Celebrating THE GESU COMMUNITY
DANCING WITH THE STUDENTS - GESU SCHOOL AT THE WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES
Dear Friends,

In this issue of Gesu Magazine, we pay tribute to the Gesu School community—the accomplishments of our students and alumni, the generous volunteers and donors who contribute their time and treasure, and the teachers and staff who work daily to ensure that North Philadelphia’s students are on the path to bright futures.

We celebrate Gesu’s identity as an independent school, cocurricular by the Jesuits and Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, where our non-selective admissions policy supports learners of all ability levels and the emphasis on character formation shapes “young men and women for others.” Our single-gender education in grades 3–8 affords students opportunities to flourish academically and nurtures their confidence.

We salute board members, donors, and volunteers who provide unique programs, such as Dancing with the Students and Boys to Men, which enable children to grow in character and to develop their God-given talents.

We recognize the gift of our Gesu families and supporters, who came together through a collective effort to build a new playground for our students. We gratefully acknowledge our Sponsor a Child donors, extending as far as Texas and beyond, who make a difference in our students’ lives.

We commemorate milestones with gratitude, such as the 50th jubilee of Fr. Neil Ver’Schneider, S.J., Gesu Chaplain and Assistant Principal.

Thank you for all that you do to support a Gesu School education. I hope you enjoy reading about why “Gesu Works” in the pages that follow.

Peace and blessings,

Bryan H. Carter
President and CEO

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FROM THE President

Photo by Sabina Louise Pierce

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To celebrate “Buddy Day” during Catholic Schools Week, 2nd grade girls help Kindergarten students work on their class book.

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Front cover photo: Dancing with the Students - Gesu School performs at the Festival of Families during the World Meeting of Families.
A Community Effort from Crowd-Funding to the Final Build

Gesu’s 450 students began the school year greeted by a new playground on the roof to ensure they have a modern, safe place to play outdoors. This build was truly a community effort. Donors, board members, parents/guardians, Gesu staff, and even children contributed—from raising $75,000 to constructing the new playscape together.

The new playscape benefits students overall health and developmental growth, aligning with Gesu’s mission to educate the whole child. Gesu Physical Education Teacher, Sean Deal, notes that it is critical for children to have a balance of academics and play in their school day. Says Mr. Deal, “Kids should play around an hour a day to keep in shape.”

But play is not just vital to physical health. Mr. Deal explains, “Research says there is a link to play as far as development and social skills. Play is linked to growth in memory and language, recognizing symbols, and self-regulation. When children play outside, they learn how to communicate with each other. If they have an issue, I tell them to talk to each other and work it out, and also to say ‘thank you.’”

According to Mr. Deal, play also enhances learning, concentration, and positive behavior: “It really helps students relax when they get back in the classroom. They are more willing to do work and more diligent for the next couple of hours.”

The playscape project began with a crowd-funding initiative among families from Holy Child School at Rosemont, a partner of Gesu School. Four families, all Gesu School supporters and friends whose children attend Holy Child, learned that the Gesu playground was in need of repair and that students could not fully use it for nearly a year. The Cooney, Scherder, Sims, and Triumphour families launched the effort through online giving pages and encouraging their children to spread the message at school and among relatives and friends.

Gesu Board Member, Jenn Sims explains, “I simply asked my children, ‘How would recess be without a playground?’ Their immediate reaction was ‘not as much fun.’ I then explained the importance of children helping children.”

Significant gifts from generous donors who also recognize the importance of play to children’s intellectual, emotional, and social growth were integral in bringing the project to fruition—done from an anonymous donor and another from PENTA Building Group Foundation. Jeff Ehret, owner of The PENTA Building Group, and his wife, Mary, have been supporting Gesu School for many years in honor of Jeff’s mother, long-time librarian and dedicated Gesu Board Member, Vivienne Ehret.

To secure the remaining funds needed for the build, the Ethel Mae Hocker Foundation, a long-standing supporter of Gesu’s Sponsor a Child program, donated a $55,000 gift towards the playground in June 2015. “Their commitment to this project and to Gesu School has enabled our students to access safe equipment for healthy, creative play during recess, gym, and after school.”

To complete the build, parents and guardians of Gesu students sprang into action. Their leadership was key to making the playground a reality. On September 19, 2015, nearly 30 volunteers, mostly Gesu families along with staff and friends from the community, spent their Saturday hard at work on the structure. From unpacking each part, to constructing the slides, and bolting each rung of the rock wall, volunteers toiled to complete the structure. Each piece was added in a spirit of camaraderie and genuine care for Gesu students.

Rodney Barber, Gesu parent and volunteer, explains the project’s importance and reach: “What inspired me was knowing that not just my daughter, but other kids would benefit from the new playground. That morning on the roof we built more than a playground; we were building and bridging their future. We were building relationships for years to come. Placing my daughter in Gesu was one of the best moves I have ever made. Gesu School is a family, and we are glad to be a part of it.”

Adds Gesu parent and volunteer, Robert Owens, a retired carpenter whose skills were invaluable during the build, “I felt good being able to do something that benefits the children and the school. It feels good knowing that I was involved in something that makes children happy. The playground is colorful, especially for the younger children, and it appears to be safe and soundly constructed.”

The build could not have happened without the ongoing support of Gesu School’s maintenance team, led by Terrence Tinsley; our neighbors at St. Joseph’s Prep and Gesu Board Member, Rosemary Espatol, with her team at IEI Group, who assisted with logistics, licensing, and inspection.

This project exemplifies the true spirit of community that permeates Gesu School. Thank you to all who shared their time, talent, and treasure to create a space for Gesu children to play for years to come.

What do Gesu students think about the new playground? D’Myiah, in grade three, exclaims, “It’s exciting! I love the rock wall!” Third grader, Saniiia, chimed in, “I love it. It’s the best!” The new playground is really safe. My favorite thing to do is slide and climb on the monkey bars. I like the whole thing!”

The completed playscape ensures that students have space for creative play to build their physical, social, and cognitive skills and to have fun!
As a non-selective admissions school, Gesu is uniquely positioned to meet the needs of learners of all ability levels. Gesu School prioritizes enrollment based on the six zip codes surrounding its neighborhood. Codirected by the Jesuits and the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Gesu’s non-selective admissions policy aligns with the IHM maxim that “every child can learn.”

Gesu School does not test for admissions. For students entering Gesu in grades 3-8, a placement test may be given to ensure appropriate grade-level placement. Gesu offers remedial instruction and learning support for students below grade level, with specific learning needs, or diagnosed learning disabilities. Resource rooms in math, for grades 2-8, and English Language Arts (ELA), for grades 1-8, are led by faculty who teach small groups, providing individualized attention at an appropriate pace. Gesu also challenges students ready to tackle higher-level material with advanced courses in small-group settings. In Advanced Math, students in grades 6 and 7 learn curriculum for grades 6-8. Once in 8th grade, these students dive into Algebra I. The Backe Advanced Writing Program pushes students with a curriculum beyond required levels. Gesu School prioritizes enrollment based on the academic needs, or diagnosed learning disabilities. Resource teachers employing differentiated instruction will teach a whole-group lesson to introduce a concept, followed by an assessment, such as a quiz, self-reflection, or small-group discussion. Teachers then break students into groups, working closely with those who need scaffolding or reinforcement, while students “a little higher in terms of mastery of concept, might have an activity that’s challenging them to use higher-level critical thinking,” explains Ms. Hinton. Students delve into the same topic, with varying activities and target skills.

For example, after a whole-group overview of two-digit addition with regrouping, Ms. Rice creates centers with multiple activities to address learning styles and levels—hands-on manipulatives, individual whiteboards and markers, flashcards with visuals. Ms. Rice notes, “In certain groups, I might reteach place value. I have to figure out what part students are missing and help them understand it. In other groups, I might do an enrichment activity that builds on fluency and critical thinking.” Differentiated instruction also enables teachers to challenge students who quickly absorb material, so, as Ms. Hinton states, they don’t “become bored with material already mastered.” Ms. Hinton and Ms. Rice agree that differentiation is essential and has multiple benefits in any subject, including active, student-centered learning. Ms. Hinton explains, “I really like group work. As the teacher, you are the facilitator. I never want to have a classroom where I am talking at students all day. It’s my job to guide the learning. It’s my students’ job to be investigators and discover. I give them the tools and am always there to help them.”

In addition to addressing academic skills, Ms. Hinton and Ms. Rice recognize that differentiated instruction also builds “soft skills.” Ms. Rice states, “Differentiated instruction focuses on that power of growth mindset.” She encourages students to “train their brain” through practice and different learning strategies. “If they don’t get it the first time, I want them to know it’s okay and that we will work together to find a way to understand the material.”

According to Ms. Hinton and Ms. Rice, differentiated instruction fosters community, empowerment, and accountability. For example, through peer work, students explain concepts to each other and practice together. Ms. Hinton sets clear expectations for group work, including a self-checklist and sharing with the larger class. Students respond positively: “When girls are in groups, they ping-pong ideas off each other and support each other in their learning. They take it as a big sense of responsibility.” For Ms. Hinton, group work also boosts students’ confidence and likelihood to ask questions when struggling. Differentiated instruction demands a heavy investment in planning for a range of activities, orchestrating classroom management of group work, and constant assessment. Ms. Hinton acknowledges that “adaptability” is critical: “I always have to check what’s working, if students are understanding, if my teaching is working, or what other activities I can use that will be more effective.” While books offer some reteaching and enrichment activities, teachers continually respond to their students’ specific needs to support learning and engagement. Ms. Rice comments, “Differentiated instruction is challenging, but worth the extra time needed to prepare!” Ms. Hinton ‘02 earned a B.A. in Sociology and an M.A. in Elementary Education from St. Joseph’s University, where she also participated in the ACE SJU program. She holds Leadership Certification from the University of Pennsylvania. Amanda Rice holds a B.S. in Psychology from Saint Peter’s University and an M.S. in School Counseling from University of Scranton. She is a National Certified Counselor.


Ms. Rice implements differentiated instruction in vocabulary building with second graders.
MAXIMIZING THE POWER OF SINGLE-GENDER EDUCATION

Eighth grade boys build “soft skills” and confidence as young gentlemen.

The positive energy in Gesu’s Boys to Men classroom is palpable. Eighth grade boys meet weekly with Fr. Stephen Thorne, Gesu Board Member and Pastor of St. Martin de Porres Catholic Church, for a mentoring class on preparing for high school and manhood.

In 2006, while Executive Director of the Office for Black Catholic Ministry in the Archdiocese, Fr. Thorne began volunteering at Gesu. The Boys to Men program evolved from his research on the needs of African American males while earning his M.S. in Education at Neumann University. Fr. Thorne brings high school and college teaching experience, making the class intentionally active. He also shares invaluable life experiences, having grown up in North Philadelphia.

Key in forging the community that pervades the Boys to Men classroom is Gesu’s single-gender education in grades 5-8. Says Fr. Thorne, “The bonding and camaraderie is very evident among the boys.” He also recognizes the positive effects on girls: “Part of single-gender education is to help boys have great respect for women and to have the young ladies have great respect for themselves.”

While Gesu separates academic classes by gender, boys and girls socialize at lunch, recess, and extracurriculars. According to Fr. Thorne, this structure enables boys and girls to “learn to work with each other, respect each other.”

Fr. Thorne tailors the course around boys’ needs. This year’s focus is high school readiness and academics. Students read Hill Harper’s Letters to a Young Brother: M&Njst Your Destiny, about charting success in life. The class covers concrete strategies to achieve strong grades.

Students even compile résumés. States Fr. Thorne, “It’s important for boys to understand that there’s no reason they cannot be as intelligent as anybody else.” Eighth grader, Jaylen, enjoys that the class centers on “believing in yourself” and includes goal setting and career planning. “I’d love to play professional sports, basketball or baseball, but we all know it’s not a guarantee. I’d love to study sports medicine and become a trainer,” he asserts.

Class dialogue is candid, including combatting stereotypes that young African American men confront. Fr. Thorne invites speakers, such as a police officer friend, to listen to students’ experiences and concerns, have a conversation to develop respect for one another, and offer “a process and teaching tools about what to do if students feel they are being profiled or treated unjustly.” According to Fr. Thorne, the goal of these conversations is to help students think about perceptions—themselves and others—and to add to what he identifies as their “Gesu bag” of skills. These tools for navigating life after graduation include “dealing with adversity, believing in yourself, service, how to conduct yourself no matter what a narrative says about you, knowing who you are, excellence—being the best you can be—and giving back.”

Boys to Men fosters respect for self and others. Fr. Thorne addresses students as “gentlemen.” As a rite of passage, students learn to tie a tie. On why it’s significant to learn this skill, one student remarks, “If I get a job interview.” Corrects Fr. Thorne, “It’s not about ‘if’ but ‘when.’”

Fr. Thorne reaches students on their level, teaching about responsibility and grit. “Homework is like a free throw,” instructs Fr. Thorne. “You can’t miss it.” He also teaches how to face challenges: “Everyone is going to lose in life at some point—a loved one, an achievement, not being chosen. You lost, but you played hard. You lost, but in a respectful way. It’s how you deal with it that is a great example of resilience and of being a young man.”

Boys to Men teaches students confidence. Fr. Thorne affirms, “Even if you are from North Philadelphia, there is nothing you can’t accomplish.”

Fr. Thorne engages 8th grade boys in strengthening study skills and life skills.

I have a dream that runs through my mind day and night. These dreams flow through my head like soothing water easing down a river.

I’ve had these dreams ever since I was a small toddler. My dream is to be a distinguished artist who wows the people filling their hearts with great amazement. I want to have art studios all over the world in my name. When people read about me they will feel the passion that I feel for art.

My dreams are as numerous as beautiful gray elephants. There are many things I can do to accomplish my dreams. Maybe I will go to an exceptional art school that will help me hone my art skills. Even God’s divine ways will help me.

But through these dreams I might encounter hateful and spiteful people who will be jealous and want to spit on my dreams. Even though those people might be hurtful, I know the best thing to do is ignore them. I will ignore them with dignity and go on my way.

My dreams are splendid, but they will come true. As long as I keep believing and never let up I will triumph. God will help me and others will too. But for now this is the beginning. I will have to see what my future holds. My dreams are big boulders that stay on my mind.
Mary Ryder: Inspiring Teamwork Across Gesu

Grade 2 Teacher shares the joy of learning through collaboration.

Mary Ryder: "I want them all to believe in themselves," she attests.

What motivates Mary Ryder to work from 6:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.? “What I enjoy most are seven- and eight-year-olds. They are just joy,” she reveals. “Gesu is a community of families. I am blessed with the teachers I work with; we are a real team.”

Mrs. Ryder began her career teaching high school in New England. After later raising her three sons near Philadelphia, she volunteered in their classrooms and with the West Philadelphia Alliance for Children. After her sons were grown, Mrs. Ryder earned her M.Ed. in Teaching and Learning at Johns College. A friend involved with Gesu’s Sponsor a Child (SAC) program inspired Mrs. Ryder to volunteer at Gesu, leading to her dream job teaching second grade. Now in her fifth year, she credits her role as a mother in her success as a teacher.

Grade partner, Amanda Rice, describes Mrs. Ryder: “She is the perfect blend of being cooperative and authoritative. She tends not only to her students’ academic needs, but also their emotional and social growth. She makes every student feel special and focuses on their strengths. She provides a ‘motherly’ touch in the classroom, for example, providing snacks for those who do not have one.” Her nurturing, interactive style fuses academics with fun in a space where students feel celebrated. From the “Question of the Day,” which engages students in current events and a graphing lesson, to math bingo, students are immersed in hands-on learning. Their “We Are a Team” wall showcases students’ photos and collectively compiled class rules. Their class chant energizes their community: “We are room 2.”

An avid reader and traveler with a B.A. in History from the University of New Hampshire, Mrs. Ryder’s favorite subjects are reading and social studies. She equips students “to develop a life-long love of reading.” Her “20 Book Challenge” incentivizes students to read and write book reviews for stickers.

Mrs. Ryder designs sequenced units that enable students to understand themselves, their community, and the world. Students create an autobiography to introduce themselves to their class. They expand to a biography on a faculty or staff member, conducting interviews and inviting their subjects to tea. They research an African American hero for a 2-3 page report and presentation.

To propel students to achieve, Mrs. Ryder teaches “soft skills,” such as gitt. She recalls a student who convinced herself she couldn’t understand math. Mrs. Ryder helped the student fine tune her skills and attitude with a personal mantra: “This is math. You are going to say, ‘I don’t get it yet. I can and I will.’” A year later, the student returned to Mrs. Ryder, declaring, “I love math, and I get it.”

Mrs. Ryder extends her care and knowledge to new teachers as a mentor. Notes Ms. Rice, “Mary’s patience and warmth helped me tremendously. Whether it was having a Coca Cola ready for me at the end of a long day or a comforting smile, she was always able to help me through challenges. Her love for teaching and helping others inspired me to become a better teacher and person.”

To strengthen the community, Mrs. Ryder coordinates Gesu’s SpeakUp program, which promotes communication among youth, educators, and adults. She collaborates with 7th and 8th graders from Gesu and local schools. Students plan an event for 100 participants on topics important to adolescents, such as stress. “I want them to feel that adults really do listen, care about what they have to say, and respect them,” shares Mrs. Ryder.

In 2015, SpeakUp awarded Mrs. Ryder the “JIMMY” Medal. This honor is given to individuals who exhibit resilience, empathy, humility, and loyalty, and who make a difference in others’ lives by recognizing their goodness and potential. Mary Ryder truly embodies these ideals.

Building Students’ Futures: OSTC and EITC Programs

Companies that donate to Gesu School through the OSTC and EITC programs maximize state tax incentives and change the course of students’ lives. For more information on corporate giving, OSTC, and EITC, visit www.gesuschool.org/corporate_giving.

Gesu’s Sponsor a Child Program: Donors Impact Lives from Across the Nation

Kathleen Nuzzo and the Nuzzo Family Foundation make a difference—all the way from Texas.

Kathleen Nuzzo travels 1,400 miles twice a year to attend Gesu School’s Sponsor a Child (SAC) events. Her family’s dedication to Gesu and the SAC program is unwavering.

Kathleen and her husband, David Nuzzo, initially learned about Gesu through a Jesuit connection in Philadelphia—their Catholic parish, Old St. Joseph’s (OSJ) Church. A valued partner and supporter of Gesu for many years, OSJ organizes an annual Christmas giving tree for Gesu’s youngest students.

After discovering Gesu through the giving tree, the Nuzzo family visited the school. Gesu’s mission to provide a quality, innovative education to low-income students resonated with the history of their family foundation and its efforts to broaden educational opportunities for secondary students through scholarships.

Kathleen notes, “My mother-in-law and father-in-law, Teeda and Salvatore Nuzzo, started the foundation many years ago as a way of giving back. My father-in-law grew up as one of a big Italian family in Norwalk, Connecticut and was a star student, athlete, and citizen at his public high school. He was accepted at Yale University, but never would have been able to attend if it wasn’t for the generous scholarship he received. Graduating from Yale opened doors for him and was the springboard for a successful career.”

The Nuzzo Family Foundation recognizes the power of education to propel students towards success. Kathleen adds, “Gesu opens doors for its students; attending Gesu can completely change the trajectory of the lives of its students.”

To learn more about the Sponsor a Child program, contact Kelly Grattan, Director of Development, at (215) 763-9677 or kgrattan@gesuschool.org.

Kathleen Nuzzo of the Nuzzo Family Foundation travels from Texas to visit Nafis, Grade 2, a Scholarship Luncheon.

“Gesu opens doors for its students; attending Gesu can completely change the trajectory of the lives of its students.” —Kathleen Nuzzo
Dancing with the Students - Gesu School Performs at the World Meeting of Families During Papal Visit.

The World Meeting of Families selected Dancing with the Students – Gesu School to perform at the Festival of Families. We are honored to have participated in this historic event. Students performed the tango and swing before a crowd of about 100,000 and appeared on 40 jumbotron screens across the city. The performance was captured live on CNN. We thank Susan Martorelli Shea, Gesu Board Member and President of Dancing with the Students, for sharing this unforgettable opportunity with our students. To view media coverage, visit www.gesuschool.org/dancing_recap.

IN MEMORIAM

John Thomas Decker, son of Candy Decker and Ted Decker, Gesu Board Member, served as volunteer basketball coach for the Gesu varsity basketball team in 2013. We are grateful for his strong commitment to our students and the enthusiasm and sportsmanship he shared.

Raymond H. Welsh, longtime friend of Gesu School. We are thankful for his generous support, and that of his wife, Joanne, since 1999.

Marjorie “Marcy” Wollfington was a dedicated Gesu School supporter since 2005. We gratefully recognize her and her husband, Eustace, for establishing the Marcy and J. Eustace Wollfington Endowed Scholarship.

ATHLETIC CORNER

Co-ed soccer team wins championship!

Congratulations to the grade 5-6 boys and girls soccer team, who won the Region 1 Championship in their first year in the CYO JV B league! Thanks to Coach Corhie for his dedication to the team.

Track team sets record in 2015 and starts new season.

Last year was a fantastic season, with 75 athletes in grades 4-8. A highlight was the new record set by the 4 x 100 cadet boys relay team at the CYO Area A championship meet! Thanks to coach, Ms. Pat Leaf, and also to Dontae Leaf for volunteering to train the boys.

Boys varsity basketball excels in league and tournament play.

With an overall record of 20-5, the team made the City Tournament for the top 32 teams across Philadelphia. The team won the St. Joseph’s Prep Christmas Tournament and advanced to the championship game in the Boys’ Middle School Thanksgiving Tournament at Friends Central. Congratulations to the team and Coach Deal!

Boys JV basketball posts a solid record.

The team played their best throughout the season. The 5th and 6th graders played hard and demonstrated strong team spirit in each game, wrapping up with an impressive 6-3 record.

Girls varsity basketball exhibits leadership and new energy.

Two returning players stepped up as 8th grade leaders to introduce 7th grade girls to the game. Seventh graders learned fundamentals, and the team excelled in defense. Coach Lisa and Coach Joe recognize the girls’ commitment to teamwork.

Girls JV basketball shines in their second season.

The team placed 3rd in the CYO league! Coach Dontae Leaf is extremely proud of the team’s improvement in their second year.

Baseball team begins its third season.

In last year’s second season, the grade 6-8 boys, many of whom had never played the sport, developed their skills, learned baseball strategy, and gelled as a team. The team is excited for the start of their third season and is ready to bring their strong pitching to the field!
Alumna Achieves in the Sciences

2007 graduate harnesses Gesu education for a career in nutrition and dietetics.

Kareemah Parker, Gesu Class of 2007, identifies a challenge, sets a goal, and conquers it.

A self-identified “go getter,” she has capitalized on her Gesu School education to chart a career in nutrition and dietetics: “Gesu was my foundation. It got me interested in my education. In this neighborhood, all kids don’t have an opportunity to go to a school like this. I tell other kids from Gesu that your education is something to take seriously. And value it.”

A 2015 graduate of Immaculata University with a B.S. in Nutrition and Dietetics and a minor in Psychology, Ms. Parker had earned a Dean’s Scholarship and membership in the Kappa Omicron Nu Honor Society. She is now a nutritionist working towards her Registered Dietitian credential at Medereth College in North Carolina.

This Dietetic Internship Program includes graduate courses and seven rotations. Ms. Parker has already completed a food service rotation in the Upper Dublin School District, planning school lunches according to federal guidelines; a community rotation working with parents at WIC N.O.R.T.H., Inc. in Overbrook; and a wellness and outpatient rotation at Abington Health Diabetes Center, where she utilizes her background in psychology to counsel patients on diet.

Ms. Parker envisions herself as a leader in “a white lab coat in a hospital,” possibly in pediatrics. She aims to work on a career in pediatrics. She aims to work on a career in pediatrics.

As a result of her achievements, the Pennsylvania Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics recognized Ms. Parker with one of only three 2015 Outstanding Dietetic Student Awards from the Pennsylvania Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

“As in this neighborhood, all kids don’t have an opportunity to go to a school like this. I tell other kids from Gesu that your education is something to take seriously. And value it.” — Kareemah Parker ‘07

2016 Gesu Spirit Medalists

Gesu Board Members, Peter G. Gould and Rev. Stephen D. Thorne, will be awarded the Spirit Medal, Gesu School’s highest honor, at the 2016 Gesu Gala for their extraordinary dedication to Gesu School. To learn more about the Spirit Medalists and to purchase tickets, visit www.gesuschool.org/2016gala.

Fr. Neil Ver’Schneider, S.J. to celebrate 50 years ordained

A true “man for others,” Fr. Neil uplifts the Gesu community.

Since 1966, Fr. Neil Ver’Schneider, S.J. has walked the halls of Gesu School as an enduring example of a “man for others.” While his roles at Gesu have evolved, each has brought the community together. Early on, as Assistant Pastor, Fr. Neil served on the leadership team that cemented Gesu School as a national model of inner-city education, fostering the transition from a parish school to an independent school and creating hallmark programming, such as single-gender education. To expand students’ opportunities to explore hobbies beyond sports—often challenging in Gesu’s surrounding neighborhoods—Fr. Neil created GEM, the Gesu Extra Mile program, which has included chess, drama, and service.

As Chaplain, Fr. Neil offers daily mass to “lift up” the community and presides at a monthly prayer service or mass for students. Revolving around liturgical seasons, such as Lent, his bulletin board displays remind the community “to use our gifts and talents to help others.” His letters to families relay that working together as a Gesu family helps students grow spiritually, academically, and socially. He teaches students to be environmental stewards by championing a recycling program and to be global citizens by educating them about missions, such as Jesuit Relief Services. His gentle, yet firm demeanor as Disciplinary invites students to reflect upon their choices.

On what he treasures most about his ministry at Gesu, Fr. Neil states, “Seeing the students grow, become more responsible, try new things, not give up amidst challenges, and become more thoughtful and caring as they go through Gesu, high school, and beyond. The generosity and dedication of faculty and staff who make Gesu work are daily gifts.”

In June 2016, Fr. Neil will commemorate 50 years ordained. He celebrated his 60th jubilee as a Jesuit in 2014. Fr. Neil humbly reflects upon these moments: “I am grateful for being called and given the grace and health to reach these milestones. One never does it alone, but receives the prayerful support of family and friends, fellow religious, coworkers, and donors. Of course, God is there every step of the way giving the grace and support, as well as forgiveness, needed.”

Bryan Carter, Gesu President and CEO, shares about Fr. Neil’s invaluable contributions: “Fr. Neil expertly fills numerous roles at Gesu School, and I am most appreciative of his passion as the spiritual leader of our community.”

ON A MISSION

We recognize the lasting impact Fr. Neil Ver’Schneider, S.J. has had on our community and congratulate him on celebrating 50 years ordained. Photo by Sabina Louise Pierce
EVENTS

Gesu Gala
May 5, 2016
6 p.m. - 9 p.m.
Hyatt at The Bellevue
For more information, including the Junior Board Gala After Hours Soiree, visit: www.gesuschool.org/2016gala.

8th Grade Graduation
June 15, 2016
7 p.m.
The Church of the Gesu
All are welcome!

Gesu All Classes Alumni Reunion
June 25, 2016
12 p.m. - 3 p.m.
Join us on the rooftop at Gesu School!
For more information, visit: www.gesuschool.org/reunions.

Please contact the Development Office at 215-763-9077 or development@gesuschool.org for more information about any of our events.

Visit www.gesuschool.org/calendar for the latest listings of events, athletics, and news!