Social justice has long been a tenet of the Jesuit tradition and forms the basis for the very existence of Gesu School. In keeping with Gesu’s Jesuit identity, social justice topics are regularly incorporated into classroom instruction, often with the assistance of the generous people who “do justice” themselves through their kindness to Gesu School.

This spring the eighth grade’s curriculum began with an examination of the Holocaust in Annette Pickett’s social studies class. Gesu’s friends Amy Brenner and Nancy Astor-Fox arranged for students to have third row seats at the Co-Existence Festival in New Jersey, featuring Holocaust survivor Gerda Weissmann Klein and Islamic spokesperson Zainab Al-Suwaij, along with an exclusive opportunity to meet Gerda personally. One impressed student commented on the similarities between the experiences of these two different women.

In Laura Weatherly’s religion class, a series of debates on the death penalty and abortion challenged students to examine these difficult issues from a variety of viewpoints. Each student was assigned to either a pro or a con position for one of the two issues, and was required to research and argue in favor of his or her assigned position, regardless of personal opinion. The debates gave the students an opportunity to learn from each other and to have their voices heard. According to one 8th grader, debating the issues meant, “you have to know your facts.”

As an introduction to recent global justice issues, the eighth graders examined the problem of genocide through the lens of the film Hotel Rwanda. Thanks to the World Affairs Council, several students attended a presentation by Paul Rusesabagina, whose heroic role during the Rwandan genocide was dramatized in the movie.

The examination of social justice is neither limited to the eighth grade, nor relegated to the realms of the intellect. This year Gesu students of all ages collected $3,654.95 in “mission money” to help others in need around the world.

8th Graders Encounter History Firsthand

“The kids were really excited because it brought to life some of the things they had read about and had written about,” teacher Laura Weatherly recounts of the morning spent at the National Holocaust Museum as part of the eighth grade class trip to Washington D.C. The trip was funded by Gesu’s friend Ellen Bachow and Board Chairman Win Churchill.

The Holocaust victims’ suffering had a tremendous impact on the students. They describe one display that recreated the life and journey of a survivor named Daniel, including his room, the tunnels he went through to the transport train, the ghetto, and even the barbed wire and the pile of shoes at the death camp. Although Daniel is now deceased, the students had the opportunity to write letters to leave in his mailbox. Student Shannon remembers writing to Daniel about “how he was strong for what he had went through. If it would have been me, I would have given up.”

The afternoon brought a visit to the National Air and Space Museum including the “Treasures of American History” display.

How Well Are Your Donations Managed?

In March, Gesu School was awarded a 4-star rating by Charity Navigator, an independent evaluator of charities. According to Charity Navigator, “Receiving four out of a possible four stars indicates that your organization excels, as compared to other charities in America, in successfully managing the finances of your organization in an efficient and effective manner.” For more information on Charity Navigator’s rating system, visit www.CharityNavigator.org.
Is it in you?

"Is it in you?" Fr. Stephen Thorne, Director of the Philadelphia Archdiocese’s Office for Black Catholics, asked the students assembled in Gesu Church for the yearly revival. Using a play on the well-known Gatorade slogan, Fr. Thorne talked with the students about "having it in you" to do the right thing. The service reminded students of their own special beauty and reinforced values taught in the classroom throughout the year. During the service, the 8th graders paid tribute to the victims of the violence at Virginia Tech by laying roses on the altar. The students were reminded that an end to violence and other troubles in the world begins with how we treat one another.

Another.

...to trustee Mark Solomon for bringing such an engaging speaker to Gesu!...
With 450 students already enrolled for next year, Gesu School is at full capacity for the 2007-2008 school year. But Gesu’s reach doesn’t end with the students in our classrooms. For some time, Gesu School has touched the lives of disadvantaged school children all over Philadelphia by providing technical assistance to other Catholic and independent schools struggling to survive. Now Gesu’s capacity to share its success has been expanded with the creation of the Gesu Institute.

The Gesu Institute is dedicated to supporting and strengthening schools that serve low-income communities, particularly in elementary education, as a means of bridging the gaps of inequality in our society. It provides the necessary resources to evaluate, refine and develop best practices in teaching, governance, administration, and fundraising by using faith-based, value-based and entrepreneurial models. Gesu School trustee Letitia Biddle is serving as the Gesu Institute’s Executive Director pro bono to help launch the organization.

On March 30, the Gesu Institute was formally unveiled at the symposium “Hav- ing Faith in Catholic Schools” at Saint Joseph’s University. Gesu Institute co-sponsored the event with its partners: the Program for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society at the University of Pennsylvania, the Robert A. Fox Leadership Program at the University of Pennsylvania, and Saint Joseph’s University. Upcoming Gesu Institute initiatives include a development roundtable in June and a daylong urban education leadership forum in August for a consortium of five parish schools serving low-income populations along Roosevelt Boulevard.

Congratulations Class of 2007

Thanks to the efforts of the entire Gesu “village,” forty-three students graduated from 8th grade on June 13th. We wish them well as they head to the following high schools:

- Abington Friends (1)
- Academy of Notre Dame (1)
- Academy of the New Church (1)
- Archbishop Prendergast (1)
- Cardinal Dougherty (1)
- Freire Charter School (2)
- Germantown or Lankenau (1)
- Hodgson, DE (2)
- John W. Hallahan (1)
- Lankenau (1)
- LaSalle College High School (1)
- Little Flower (1)
- Lydenwald High School, NJ (1)
- Mastery Charter School (2)
- Mercy Vocational (4)
- Monsignor Bonner (1)
- Neumann-Goretti (1)
- Northeast High School (1)
- Palumbo Academy (1)
- Philadelphia Mennonite (3)
- Roman Catholic (2)
- Saul High School (1)
- School of the Future (1)
- Shipley (2)
- Southwest Academy for Boys or Mercy Vocational (1)
- St. Joseph’s Prep (4)
- Undecided (1)
- West Catholic (5)

Athletic Corner

Track

Over 90 students in grades four through eight competed in track this year. Kudos to all the athletes, as well as to coach Pat Leaf, who single-handedly led this year’s enormous team! Basketball

Congratulations to the JV boys basketball team and coach Aaron Prince, who won the Region 8 Championship this year. The team suffered only two losses out of more than a dozen games this season! Tennis

Thirty students participated in indoor and outdoor tennis at the new Arthur Ashe Youth Tennis and Education facility. Thanks to coordinators John Young and Andrea Warner.

Corrections: We apologize for misreporting two teachers’ alma maters in the previous newsletter. Teacher Kirsten Esbetsmeier earned her degree from the University of Scranton and teacher Tammi Grummow earned her degree from Virginia State University.

Saint Joe’s Prep ’Buddies Up’ with Gesu

As part of a joint effort to deepen the relationship between the neighboring Jesuit institutions of Saint Joseph’s Prep and Gesu School, Prep President Fr. William Byron suggested to Gesu President Chris Beck that they create a buddy system to help prepare three Gesu 7th graders for successful admission and transition to the Prep. Over a pizza lunch in April, Gesu students Lawrence, Wardell and Andre met their Prep buddies Ashton (Gesu ’08), Dante and Anthony, who will tutor and mentor the Gesu students through 8th grade. If the Gesu students meet the Prep’s admissions requirements, they will receive full scholarships and continued mentoring support.

Teacher Feature

In the summer of 2005, Gesu School received a very special gift from the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus – Fr. Ray Donaldson, S.J. Fr. Ray joined Gesu as the Advanced Math teacher for the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, but he wears many other hats as well, including organizer of Gesu’s first soccer season, assistant coach for the girls’ basketball team, initiator of various academic challenge teams, and director of the Father Neil G.E.M. (Gesu Extra Mile) program that offers 6th, 7th, and 8th graders a variety of after school enrichment options, including chess club, knitting, tae-bo, jewelry-making, and the Urban Nutrition Initiative.

Fr. Ray earned his B.S.E.E in Electrical Engineering from the University of Maryland College Park in 1982. Following his career as an engineer, Fr. Ray entered the Society of Jesus in 1995 and furthered his education with an M.A. from Loyola University Chicago and an M. Div. from Weston Jesuit School of Theology. His desire to work with the poor and his previous experience in inner-city education led him to Gesu School, which he describes as a unique apostolate among the Jesuits’ missions and a wellspring of potential for ministering with the community.

Although teaching has its challenges, Fr. Ray is encouraged by the sense of mission among the faculty and staff. He finds getting to know the students to be the most rewarding part of teaching, and enjoys seeing the “light bulb go off” when students make connections. Gesu is fortunate to have such a multi-talented faculty member!

President and CEO Christine Beck Honored with Prestigious Award

Queens University of Charlotte presented Gesu President and CEO Christine Beck with the Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award at the university’s commencement exercises on May 5. The New York Southern Society, which initiated the award over fifty years ago, states: “The award is a continuing reminder that the noblest qualities are those characteristics of heart, mind, and conduct which evidence a love for, and helpfulness to, other men and women. True nobility is found in those who move beyond the narrow circle of their self-interest and spend themselves in the interest of humanity.” Ms. Beck, an alumna of Queens University of Charlotte, has served the university as a trustee since 1995.

GESU summer 07.indd   3
GESU summer 07.indd   3
Students in the 3rd through 5th grade, including some aspiring veterinarians, were fascinated by Dr. Amy Brenner’s presentation about caring for animals and her career as a vet. Here several 5th graders greet Dr. Brenner’s co-star Lacey. Dr. Brenner remains involved with the students as a weekly tutor in the YET after school literacy program.

Family, friends, and Ms. B’s first grade class surprised trustee Bob McAlaine with a party in honor of his 70th birthday. Bob’s mentored student Jahmir turned seven that week and shared in the spotlight with his new friend. Bob is a champion of the Sponsor A Child Program, which raises money for Gesu School Scholarships. Under Bob’s leadership, Gesu has more than doubled the number of sponsored children to 76.

Much to their delight, the Pre-K, Kindergarten and 1st grade students had several new additions to their classrooms when the eggs that they were incubating began hatching. After five fun and educational days, the children said goodbye to their new friends as the chicks moved to their permanent home on the farm.

Two Gesu students were among 48 winners selected from 2,500 entries in the 2007 Philadelphia Inspired Expressions Contest. Eighth grader Lucretia was honored for her painting “It All Begins With Me” and 7th grader Brittani was honored for her poem “Love Life.” In addition to their “Best of School” awards, Lucretia and Brittani were also honored with “Trailblazer” awards as the only two winners from an elementary school.

On May 16th Gesu School held a celebration to thank everyone who helped our Building for Tomorrow capital campaign surpass its goal of $12 million. The evening’s festivities included a performance by Gesu’s 6th grade ballroom dancers pictured here. Photo ©2007 Edward Savaria Jr. Photography Services