

New Catholic School Opens in Newport

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Child Development Center and Junior High At Former St. Stephens

NEWPORT - A new chapter in Catholic education began Tuesday as the former St. Stephen's Parochial School was reopened as the Holy Trinity Junior High School and Child Development Center after undergoing a \$3.8 million renovation.

The new school will offer sixth through eighth grades, a preschool, a day-care service for children ages 6 weeks to 5 years, as well as provide after-school care for the parish's elementary schools.

The week before the move, the parish's schools were closed so students, teachers, administrators and parents could move materials into the new building. The old location, near the Newport Plaza, will be demolished for the expanding shopping area. For school secretary Pat Lauer, it's a bit of a homecoming. She worked in the school for 28 years and lives just around the corner. Both of her sons attended the school.

"I credit both my boys' success to their Catholic education," she said. Her eldest son, David, now manages an Arby's restaurant while her youngest son, Douglas, was ordained in 1994 and is now the diocesan priest of St. Edwards in Cynthiana.

Community Education

Peggy Piccola, development coordinator for the school, feels the school can play an important role in the community.

"We are in a unique position to offer education not only to families in the parishes but, due to our proximity, to children living in downtown Cincinnati or whose parents work in downtown," says Piccola. "It would solve a lot of problems for parents - we're just a couple of turns off I-471. Our Development Center and after-school programs together with our traditional schools make childcare and education easy."

The principal of the school, Sister Mary Ruth Luebbers, agrees, but thinks the school can also provide something more essential.

"Yes, the whole building is computer-networked, we'll have televisions in each classroom and a new gymnasium," she says. "But our primary goal is to keep the faith alive in the cities."

New and Improved

The building's renovation took about two years to complete. Randy Neises, a contractor on the project and the chairman of the school board and the building committee, is proud of the level of work accomplished and the amenities now available to the students.

"We completely redid the HVAC and electrical," says Neises. "The students now have a new art room with a kiln for pottery, a fully functioning science laboratory, and a state-of-the-art computer lab. A new gymnasium will be completed soon. We are as good as any school in Northern Kentucky."

Given the building's history and its place in Newport's East Row Historic District, care was taken to preserve as much of its architectural integrity as possible. Though the floor plan was reconfigured to allow for the maximum number of classrooms, the stained glass windows were preserved. Unfortunately, the budget didn't accommodate incorporating the ornate ceiling of the former auditorium into the school. But it was left intact for use in possible future renovations.

With so many school mergers between the parishes within the Diocese of Covington, many parents feared a slow closing down of Catholic schools in the area. The Rev. Rick Bolte, parish priest for Holy Spirit Church across the street from the school, bristled at



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SCHOOL'S IN: St. Stephen's Parochial School has been renovated into the new Holy Trinity Junior High School.

that notion.

"This opening and renovation is a diocese commitment-led by Bishop (Roger) Foys-to keeping a school in Newport, Bellevue, and Dayton," says Bolte. "We are here to stay. With the remodeling we have everything we need to offer our students a top-notch education and facilities."

Change Is Constant

The opening of Holy Trinity is the latest in a long line of changes for the parish. The building was originally built in 1912, as St. Stephen's High School. Later, when the high school moved to the Immaculata Building at Fifth and Columbia streets, it became St. Stephen's Elementary School. In 1982, the parishes of Newport merged and the school became an elementary school for students throughout Newport. In the latest round of mergers that brought the parishes of Newport, Bellevue and Dayton together, the school was closed for renovation. Elementary school students were moved permanently to the new Holy Trinity Elementary in Bellevue, while the junior high school students were temporarily housed in the old elementary school of St. Francis. On Feb. 27, Bolte will conduct the first Mass for Holy Trinity Junior High School.

After all the reshuffling, the parish is closer to reaching the ultimate goal, according to Neises: "To keep a strong, catholic school presence in Newport, Bellevue, and Dayton."

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