



EDUCATION

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New busing system helps flame the fire of Catholic education

Collaborative project to bus students from Cabrini Parish to Lourdes School

By Elizabeth M. DeLine

Not every parish has a Catholic school. And not every Catholic school is located in a neighborhood full of school-aged children. A couple of parishes are working together to bridge the gap and make valued Catholic education more easily available.

Our Lady of Lourdes School in Denver, along with the parish of St. Frances Cabrini in Littleton, will reintroduce a busing program, beginning in the fall of 2009, which will bus children in from St. Frances Cabrini Parish to attend school at Our Lady of Lourdes.

Looking back at its history, this is nothing new for Lourdes.

Margaret Moschenross, who taught math at the school on South Logan Street, recalled how, "At one time during the '60s and '70s it was the teachers who were bused in to the school. Now it's the kids."

But going back even further to the school's opening in 1948, children from the surrounding areas to the south and south west were bused in to Our Lady of Lourdes precisely because parochial schools were scarce in the growing Denver metro area and the desire for Catholic education was high.

Robert Sickles, the principal of Lourdes, has spent time and energy promoting the busing program at St. Frances Cabrini after weekend Masses so parents can learn more about Lourdes and the unique benefits of Catholic education. He is so enthusiastic about the program that he plans to be one of the bus drivers. He is already calling his route from Cabrini to Lourdes "the rosary ride."

"Throughout the year," he said, "each child will have their turn to lead the rosary on the way to school."

This "rosary ride" will fit nicely into the school's legacy. The small school and parish has been a Catholic landmark for the last 50 years mainly because of the large stone Marian grotto behind the church that was built by Father Damen L. McCaddon. He organized 220 men, who over several months constructed the grotto to Our Lady of Lourdes and who, for many years after, maintained their friendship in a group called the "Rocks of Lourdes."

Whether it is shown through their financial investment, getting up a little earlier to be sure their kids catch the commuter bus or regular involvement in school and parish activities, Our Lady of Lourdes' parishioners and Catholic school parents are determined and convicted when it comes to supporting Catholic education.

Christy Marquez, mother of a current Lourdes School student, couldn't agree more. Speaking of Lourdes' caring close-knit community and quality school, she said, "This is what we've looked for in Catholic education from day one."

When faced with the prospect of the school closing because of low enrollment in the early '90s, Marquez remembered that it was "the strong base of parents willing to do anything, that kept the school alive."

Father Peter Quang Nguyen, the pastor of Lourdes, reaffirmed that.

"It is the prayer, time, talent and treasure of the parishioners who pour their heart and soul into the school that make Lourdes what it is today," he said. To continue to foster this commitment Father Quang, together with his finance and pastoral councils, has initiated the Flame to Faith campaign that intends to raise spirits, funds and enrollment at Lourdes School.

Father Quang, native of the small town of DaNang in Vietnam, said he values Catholic education, "Because I am a product of it."

Drawing from his history of growing up in a war-torn country with many hardships to bear and overcome, Father Quang was struck by the sacrifices made by his parents to pay for his Catholic schooling even when it came to the point of selling their wedding rings to cover his tuition. When celebrating his parents' 50th wedding anniversary Mass along with his 10th anniversary of being a priest, he gave his parents back a new set of wedding rings as a token of his gratitude not only for his life, but for the immense gift they endowed him in the Catholic formation he received.

No doubt the seeds of vocations are nurtured in Catholic schools and for Lourdes, this is more than evident. The school prides itself on educating several priests now serving or who have served in the Denver Archdiocese. Father Quang hopes the school continues to serve the Church in this great way and he knows there's only one way to do that.

"The bottom line," said Father Quang, "is that Christ is the center of Lourdes."

These students, receiving Christ in their formation at school, he added, "will pass the flame of faith on to many generations to come."