Becoming a teacher “was part of a childhood dream” for Gesu’s 2009 Knetzger Teaching Prize winner Miki Nicholson. “It’s more of a vocation – a call to what I want to do in life,” the 6th grade teacher explains. “I thought it was fun to learn. As an adult, I wanted to share that gift with someone else.”

The love of teaching and the effort that goes into each of Nicholson’s lesson plans are strikingly apparent. Her lessons are comprehensive, target a variety of learning styles and abilities, and are fun. Yes, FUN. Whether she’s using a YouTube introduction to prime factorization on the Smart Board or a soap-opera style presentation of the week’s Bible story in Religion, Nicholson’s captivating approach makes it hard NOT to be engaged. Her engagement extends to the home through PDF snapshots and PowerPoints of the day’s lessons, website resources, and other homework information that she emails daily to any parents or guardians with email.

In addition to focusing on academics, Nicholson guides her students’ growth into responsible individuals of character. She encourages them to establish goals, to cultivate a positive attitude, and to demonstrate punctuality. She reminds her students to be honest and upright in class because “the consequences are bigger out on the street” for deviating from the straight and narrow.

On her nomination as the Knetzger Teaching Prize winner by her fellow faculty members, Nicholson admits, “It was certainly flattering to have your colleagues think that much of you.” Earlier this year, she was also voted to be the faculty representative on the Board’s Faculty Support Committee. But Nicholson’s focus on what’s really important is obvious – she emphasizes, “You can’t buy the moment when you see a kid get it.”

The importance of strategies to cultivate a quality teaching corps – ranging from programs like Teach for America to the Alliance for Catholic Education – was one of several themes raised by this year’s panel, which also included Dr. John J. Dilulio, Professor of Political Science & Director of the Robert A. Fox Leadership Program at Penn, the Hon. Bruce W. Kauffman, recently retired from the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of PA, and Benjamin Rayer, Associate Superintendent for Charter, Partnership and New Schools with the School District of Philadelphia. Over 170 people attended the event. Find the complete transcript at www.gesuschool.org/2009symposiumrecap.htm.
FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

It’s hard to get used to certain things in North Philadelphia—like gun violence, incarceration, hunger (yes, hunger), and the power of addiction. They keep popping up and continue to impact our children, their emotions and their behavior.

How do we break these cycles of violence and drugs? Although I sound like a broken record, I don’t know any other way but through early education. If we start early enough, our children can receive the tools they need to reach grade level by the all important 4th grade. They learn to love learning, and quality education gives them options.

Gesu’s safe haven, faith-based essence, and quality, enriched education empower our students to make good choices.

Of course, since lots of schools face similar challenges, what makes Gesu so special? We have an exceptionally good track record of success. In short, Gesu works!

Even though Gesu has non-selective admissions, both academically and financially, our students grow and achieve. Regular testing and assessment help target each child’s need, and a wide range of after-school activities and literacy programs motivate their interests.

As always, thank you for your generous support of our mission and children. I am particularly pleased at this year’s growth of our appealing Living Endowment/Sponsor A Child program which enables us to give vital scholarships and to support our mission.

Please come visit! It will affirm the value of your investment—whether you donate your time, talent or dollars.

God bless!

Christine S. Beck
President and CEO

THREE CHEERS!

8th graders Kameron, Matthew, Payton, & Tashira won 1st place in the English Round at the West Catholic Academic Bowl… Shirley Bright, 3rd grade teacher, received an Honorary Alumni Award from Saint Joseph’s Prep and completed her Roman Diploma Program at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, … Saced Briscoe ’05 won 1st prize in Advanta’s Cezanne and Beyond: Art of Inspiration Contest. Trustee Rosemary Espatado’s company EII was named among Interior Design Magazine’s “2009 Interior Design Giants”… Trustees Byron McCook ’73 earned his Ed.D. from Saint Joseph’s University… H.L. Ratliff, music teacher, was honored with the Points of Light Foundation Award… Laura Weatherly, 8th grade teacher, received the St. Peter Claver Award for Education from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia… The Devon Barnes & Noble collected over 2,600 books for Gesu students through their book drive… Mercy Heartland Hospital generously sent nurses to administer 120 H1N1 vaccines… Darlene Piazza, R.N. administered the second dose of H1N1 vaccine to the children and under… Old Saint Joseph’s Church donated Christmas gifts for Grades Pre-K through 2nd grade… and The Zoo provided the Youngest Scholars Program with complimentary tickets!

STUDENTS APPLAUD KYW-COMCAST LAPTOP AWARD.

The addition of 10 laptops to the Advanced Writing room will make class more productive, students say.

Gesu’s Advanced Writing Program now benefits from the prize of 10 laptops awarded the school by the KYW-Comcast “Laptop Daily Double” contest. The school was nominated for the award by Karen Gaffney, mother of a Saint Joseph’s Prep grad who had tutored at Gesu. Several Advanced Writing students attended KYW’s presentation of the laptops, and shared their enthusiasm for the impact the laptops would have on their learning and their research. They stressed the increased productivity that would result from the ability to compose and edit right on the computer. Advanced Writing teacher Dr. Erwin facetiously suggested she might just increase the number of assignments the students complete per year.

LONG-STANDING CITY TRADITION STEPS UP TO SUPPORT STUDENTS.

Gesu School honored as beneficiary of 2009 Philadelphia Charity Ball.

The Philadelphia Charity Ball, a tradition for over 125 years, graciously chose Gesu School as its 2009 beneficiary. In addition, 8th grade Brandi was awarded a Bryn Mawr Trust Scholarship at the ball, which took place at the Union League in November under the leadership of Charity Ball President D. Christopher LeVine. Gesu Ballroom Dancers from the Class of 2009, under the direction of Trustee Susan Shea, performed before the Collition.

MITCH ALBOM, DERRICK PITTS, AND OTHERS QUENCH STUDENTS’ THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE AND CAREER EXPOSURE.

Gesu’s students overflow with thoughtful questions for the guests of the Gesu Speaker Series.

“Your questions reveal an understanding beyond many adults,” asserted Derrick Pitts, Chief Astronomer for the Franklin Institute, who answered students’ questions ranging from how his faith intersects with science to whether the 2012 Theory is actually the prediction of a pole shift. A product of North Philadelphia himself, Mr. Pitts spoke to students as part of the Gesu Speaker Series for 7th and 8th graders at the invitation of trustee Susan Shea.

The Speaker Series was created to give students exposure to successful individuals, especially African Americans, in a variety of fields. Throughout the series Gesu’s students have been ripe with questions. Here’s a sampling of what Gesu’s inquiring minds wanted to know, and the speakers who addressed their questions:

- “What inspired you to write the book?” students asked Mitch Albom, author of Tuesdays with Morrie and Have A Little Faith. Albom was brought to Gesu School courtesy of the Taggart Cultural Series at Saint Joseph Joseph’s Prep.
- “Are there other jobs in the Secret Service where people don’t have to risk their lives?” a student asked John Roberts, Secret Service Agent to Michelle Obama, who was introduced to Gesu through teacher’s aide Andrea Warner.
- “Have you ever fired anybody?” another questioned Taj Scott, headwaiter at Squires Golf Club, who came to Gesu courtesy of Win Churchill.

Ballet “ROCKS” GESU STUDENTS.

Inner-city children expand horizons through classes and performances at Rock School of Ballet

Every Friday afternoon, Gesu’s 2nd graders enjoy an hour ballet class courtesy of the Rock School and Trustee Randi Zemsky. While ballet class and other enrichment activities may be something other children take for granted, Gesu’s students often have few opportunities to participate in such programs outside of school.

On December 4th, the entire school attended the Rock’s School’s performance of The Nutcracker 1775 at the Miriam Theater, thanks to Trustee Peter Gould and his wife Robin Potter. “Now, my students are all writing about the performance in their journals. They all want to be ballerinas,” says 4th grade girls teacher Andrea Carter.
With your help and Gesu’s cost-cutting measures, the school survived a difficult fiscal year in 2008-2009 with minimal program cuts. Thank you for your generosity and prayers.

We are 73% of the way towards our fundraising goal for the current fiscal year, which ends in June. If you have not already made a contribution and would like to do so, please use the enclosed envelope or make your gift online at www.gesuschool.org.

GESU UNVEILS “LIVING ENDOWMENT” PROGRAM. New initiative seeks to secure support from “investors” who cover full cost of one child’s Gesu education for one year.

Conceived by Trustee Rev. William Byron, S.J., Gesu School’s new “Living Endowment” Program seeks annual financial support for scholarships from donors. In the coming year, the Living Endowment Program will succeed Gesu’s long-standing Sponsor A Child Program.

According to Fr. Byron, contributions to this program ($6,000 apiece for each child) constitute a “living” endowment because they are “annual contributions from people who are alive and alert to the need.” It is not an endowment in the traditional sense of a non-to-be-invaded asset base, but a fund to be replenished annually by contributors who are committed to Gesu’s mission of justice in education.

Thanks to a coalition of dedicated trustees who provide leadership, the Living Endowment/Sponsor A Child Program is already providing scholarships to 143 of our 453 students (there are also 15 additional Endowed Scholarships). Participants in the Living Endowment Program learn a little about the child or children they support and receive invitations for two special luncheons each year to meet them.

Many more scholarships are needed. For a prospectus on the Living Endowment Program, please contact Kelly Grattan at 215-763-9077 or kelly.grattan@gesuschool.org.

PHILLY by Nysir, 6th Grade
I look up at the city’s streets as the night falls, Cats roam the dark alleys without a home, The gunshots echo across the city blocks, Cops zoom by like herds of wild cattle, Hunters scatter though the trashy lots, Mothers cry out for their beloved sons: Dead and gone.

As the sun rises beyond the dark shadows of the killer and drug dealers, Kids swim out of their homes, Footballs fly like birds in the midnight sky, You can hear the joy of a baby’s laughter, The curiosity of a child’s question, The importance of an elderly woman’s story, The importance of an elderly woman’s story, The curiosity of a child’s question.

CORRECTION TO ANNUAL REPORT
We inadvertently omitted Ed Beckett from the Chaplain’s Circle in the 2008-2009 Annual Report. We thank Ed and all Gesu’s donors for your past support.

GESU SPEARHEADS COMPETITION TO ENCOURAGE WRITING COMPETENCY IN NORTH PHILADELPHIA MIDDLE SCHOOLS. School’s 2nd Annual Writing Contest fires up aspiring writers.

A student from James R. Ludow School won the $300 first prize from among over 30 entries to Gesu’s inaugural Writing Contest for North Philadelphia Middle Schools last year. Again endorsed by Mayor Michael Nutter, Gesu hopes to expand this year’s contest, which features the topic, “If I were Mayor of Philadelph...” This year’s judges will be former Philadelphia District Attorney Lynne Abraham, Judith Christian of Saint Joseph’s Prep’s English Department, and Trustee Rev. Daniel Ruff, S.J., pastor of Old Saint Joseph’s Church. Interested North Philadelphia schools should contact Germaine Hendon at germaine.hendon@gesuschool.org for more information.

After Twenty years at Gesu, Rev. Neil VerSchneider, S.J. Continues to “Toil and Not to Seek for Rest.” Community celebrates Father Neil’s selfless contribution with Mass and luncheon in his honor.


Over the years, Fr. Neil has been a bedrock of Gesu’s North Philadelphia community, not only lovingly disciplining students in Gesu School’s Time-Out Room – for which he is most famous – but also assisting families in crisis, helping young men find work, and offering spiritual guidance and friendship to anyone who appears at his door, from the littlest children to the neighborhood matrons. He inspires those around him with his frugality (nobody dares throw anything out as long as Fr. Neil’s around – he’ll find a new home for it!), his humble demeanor, and his mastery of technology. Gesu is grateful to the New York Province of the Society of Jesus for sharing this treasure with us!
Upcoming Events

Believe! Gesu’s 2010 Gala to Raise Scholarship Funds
Cathy Peacock & Kay O’Grady, Co-Chairs
Honoring John Dilulio, Jr., Ph.D.
April 29, 2010
6:00 - 9:30 p.m.
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Visit www.gesuschool.org/believe.htm

Conversations with the President
Join President Chris Beck for breakfast and a candid conversation on inner-city education at 9:00 a.m. on the following dates in 2010: Mar. 11, Apr. 8, and May 13. Please contact Suzette Baird at 215-763-9077 or suzette@esuschool.org to confirm your attendance.

Remember, our United Way Donor Choice Number is 7408 (Gesu Community Service Project).

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Students Step Up to Help Haitians.
Benefit dress down day raises $1,481 for Jesuit Refugee Service.
In an act of self-giving, Gesu’s students raised $1,481 to assist the work of Jesuit Refugee Service in earthquake-ravaged Haiti. In addition to the students’ compassion for the suffering of fellow human beings, the Gesu community has ties to the island nation through Gesu’s spiritual patrons, the Venerable Pierre Toussaint and his wife Juliette. Born in 1766, Pierre Toussaint was a freed Haitian slave who worked as a hairdresser to purchase others’ freedom, including Juliette’s. Their lives prove to be a fitting model for the acts of social justice at work in Gesu’s halls.