



GESU SCHOOL

Educational Excellence in North Philadelphia in the Jesuit and IHM Traditions

Social Justice in Mind and Action

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.



Eighth graders pose for a photo with Holocaust survivor Gerda Klein.

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 eight 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.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

As you read this newsletter about our students' accomplishments and our impactful programs, it will be easy to forget the reality of our day-to-day challenges here at Gesu. Our news may seem comparable to other successful schools. However, our reality is much different.

- Unlike many schools that achieve good outcomes with inner-city children, Gesu has no selective admissions. Our mission is to serve our depressed North Philadelphia neighborhood, and our admissions priority is for those children who live in our 19121 zip code and those closest to it – whatever their ability or readiness.
- Our full-time counselor and half-time social worker see 60 to 85 children EVERY week.
- Each week at least 50-65 children are sent out of the classroom by a teacher to Father Neil and his Time Out Room.
- Each trimester, about 25 children are suspended for one or two days, mostly for fighting, hitting, disrespect or profanity.

Last September one of our most seasoned, savvy and experienced teachers literally cried at the end of every day – for at least two weeks – because she did not know how she would ever make progress



with her 22 kindergarten children. They could neither follow directions nor sit still, and had no practice in sharing or socialization. By June, however, her class was well-managed and joyful – with some children even having started reading. Throughout the whole year, our 3rd grade boys' teacher dealt with the most difficult group of 24 boys he has experienced in 24 years of teaching.

Yet, Gesu School works! It works because of YOUR support, because of our teachers' mission-driven commitment, because of the school's spiritual and Catholic essence and because of our passion for social justice.

We hope and pray that you will continue to support our children and our mission so that together we can keep Gesu's success alive for future generations. Thank you so much for your generosity.

With blessings for a peaceful summer,

Christine S. Beck
President and CEO

GESU SCHOOL NAMED BEACON CENTER

Gesu School is thrilled to be a Beacon Center as of May. Beacon Centers provide students with extensive after school programming free of charge and a summer camp for a nominal fee. This exciting development will greatly expand the after school and summer options previously available to Gesu students. In addition to the Gesu Beacon Center's after school line up, Gesu School will continue to offer students the Y.E.T. literacy program, Homework Club, Young Scholars, and the CYO sports teams.



3rd grader Taylor reads Ronald Dahl's *The BFG* (Big Friendly Giant) as part of the 2nd and 3rd Grade Girls' Book Club organized by 4th graders Kavanaugh and Jamie. The girls were inspired to create their book club after 6th grade girls Bria, Lynette, and Briana created a program for 3rd and 4th grade girls.

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.

GESU SCHOOL WELCOMES NEW TRUSTEES

This year Gesu School welcomes new trustees Scott Beaumont, *Chairman and CEO, Lilly Pulitzer*; Fr. William Byron S.J., *President, Saint Joseph's Prep*; Kathleen M. Cannon, *Community Volunteer*; Gerard J. Davies, *Retired Partner, Deloitte & Touche*; Dr. Deirdre Guion, *Assistant Professor of Marketing, Saint Joseph's University Haub School of Business*; Philip J. Kendall, *Chairman and CEO, GCom2 Solutions, Inc.*; Dr. Tashon McKeithan, *Principal, Bronx Public School PS065*; Barbara Renninger, *Community Volunteer*; Don Tollefson, *Sports Anchor, FOX Ten O'Clock News*.

HEARD IN THE HALLS

8th grader Ronique was chosen to represent the Caring People Alliance Boys & Girls Club at the National Keystone Conference in Minneapolis... Ashton Miller '04, a rising senior at Saint Joe's Prep, was invited to attend the ten day hands on LeadAmerica Youth Leadership Conference this summer where he will get a head start in his field of interest, global business and entrepreneurship. He will receive financial assistance to attend the conference through the Gesu Scholarship Fund... Catera Rivers '02, a rising sophomore at Spelman College has been nominated for membership in The National Society of Collegiate Scholars, an honor society for high-achieving first and second year college students... The fourth grade students made their TV debut on CBS News' Weather Wednesdays on February 21st. Check out the video footage of these rising stars at <http://cbs3.com/video/?id=36670@kyw.dayport.com>... 6th and 7th graders Lynette, Jasmine, Jamaya, and Brittani learned about leadership styles at Merion Mercy Academy's Leadership Workshop in April... Teachers Michelle Nicholson and Kirsten Echelmeier will attend the Connelly Foundation's three day Summer Peace Institute in June.

EXECUTIVE ENCOURAGES DREAMERS

Llyod Trotter, President and CEO of GE's Consumer & Industrial Division, spoke to grades 6-8 about the importance of "having the ability to dream and then setting your sails in the right direction." Mr. Trotter, himself a product of inner-city Cleveland, emphasized that Gesu students could also look forward to successful careers if they dared to imagine them, emphasizing that, "education is the ticket." Mr. Trotter is as supporter of the Gesu School Sponsor A Child Program. Thank you to trustee Mark Solomon for bringing such an engaging speaker to Gesu!



Pre-kindergartener Hannah, the youngest Akybra member, and 3rd grader Ayannah await their curtain call.

STUDENT THEATER PERFORMANCE A DISPLAY OF "GREATNESS"

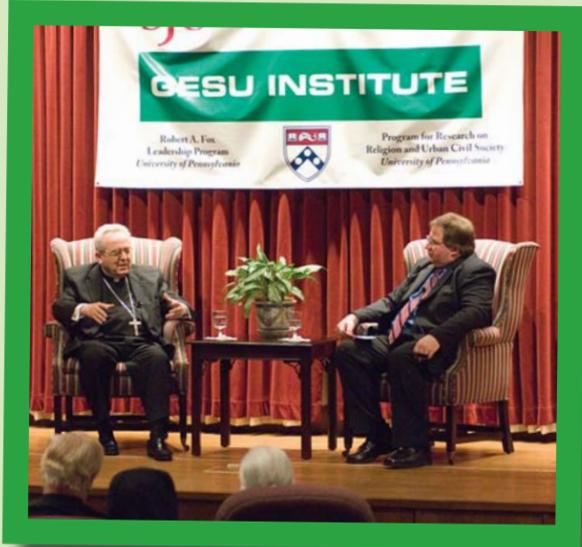
The student theater troupe Akybra brought African American history and music to life through the April performance "S.O.N.G.: Story of Never Ending Greatness." The play was written and directed by 3rd grade teacher Shirley Bright, herself a Gesu graduate, in "response to the violence and disrespect" found in rap music, as well as the senseless death of a former student whom she taught at a previous school. The performance of S.O.N.G. starred 8th graders Gabriella, Brittany, Sheila, and Joshua, and included younger students in numerous roles, including appearances as Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, Harriet Tubman, and other famous African Americans.

Akybra, which means "our joy," involves 3rd through 8th grade students in theater activities on a weekly basis. The program builds students' public speaking skills and confidence, while promoting team spirit and personal motivation. Ms. Bright keeps in regular contact with alumni in the Akybra "Forever" Chapter, seven of whom will graduate from college this year.

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

GESU INSTITUTE TAKES OFF!

Dr. John DiIulio interviews Cardinal Justin Rigali at the Gesu Institute's March 30th Symposium "Having Faith in Catholic Schools." The interview was followed by a panel discussion focused on successful Catholic schools and challenges they face. Photo / John Welsh Photographer



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 "Having 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.



Students operate a fruit stand on 17th Street on Thursday afternoons as one of the many electives offered through the Father Neil G.E.M. after school enrichment program. The fruit stand, as well as a health and nutrition class, are brought to G.E.M. by Danny Gerber of The Urban Nutrition Initiative, a university-community partnership program through the University of Pennsylvania.

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.

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 '04), 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.



Advanced math teacher Fr. Ray gives 8th graders Joy and Konica chess pointers on the eve of the MABACH Challenge in Massachusetts. Fifteen 7th and 8th graders competed against other Nativity/Miguel schools in math word problems, basketball, and chess, thanks to the generosity of Old Saint Joseph's Church.

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!

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) | Mercy Vocational (4) |
| Academy of Notre Dame (1) | Monsignor Bonner (1) |
| Academy of the New Church (1) | Neumann-Goretti (1) |
| Archbishop Prendergast (1) | Northeast High School (1) |
| Cardinal Dougherty (1) | Palumbo Academy (1) |
| Freire Charter School (2) | Philadelphia Mennonite (3) |
| Germantown or Lankenau (1) | Roman Catholic (2) |
| Hodgson, DE (2) | Saul High School (1) |
| John W. Hallahan (1) | School of the Future (1) |
| Lankenau (1) | ShIPLEY (2) |
| LaSalle College High School (1) | Southwest Academy for Boys or Mercy Vocational (1) |
| Little Flower (1) | St. Joseph's Prep (2) |
| Lydenwold High School, NJ (1) | Undecided (1) |
| Mastery Charter School (2) | 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 JoAnne Young and Andrea Warner.



In an outstanding showing at the Penn Relays, the junior girls team of 6th graders Antoinette, Cierra, Destiny, and Jasmine placed 3rd in the Philadelphia Archdiocese 4x100 meter race with a time of 59.66.

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

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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.



Students shower Edward Skoglund of Sweden with questions as he explains the nyckelharpa, a traditional Swedish instrument. Edward and his fiancée Elin Skoglund were introduced to Gesu School on their recent visit to America through Gesu's friend John Burns.



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.



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.



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.



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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