

Our Lady of Perpetual Help Dedicates New 'Gateway' to Knowledge

By Ann Aubrey Hanson

LAKESIDE -- Let the children come to me, Jesus said in Luke's Gospel.

On Feb. 1, with the blessing of Bishop Robert H. Brom, Our Lady of Perpetual Help School dedicated its new "gateway," through which students will come to find their way to knowledge and to Christ.

The new entry creates an inviting and attractive access point for families and the general public. Personalized laser engraved bricks line the walkway and highlight the lasting legacy of the many pastors, principals, students and families who have helped build the OLPH school community over its 45-year history.

The entry also uses high tech security cameras for identifying visitors.

Much of the materials and labor for the gate construction were donated by school families. The development project, of which the gateway is just one piece, will remain open-ended, allowing participation of future families and friends of OLPH School.

OLPH School was dedicated on Nov. 12, 1961, by Bishop Charles F. Buddy and by then pastor Father James P. O'Donoghue.

The school was initially staffed by three Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet and had four classrooms. The first graduating ceremony was held in June 1964 with 23 students.

Today, OLPH School serves the entire East County region.

The campus boasts of an excellent computer technology lab, award-winning sports programs, a buddy system pairing younger and older students, required service hours for junior high school students and high academic standards.

Principal Jeanne Nickoli-Pate and Pastor Ron Buchmiller see a bright future for Catholic education in general and for OLPH School in particular.

"The East County will continue to grow as demographics change and OLPH is poised to meet the increased need to educate not just the mind, but the heart and soul of tomorrow's Catholic leaders," says Pate.

Almost 100 percent of OLPH's graduating students who apply to private high schools are accepted and handle the challenging curriculum with success, says Peggy Stenbeck, OLPH development coordinator. "Those who enter public high schools tend to excel academically, often choosing honors or AP classes."

The students are rightly proud of their school, and even the youngest ones declare their mission in terms of a personal goal of becoming active Christians, eager learners and responsible citizens.

"I realize not all schools can even recognize God at school," says a junior high student. "Some cannot even say 'one nation under God' in the Pledge of Allegiance. I appreciate being able to talk about God and pray."

"I can make better decisions in life because OLPH teaches me to be a better person," says a sixth-grader.

During his visit, Bishop Brom hosted lively interactive discussions with students. As he pointed out the various articles worn or carried by a bishop, he challenged students that they, too, are called to action.

"The prayer hat reminds us that all of us are 'under God,' and apart from God we get in trouble," said Bishop Brom. "We are called to live under God -- and that's what discipleship is all about -- that's what Catholic education is all about."

"The crucifix reminds us that we all must take up our cross," added Bishop Brom, "even when it's not easy, to follow Christ."

"The pastoral staff reminds us that Jesus brings us back when we stray, but we are called to bring back others who might lose their way."