools, her staff, diocesan and local schools boards, home and school associations, pastors, priest chaplains, administrators, teachers, staff, volunteers, benefactors, alumni and alumnae and parents of and students in our Catholic schools. The theme for National Catholic Schools Week 2015 is “Catholic Schools: Communities of Faith, Knowledge and Service.”

A week to celebrate

Schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge look forward to the annual celebration of Catholic Schools Week as Communities of Faith, Knowledge and Service. While each school holds special events on campus during the week, all schools also come together to celebrate as a larger community.

Early in the week, the Distinguished Grads Dinner provides a venue to honor outstanding graduates who have contributed significantly to the community. There is much to celebrate as guests from all schools gather to honor graduates, who are tangible signs of the effectiveness of our Catholic schools, which strive to evangelize hearts, educate minds and embrace the future within our classrooms, hallways, and playing fields.

Later in the week, all schools gather to celebrate Mass with Bishop Robert W. Muench and priests from across the diocese. In addition to prayer during Mass, two important signs of our Catholic identity are included in the day’s activities.

First, schools bring gifts for clients of Catholic Charities as a sign of their commitment to service. Each year, these donations fill an entire truck and contribute greatly to help people in need within our diocese.

Second, faculty members with anniversary years of service are recognized as a sign of gratitude for their generosity of spirit in education.

From The Bishop

Bishop Robert W. Muench

From the Superintendent

Dr. Melanie B. Verges

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Serving Grades Pre-K3-12

Our St. John School family salutes
Mrs. Bernardine Legendre
Diocese of Baton Rouge
Distinguished Elementary Principal
Thank you for over 30 years of faith-filled love and leadership to our school.
Award humbling for principal

By Richard Meek  
The Catholic Commentator

Bernardine Legendre has never really left her beloved Plaquemine, a scenic hamlet along the Mississippi River where she was born, educated and has spent the majority of her teaching career. There were her college years at Nicholls State and six years teaching at public schools in West Baton Rouge and Iberville parishes but her heart always remained in Plaquemine, especially at St. John school, where she spent her entire elementary and secondary years.

She returned to St. John in 1981 to teach second and fifth grades and in 34 years has risen from teacher to assistant principal to principal. This year, she is being honored with the diocesan Principal of the Year award.

“Having been a student, a teacher, an assistant principal and principal of a school that has been a very large part of my life and now to receive this prestigious award is truly gratifying to me,” said Legendre, a 1966 graduate of St. John High School. “I was very surprised (upon learning of the award). I am very humbled because there are so many wonderful principals in our diocese who would be most deserving of this award. I am very honored and thrilled that I was chosen to represent the principals in our diocese.”

Legendre’s dedication to her students and her determination that they reach their potential academically, physically, emotionally and spiritually shines through her words and actions. She employs an open door policy and proudly admits she knows the names of the majority of her students.

“The students love to be called by name,” she said, adding that she visits every classroom as often as possible. “My students know if they have a problem or if they need to speak with me about anything I will be available. If I am busy with something, they know I will get back to them as soon as possible.”

“If I am having a bad day, all I have to do is go to our Pre K3 classroom and the students brighten my day,” she added. “My philosophy is to always be available to my students at all times.”

Just as Legendre views her job as a ministry she said that philosophy is shared by her faculty, staff and administrators. She said they all minister to students as well as model the Catholic values and morals that “we want our students to learn.”

“In Catholic schools we don’t just teach about faith, we live our faith daily,” she said. “In the same way, we not only talk about service to others, we service our community, our church community and our local communities in so many different ways.”

Having been witness to the success of so many St. John graduates, many of whom she taught, Legendre said Catholic education is a valuable tool for success for today’s young people. She said numerous graduates are sending their own children to St. John, and many alumni have earned recognition in a number of professional careers.

“In speaking with these students, parents and grandparents, they all refer to the importance of their Catholic education in bringing them to where they are in life today,” she said. “The values, morals, service and the discipline taught in Catholic schools is very evident in the success they have achieved in their lives.”

“The parents who choose a Catholic school know the importance of their child being educated not only academically, but most importantly spiritually.”

Bernardine Legendre

The Catholic Commentator
St. Michael the Archangel
High School instructor Dr. Kevin “Doc” Andry was selected the Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge Distinguished Secondary Educator of the Year.

The Distinguished Secondary Educator of the Year Award is annually given to a Catholic secondary educator who reflects the richness and diversity of American Catholic education. Andry is a musician, educator and a strong Catholic role model for students and teachers. He has spent more than 26 years as a teacher in Catholic high schools, while also teaching part time in Catholic elementary schools.

Andry received a bachelor’s degree in music from Loyola University in New Orleans in 1982, master’s degree in music performance from LSU in 1984 and a doctorate from LSU in 1988. During the past six years, Andry has volunteered at St. Jean Vianney School in Baton Rouge to help boost the school’s band program and strengthen the students to attend St. Michael and other area high schools.

“(Andry) teaches students that they should use their gifts and talents for God; that it is not about being the best but about being the best that they can be,” St. Michael principal Ellen Lee said. “(Andry) uses every moment possible as a teaching opportunity – whether it be about mastery of music skills, about hard work, about taking risk or about life lessons.”

According to Lee, Andry regularly gives after school music lessons to his students who are eager to learn difficult pieces of music or perfect their techniques.

“I am overwhelmed and humbled by the recognition of being named the recipient of the Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge Educational Excellence Award. I am truly blessed to be able to pursue my vocation of teaching music and be able to share my faith among my students and colleagues on a daily basis. I am fortunate and blessed to get up every morning and work with the students at St. Michael High School,” Andry said.

Dr. Melanie Verges, Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, said, “(Andry’s) professionalism, abundant energy and generosity of spirit distinguishes him as an outstanding educator. He shines a light on the talents of his students and helps them all develop a deep appreciation for the arts.”

With teaching part-time at a local elementary school, teaching full-time at St. Michael and playing for St. Jude Masses on Sunday, Andry has a full schedule. But Lee said he still finds time to play in the Baton Rouge Symphony, living out his love of music for 32 years for his students and for the community to enjoy.

“(Andry) is an outstanding role model for all his students,” Lee said. “His love of music, his exceptional work ethic, his patience and his dedication to the development of his students combine to make him a valuable gift to St. Michael High School and the entire community.”

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Teacher of the year living her dream in New Roads

By Debbie Shelley
The Catholic Commentator

Allison Christina “Miss Chris” Chustz is living out her dream teaching at Catholic of Pointe Coupée Elementary in New Roads where she learned as a student.

Chustz comes from a long line of educators on both sides of her family, including her grandmother, Dionysia Dawson, who was taught at St. Joseph Academy before the school was merged with St. Mary Elementary School and renamed Catholic of Pointe Coupée.

“I’m back home, just in a different capacity,” said an exuberant Chustz.

Chustz, who has spent 32 years mentoring, challenging and loving students as well as teaching them the love of Jesus, has been selected the 2015 Distinguished Elementary Teacher of the Year for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

Chustz earned her bachelor’s degree in elementary education from the University of Southwest Louisiana in 1977 and her master’s in education with an emphasis on early reading from LSU in 1980. She went on to receive her certification in supervisor of student teaching at LSU in 1989.

Chustz taught sixth-grade language arts and K-8 art at St. Pius X School in New Orleans and first- and third-grade at St. Louis King of France School in Baton Rouge before becoming a third-grade teacher at Catholic of Pointe Coupée in 2004. She was also a faculty member of Chamberlin and Cohn elementary schools in Port Allen that were each awarded Model School Status as part of the Special Plan Upgrading Reading (SPUR) program for commitment and dedication to educational excellence. Chustz adapted her own classroom model based on the Workshop Way developed by Sister Grace Filion SBS of Xavier University in New Orleans. The Louisiana Department of Education filmed Chustz using the model in the classroom for statewide use.

West Baton Rouge Civil Parish selected Chustz to serve on a SPUR evaluation team and selected her its teacher of the year in 1980. At Immaculate Conception Church in Lakeland, Chustz is active in pro-life ministry. She helped develop a respect life lesson plan for the parish school of religion, obtained respect life speakers for high school students, formed a prisoner Christmas card outreach, organized nursing home visits, held respect life rosaries and youth living rosaries during October, assisted in the parish’s sponsorship of days for 40 Days for Life, presented information to the youth for March for Life in Washington, D.C., and supported ICC and Holy Family school fairs.

She also supports the St. Agnes Soup Kitchen, St. Vincent de Paul, local food banks and St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital.

From her more than three decades in the classroom, Chustz said she has volumes of adorable tales that she could tell, but there is “one special moment frozen in time” that emphasizes her mission as a Catholic school teacher.

She said there was a student who was not only new to Catholic schools but to Catholicism.

“I noticed immediately that, unlike his attention toward the other subjects, he sat on the edge of his seat for every religion lesson,” she said. “He was truly captivated, engaged, thirsting for more. Of this I was certain. This child was amazed when I stated that Jesus died on the cross for us to save us from our sins, and he did it willingly. I had only mentioned it in passing, as an adjunct to my main lesson.”

“I assumed this was nothing new to my classroom of little Christians before me,” she added. “It was then that I realized that this young boy was being told the Good News of Jesus Christ for the first time. Right there, sitting in the front row of Room 11, he looked at me very puzzled, mouth literally gaping, ‘Really? He did that? Why?’ He had never heard this before. He was astounded and truly bewildered.”

She said the child continued in his enthusiasm as he came to know Christ. He carried his newfound knowledge to his family, who were grateful.

Chustz said, “I can still see the sparkle in his eyes, hear the excitement in his voice, and will never forget the look on his little face as he tried to take this all in. He was touched by the hand of God that day.”

Moments like these are when Chustz said she knows she has fulfilled her mission as a Catholic educator – to bring Jesus into all the lives of her students’ lives.

“Our Lord Jesus Christ understands our vocation better than anyone, for he was a teacher,” she said. “I often remind my students of this. I once said, ‘I am the teacher, but Jesus is THE teacher.’ One of my students retorted, ‘Do you get it, Miss Chris? You are the teacher, but Jesus is THEE teacher.’

“How awesome. Of course, that led us into a lesson on the use of the word ‘thee,’ foreign to some.”

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Catholic Schools Snaps
A quick take on issues and statistics

Percentage of 12th graders who attend a four-year college

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Catholic Schools</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Religious Schools</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Private Schools</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Schools</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
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OLOL students praise Catholic Education

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Catholic education offers students the opportunity to strengthen their own faith lives while building an excellent academic foundation that can carry them through the difficult years of higher education, according to several students at Our Lady of Lake College.

St. Joseph’s Academy graduate Emily Lasseigne, an OLOL senior who is majoring in biology, called her Catholic education “an amazing experience.” Lasseigne, who attended St. Thomas More School in Baton Rouge, said attending Catholic schools throughout her academic career has been a “wonderful opportunity to not only receive a great education but to also learn about God through my school years.”

“This has given me the ability to strengthen my faith which is a necessity to have during the strenuous years as a college student,” added Lasseigne, who hopes to pursue a profession-al career at a Catholic hospital. “Being able to pray with my classmates before my classes and openly talk about Jesus with professors, faculty and peers has added not only to my personal growth but to my education and future career.”

Senior Derek Wiltz, also a biology major, graduated from Tuerlings Catholic High School and either attends Mass at Christ the King in Baton Rouge or Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Lafayette. He said Catholic education has taught him “the truth of Christ, of morality, of how to love God above all else, of how to love your neighbor, of marriage, of family. You can’t learn those things in science and history.”

Wiltz said he hopes to pursue a career in sports medicine that will include research so “it can be personalized medicine and sports medicine.”

Nursing student Shelby Thompson, who attends St. Peter Church in Reserve and attended the church parish’s elementary school, said Catholic education has instilled morals and values into her life.

“This special learning atmosphere has so many facets that are rooted in one’s faith,” Thomp-
Our Lady of Mercy philosophy provides educational balance

Our Lady of Mercy School in Baton Rouge embraces the philosophy providing students a foundation for a balanced and purposeful life.

The comprehensive education focuses on language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and foreign language, which are all crucial in a child’s development. Equally important is a Catholic education, which helps bring students closer to God, develop their minds and build character.

A variety of arts education options helps round out all areas of a student’s development.

Involvement in the arts is proven not only to increase academic success in math, reading, cognitive ability, critical thinking and verbal skills, it also gives each student an opportunity to explore his or her gifts and share them with the school community.

Arts education is part of every Mercy student’s experience, with music and art in the younger grades and as an elective through band, choir, art and drama on a more advanced level in upper grades. Each program focuses on specific standards unique to that field of study and provides the student an opportunity of growth within their area of interest and talent.

Mercy’s band program offers students as early as fifth grade an opportunity to discover, develop and showcase their unique musical talents.

“The instruments students play are chosen based on natural fit and student interest,” said band director Duane LeBlanc.

The curriculum LeBlanc utilizes is focused on creating a school concert band. Band members have various opportunities to perform for the school community throughout the year, including the school Christmas concert, Mardi Gras parade, church parish fair and a year-end concert in the spring.

Technology plays a key role as LeBlanc uses Apple TV, iPad apps and a band website as academic aids. Two of LeBlanc’s students have been selected to participate in this year’s All Parish Honor Band.

The choir emphasizes healthy vocal technique providing educational balance.

OLOL president Dr. Tina Holland said the school’s Catholic identity fits in with the mission to help students become competent professionals as well as good and faithful servants.

“We encourage them to be Gospel witnesses while constantly pursuing the truth through scholarly dialogue,” Holland said. “Thus, we in Catholic education cherish the dear privilege and the awesome responsibility to serve the church.”
Catholic schools combine education with a ‘lens of faith’ through which children view the world and act as living examples of Christ.

Mrs. Stacey Brenner Keaton  
2013 DISTINGUISHED GRADUATE

Eleanor Bach teaches music at all grade levels. Her general music students use handbells, percussion and other classroom instruments. Bach’s use of Promethean board technology enhances instruction through interactive lessons and projects.

Students have the opportunity to join the liturgical choir and lead the school in song during school-wide celebrations of the Mass. Two of Bach’s students were selected for the Greater Baton Rouge Children’s Chorus and several of her choir members participate in the Louisiana All State Choir.

Drama I and II are offered as electives for sixth through eighth grade students, with Anna Haldane using the Louisiana Theatre Standards as the basis of her Drama curriculum. Students hone in on skills such as creative expression, aesthetic perception, historical and cultural perspective, and critical analysis.

“Theater is the window to the world allowing students to encounter places and things they wouldn’t otherwise have experienced,” Haldane said.

Haldane’s students learn the importance of all production roles such as set design, wardrobe, lighting and sound.

Dr. Valerie Comeaux teaches Drama II to seventh- and eighth-grade students. Her students spend time practicing vocal and movement activities, and rehearsing individual and team pieces for speech and debate tournaments.

The Mercy speech and debate team travels throughout Louisiana competing against state high schools and schools from other areas of the country.

The fourth area of arts education is the visual art program. Students in grades Pre-K through eighth are exposed to art on various levels.

In Pre-K, art is incorporated into daily lessons by homeroom teachers. Students in kindergarten and first grade have art class once a week, and art is offered as a rotating enrichment class for second through fifth grades.

Art I and II are year-long electives for sixth- through eighth-grade students. Pamela Cuccia follows the guidelines outlined in the National Visual Arts Standards with a focus on the “Elements and Principals of Art” curriculum. Cuccia’s art lessons focus on the experience of creating art and the use of artistic materials such as oil/chalk pastels, watercolor/tempera paints, markers, colored pencils.
Sacred Heart drama club students enjoy ‘acting up’

Sacred Heart of Jesus School students are acting up, but club moderators aren’t upset about it one bit.

Moderators Beth Jones and Mikelyn Donaldson are actually encouraging them to talk louder. What’s this club all about? It’s called the Tiger Troupe drama club.

Formed during the 2013-14 school year, the club is open to seventh- and eighth-grade students and has two types of membership: acting and technical crew. Auditions are not required of students interested in the acting component. Any interested student is able to join and have a speaking part in all activities.

Students interested in participating on the tech crew must secure a teacher’s recommendation for one of those spots. For those students interested in the technical aspects of theatre and video productions, Tiger Troupe gives them the opportunity to produce, direct, film and edit productions.

The troupe has starred in, produced, directed, filmed and edited several TigerVision broadcasts that showcase various activities on campus, as well as commercials for the book fair and art show. The group’s anti-bullying commercial produced at the end of the 2013-14 school year was the inspiration for Sacred Heart’s 2014-15 theme, “Count on Me.” The club’s first stage production, “Big Bad,” was a huge success with students and parents alike.

Its second stage performance, “A Night at the Wax Museum,” will be presented March 20.

In less than two years, club members said they can see a marked improvement in their performances. Seventh-grader Ashley Stevens has starred in a number of local theatre productions and is “thrilled” to be a member of Tiger Troupe.

“We have progressed so much since last year in projection and focus,” Stevens said. “Being on stage or in front of the camera has built up people’s confidences.”

The club also plays games such as Vocal Ping Pong and Ten Second Objects, said seventh-grader Abby Ligon, “and the games help us with our eye contact, voice projection and quick-thinking.”

Seventh-grader Madi Holden notes how much she has grown since joining Tiger Troupe. “I used to not want to get up in front of people, but, once you’re up there, you find out it isn’t that bad,” she said. “So many people have low self-esteem and, through drama club, we realize we can do better than we thought.”

Tech crew member Landon Simpson also has experience in local theatre productions, and now the eighth-grader is learning about productions from behind the camera.

“Being on the tech crew is lots of fun,” said Simpson. “It’s great that we are getting this experience. There’s so much to learn about filming and editing and Tiger Troupe is giving me that opportunity.”

The tech crew is excited about adding green screen productions this school year. “Working with the green screen and the green screen app has given us a chance to be more creative in our TigerVision broadcasts and other videos,” said eighth-grader Breann Keoven. “There’s so much more to learn about the green screen that will give us even more creative options for our work.”

Club moderators believe that the benefits of drama instruction go well beyond the classroom, both physically and academically. From motor skills to positive social interaction, from spatial and mathematical intelligence to creative expression, education in the arts benefits the whole child.

“The arts at Our Lady of Mercy encourage children to develop a love and appreciation of the arts,” Cuccia said. “Each child has a chance to participate in something they love, whether it be drawing, painting, singing, dancing, playing an instrument, acting. Regardless of who can do what, we all can do something extraordinary.”

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SJA to expand STEM curriculum

As part of St. Joseph’s Academy’s strategic plan to more fully integrate science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) across the curriculum, two exciting undertakings have been announced.

A STEM lab, or MakerSpace, is currently being created in a large room in Mother Alice Hall. The lab will be used by all subject areas and will feature brainstorming areas, workspace, 3D printers and other tools and resources to enable students to experiment with emerging technologies and work on multidisciplinary projects of their own creation.

“Because women have traditionally been under-represented in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math, we have identified STEM as an area of focus for the future,” principal Linda Fryoux Harvison said. “The creation of the STEM lab will enhance our students’ exposure to a wide variety of opportunities that strengthen their problem-solving and logical-thinking skills as well as their ability to pursue creative and original solutions.”

Claire Luikart, special projects manager for SJA’s technology team, will head up the STEM lab. “Our ultimate goal, in addition to having a creative space, is to provide a means for our students to express themselves and build their ideas in a structured environment,” she said. “We are excited that the MakerSpace will provide a STEM-centric area where critical thinking, creativity and collaboration will flourish.”

Luikart said the new lab will provide the means for SJA students to expand the scope of the STEM-related work they are currently doing in 3D scanning, 3D modeling, 3D printing, electronics, design, programming and technology. “We instill in our students that they are the future generation of thinkers and creators,” Luikart said. “The space will allow our highly talented young women to more fully engage in STEM activities on all levels.”

Additionally, SJA will participate in the FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) Tech Challenge, a robotics competition designed for students in grades 7 to 12 to compete head to head in designing, building and programming robots. Teams will develop and build robots based on engineering principles and applying real-world math and science concepts. Participating teams compete in local qualifying tournaments to advance to state championship tournaments and ultimately the world championship tournament.

Plans are being finalized as the SJA tech team anticipates the arrival of the robot kit.

STEM lessons have long been part of the SJA curriculum, but a new STEM lab will enhance students’ opportunities for critical thinking, creativity and collaboration. Here, biology students learned about DNA testing and solved a fictitious crime by comparing DNA samples using electrophoresis. Photo by Jennifer Fontaine | St. Joseph’s Academy

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Holy Family brings back the arts

In 2013, Holy Family School in Port Allen decided to bring “the arts” back to West Baton Rouge, hiring Madlyn Hicks to teach art class as a component of the school’s multifaceted enrichment program. Hicks has a degree in fine art and dance from Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri, and has been teaching art for more than 38 years.

Hicks is teaching that art is the basis to all learning whether it is the analytical side of the brain or not. Art is incorporated into so many fields of learning such as computers, math, history and literature.

“It is the foundation that you build upon for all education,” Hicks said.

Art can be a release of both positive and negative energy for kids, she said.

“You submerge yourself into art and it allows you to create and express yourself,” she said. “Art is a necessity for advanced degrees because it is a thinking craft and through repetition, you learn discipline. Art is the unspoken word for many of our children’s thoughts.”

Hicks takes students through the beginning stages of art then on to drawing, scale and proportion.

“Everyone can paint but everyone doesn’t have technique,” Hicks said. She wants the children to not only learn these techniques but to also keep them interested. She teaches in all art mediums from water color, pastels, oils to pen and ink.

“Art must speak to people in order for it to be everlasting,” according to Hicks.

For Holy Family students, art is everlasting and is currently on display not only on their campus but at the West Baton Rouge Library and the West Baton Rouge Museum of Art.

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St. Francis students rise to the challenge

The Capital Area United Way held its annual drive to help more than 300,000 people get services in the Baton Rouge area. The students of St. Francis Xavier School in Baton Rouge, under the leadership of chairperson Betty Bickham, decided to have a different contest than usual to see which class could raise the highest amount in contributions. Each class was challenged to “Give A Heart” and donate money to support this United Way project. Students were given paper hearts for each donation they made and each paper heart was posted in the hallways. Jacqueline Hunt’s third-graders won the challenge, raising the highest amount in donations for the school. St. Francis Xavier’s total contributions topped more than $700. The amount included employees and special events.

St. Francis Xavier School third-grade class taught by Jacqueline Hunt, center back, won the “Give a Heart” challenge by raising the most money. Photo provided by St. Francis Xavier School

Caleigh Bonano, fifth-grade
Maddie Grant, third-grade
Gracie Gantt, second-grade

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St. Francis Xavier School third-grade class taught by Jacqueline Hunt, center back, won the “Give a Heart” challenge by raising the most money. Photo provided by St. Francis Xavier School
St. Peter Chanel School students have been enjoying learning about science in all grade levels.

The PK3 class began the school year learning about pumpkins. They learned about the life cycle of pumpkins and identified the parts of the pumpkin plants in their garden. The students guessed whether a small or large pumpkin would have the most seeds, then checked to see if their hypothesis was correct. They learned that both pumpkins had more than 500 seeds, but their guess was right; the large pumpkin did have more seeds than the small pumpkin even if it was only nine more.

The students were excited to realize the size of the seeds were different also. The large pumpkin had large seeds and the small pumpkin had small seeds. The students also enjoyed tasting pumpkin seeds and making pumpkin shakes to finish their lesson.

Students in fifth grade enjoyed learning about chemical reactions. They worked through the scientific method to determine the outcome of the experiment, which was to determine if baking soda and vinegar would inflate a balloon. They also combined white glue with borax, along with water which resulted in a new product called slime.

Students also enjoy sharing what they learn in science with other grade levels. Sixth-graders Madison Beier and TaLaija Allen helped kindergartener Jaci Anslum launch a rocket.

Students in fourth- through eighth-grade made rockets as part of a 4-H National Science Week project, Rockets to the Rescue. Older students launched for their buddies, then helped them launch one themselves.

St. Peter Chanel PK3 students, from left to right, Kennedy Felse, Allison Vincent, Malik Whittington, Jessie Poirrier, Nathan Duhe and Cole Keller, learned about the life cycle of pumpkins during a science project. Photos submitted by St. Peter Chanel Interparochial School

Fifth-graders Cohen Veron, right, and Caitlyn Rojas work on their experiment.

Chanel students Madison Beier, from left, Jaci Anslum and TaLaija Allen work on a project to launch a rocket.
Most Blessed Sacrament School celebrates 35th anniversary

Just one year after Most Blessed Sacrament was established as a church
parish in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, a school building housing 18 classrooms,
and an administration building that
included a library, were completed and the school opened with 514 students.
This year, the school will celebrate its
35th anniversary of providing academic and spiritual education to students in
this southeast Baton Rouge area.
Msgr. Lester C. Lacassagne was ap-
pointed as the first pastor of Most Bless-
ed Sacrament in 1979 and construction of the
school buildings began shortly after.
A faculty of 18 teachers plus an of-
fice and administrative staff was hired
and the school opened with 514 student
its first year. The next year the cafeteria
opened with the back of the church building serving as the dining area. The
MBS Home and School Association was also formed that year.
Growth was immediate. In 1984, an
annex building used for fine arts enrichment and physical education was com-
peted and French instruction was added to the curriculum. Father Gerard Young was assigned as the pastor that year.
The next year, the annex building was converted to kindergarten classrooms.
In 1987, Maria Cloessener was em-
ployed as principal, an Assertive Disci-
pline program was adopted, and Most Blessed Sacrament – Long Field opened
for athletics. In 1988, a 16-station Apple II computer lab for grades K-8 was opened. The next year, as the parish and school celebrated its 10th anniversary, the Come Lord Jesus program was intro-
duced for eighth-grade participation in the Duke Talent Identification Program. This year, the newly renovated St. Ursula Hall.
In 2001, fifth-grade student Adam Catanzaro was chosen as Diocesan Student of the Year, and in 2002, second-
grade teachers visited Nicaragua, the site of the Los Ninos Mission, which
the school adopted as a service project.
In the spring of 2005, MBS celebrated
its 25th anniversary with a special Mass
and a reception in the school gym. In the
fall of that year, MBS accepted 60 new
students after Hurricane Katrina dev-
astated New Orleans and surrounding areas.
A new parish church was dedicated on Jan. 21, 2007, and the old church was
refurbished to St. Ursula Hall with a pre-
sentation area and small meeting rooms. The next year SmartBoards and Star-
Boards began to be installed in the class-
rooms, and today every teaching area
is adorned with several religious stat-
ues, and the cafeteria with Christian art
tables, but also in the campus courtyard which is adorned with several religious statues, and the cafeteria with Christian art work, all of which was made or donated by staff members or friends of the school. Through the service projects sponsored by each grade level and by the school’s Student Council, and are generously sup-
ported by our parents, MBS continues to reach out to the community by giving witness to the Corporal Acts of Mercy.

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Catholic tradition.

At Our Lady of Mercy, we believe
in educating the whole person, giving your child
the foundation for a balanced and purposeful life.
Your child will benefit from a comprehensive and Catholic education,
one that brings children closer to God, develops their minds, and builds character.

OPEN HOUSE / APPLICATION DAY
Wednesday, January 28 / 8:00 - 1:00
You may also schedule a private tour by contacting
our Admissions Office.

Our Lady of Mercy Catholic School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin.
Every year each Catholic school in the Diocese of Baton Rouge selects one of its alumni as its distinguished graduate. This year these people will be honored at a dinner Monday, Jan. 26 at the Renaissance Hotel in Baton Rouge.

The 2015 Distinguished Graduates along with the information submitted by the schools are:

**Ascension Catholic School**

Ascension Catholic’s distinguished graduate is known as the “voice of the bulldogs” at football games. David M. LeBlanc has been a vital part of the school for 30 years, serving as past president and treasurer of the Ascension Catholic School Board, the finance committee, the Purple and Gold Club and as master of ceremonies for many events. He and his wife, Rhonda, as well as his children and siblings, graduated from Ascension Catholic, creating a family tradition.

LeBlanc is a member of the American Institute of CPAs and the Louisiana State Society of CPAs. He is a lector and extraordinary minister of holy Communion at Ascension of Our Lord Church, a member of the Donaldsonville and Assumption Chamber of Commerce, a past chairman and current treasurer of the Ascension Parish Fire Protection District and a member of the Rotary Club.

He was inducted into the Ascension Catholic Alumni Hall of Distinction in 2001 and received the Mother Seton Award in 2011.

**Catholic High School**

Dr. Tomasz “Tommy” Stryjewski is an accomplished physician, but it is his desire to eradicate diseases without a cure and his dedication to helping more than one person at a time that make him so special, Catholic High School said of its distinguished graduate.

Currently in the Residency Training Program at Harvard Medical School Department of Ophthalmology, Stryjewski has written numerous articles in medical journals and has received grants, fellowships and awards for research, service and leadership in the field of vision loss, the school said. He has also established a charitable organization that informs people of the need for organ donations.

A 2004 graduate of Catholic High, Stryjewski said the dedicated teachers who provided him with a Catholic education helped create and support the moral foundation that has propelled him through life.

Among his awards are the Harvard Medical School Traveling Fellowship; the Dubin Fellowship for Emerging Leaders; Harvard University Center for Public Leadership; Harvard Medical School’s Charles Janeway Prize for International Research; the Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowship for New Americans; USA Today National College Academic First Team member; Outstanding Junior of LSU; and Man of the Year at Catholic High.

While at Catholic High, Stryjewski was an exemplary student and was concerned with social justice and service to others. He volunteered with the Baton Rouge EMS while in high school, and while attending LSU, he established Tigers for Donating Life, a group that informs people of the need for organ donors.

**Catholic of Pointe Coupée School**

New Roads Mayor Robert A. Myer said, “Community is the basis of what a Catholic education is about.” “My Catholic education and values based on community have helped me to a better mayor, community leader and servant,” said the 1980 graduate of Catholic of Pointe Coupée.

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**St. Aloysius Catholic School**

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Robert A. Myer

“Mayor Myer’s vision has led to a revitalization of our community,” said principal Colleen Caillot in naming him the distinguished graduate. “His business-like approach has created growth opportunities that have benefited our school as well as the community. His ability to work with others has led our town to come together for the benefit of all,” she said.

Myer is an accomplished businessman, a civic-minded leader, a visionary, a philanthropist and a proven leader, the school said. He is chairman of the board of Youth Oasis, has served as board director of Volunteer Baton Rouge of the Capital Area United Way, is a member of the Kiwanis Club and a volunteer for many school activities.

He founded the Myer Restore Hope Fund that is operated through the Baton Rouge Area Foundation to help children with severe burns. As mayor, he has worked to improve the city’s recreational opportunities, which has benefitted the school.

The president and CEO of Comfort Keepers and Express Employments, he has received several awards for excellence in his professional life.

Holy Family School

The comptroller of the University of Louisiana System, Rhoda Rizzuto Webber is the 2015 distinguished graduate of Holy Family School in Port Allen.

“I realize it is our duty to instill Christian values, to provide our children with a quality education and to encourage parental involvement in the education of our children,” Webber said.

“Holy Family School provided the foundation to be a loving daughter to my parents, a supportive wife to my husband, a caring mother and active member of my church.” It also provided an excellent education, both academically and spiritually as well as friends for life, she said.

Webber has served as a coach for soccer and basketball, been treasurer of the Athletic Committee, served as a room board member, secretary of the Advisory Board, and on the parish council for Holy Family Church.

“She is a wonderful person who exemplifies the values that we try to instill in all of our students. Rhoda is in a class of her own. She is the best of the best,” school officials said of this 1977 graduate.

Holy Ghost School

Holy Ghost School’s distinguished graduate has helped many veterans with medical expenses, living expenses and countless other needs.

Brad Joseph McKee, a 1999 graduate of Holy Ghost, enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps after high school, graduating from the U.S. Marine Corps Scout Sniper School. After his tour of duty, he spoke to students at his alma mater on several occasions about being healthy and serving others. He founded the “Disposable Heroes Project,” working to raise money and awareness for wounded veterans. Through this project, he has kept many veterans from becoming homeless, school officials said.

“A Catholic education is the most important aspect of a child’s early life,” McKee said. “It helps form personality and character of the child forever.”

The owner of CrossFit of Hammond, McKee was the first recipient of the “Heart of a Lion” Award from Southeastern Louisiana University in 2014. He was named Citizen of the Year for the city of Hammond in 2011 and was voted Most Athletic at St. Thomas Aquinas High School in 2003.

Mater Dolorosa School

Screenwriter Samuel Christopher Spitale came to Mater Dolorosa School with big dreams. Add in a lot of hard work and he has become a huge success working with producers such as George Lucas, school officials said.

“It is not often that one of our own can work with people such as George Lucas and be a part of Comic Con, (a convention showcasing comic and pop culture artist and memorabilia. Spitale is in charge of memorabilia from the “Star Wars” series). He is a role model for our young students to aspire to and realize that dreams do come true,” school officials said in naming him this year’s distinguished graduate.

Spitale “has taken his religious education and cultural experiences from Mater Dolorosa School and used them as a foundation for his writing for films in California,” the school said.

“Mater Dolorosa and the town of Independence are proud to have one of their own share their Catholic education and culture ... This is a wonderful asset to our school and community.” Spitale graduated from Mater Dolorosa in 1988.

Most Blessed Sacrament School

Lindsey Falcon Johnson is a lector, an extraordinary minister of holy communion, a fourth-grade teacher in the parish school of religion, a volunteer with baptismal seminars and a St. Jean Vianney youth ministry core team member.

She also serves on the Diocesan Youth Board leadership team, the diocesan Young Adult Min-
Garret Neal Graves

Prior to his election to the 6th U.S. Congressional district seat, Graves was appointed by Gov. Bobby Jindal as the chairman of the Coastal Protection and Conservation Authority. He also worked as chief legislative aide to the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Graves has “dedicated his time and talent to public service, living out our school’s mission and motto in a beautiful way,” school officials said. He has committed himself not only to being a great husband and father, but also to being a public servant.

In addition to his six years as chairman of the state’s Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority, Graves has worked with U.S. Sen. David Vitter, former U.S. Sen. John Breaux and former U.S. Rep. Billy Tauzin.

Our Lady of the Lake College

Born near Saigon, Vietnam, Sister Uyen Vu came to the United States in 1989 because of the Communist takeover of her country. Sister Uyen, who was born into a Catholic family during the Vietnam War, remembers attending daily Mass at 4 a.m.

She said she first considered joining a religious order with her first encounter with a sister at the school she was attending. But she said she realized family considerations came first so she delayed her decision.

Sister Uyen, who moved to New Orleans with her family in 1989 and attended O. Perry Walker High School, entered the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady.

She has served as a nurse at Our Lady of Lourdes Regional Medical Center and traveled to Haiti twice to assist with mission work. She has also worked in several other facilities including St. Elizabeth Hospital in Gonzales and in her current position as mission services assistant at Our Lady of Mercy School in Baton Rouge.

Sister Uyen, soft-spoken by nature, said she believes she is where God has intended for her to be. “It doesn’t matter what happens,” she said. “At the end of the day I just feel like, yes, the Lord is calling me. The Lord is calling me so just be patient.”

Sister Uyen called Catholic education “a gift from God because it grounds students in the Christian faith. My own Catholic education influences me in all I do.”

Redemptorist Elementary School

Kemery Ann Stevenson is “an advocate for youth who often have no voice in the world,” Redemptorist Elementary School said of its distinguished graduate.

Stevenson has worked with foster children in the Pittsburgh area for more than 15 years. She is an active member of St. Benedict the Moor Church where she is a youth minister. She is also working with the pastor to establish a young adult ministry for the church parish.

“Catholic education is grounded in principles that prepare one to achieve in life,” said Stevenson, a 1986 graduate of Redemptorist Elementary.

The school said Stevenson has a “dynamic personality that allows her to create a trusting rapport with the youth she works with. She is a dedicated and compassionate social worker who has a passion for underprivileged youth.”

The director of Transition Services for Circle C Youth and Family Services, Stev-enson received the Employee of the Year award in 2002 and was honored as the volunteer of the year for the Sickle Cell Foundation in 2014. She was an honor graduate of Southern University and received a full scholarship to the University of Pittsburgh for graduate school.

Redemptorist High School

Redemptorist High School officials called attorney Gregory Day Callihan their “largest overall contributor” over the years.

The 1985 graduate shows his support by volunteering his time and through monetary donations. “As most choose to contribute one way or another, he chooses both, certainly a path much less traveled and a support that is unparalleled in the community,” school officials said.

“The Catholic faith and education is what has shaped Mr. Callihan throughout his life and lead him to being the successful individual that he is today,” school officials said.

An attorney with Callihan Law Firm/Central Title and Closing, Callihan has been an active leader in efforts to keep Redemptorist High school from closing at the end of the school year.

He is also president of the Athletic Association, and a member of the School Board. His three children have also attended Redemptorist.

Sacred Heart of Jesus School

As Brother Bernard George Couvillion celebrates 50 years as a Brother of the Sacred Heart, his alma mater, Sacred Heart of Jesus School in Baton Rouge, honors him as its distinguished graduate.

“Catholic education offers the rich gift of holistic education which includes instruction formation and personal witness of students’ spiritual life neglected by most schools,” said Brother “Bernie,” who graduated from Sacred Heart in 1960.

Sacred Heart school officials said Brother Bernie has a “special, unique charisma of trust and compassion recognized by the church.” He has served as a teacher, director of formation, provincial superior, Catholic school admini-
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Brother Bernie truly witnesses to the Catholic faith by passing on the light of Christ. This has been his life’s vocation, the school said.

Brother Bernie currently serves in campus ministry at St. Stanislaus in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.

**St. Aloysius School**

Randal Roe Cangelosi said his Catholic education has made him a better father, husband, son, person and attorney and provided him a quality education combined with the teachings of love, respect and compassion.

A lawyer with Kean Miller LLP, Cangelosi has served with the St. Aloysius Boy Scouts of America Pack No. 7 as a den leader and has been a volunteer coach of numerous athletic teams. A past St. Aloysius Fair chairperson, he has also chaired the parish golf tournament for seven years.

He has volunteered with the American Red Cross, the Baton Rouge Chamber of Commerce, the Catholic High School Alumni Board and the Louisiana Lupus Foundation.

School officials said they chose to honor this 1983 graduate because of his commitment to St. Aloysius Parish, his work ethic and his tireless commitment to volunteerism.

**St. Alphonsus School**

Angelina Marie Giovingo has a “smile on her face that brightens everyone’s day.” That’s what St. Alphonsus School said in naming this dedicated volunteer as its distinguished graduate this year.

A 2003 graduate of St. Alphonsus, Giovingo has devoted her time and talents to the church and school. She is a member of the church bell choir, adult choir, a lector, an extraordinary minister of holy Communion and an assistant for altar server events. She is also a leader in the youth group, a confirmation mentor and a high school coordinator. She also helps with the St. Alphonsus festival and is a past member of the Pastoral Council.

Giovingo is “dedicated, energetic, enthusiastic and devoted,” the school said.

A senior clerical specialist with the Baton Rouge City Court, Giovingo said Catholic education has the “unique ability to help students grow spiritually as well as intellectually. This is something that was extremely important to me as a student and it will continue to be important to me as a future parent.”

**St. Elizabeth School**

“An ideal example of living the Gospel.” That’s how St. Elizabeth School describes its 2015 distinguished graduate, Loretta Rousseau Lirette.

Lirette has ministered to youth in Catholic education for 26 years. She has served both the St. Elizabeth and St. Joseph (Thibodaux) communities as St. Elizabeth kindergarten religion teacher, librarian and development director, and as a resource teacher for the first- and second-grade St. Joseph School.

She is a lector, commentator, extraordinary minister of holy Communion, Teen Life volunteer and Steubenville on the Bayou youth rally volunteer for her present church parish, St. Joseph Co-Cathedral in Thibodaux. She also was active in her former parish of St. Elizabeth, where she was director and a teacher in the CCD program, a lector, commentator, extraordinary minister of holy Communion, a choir member and co-chair of the St. Elizabeth harvest festival. She also represents St. Elizabeth for the Assumption Civil Parish Chamber of Commerce.

“Catholic education educates the students spiritually, morally, academically and socially, nurturing a well-formed conscience which will guide the adult Catholic through life,” said this 1968 graduate of St. Elizabeth School.

School officials said they chose Lirette as the distinguished graduate “because of her unwavering faith, her dedication to spreading God’s word to the youth she educates and her willingness to serve her community in any way she can.”

**St. Francis Xavier School**

Gail Vavasseur Jones said Catholic education nurtured her beliefs in the Catholic faith.

“It instilled the virtues of faith, hope and love that are still present in my life today,” said the 1961 graduate of St. Francis Xavier School.

“My professional and personal life has been tremendously affected by my mor-

**St. George School**

“Living the Gospel values is clearly evident in the lives of Stephen M. Dille and his wife, Jodie,” St. George school officials said.

The 1986 graduate of St. George and his wife have adopted four children from China, two of whom have special needs.

Dille “has truly taken the St. George mission to heart. He and his family live Gospel values and promote faith development and service to others,” the school said. He has continued to demonstrate that he is a lifelong learner and contributes positively to the community to which he belongs.”

A foreign service officer for the U.S. Agency for International Development, Dille is committed to serving the poor in Third World Countries, the school added.

Dille credited his Catholic education for the decisions he has made in his life. “Being able to attend religion class everyday significantly impacted my life. SEE GRADUATES PAGE 10B
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These classes and the understanding of Jesus’ teachings have provided a blueprint for my life’s decisions.”

In September 2014, Dille and his wife were recognized by the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute in Washington, D.C. Jodie Dille was presented the Angel in Adoptions award for her efforts, with the support of her husband, in the area of adoptions and foster care.

**St. Jean Vianney School**

Education is the key to empowering future generations to confidently and successfully drive the world in a direction that is both hopeful and compassionate, said St. Jean Vianney’s distinguished graduate.

Joshua Paul Barrios, a 2001 graduate of St. Jean Vianney, is a graduate student in neurobiology and anatomy at the University of Utah where he has a full-paid scholarship and is pursuing a doctoral degree.

His early education in Catholic schools set him on a caring and committed path to helping others, school officials said. His path has not always been one of ease as he struggled with Attention Deficit Disorder as a student. “Through hard work and commitment, he has persevered to continue his education.”

In 2011, Barrios was awarded a fellowship at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, which is a competitive research award from The National Science Foundation. He was invited back in 2012. His work was published in the Journal of Cell Biology while studying biological science at LSU in 2012-1013.

At the University of Utah, he is a member of the Brain Awareness Committee, which executes science outreach programs in local elementary and high schools and halfway houses. He also serves on the recruitment committee that organizes and executes interview weekends for prospective students.

**St. John School**

Stacey LaBauve Allain has shared her time, talent and treasure with St. John School in Plaquemine. A 1974 graduate, she has worked with the Alumni Association, volunteered in various efforts and given financially to the school. “Stacey has distinguished herself in many ways in the school community sharing her time, talent and treasure with us. Stacey is the wife of a former sheriff of Iberville Parish, Brent Allain, and has given many hours of service,” school officials said.

She is a charter member of the St. John Alumni Association and has served on its board of directors.

Allain has been active for many years in civic, parish and church organizations but she continues to put St. John School as a priority in her life with the work that she does for the school, school officials said. They described her as a humble person who works not for the recognition of honors or awards which makes her so much more serving.

Allain said, “A Catholic education provides students with a strong academic foundation enriched in their Catholic faith. The values learned will guide them throughout their lives.”

**St. Joseph’s Academy**

Spiritual Director Becky Uffman Eldredge said Catholic education “builds community, deepens your faith, teaches discernment and provides a foundation of how to integrate faith and life.”

This 1998 graduate of St. Joseph’s Academy has been involved in Catholic ministry since serving as a peer minister at SJA. Her love of retreat ministry began during high school and she has now led retreats for 17 years, school officials said. At LSU, she founded the College Retreat Team and facilitated retreats for junior and high school students.

Eldredge “lives the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph in her daily life,” school officials said. “She invites people to reflect on sacramental moments in their daily lives – those moments where we both receive and give God’s love.”

After moving to Athens, Georgia, Eldredge worked for Charis Ministries, a Jesuit retreat ministry for young adults. As she led retreats, she noticed participants wanting to meet with her to talk about their relationship with God and their prayer life. Wanting tools to support this work, she went to school to be trained as a spiritual director, the school said. She received her certificate in spiritual direction from Spring Hill College in 2012. She is also in the process of writing a book on the transformative power of prayer.

**St. Joseph School**

Third-grade teacher Veronica Kraft Pierson has an “up-beat, can-do attitude that leads and infuses enthusiasm into others,” St. Joseph School officials said of their distinguished graduate.

“She is willing to serve whenever asked at whatever task is asked of her. She is always part of the solution if ever a problem arises. She is a great cheerleader for St. Joseph School,” school officials said.

**GRADUATES ▼**

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**Most-Blessed Sacrament**

Catholic School

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CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK 2015

January 23, 2015

ST. ELIZABETH’S STUDENTS OF THE YEAR – St. Elizabeth School announced its Students of the Year, fifth-grader Saniyah Prean, left, and eight-grader Zane Blanchard. Photo provided by St. Elizabeth School

STACEY LABAUVE ALLAIN – Stacey LaBauve Allain has shared her time, talent and treasure with St. John School in Plaquemine.

BECKY UFFMAN ELDREDGE – Third-grade teacher Verocnia Kraft Pierson has an “up-beat, can-do attitude that leads and infuses enthusiasm into others.”
Pierson teaches at Springfield Elementary School in Livingston Civil Parish and was named the Springfield teacher of the year as well as the American Legion teacher of the year in 2008.

A room mother for eight years and winner of the 2011-2012 Mother Seton Award, Pierson “infuses her positive attitude into everything she does. She is happy and active in all aspects of her life: family, her children’s school as well as her own, her church and her community. She lives God’s message of evangelizing through her actions and attitude,” school officials said.

Pierson, who graduated from St. Joseph in 1988, said she believes Catholic schools provide students with the opportunity to develop their God-given talents through academic excellence and Catholic faith through prayer and service.

Pierson has served on the school’s home and school association, the school advisory board and the pastoral advisory board. She also volunteers with Vacation Bible School, Children’s Liturgy, THRIST youth group and serves as an extraordinary minister of holy Communion. She is secretary of the Ponchatoula FFA and fund-raising chair for Springfield Elementary.

St. Jude School

Lauren Edmonston Brown said she believes Catholic education reinforces a foundation of faith in God and the church by educating the whole child: mind, body and spirit.

A 1991 graduate of St. Jude School, Brown has served the St. Jude church community by volunteering for Sunday school, Children’s Liturgy and on the parish fair auction committee for which she has also served as chairperson. At St. Jude School she has served on the advisory council and as a room mom and helped in the cafeteria, library and with SantaLand.

Brown has made great contributions now that she has returned as a parent of two students enrolled at St. Jude, school officials said. She has taken a deep interest in promoting the school and has helped to organize alumni events.

Brown, who is a sales administrator in her professional life, is “committed to the mission of St. Jude School and the value of Catholic education. She is always positive, helpful and dependable in whatever the needs of the school,” school officials said.

St. Louis King of France School

St. Louis King of France School officials say they have watched 2000 graduate Florence Bonaccorso Folse grow into a “caring, loving and responsible adult who gives back to her school and church community.”

“Even though she lives in another city, she makes the daily drive into Baton Rouge to teach at a school she loves. Then she stays late to tutor or coach students. As a teacher, she has a great love of her students and expresses concern for them personally and academically,” the school said.

“She has a continued dedication to the school and to the church. Despite the changes the school has been through since she was a student. She continues to be an active, involved alumna.”

Folse has also served in the Knights of Columbus auxiliary and coached many church and school teams.

Folse said Catholic education inspired her dream to become an educator. “During my adolescence, I learned the importance of education and realized that God gave me gifts and I should not waste them. He blessed me with parents who cared deeply enough about my faith to work hard and make sacrifices so I may have a bright future while serving God.”

“Catholic education is the foundation of who I am,” she said. “It forged my devotion to the holy family and especially to the blessed mother and taught me to open my heart to others and not be judgmental.”

St. Michael High School

Catholic education “provides for exposure to ideas of truth, beauty and goodness, but most importantly, for an actual experience of the person of Jesus Christ,” said David Charles Dawson Jr., a 2000 graduate of St. Michael High School.

This year’s distinguished graduate is the director of the Family Life Apostolate for the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

Dawson “embodies the mission of St. Michael by constantly striving to serve the Catholic Church,” school officials said. “He has committed his life to fostering the spiritual, intellectual and personal development of all people as committed disciples of Christ.”

Dawson has served locally and internationally in the dioceses of Lake Charles and Baton Rouge and the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

He participated in Domestic Church in Poland, which led him to help develop an English-speaking branch of Domestic Church in Louisiana. Domestic Church is a lay movement to strengthen marriages and family life.

Dawson has been a speaker on faith, spirituality and sexuality at St. Michael School.

He was named distinguished graduate of St. Jean Vianney School in 2006.

St. Peter Chanel School

St. Peter Chanel School chose as its distinguished graduate Bruce Gerard Mohon, a lawyer who has “held true to the values and morals that his Catholic education has given him.”

A 1980 graduate of St. Peter Chanel, Mohon “has given back to the community, church parish and school in his various roles as parent, alumni, school board member and finance committee member, school officials said. He was also a leader in the recent capital campaign to build a new gymnasium.

“He is always willing to help out anyone when asked,” the school said.

Mohon is a lawyer in the firm of Bruce G. Hohon LLC and an assistant district attorney for the 23rd Judicial District. He has three daughters who are also attending Catholic schools so he continues to support Catholic education, the school said.

“What sets Bruce apart from others is his willingness to always offer advice or support to the faculty and staff of St. Peter Chanel.” He believes in the mission of the school and the Christ-centered curriculum and how it provides the young people today a method to continue to practice their faith in their every day lives, school officials added.

“He was raised with great work ethics and an active faith life that he continues today as a parent and lawyer. His willingness to be involved in his children’s education and school along
with his busy work schedule shows his commitment to giving back the gifts that he has been given.

Mohon said “Catholic education is important in that it reinforces our foundation of faith and provides a Christ-centered curriculum each and every day.”

St. Theresa Middle / St. John Primary School

Frances Katherine Oliver Warthen said Catholic education has instilled in her a foundation of core values that has allowed her to live a fulfilling life of joy and happiness.

The 1994 graduate of St. Theresa of Avila is being honored as the distinguished graduate of St. Theresa Middle/St. John Primary Schools.

Frequently a substitute teacher at St. John, where her 6-year-old twins attend school, Warthen has also volunteered in the school cafeteria, as a coach, a bus driver and “for anything they ask,” she said.

School officials said she is a true representative of “warrior spirit,” citing her dedication to her family and school. She continues to live her life based on the values she learned as a student at St. Theresa. Her dedication to her family, community, church and St. Theresa is truly exemplary … She has continued to volunteer and be present at a moment’s notice to assist the school in continuing its mission of service, spiritual growth and academic excellence.

A parishioner of St. Gabriel Church in St. Gabriel, Warthen serves her church as a member of the committee that coordinates St. Gabriel Day and for Children’s Liturgy.

St. Thomas Aquinas High School

Nurse practitioner Katy Klaire Zahn volunteered to go to Tanzania, Africa, to serve a population in dire need of nursing care.

This 2001 graduate of St. Thomas Aquinas High School provided nursing care, local healthcare initiatives, community outreach, vaccinations and maternity care to the people of Tanzania.

“She has modeled her life by emulating the mission of St. Thomas Aquinas High School and the development of the whole person,” the school said. She has used skills learned while at STA to further the meaning of a true servant in today’s world.

The distinguished graduate said, “By extending values of Catholic faith tradition into the classroom, Catholic education instills moral grounding for a full faith-oriented life, focused on service for the greater good.”

Zahn is a board-certified psychiatric nurse practitioner, working with children and families in the community. She earned her bachelor’s degree from the University of Miami, where she studied International Business.

Zahn went to Duke University to pursue a nursing degree and while at Duke she ministered in Tanzania. She later received a master’s in nursing from Southeastern Louisiana University.

She has been inducted into Sigma Theta Tau, the honor society of nursing; the Golden Key International Honor Society; and the National Society of Collegiate Scholars.

St. Thomas More School

Father Matthew Edward McCaughey greets St. Thomas More students when they arrive for class in the carpool line. He then joins them and the faculty for morning prayer.

It wasn’t long ago that Father McCaughey was one of those students. He graduated from St. Thomas More in 1998.

Now assigned as the parochial vicar in his home parish, Father McCaughey is active with the school, participating in retreats, reconciliation, faculty prayer and school Masses. He visits students in the classroom, shares lunch with them and frequently attends athletic and other co-curricular events.

Through his presence on campus throughout the school day and in his celebration of school Masses, he is an “inspiration to the faculty and students,” school officials said. “He continuously gives back to our school and church community through his presence and spiritual leadership.”

“For all the blessings Father McCaughey received from St. Thomas More, the opportunity to give back has been an even greater blessing … Father Matthew has witnessed the joy of the church faith in his assignment at STM.”

Father McCaughey graduated magna cum laude from LSU with a bachelor of science in chemical engineering. He received the Donald W. Clayton Excellence in Engineering Award and the Chancellor’s Research Scholarship.

He graduated summa cum laude from Notre Dame Seminary with a masters of divinity and received the Father Michael J. McGivney Vocations Scholarship. He was ordained a priest in 2012.