Catholic Schools Week is here again. The Diocese of Baton Rouge is fortunate to have 23 elementary schools, eight secondary schools and one college, with enrollment of approximately 11,000, 4,200 and 2,000 students respectively. This year’s theme for Catholic Schools Week is: “Catholic Schools: Communities of Faith, Knowledge and Service.”

Catholic schools exist to inform, reform and transform the lives of its students, providing a holistic, God-centered and faith-based education, designed to facilitate the personal development of their students – humanly, spiritually, morally, academically, psychologically, emotionally, vocationally and socially.

In this message I salute an essential part of our Catholic schools exist to evangelize hearts as they nurture faith formation each day. Data gathered annually on faith knowledge in grades 5, 8 and 11 using the Assessment for Catechesis and Religious Education (ACRE Test) indicate that our students score above the national norm in all eight domains. Besides knowledge of their faith, students in the diocese live the Gospel by serving the community, often reflecting on their service as life-changing experiences.

As nationally accredited schools, Catholic schools are committed to increasing rigor and relevance in instruction, which ensures academic excellence in our schools. As nationally accredited schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge, our schools identify annual goals for improvement and utilize Common Core standards as a tool for challenging students as they develop higher order thinking skills. Such initiatives indicate long-term commitment to the vision of educating minds, as our schools strive to be centers of knowledge.

The academic accomplishment of students in the diocese continues to be outstanding, as evidenced in daily classroom work, performance assessment and standardized testing. The Class of 2013 scored above state and national results on the ACT Test as they qualified for $46 million. 

Educators make a difference

From The Bishop
Bishop Robert W. Muench

never forgotten. That same year (1951) she married and became Mrs. S. Trambatore. Sadly, after our last day of class with her, I never saw her again.

Sister Mary Margaret was a born teacher. She could make the most difficult concepts understandable and had the remarkable ability to both maintain discipline and promote humor in the classroom. Among other things she taught us to diagram sentences (which I always enjoyed doing). One day in fifth grade she demonstrated a prism breaking the colors of the spectrum of light (which totally fascinated me then and since). The late Sister Mary Alice was at St. Leo only for one year (1955-56), serving as principal. She was the one who encouraged me to consider the priesthood (which I already was) and encouraged/convincd me to apply to the seminary for high school (which I did and was accepted!), 12 years later ordained a priest. When I was bishop of Covington, Ky., she asked me to preside and preach her funeral liturgy. I agreed, if my circumstances would allow. A year or so later, I was transferred to Baton Rouge, where she attended my installation in 2002. A couple of years later I was privileged to lead her funeral. (Is not God the God of Providence?) God rest her soul.

Those of you who attended Catholic schools surely have your own memories of favorite teachers. If you can, let them know how much they contributed to your well-being. Happy Catholic Schools week, all!

From The Superintendent
Dr. Melanie B. Verges

Core standards as a tool for challenging students as they develop higher order thinking skills. Such initiatives indicate long-term commitment to the vision of educating minds, as our schools strive to be centers of knowledge.

The academic accomplishment of students in the diocese continues to be outstanding, as evidenced in daily classroom work, performance assessment and standardized testing. The Class of 2013 scored above state and national results on the ACT Test as they qualified for $46 million.
Father Dufresne a ‘blessing’ at St. Peter Chanel

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Despite a hectic schedule that includes being a pastor to three cluster church parishes, Father Vincent Dufresne remains active in St. Peter Chanel Interparochial School in Paulina. Principal Paula Poche said Father Dufresne participates in many of the school’s activities, celebrates weekly Masses for the students, offers mini-retreats to the faculty and staff, discusses faith with the students, hears confessions several times during the year and is available to the faculty and staff for personal counseling.

“He is very vocal to parents about his support of Catholic education,” Poche said. “He thanks them for giving the school the opportunity to teach and mold their children in their faith.”

Poche said Father Dufresne’s presence at the school has been a “blessing.”

“He is very busy but never too busy to help the school when needed,” she said. “Father Vincent has a way of preaching his homily at the students’ level to keep them engaged.”

During the past three years Father Dufresne has been active in the school’s capital campaign to help build a gym. He is an active participant on the capital campaign committee and has engaged the community seeking financial support and is also a member of the St. Joseph school board.

For all of his dedication, Father Dufresne was selected to receive of the Distinguished Pastor award because I am only fulfilling my responsibilities as a priest and pastor, doing no more than what any other priest would do.

“I see it as belonging to the entire St. Peter Chanel School family: the administration, staff, teachers, students, parents and supporting parishioners. I can do nothing nor accomplish anything without their full dedication, and I am just one of that whole and wonderfully successful school community,” Father Dufresne said.

St. James Parish Councilman Jason Amato said Father Dufresne’s leadership style is “Christ-like in every way.”

“Father Vincent has displayed tolerance and understanding as he has guided our cluster (parishes) through tough decisions, measuring our residents’ passions with his desire to bring everyone close to God,” Amato said. “While his business sense is truly remarkable, what has really made a huge impression on me has been his mentoring ability of newly ordained priests who have served under his tutelage and guidance.

“He has shown patience and kindness, reflected by his own humble words that he ‘was once where they were.’”

Chad Weidert, vice-chairman of the St. Peter Chanel School Board, said Father Dufresne’s leadership, direction and services in the teachings of the Catholic faith are evident in all that he does for the church parish and school.

“Be it the finance, maintenance or recruitment committee, Father Vincent makes it a pleasure to serve the school with such an open and honest relationship,” Weidert said.

“From the simplest to the most complex, from the most mundane to the grandest element of learning, God is involved,” Father Dufresne said. “Catholic education allows us to acknowledge this truth and experience the fullness of life no other system of education offers these days. Catholic education offers those involved – students, teachers and parents alike – the phenomenal opportunity to encounter God in every moment of every day.

“We can live the truth that we are both physical and spiritual beings, that we have an earthly home and are preparing for a heavenly home. This is the true beauty of Catholic education as I see it,” he said.

Weidert remembers, when Father Dufresne first arrived at the church, he gave the board his full support for a capital campaign to build a much-needed gym. The school had been wrestling with the decision for the better part of a quarter of a century, Weidert said.

Father Dufresne not only supported the project but also was visible in the community during the campaign, which was successful and led to construction of the gym.

“To have that leadership, direction and service from Father Vincent, allowed the board to grow,” Weidert said. “Yes, we have boundaries, but we also have his support to help the school meet its mission.”

Sue Beier, a teacher at St. Peter, calls Father Dufresne a “guy.”

“I admire Father Vincent for his beauty in being one of God’s most precious servants and also admire him for his excellence in sharing God’s love with us each day,” she said. “It is not unusual for one of my 4-year-old students to refer to Father Vincent as God when we see him at our weekly school Mass.

“I know the humble man he is and he would not consider himself God, but from the eyes of a 4-year-old this is how they see him … the teacher, the servant, a man who is greatly admired and loved.”
Cloessner chosen distinguished principal of the year

By Richard Meek
The Catholic Commentator

Each morning at Most Blessed Sacrament School, long before social studies and math books are opened, students and faculty gather in prayer. Teachers also begin each class with a prayer.

The emphasis on spirituality is by design; the philosophy of principal Maria Cloessner, who is committed to developing students not only academically but focusing on their spiritual lives as well.

“My philosophy of Catholic education is child-centered,” said Cloessner, who won the 2014 Distinguished Principal Award for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

“It is not just about teaching subjects, it is all about teaching students,” she added. “At (Most Blessed Sacrament) each child needs to know they are capable and valuable, and they are encouraged to learn.

“The teachers are entrusted with the care of our students and reminded that teaching is a ministry. We know that the parent is the primary educator of their child, but it is important for school and parents to work together to develop their child, not only academically, but in all ways, especially spiritually.”

Cloessner has been a fixture at the school since its inception, spending the summer before the doors first swung open helping put together desks. She has served in various capacities at MBS, including as principal since 1987.

This past fall, Most Blessed Sacrament was selected as a National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence by the U.S. Department of Education. MBS is the first diocesan-operated school to receive the award.

“(Cloessner) has dedicated most of her life to Catholic education, with more than 30 years of service in leadership at (Most Blessed Sacrament),” said Dr. Melanie Verges, superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Baton Rouge. “Recognizing the paramount importance of Catholic identity, (she) emphasizes prayer as the most important part of the day, both for her faculty and her students. She develops annual themes for her school that reinforce faith as best expressed through action.

Testimony to the fostering atmosphere Cloessner has created at the school, there is little turnover with the teachers. And it’s not unusual that when a teacher does leave for any reason, he or she ultimately returns.

“(Cloessner) leads (the school) with a firm but loving hand,” said Celeste Rabalais, a third-grade teacher who has served at MBS for 12 years. “She promotes discipline in her school while each child knows their value in life. She knows each student by name and never hesitates to be present for him or her.

“Each student knows that if he or she needs something that her door is always open.”

Rabalais said Cloessner exhibits strong leadership skills and has a vision for the school, demanding excellence from her teachers, the same standard she commands from her students.

NCEA’s secondary educator named for the diocese

By Barbara Chenevert
The Catholic Commentator

Even though she has spent 42 years as a teacher and principal, Linda Harvison is described as a life-long learner.

Harvison, principal of St. Joseph’s Academy, is this year’s NCEAs Secondary Education Award winner for the diocese.

Harvison “is a highly visible leader. From her early years as a teacher, her career has been her vocation and her passion. Since beginning her SJA career in 1981, Linda has steadfastly committed to enhancing SJA’s sterling reputation as a pillar of the Baton Rouge community,” said Jan Breen, president of SJA. Her commitment to education has led her to embrace numerous opportunities for professional development, advanced training and post graduation education. She is truly a life-long learner,” Breen said.

“The mission of St. Joseph’s Academy is to educate young women to be responsible and unifying members of the world community,” Harvison said. “The Sisters of St. Joseph have taught us to strive for excellence in all endeavors, tempered by gentleness, joy and peace.

“We have been taught that through education, you can change the world ‘one person at a time.’ The sisters gave this gift to me as a student, teacher and their first lay principal,” she added.

In 2004, Harvison became the first lay principal of St. Joseph’s. Along with then-president Sister Adele Lambert, Harvison ushered in a new administrative model in which SJA would be led by a president and principal for the first time. She and Sister Adele set about to make strategic changes in the area of education environment, curriculum and facilities and worked to create a greater balance among the three pillars of the school’s mission statement – faith development, academic excellence and personal growth. They worked to ensure that technology was effectively and seamlessly integrated across the curriculum and brought a more “personal touch” to the school’s high tech learning environment.

After attending a two-week retreat in LePuy, France involving the spirit of charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Harvison meets with the freshman class each year teaching them about the sisters’ desire for worldwide unity, to bring all people into union with God, with each other and with all creation.

School officials praised Harvison for her work after Hurricane Katrina when the school integrated 250 students from the New Orleans area into the student body. She and her administrative team created schedules to meet each new girl’s academic needs and hired three New Orleans area into the student body. She and her administrative team created schedules to meet each new girl’s academic needs and hired three New Orleans area.

Linda Harvison

“Sisters of St. Joseph, Harvison continued. “Along with then-president Sister Adele Lambert, Harvison ushered in a new administrative model in which SJA would be led by a president and principal for the first time. She and Sister Adele set about to make strategic changes in the area of education environment, curriculum and facilities and worked to create a greater balance among the three pillars of the school’s mission statement – faith development, academic excellence and personal growth. They worked to ensure that technology was effectively and seamlessly integrated across the curriculum and brought a more “personal touch” to the school’s high tech learning environment.

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Maria Cloessner

“She is not afraid to try new and innovative ideas that will push the students to a higher level of achievement,” Rabalais said. “She is never satisfied with MBS being a great school. She wants us to be an exceptional school.”

Cloessner earned her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from LSU.

Linda Harvison
NCEA’s Distinguished Primary Teacher named

By Barbara Chenevert
The Catholic Commentator

Sister Micha DeHart MHS remembers with fondness the third-grade student who wrote a letter, asking God to save Sister Micha a place in heaven because she had tried to teach her students “the right way to go.”

She called it one of the most rewarding experiences of her 45 years in education, 36 of which have been at St. Theresa Middle/St. John Primary schools.

This year’s National Catholic Education Association’s Distinguished Teacher Award goes to this sister, who says, “Education is the key that opens the world to us.”

And Sister Micha has opened the world to hundreds of students.

St. John Principal Kim Naquin puts it this way: “When you meet Sister Micha DeHart, you will be impressed with her kind-hearted spirit and the glimmer of joy in her eyes. She is an unselfish, dedicated professional with a wonderful sense of humor. She is a mentor to younger colleagues, as well as a role model. She has high expectations for her students and instills confidence in them, as she treats them with respect and love.”

Sister Micha said Catholic education adds another, wider dimension to traditional education. “It elevates your soul, your spirit, and opens them to a God who loves us individually 100 percent. “I live out this philosophy by bringing God into all the subject areas. I try to develop a spirit of prayer. I had my students make a prayer card with a picture of their family drawn on it. We use these family cards to pray for that family all day,” she said.

Sister Micha has served on the textbook committee, school evaluation committee and as a visiting team member for evaluations of other schools. She also has helped her colleagues by presenting workshops for math and religion teachers and on the use of teacher’s assistants in the classroom.

She is a member of the school’s Individual Needs Committee and a member of the Peace and Justice Committee for religious sisters in the Baton Rouge area.

She is also a council member for the Sisters of the Most Holy Sacrament, which sponsors a summer service program for high school and college-aged students in Louisiana and New Mexico. She has worked with students on such projects as cleaning houses, serving in soup kitchens, working in food banks, delivery of Meals on Wheels and cooking for elderly Native Americans and children.

With a master’s degree as a reading specialist, Sister Micha has helped many students with letter recognition, sounds, blends and connecting letters and sounds to make words. Through her work as a Title I teacher and as a first-grade teacher for many years, she has developed skills to identify a child with reading problems and how to utilize different strategies to aid them in the process of reading.

Sandra Miller, a parent whose children and grandchildren have been taught by Sister Micha, said, “She is a woman who extends her kind heart, love of God and appreciation for learning, into everything that she does. She loves her students from the moment they step into her classroom and cares for them for a lifetime.”

Another teacher at the school, Trena Parson, said Sister Micha has been a dedicated educator who has evolved with the times of teaching. She is always trying new technology and routines in her classroom.

The Sisters of the Most Holy Sacrament established St. Theresa School many years ago. Sister Micha is the only sister who still lives on the campus.
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St. John Primary and St. Theresa Middle: Schools with heart and soul

The heart and soul of St. John Primary and St. Theresa Middle schools are summed up in their mission statement: to serve one another through Catholic values as they strive for spiritual growth and academic excellence. The two sister schools, located in Prairieville and Gonzales, build on this strong foundation to provide a quality Catholic education that is always looking to the future to prepare students for the world in which they will work and live.

The strong Catholic school history began when Father Arthur Lieux chose eight men to plan a drive for a new school in August 1957. There were 860 families in the St. Theresa of Avila parish who were asked to make the sacrifice of 4 percent of their weekly income to make the dream of a Catholic school in Gonzales a reality. Thanks to their foresight and dedication, St. Theresa of Avila School became a reality on Sept. 8, 1959 when 276 children attended their first day of school.

In keeping with the tradition of priests and nuns teaching and running Catholic schools at the time, the facility was under the administration of the Sisters of the Most Holy Sacrament, who to this day have a sister actively involved at St. John Primary.

The same strength of purpose and sacrifice continued when the decision was made to expand from St. Theresa of Avila School to the two sister schools present today. This allowed many families, who otherwise would have been turned away because of a lack of room, to achieve the Catholic education they desired for their families. The setting up of a new school again took the sacrifice and hard work by both families and parishioners in the seven original supporting church parishes (which have now increased to nine).

Students are taught that they are responsible, in conjunction with their parents and teachers, for their own spiritual and academic growth. With the background of so many others in the past working to provide a quality Catholic education for them, it's the students' turn to give back to the community themselves. Students throughout both schools worked on a fund raiser to raise money for spina bifida research to help “Make a Difference with Morgan,” one of our students suffering from spina bifida who made the decision it was up to her to start making a difference. Countless opportunities present themselves throughout the school year to regularly allow the students to practice caring for and serving the needs of others.

Academic excellence is the second cornerstone upon which the students aim to achieve their objectives. Teachers encourage the students to set academic goals at the beginning of each nine weeks, and then they are encouraged to achieve their goals to the best of their abilities.

St. John Primary students had 90 percent of students on the honor roll in the first quarter of this school year and 87 percent in the second quarter. St. Theresa Middle had 81 percent of students on the honor roll in the first quarter and 78 percent in the second quarter.

Math teachers use Common Core State Standards in the curriculum to promote higher order thinking, teamwork, problem solving and delving deeper into specific math topics.

All subject area teachers continue to engage the students with various techniques such as paired-sharing, teamwork, small groups, creating PowerPoint presentations and demonstrating scientific hypotheses. From mumifying apples in the same way Egyptian kings were preserved to exploration centers, to utilizing apps to practice new concepts on iPads, students are challenged to think in new ways and to defend their answers to the class or a group. Whether by captivating students through robotics or utilizing the Criterion Writing online program, the engagement is wonderful, and the classrooms are alive.

St. John Primary and St. Theresa Middle will continue to carry their school mission into the future where another generation of young people from the schools can help support and carry on the tradition of a quality Catholic education.
Sacred Heart of Jesus School introduces virtual open house

Sacred Heart of Jesus School in Baton Rouge continues to adapt to changing communications in the digital world by introducing an online virtual open house. School officials realized that a virtual open house would be an excellent way to introduce prospective families to the school.

“We understand that parents are extremely busy and we also recognize what a benefit a virtual tour would be to families moving to Baton Rouge and eager to find a school for their children,” said SHS Principal Joan Hutson.

The school annually holds an open house for prospective families on the Tuesday during Catholic Schools Week. Private tours are also available upon request.

“The virtual open house will only serve to enhance a prospective family’s visit to the school,” added Hutson.

The video features four SHS eighth-graders as tour guides, taking visitors around the school on a typical school day.

“We wanted the virtual tour to emulate a regular school tour as much as possible,” said development director Michelle Schroeder, who developed the tour.

“We use seventh- and eighth-grade tour guides for our annual open house and our private tours. Who better to tell our story? The prospective families love hearing the students’ personal SHS experiences,” Schroeder continued. Prospective families also speak to members of the administration after the student-led tours.

While Schroeder developed an outline for the virtual open house, the students worked on their individual parts and wrote their own copy, as they do for the annual open house and private tours.

The virtual tour has received a large number of views since it was posted in mid-October 2013. Those numbers have climbed since the school promoted a recent Facebook post that included a link to the tour.

“We have a very popular Facebook page that truly reflects who we are at Sacred Heart, so pairing the page with the virtual open house was a logical step that has really paid off,” said Schroeder.

Sacred Heart of Jesus Church Deacon David Dawson recorded and edited the tour.

The virtual open house may be accessed via the school website at sacredheartbr.com.

Mrs. Stacey Brenner Keaton
2013 Distinguished Graduate

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

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Mrs. Stacey Brenner Keaton
2013 Distinguished Graduate

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
iPads provide new learning experience at St. Joseph School

It required tremendous planning. It required substantial investment. It demanded patience on the part of students, faculty and parents. But it’s here now, and it’s changing the teaching and learning patterns all over the school.

Everyone is excited that iPads are everywhere at St. Joseph School in Ponchatoula.

The vision began with the principal, Dr. Gerard Toups, who found strong support from the advisory council and other parents for the project. A year of preparation and more than $40,000 was necessary to put the infrastructure in place. A new fiber optic trunk line had to be installed at the school to support the new technology. This was particularly challenging, as the campus sprawls across a city street and encompasses six separate buildings. A new router was a necessity. Now every building is equipped with fiber optics service and has wi-fi access. There is an Apple monitor in each classroom to support the use of iPads as well as other technologies.

As the infrastructure was being placed, iPads were purchased for a nucleus of middle school teachers to be trained on iPad use. Using an iPad as a teaching tool was a new concept to most of the faculty. This nucleus of iPad teachers – a group of 10 –

Kindergarten students, Jacob Laurent, left, and Noah Fuselier, working on Mathletics app on iPad. Photo provided by St. Joseph School

were sent to area high schools who were already using the one-to-one program. Over the course of the spring and summer, these teachers collaborated and shared findings, ideas and apps.

The original plan was to have an iPad in the hands of every sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade student at St. Joseph for the 2013-2014 school year. This would be at a cost of $65,000 plus the price of the protective covers.

The results were so successful and the program so well received that a drive was held to expand the use of iPads to other grades as soon as possible. A drive to fund the additional equipment was held. Thanks to it and the donations of some generous individuals, St. Joseph School now has middle school students with their own iPads, as well as a portable iPad cart with enough devices to equip an entire classroom, and mini iPads for use in the kindergarten classrooms.

The middle school students had enthusiastic praise for learning with iPads. They say that it helps keep them organized, as their notes and homework are placed in specified folders. Note-taking is a quick process now. They use less paper and find it easy to do quick research to learn more about a particular subject. They appreciate that the iPad is easy to carry and homework seems to go faster and involves fewer textbooks. They like the ability to use color text for various purposes and can highlight important information. The ease of making presentations was a popular reason cited for using iPads.

Most of the faculty quickly adapted their teaching styles to using the iPad. The device gives the teacher the ability to walk about the room and teach from any point, as the Apple monitor projects the information from the hand-held device to the large screen for everyone to see. Notes and other work can be kept in neatly organized folders on the iPad. Workbook pages or other assignments can be uploaded by the teachers, sent to and completed by the students who then send the work back to the teacher. Quizzes can be taken and submitted on the device.

Lower grade teachers use more of a “centers” approach to using the iPads. They have the students highlight skills learned as a whole group through games that reinforce phonics, reading and math skills. In this manner, practice can be individualized to re-teach or challenge the students depending on their needs at the time.

When asked if all of the planning, implementing and use of resources was worth waiting for, teachers and students alike answered with overwhelming positive replies. They love learning and teaching with the new technology. No one asked to change back to the “old way.”

They love learning and teaching with the new technology. No one asked to change back to the “old way.”

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Our Lady of Mercy Church and School reveal the ‘One Mercy’ project

Our Lady of Mercy Church and School unveiled its updated visual identity on Dec. 20. From its launch during the summer of 2013 until its ultimate reveal, the “One Mercy” project proved to be a unique and exciting venture for the families of Our Lady of Mercy Church.

Father Cleo J. Milano became the pastor of Our Lady of Mercy Church on July 1, 2013, and considered the “One Mercy” project as one of his first initiatives to build on the rich traditions of the church parish. “Our Lady of Mercy has been a strong church parish in the diocese and a fundamental center of Catholic education in the Baton Rouge community for more than 60 years”, Father Milano said. “We wanted to unify the church and school into one symbol that would pay homage to our past and last for several generations.”

Covalent Logic, an adaptive communications agency, was hired to manage the identity development. “It was an honor to be chosen for such an historic and important project in the local community,” said co-founder of Covalent Logic, Stafford Kendall.

Conversation with Kendall revealed her enthusiasm for this project. She clearly conveyed that the final image created was not one that would be perfect for any Catholic church in this or any other area, but one created uniquely for Our Lady of Mercy. “This logo is a tangible reflection of the unity of our church and respect for the Blessed Mother,” said Father Milano during the schoolwide Mass prior to its reveal. Regarding the project, school principal Brian Moscona stated, “It’s such a great blessing to be part of a church in which the church and school work closely together as one united community. This new logo is a beautiful symbol of our unity, and I know the students and families are very excited about it.”

The logo was created following a standard brand development process including research, analysis and survey of stakeholders. Added to those standards were the traditional elements of Our Lady of Mercy that were considered essential in development of the final design. The image of the Blessed Mother, the church’s unique stained glass creations by artist Paul Dufour, and typography modeled on chancery handwriting scripts during the Italian Renaissance were all inspirations incorporated into the design. The new logo encompasses the rich tradition and grace of Our Lady of Mercy Church and displays deliberate effort to visually represent Our Lady of Mercy Church and School as they are – united as one. It was designed by Covalent Logic artist and Our Lady of Mercy School alumnus Darren Vincent.

The culminating event regarding the “One Mercy” project occurred following the schoolwide Christmas liturgy. Father Milano chose to share the reveal of the new logo first with the students of Our Lady of Mercy School. Following the address by Father Milano and Moscona, students and visitors viewed a video that concluded with the reveal of the image of the new logo. During the viewing, parishioners and school families were emailed a link to access the video entitled, “Our Lady of Mercy: Where I Hear God’s Voice.” It can be found at the school’s website at olm-school.org. Narration in the video included the following:

“Our Lady of Mercy is where I hear God’s voice.
In the laughter of school children
In the dancing of the fountain
In the silence of the adoration chapel
In the pastor’s homily
Our Lady of Mercy is where
I speak with God’s love
At the patient’s bedside
At the meeting in the activity hall
At the front of the classroom
Mass on my knees
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy

As an additional and well-received treat, students were presented with swag bags filled with pencil bags, pencils, license plates, bumper stickers and window decals. These bags were prepared as gifts to the students and distributed upon their departure for the Christmas holidays. An additional gift of school gear will be presented to each student at the close of Catholic Schools Week.

SJA continues tradition of service

As an expression of the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph, education at St. Joseph’s Academy emphasizes the importance of relationships with the dear neighbor. The service component of the Academy Experience encourages students to express God’s love and answer the call to reach out to those in need, both within the local community and in the context of the broader world.

In addition to fulfilling required service hours during each of their four years, SJA students are afforded co-curricular opportunities to become young women for others. New service opportunities this year are the Bags of Hope partnership with St. Vincent de Paul and a technology mission trip to Puerto Rico.

Each Tuesday, the SJA community provides 250 brown bag lunches, called Sticker Sacks in reference to the school’s Red-sticker mascot to St. Vincent de Paul. Faculty and staff members provided the first 250 meals in early September; student groups provided sacks on a rotating basis.

In 2012, St. Vincent de Paul served 236,000 meals, and that number was surpassed in 2013. “The need in our community is great,” said principal Linda Fry-oux Harvison. “By providing Sticker Sacks each week, we are making a difference in the lives of those who are most in need of help and hope. As we help fight hunger in our local community, we are living out the Sisters’ mission that we be united with God and with one another.”

During the early January cold snap, students, faculty and staff supplemented the Sticker Sack donations with 10 large bags of coats and blankets.

On Christmas day, a group of SJA staff members and nine students embarked upon a journey to Puerto Rico to bring the gift of technology to the Chino Mendez Academy and Preparatory School (CHIMAPS).

Technology Department staff members John Richardson, Colette Burke and Claire Luihart led the 10-day service trip to San Sebastian, in which the team wired the school with Ethernet cable, established wireless internet access points, equipped a computer lab, refurbished donated laptop computers, loaded them with educational software and trained faculty members to make needed repairs. The team also mounted and connected five LCD projectors and equipped each teacher’s desk with a connection to the school’s network, all to enable the faculty to realize their goal of integrating technology across the curriculum.

The groundwork for the trip was laid when Richardson had a conversation with Fermin Rodriguez, father of SJA senior Erika Rodriguez-Guzman, who works in the SJA Help Desk as a paid technician. Fermin Rodriguez, a native of Puerto Rico, was a student of Chino Mendez, whose mission was to provide a quality education to the children of San Sebastian.

When the team was not at work at CHIMAPS, they enjoyed cultural excursions to many of Puerto Rico’s landmarks, including a bioluminescent bay and the island’s historic capital, San Juan. The students stayed with host families, giving them a true immersion experience in Puerto Rican culture and cuisine.

For Rodriguez-Guzman, the trip was personal. “Having the opportunity to go back to the town where my dad grew up, work in a school named after his old math teacher and interact with some of the people he went to school with was an amazing experience,” she said. “I have visited Puerto Rico before, but only to see family and get to know the place where my parents grew up; I never thought I would be able to go back and contribute to the community. It is such a special place to me and my family, and I am so glad that I could go back and spend the Christmas season surrounded by family members I have not seen in many years and working to make at least a small part of it better than it was before. I am so grateful to SJA and to all the people in Puerto Rico who worked to make this technology trip possible, and I hope that we can continue to make a difference on the island.”

The technology team plans to return to Puerto Rico in the spring to work with Catholic elementary schools in San Juan.
Local youth from Uganda with the jerseys and equipment donated by the St. Michael Warrior Baseball Team. Photo provided by St. Michael High School

Touching the bases to heaven

This past spring, St. Michael baseball coach Johnny Bernard and the Warriors partnered with the International Mission Board Organization to deliver game jerseys, baseballs and other equipment to Arua, a small town in the northwest corner of Uganda, Africa.

Baseball was originally introduced to Uganda in early 2000 through the organization, Sports Ministry and a group of missionaries led by Douglas and Kathryn Taylor. The Taylor family began by introducing baseball as a means of ministering to the young children of Arua. They eventually developed and organized a group “Baseball for God” and a club team called the Hammers consisting of young adults ages 18-25 from throughout the community.

Prior to the donation from the St. Michael baseball team, a number of the baseball clubs were using equipment that was outdated. However, they would still take the equipment with them into schools as a means of ministering to others just as “Baseball for God” did for them. All of the coaches were trained on how to share the Gospel with their team with the intent of converting others to Christianity and teach them the game of baseball.

In the summer of 2013, despite being a new sport in Uganda, one of their local teams qualified and participated in the Little League World Series for the first time in history.
2014 Catholic School distinguished graduates named

By Barbara Chenevert
The Catholic Commentator

Richard Meeks
The Catholic Commentator

Every year each Catholic school in the Baton Rouge Diocese selects one of its alumni as its distinguished graduate. This year these people will be honored at a dinner on Monday, Jan. 27 at the Renaissance Hotel in Baton Rouge.

The 2014 Distinguished Graduates are:

Frank Marcello
Frank Marcello has successfully balanced his business career by giving back to the community of Donaldsonville in a number of ways.

Marcello, the Ascension Catholic School distinguished graduate, has served as commissioner of finance for the City of Donaldsonville, and is presently on the board of directors for the Donaldsonville Chamber of Commerce.

His service, however, extends beyond serving just his civil community. Marcello, who is owner of Marcello Distributors, has also served his church and school by accepting posts as treasurer of the St. Joseph’s Society of Donaldsonville and president of the Ascension Catholic Purple and Gold Club.

He also continues his support of the school’s academic and sports programs. Marcello said he lives by the values taught to him through Catholic education.

“A faith based Catholic education taught me how to handle daily life and its challenges for me and my family through faith, vision and the will to succeed,” he said. “I have always stayed focused on utilizing respect and dignity in personal and business interactions with the people I come into contact with. This has always proved to make people feel good about themselves and treat me the same way.”

“A positive attitude and outgoing demeanor has also helped me to achieve success both in my personal and business life,” added Marcello, who was chosen Outstanding Business Leader, Parish of Ascension in 2006; won the Shell Oil Company VIP award; and is a 3rd Degree Knights of Columbus.

“Mr. Marcello has selflessly given many years of service to Ascension Catholic as president of the Purple and Gold Club and just recently donated iPads to the third-grade class at Ascension Catholic School,” said Sandy Pizzolato, administrator at Ascension Catholic.

The Marcello family is following a rich tradition of service to others through its teachings about the dignity of every human life and the concomitant duty to treat others as we would have them treat ourselves,” said the distinguished graduate of Catholic of Pointe Couplé.

Thomas Barfield Jr.
From his position as Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Revenue, Thomas Barfield is leading the charge for tax reform in the state, not an easy task. But facing difficult challenges is nothing new for Barfield, and acknowledging the education he received at Catholic High School helped prepare him for such a noble, yet daunting task.

“Catholic education prepared me with the knowledge, discipline and spirituality to address the challenges of life and serve my family, community and faith well,” said Barfield, the Catholic High distinguished graduate.

Barfield, a 1982 CHS graduate, serves on the school’s foundation board. He was selected the Young Businessperson of the Year by Baton Rouge Business Report in 2004 and is a previous winner of the Purple and Gold Award from LSU.

Barfield has also served in leadership positions on various boards at Catholic High and St. Joseph’s Academy as well as his home church parish of Our Lady of Mercy in Baton Rouge.

“He is a role model for students through his impressive business experience and commitment to ensuring that Louisiana is a place where families and businesses can remain and have a quality life,” said CHS Principal Lisa Harvey. “He has constantly exhibited values he learned at Catholic High School, in both his personal/business and private life. His personal commitment to Catholic education is demonstrated through his close ties and involvement with Catholic schools.”

Harvey said Barfield has always held leadership positions in each step along his career path, and part of his mission has focused on improving conditions and creating opportunities for Louisiana families and businesses.

“His dedication to Catholic education is evident through his willingness to assume key roles in several Catholic schools and offer his expertise to assist these schools in furthering each of their missions,” she said.

Donald J. Cazayoux Jr.
Donald Cazayoux Jr. has held high ranking positions in the community as a congressman, U.S. attorney and state representative, but he said it all started with the love of service instilled in him by Catholic schools and the Catholic Church.

“I believe an important component of a Catholic education is the emphasis on service to others through its teachings about the dignity of every human life and the concomitant duty to treat others as we would have them treat ourselves,” he said.

In selecting Cazayoux, school principal Colleen Cailliet said, “Throughout Don’s life, he has been a living example of the Christ-like qualities that we desire for a Catholic school graduate to exhibit. His selflessness and his generosity are unmatched.”

A 1982 graduate of Catholic of Pointe Couplé, Cazayoux has served on the school board, as a lector for St. Mary of False River Church in New Roads and a committed adorer. During high school, he served on the St. Mary Church Youth Council, and in college he helped lead youth retreats. He is currently of counsel with the Long Law Firm.

Dora Dupuy Alford
Dora Dupuy Alford is a “joyful, spirit-filled woman of faith who exemplifies Christ’s light and love for all,” said her principal Brenda Fremin in naming her as Holy Family School’s distinguished graduate.

Alford is the middle school religion teacher for the school from which she graduated in 1961. “Catholic schools teach the importance of God in our daily lives, how we must be servant to others and live the Gospel values of Christ,” Alford said.

Besides teaching at the school, Alford has been very active in the church parish.
GRADUATES
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of Holy Family and as an advocate for children in the school community.

Her faith life, care and concern for others, love for God’s children and wanting to make a difference in their lives, sets her apart, Fremin said. “Her dedication to Catholic education and service to Holy Family parish is evident in her daily actions. She is devoted to her family, her students and to living and sharing her faith.”

Ashley Edwards Sandage

Ashley Edwards Sandage is just as likely to be found laminating items for teachers as she is debating in a courtroom.

The distinguished graduate of Holy Ghost School is a practicing attorney with the firm of Cashe, Coudrain and Sandage. But she has also stayed busy helping the school and the community in any way she can.

“Catholic education is important to me because I believe my children will benefit from an education that is based in the Catholic faith. With all the challenges our children face today, it is important for them to have an education that also teaches them their faith and gives them an opportunity to practice their faith in school with their peer group,” Sandage, a 1980 graduate of Holy Ghost, said.

Principal Tangee Daugereaux praised Sandage as an active volunteer who thinks no task is too small or too large. “She can be seen laminating or facilitating a school board meeting. She truly models giving back to her school and parish.”

Sandage was named Woman of the Year in 2008 for the Junior Auxiliary of Hammond. She is chair of the Education Committee for the Hammond Chamber of Commerce, a board member of the Chamber of Commerce, CASA and Relay for Life. She has also served as chairperson of the Holy Ghost School Board, newsletter chairperson for the school and a member of the Diocesan School Board.

She has been involved in many aspects of the school from serving as room mother to serving on the school board as president.

Angelo J. Distefano

One day last summer Angelo Distefano decided to stop by his alma mater, Mater Dolorosa School, en route to visit his mother. He asked principal Linda Wisinger what he could do to give back to the school that had educated him. Knowing he owned a landscaping company, Wisinger asked if he could replace a few bushes that had died. Two weeks later, he returned with a landscaping plan that Wisinger called the most beautiful site and way beyond my wildest dreams. I just asked for bushes and received a beautifully landscaped campus.”

The 1964 graduate of Mater Dolorosa believes his experience at the Catholic elementary school shaped him into the man he is today. It is Catholic education that gave him not only a good education, but also taught morals and values that were not offered in other schools, Distefano said.

Wisinger called this year’s distinguished graduate a “generous, kind, warm-hearted man who believes in giving back to his community and the educational institutions he attended.”

Although he now lives in Baton Rouge where he owns Angelo’s Lawn Service, he frequently returns to Independence to visit family.

Distefano was also named Southeastern Business Alumnus of the Year for 2013.

Jason Michael McCann

Jason Michael McCann has a knack for making every player on his team feel special.

The 1990 graduate of Most Blessed Sacrament School has returned to his alma mater for eight years as a volunteer coach.

“I admire the way he works with the children teaching them not only the skills, but how to enjoy the sport. He makes every player feel special and important to the team. He coaches with love and respect and is a great role model for the players,” said principal Maria Cloessner in nominating McCann as this year’s distinguished graduate.

“Catholic education affords an individual the ability to grow both intellectually and spiritually in the Catholic faith, preparing them to live a life in Christ,” said McCann, who works as human resources director for the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance.

He has served as vice president of the MBS Men’s Club, as well as being active in MBS church and school activities. He was named the Men’s Club Man of the Year 2001 to 2005 and was inducted into the St. Michael High School’s Wall of Honor/Fame. He was also the 1998 WBRZ/Man- ship School of Mass Communications Apprentice recipient.
Sister Martha Ann Abshire

Sister Martha Ann Abshire FMOL serves with a smile.

“Her laugh and warm smile brighten every occasion. She serves the community with enthusiasm, working as a nurse and healthcare administrator and volunteering her time for numerous community events,” said the administration of Our Lady of the Lake College who selected Sister Martha Ann as its distinguished graduate.

“Education needs to be about more than gathering facts,” Sister Martha Ann said of her Catholic education. “It needs to be about acquiring values that will serve you for your entire life.”

She received a bachelor’s degree from the University of Southwestern Louisiana and a master’s degree from the University of Notre Dame. She has also received a Missioner Certificate from Maryknoll Missionary Training.

Sister Martha Ann joined the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady in 1970 and has since worked in many capacities in health care as a nurse and an administrator.

In 1988 she and Sister Althea Jonis started a medical care clinic for indigent Haitians in the mountainous region north of Aquin, Haiti.

She currently serves as campus minister for OLOL College, holding group prayer with the students, blessing the hands of the future health care workers and supporting the spiritual growth of students, faculty and staff.

“I hope that people will come to know that they are loved by God through my interaction with them,” she said.

Sister Martha Ann has given her time and talents extensively to the community. She has been instrumental in establishing a spiritual foundation at the college that is welcoming and inclusive.

She has nurtured campus organizations like the Franciscan Student Fellowship and the Catholic College Student Organization and functions as a role model of service.

“I would like to look back on my work at the college and know that I have said something or done something that will help our young people to move toward becoming more moral and ethical members of our community,” she said.

Stephen Michael Toups

Stephen Michael Toups, corporate vice president of Turner Industries Group, is described as faith-filled man, dedicated to his family, his church and his community.

The distinguished graduate of Our Lady of Mercy School balances an active community life with the busy life of a parent and alumnus of OLOM.

He said he greatly values his Catholic school education and has given the same opportunity to his children, who also attended OLOM.

Toups has taken on leadership roles at the school through volunteerism and fund raising, said principal Brian Moscona. He is a “great role model for our students, faculty, staff and parishioners. He has many gifts and talents and he is always willing to share them when asked to serve his community,” he added.

Moscona said Toups is a joyful and charismatic man who goes above and beyond in service to others.

Toups currently serves on the national board of directors for the Associated Builders and Contractors, as a trustee for the LCTCS Foundation and on the board of the Baton Rouge Area Workforce Investment Board and as chairman of the Louisiana Private Employer Council.

For the school, Toups served as the major donor chairperson for the school’s first annual giving campaign last year, which raised $280,000 with almost 80 percent of the parents participating and 100 percent of the faculty and staff participating.

Toups’ “knowledge, enthusiasm and passion for our parish school was instrumental in helping us achieve so much success in the first year,” Moscona said.

Veronica Rose Legrange

Catholic education is the perfect opportunity to share, practice and teach the faith, ultimately being a part of helping to build God’s kingdom here on Earth, said Veronica Rose LeGrange, distinguished graduate of St. Isidore Elementary School, which merged with St. Gerard and became Redemptorist Elementary School.
Michael Timothy O’Neill
Most Redemptorist High School students probably know Michael Timothy O’Neill best by his voice.
O’Neill has been the announcer for Redemptorist High athletic events since 1981, when he took over the duties of his father, Paul, who had been announcing since 1953.
“Michael O’Neill, each Friday home game, has walked quietly to the press box at the ‘the rock’ to announce the football games whether we won state championships; he has announced when we won teams who were going to the state playoffs; he has announced when we won state championships; he has announced when Redemptorist didn’t win a game all season. He has announced for games with future college standouts. His dedication to this high school is unmatched.

He is a role model to our newer families for his dedication, work ethic and high standards,” Andereck said.

O’Neill, who graduated from Redemptorist in 1975, said he believes “a Catholic education provides a deep foundation for which to develop a life-long future college standouts.

As marketing director for Cancer Services of Greater Baton Rouge, Connie Renee Boudreaux knows the importance of community involvement.

“My Catholic education instilled in me a true sense of community that will see me through my whole life – both personally and professionally,” said Boudreaux, who is St. Aloysius’ distinguished graduate.

Besides her work with Cancer Services, Boudreaux volunteers with the Capital Area United Way, Young Adults Living to Lead and LSU S.T.R.I.P.E.S. She has been a member of the St. Aloysius Group Leadership Team and a member of the Diocesan Youth Board.

She is also a member of the Rotaract Youth Professionals Group and a Rotary International Sergeant at Arms.

Calling her an “industrious young woman,” St. Aloysius officials said Boudreaux has “immersed herself in many philanthropic efforts. Her caring manner is very evident.”

Boudreaux graduated from St. Aloysius in 2001.

Charles “Rodney” Nijoka Jr.
St. Alphonsus School’s distinguished graduate has devoted his time to mentoring and coaching youth.

Charles “Rodney” Nijoka Jr. is a lifelong member of St. Alphonsus Church and graduated from the elementary school in 1989. Since that time he has returned to his alma mater to coach students in every sport, serve as a member of the school board and participate in church ministry.

“A Catholic education is one of the best gifts you can give to a child to instill a life-time of Christian values and morals,” said the SAS graduate.

Nijoka is “an excellent role model for the youth he coaches. He is always the first one to volunteer for projects at the school and church,” said principal Cindy Ryals.

He is always smiling and a pleasure to be around. His Catholic values and morals are evident in his everyday life, especially when it comes to his family.
He always steps up to help and volunteer, she added.

**Dr. Allison Banta Barbin**

Dr. Allison Banta Barbin said Catholic schools provide a nurturing environment where children are challenged academically while learning to be Christ-like in work and deed.

“Faith, which is rooted at home, is cultivated and encouraged to blossom” in Catholic schools, said the distinguished graduate of St. Elizabeth School.

Barbin is a lector at Sacred Heart Church in Baton Rouge where she also serves as school room mother and auction chair. She was awarded the Mother Seton Award in 2006. She is currently a member of the Mother’s Club at St. Joseph’s Academy and Catholic High School and is a Physician at the Baton Rouge Clinic. She graduated with the Red Stick Group at Morgan Stanley.

Katherine Darensbourg O’Brien

No one has to ask Katherine Darensbourg O’Brien to help.

The St. Francis Xavier distinguished graduate never tires of volunteering, according to school administrators.

O’Brien “has distinguished herself at our school because she reflects Catholic values of caring, sharing and encouraging others... She supports not only the Catholic education of her two grandsons, but also of our school and church family,” school principal Paula Fabre said.

“She distinguishes herself also because we do not have to ask her to help. She attends meetings, works diligently on all projects and always has a positive attitude and a wonderful spirit,” Fabre said.

O’Brien, who is retired, said she believes “it is important to bring children up in the teachings of the Catholic Church. Catholic education provides the best of both worlds.”

Fabre said O’Brien, who graduated from St. Francis Xavier High School in 1965, has been active in the community, church and school. She is also an active volunteer at Redemptorist High School.

**Kenneth L. Riche**

Kenneth L. Riche is truly a servant leader and seeks to glorify God in everything he does, said Karla Prejean, assistant principal of St. George School in naming Riche the school’s distinguished graduate.

St. George continues to be a beacon in the community because of his efforts and dedication to the school and church parish, Prejean said.

Riche, a 1984 graduate of St. George, is currently senior vice president and wealth management financial advisor with the Red Stick Group at Morgan Stanley Co.

At St. George, he is assistant athletic director and a head football coach. He has also served on the School Advisory Board as well as the athletic association.

“Kenny is always the first one to step up and offer to help St. George School in any way possible. He and his family are extremely active in our St. George community and in the Baton Rouge community.”

“One way that he gives back to others is through athletics. He coaches football because he not only wants to teach young men about the fundamentals of the sport, but also to show them what it means to live with pride, dignity, honor and love for your family, friends and teammates,” school officials said.

In the community, Riche serves as a member and former chairman of the Baton Rouge Recreation Commission (BREC) and a board member of Capital Area United Way and the Baton Rouge Area Sports Foundation. He is a member of the Catholic High School Founders Society and Men’s Club, a past CYO board member and a 2008 graduate of the Leadership Class of the Baton Rouge Area Chamber of Commerce.

“My Catholic education at St. George helped develop my belief that our lives

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should be rooted in service to God and love for others,” Riche said.

As a student at St. George, Riche received many scholastic and student achievement awards.

His Catholic education was rooted in service to God and others, led by the example of his parents. His view that we are all put on Earth to love and serve others was woven into his personality during his formative years in the Catholic school system, the school said.

Rachel Christine Touchet

Catholic schools have given Rachel Christine Touchet the confidence to incorporate her beliefs and spirituality into her everyday life.

A nurse with Ochsner Medical System, Touchet has struggled to complete her schooling while raising a child with emphasis on educating her in the same Catholic school she attended.

“I love knowing my daughter’s entire school day from religion to math to music is faith-based,” Touchet, St. Jean Vianney’s distinguished graduate, said. Her daughter is in second grade at St. Jean Vianney.

School officials described Touchet as a “young mom who has focused her sights on raising her child in a Catholic school even with mounting pressures of society.”

Her family is very involved in the church parish as well as the school. Touchet serves as a Girl Scout leader and has volunteered as a room mother, a Vacation Bible School volunteer and for Grandparent’s Day and Veteran’s Day activities at the school.

The 2000 graduate of St. Jean Vianney stands out in the school community and has stayed close to it, the school said.

Lesa G. Sanchez

St. John School in Plaquemeine has many graduates who could have been chosen as its distinguished graduate this year, but it selected Lesa Sanchez because she visibly distinguishes herself everyday as a role model for students.

Sanchez, a 1977 graduate of St. John, has been teaching at the school for 34 years.

“After graduating from college with a degree in education, Lesa made the choice to return to St. John to begin her career as a Catholic school teacher. She has remained at St. John giving back to St. John by using her teaching skills, her time and her talents to educating students and to being a part of continuing Catholic education in our community,” school principal Bernardine Legendre said.

Sanchez has served as a teacher, the director of religious education and assistant principal during her years at the school.

“Catholic education provides experiences for a lifetime of service to others, opportunities to share faith-filled values and resources for obtaining academic excellence for all,” Sanchez said.

Sanchez is proud that she, her father and her three children graduated from St. John, and four of her six grandchildren are now attending St. John.

Sanchez serves as an extraordinary minister of holy Communion for St. John Church and St. Clement Chapel. She has written and has been awarded grants for new programs and initiatives at St. John. She has also served as Junior Beta Club sponsor and 4-H club sponsor. She has been named St. John Teacher of the Year and has received the Brotherhood-Sisterhood Award. She has also served on the Iberville Civil Parish 4-H board.

Sanchez “has distinguished herself for her love for St. John in our school and community and is the epitome of all the characteristics of a true distinguished graduate,” Legendre said.

Suzette Rome Say

All that Suzette Rome Say does is “tempered with gentleness, joy and peace,” said administrators at St. Joseph’s Academy who named her their distinguished graduate.

“As president of the SJA Mothers’ Club, she is present on campus on a daily basis, always working to enhance the daily activities of students, faculty and staff. She is a selfless, kind woman who is dedicated to her family, church and children’s schools,” the school administration said.

Not only is Say active at SJA, she is also involved with the Catholic High Mother’s Club and serves on the Home and School Association for Our Lady of Mercy School. She is a member of that church parish’s PACE rosary group, serves on the Mercy pastoral council and is an extraordinary minister of holy Communion. She has served as a teacher and director of the SJA school choir, and as a Girl Scout leader and 4-H club sponsor.

Sanchez “has distinguished herself for her love for St. John in our school and community and is the epitome of all the characteristics of a true distinguished graduate,” Legendre said.

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Evident to all and present in her lessons,” teaching at St. Joseph. “Her deep faith is a gift from my parents, a foundation for education as a blessing. “Catholic education was an invaluable gift from my parents, a foundation for success. I learned about perseverance, respect and our faith,” she said.

The 1988 graduate of St. Joseph School, Ponchatoula, now teaches at her alma mater. School officials said they chose her as the school’s distinguished graduate this year because she has chosen to share her talent for teaching at St. Joseph. “Her deep faith is evident to all and present in her lessons,” the school said.

“Catholic education is important as it provides a sense of community, encourages each of us to give back and make a difference, a true gift that keeps on going,” Sy, a 1986 graduate of St. Joseph, said.

Sy is “truly a woman for others. She lives out the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph in her daily actions by serving her community in various ways,” the school said.

Ashley Dugas Notariano

Ashley Dugas Notariano sees Catholic education as a blessing. “My Catholic education was an invaluable gift from my parents, a foundation for success. I learned about perseverance, respect and our faith,” she said.

The 1988 graduate of St. Joseph School, Ponchatoula, now teaches at her alma mater. School officials said they chose her as their distinguished graduate this year because she has chosen to share her talent for teaching at St. Joseph. “Her deep faith is evident to all and present in her lessons,”

Claire Salvaggio Tucker

An active role in church ministry has helped define Claire Salvaggio Tucker, the St. Jude School distinguished graduate.

Tucker is a member of the church’s faith core committee, severs on the parish council, facilitates children’s liturgy, and is a extraordinary minister of holy Communion and volunteers regularly at the school.

Patrick Lewis Landaiche

Seminarian Patrick Lewis Landaiche is St. Louis King of France School’s distinguished graduate.

“Catholic education has been a fundamental aspect, not only in regards to learning about the faith, but also as it regards human formation to the success of many individuals throughout the world.”

Landaiche said, “I believe Catholic education has a strong foundation in the truth as well as its desire to see the individual success of its students.”

Landaiche was an altar server and an active participant in the St. Louis King of France youth ministry. During the summer of 2005, he assisted the physical plant manager, Buddy Ricaud, and said he learned a lot about himself and the importance of hard work during that time.

School officials said Landaiche has a sense of self awareness and is comfortable sharing his wisdom with others. He was an outstanding student who is remembered fondly by the faculty and staff. He was active in all aspects of school and parish life, was quick to lend a helping hand and greeted everyone warmly.

Landaiche sees teachers in Catholic schools as “educators in the truest sense. They often deny themselves a higher salary because they are interested in the success of our future generations.”

A 2005 graduate of St. Louis, Landaiche was named the friendliest and most dependable student and received the President’s Award for Excellence. At Redemptorist High School, he received the Brotherhood Award, was named senior favorite, “most likely to succeed” and was all state and all metro in golf.

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perfect. He is perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect, they are answering Jesus’ call to be perfect as the heavenly father is perfect.

The distinguished graduate of St. Michael the Archangel High School is certainly contributing her leadership skills to that purpose.

“Vanessa Clark embodies each of the charisms that St. Michael High School has distinguished as important pillars to live by as a Catholic school. She is committed to living our charism of truth, faith and service,” school administrators said.

“She seeks the truth within her church parish as a committed disciple of Christ. She has lived the faith by pursuing a life dedicated to God and sharing that with others. She serves like Christ through her various volunteer and leadership efforts in her church and parish and the community,” the school administration said.

At St. Jude Church, Clark co-chaired the auction for the church fair and helped coordinate events such as Grandparents’ Day, the annual teacher appreciation week breakfast, Santa Land and the Newcomers Coffee.

She also serves as an eighth-grade “Come, Lord Jesus,” leader and a retreat leader host family at St. Jean Vianney Church.

A 1989 graduate, Clark is also an example to her own family. When she became an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, her son and daughter became altar servers. When she volunteers for church programs or Bible studies, her children join in her efforts, school officials said.

As a student at St. George, Riche received many scholastic and student achievement awards. His Catholic education was rooted in service to God and others, led by the example of his parents. His view that we are all put on Earth to love and serve others was woven into his personality during his formative years in the Catholic school system, the school said.

She is a member of the Republican Women’s Association and the Capital Area Medical Alliance and was a member and chaplain of the Gamma Phi Beta sorority at Loyola and the Psychology Honor Society.

She is involved with “Never Quit, Never Forget,” a gala to honor Louisiana soldiers and to raise funds for wounded soldiers and survivors.

Sidney Joseph Berthelot

As a deputy sheriff for 23 years, Sidney Joseph Berthelot was instrumental in implementing the DARE anti-drug abuse program in all St. James Civil Parish schools.

The distinguished graduate of St. Peter Chanel School has a “warm, friendly personality” and is willing to go beyond his own limits to help others, school principal Paula Poche said.

Berthelot has also been active in the 4-H club, a high school religion teacher, altar server for Sacred Heart Church, and he has constructed the Easter vigil fire for the church for the past 25 years.

Berthelot said he believes strongly in providing children with a Catholic education. By educating them about their Catholic faith, children can build upon that foundation and continually grow in their faith, he said.

Berthelot attended Lutcher High School, Nicholls State University, the LSU Police Academy, DARE Officers Training, HAZMAT technician training and FBI instruction development. He has risen through the ranks of the St. James Sheriff’s office where he is currently a major. He has also been the recipient of the VFW Community Service Award.

Berthelot has been involved in many school and community events, school official said. He has offered help in making schools in the parish safer through his education and training in the sheriff’s office.

Becky Bourque Petite

Becky Bourque Petite believes Catholic school students can learn that God is active in their lives and they can become his hands and feet in their community.

The 1973 graduate of St. Theresa Middle/St. John Primary School is living out that role in her ministry to those in need in her community.

Petite has worked tirelessly with Mission Honduras, a ministry of St. John the Evangelist Church, Plaquemine to provide service to schools and the community of Olancho in Honduras.
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She also has an “animal ministry” in which she spreads joy to area nursing homes, churches, schools and the Sweet Dreams homeless shelter. Using her ducks, chickens, pigs and horses, Petite also puts on an annual “farm day” for special needs children and others. “Although many of our graduates continue to serve our community in countless ways, it is clear that Becky has made this her mission,” school officials said. “She truly embodies the characteristics we hope and desire for all of our students as they participate in the educational ministry of St. John Primary/St. Theresa Middle. The love and joy she spreads is infectious and offers hope to those who are often left wanting in our society.”

A retired special needs educator, Petite was named Dutch-town Middle School’s Support Personnel of the Year for 1998 and 2004; Ascension Parish Support Personnel of the Year, 1998 and 2004; Knights of Columbus Family of the Month, and a WAFB TV Hand-It-On Award recipient.

Brian James Gohres

Brian James Gohres is a Falcon all the way. After graduating from St. Thomas Aquinas High School in 1999 and from Southeastern Louisiana University in 2003, he returned to his high school alma mater to begin an Alumni Association.

One of the founding members of the Falcon Alumni Association, Gohres is committed to the mission of STA and the advancement of the school, the students and the Catholic education experience, said STA officials who named him this year’s distinguished graduate.

“The Catholic education experience was a vital part of my development as a Christian, and I truly believe that my time at STA has helped me become the person I am today,” said Gohres, who is president of Emery and James LTD – Gohres Insurance.

St. Thomas Principal Jose Becerra called Gohres a “natural leader with the tenacity to succeed. He has the ability to bring people together to work toward a common goal. He’s a giving person who sees the need to serve his community.”

Gohres has chaired the Leadership Tangipahoa Board of Trustees and received the Hammond Chamber of Commerce Chairman’s Award in 2012.

John Birnie Dupuy

John Birnie Dupuy has been a sort of jack-of-all trades for St. Thomas More, Dupuy is also a member of the church’s St. Matthew’s Bankers Bank. He is on the school board and the school finance committee, and has chaired the school festival for the past 12 years. He has also been an intramural coach and a cub scout leader.

Dupuy “continues to serve STM school and church on a daily basis even though his children graduated many years ago. He is always willing to volunteer and offer support in helping us meet many needs throughout our parish – all we have to do is give him a call,” said St. Thomas More Principal Dr. Judy Armstrong.

He serves as a witness for our Catholic faith through his commitment and involvement in our entire STM community. His dedication to the many aspects of STM community life is a gift and a blessing, Armstrong said.

Dupuy said he believes in Catholic education because it “assists parents in providing a solid foundation while instilling family values, building strong character, developing self discipline and encouraging high academic achievement.”

A 1977 graduate of St. Thomas More, Dupuy is also a member of the church’s St. Matthew’s Guild and the Men’s Club at St. Thomas More and Catholic High School.

He is assistant vice president for loan review for First National Bankers Bank.