



Spring
2015

Alumni and Friends Newsletter

Gesu Grows from Rural Outpost to Urban Beacon

By Katie Kerwin

At 5 a.m. on Aug. 28, 1925, five Immaculate Heart of Mary nuns—Mother Lucilla and Sisters Mary Claude, Eleanor, Muriel and Rose Ethel—left St. Boniface Convent in Detroit and took what they described as “a long and delightful ride through city and country” to the new Gesu School, two miles outside the city limits.

The sisters considered their new posting to be a true “pioneer existence,” according to a senior thesis about Gesu written by parishioner Helen Marie Berg, whose sources included the *Gesu Convent Chronicles*.

On Sept. 14, the IHMs opened the doors to 200 students for the first day of classes at the newly built school. The children, bearing lunch pails, trooped across clover fields to the Spanish Mission-style edifice. There were no sidewalks, so they crossed wooden planks to enter the building. New pastor Father Justin De La Grange said the Mass that day.

The school had opened barely three years after Rev. John P. McNichols S.J., celebrated the first Mass for 25 congregants at the Gesu mission church in a



Construction of Gesu School in 1925

converted farmhouse. Once the school was built, the parish began holding Mass in the basement chapel.

It was all part of the broader vision of Fr. McNichols, president of the University of Detroit and Gesu’s first pastor. U. of D. was then confined to a small downtown campus, but in 1921, the Jesuits acquired a large tract of land east of Livernois and south of Six Mile Road, the current site of University of Detroit Mercy. Fr. McNichols knew the sprawling new campus would need a parish to accompany it.

But Gesu School was the first permanent building in the grand plan. Parishioners held card parties, sales and other fundraisers to pay for the land north of Six Mile (now McNichols) between Quincy



Gesu School graduating class of 1927

For more about Gesu School’s 90th anniversary issue, see the schedule of events (Page 2), plus interviews with three of the school’s early students: Frances Prucha Vorys (Page 3), James Ignatius Butler (Page 4); retired Congressman John D. Dingell (Page 8).

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Gesu Plans Events To Celebrate School's 90th Anniversary



2015 marks Gesu School's 90th anniversary. To celebrate this milestone, the school is planning a number of activities to which Gesu School alumni and friends are invited.

Educating Detroit's Future™

Family Birthday Party: May 29

Gesu will be hosting school families, friends and parishioners in the community from about noon to 3 p.m.. There will be games for the children and an opportunity for families, friends and parishioners to enjoy a special party together.

Alumni and Class Reunion Weekend: July 31-August 2, 2015

Friday, July 31: A happy hour gathering for alumni.

Saturday, Aug. 1: A basketball game and tournament in the school's gymnasium, as well as a family picnic in the school park and parking lot from noon to 4 p.m.

Sunday, Aug. 2: A class reunion Mass in Gesu Church at 10:30 a.m., followed by brunch in the school at approximately 12:30 p.m. All Alumni are invited and welcome.

Special recognition will be given to the 25th reunion class (1990), 50th reunion class (1965) and 75th reunion class (1940).

We also will be celebrating, in particular, the other five-year anniversaries: Class of 2010 (5th year reunion); Class of 2005 (10th year reunion); Class of 2000 (15th year reunion); Class of 1995 (20th year reunion); Class of 1985 (30th year reunion); Class of 1980 (35th year reunion); Class of 1975 (40th year reunion); Class of 1970 (45th year reunion); Class of 1960 (55th year reunion); Class of 1955 (60th year reunion); Class of 1950 (65th year reunion); Class of 1945 (70th year reunion).

Gesu School Gala: Saturday, Oct. 24, 2015

The gala, featuring live music from the Original Vandellas, will be held in the newly renovated ballroom on the McNichols Campus at the University of Detroit Mercy. The event will honor several individuals with the Spirit of Gesu School award.

Please watch your mail, email, Facebook and Gesu School's website for more information. For more details, please contact Anita Sevier, Gesu School's Outreach Coordinator at Sevier.a@gesudetroit.org or 313-863-4677.

THE ENGAGING FRAN VORYS RELIVES MEMORIES OF GESU IN THE 1930'S

By M.B. Dillon

Spend some time talking with the vivacious Frances Prucha Vorys, 88 years young, and she'll tell you she is still reaping the benefits of her Gesu education.

"We were taught by the IHM nuns at Gesu, and my spelling to this day is unbelievable. I tell everyone I had it pounded into me," said the Holland, MI, resident. "And no one can question my math."

The 1940 graduate was physically fit in grade school, and stayed that way. "I never weighed over 90 pounds in my life," she said. The Prucha kids walked a half-mile to Gesu from their home at 16820 Welland, now called San Juan, which is west of Livernois. They made the walk four times a day, including the trip home for lunch.

"We loved to go ice skating, and we'd walk to the ice rink about three miles away at Palmer Park, carrying our skates. There were no buses," said Fran. "If we wanted to go somewhere, we walked."

Frances, born on Dec. 21, 1926, was the third of four children. Her sister, Henrietta and brother Stephen James are now deceased. Fran talks often by phone with her brother Charles, who lives in Texas.

"My dad's name was Francis; he was from St. Benedict's in Highland Park. My mom, Lenore Butler, grew up on a farm near Sarnia in Ontario, Canada," said Fran. "My Dad was Catholic, but my Mom wasn't. On their 25th wedding anniversary, she converted to Catholicism. That was her gift to him."

Until Gesu Church was built in 1935, Mass was celebrated in the school basement. The priest didn't have much of a singing voice, she recalled. "So my Dad used to stand behind the stovepipe near the altar and do the sung parts of the Mass for him. Back then, the priest faced the altar, not the congregation, and it worked out fine."

Fran still knows the words to hymns she sang as a child, including the ones in Latin."

Prized friendships took root and grew at Gesu. "I

remember a girlfriend named Kathleen Scallen; her father was a judge. Other friends of mine were Judy Van Atter and Patricia Raitz." Fran said. "Sister Marie Michaela was principal for a few years when I was there." The parish was full of big families, such as the Reillys and the Clarks, both with seven kids.

"We all lived through the Depression, but I had no idea I was poor," said Fran, who remembers missing lots of school after she contracted scarlet fever.



Frances Prucha Vorys

"My mother often cooked hasenpfeffer (rabbit stew)," Fran recalled. "I wouldn't eat it, so my mom always made me macaroni and cheese," which remains her favorite comfort food to this day.

Fran marveled that her dad managed to pay the family's bills plus tuition for

four on a mechanic's salary. "I don't know how he did it," she said. "When he started working at the Ford plant in Highland Park, my dad earned 50 cents an hour. Later he moved on to General Motors. By the time he retired, he was a master mechanic, a big job."

For most of high school, she and her sister took the bus downtown to Girls Catholic Central." Fran missed a year of high school because of a ruptured appendix.

"I didn't go on to college. My Dad couldn't afford it. He said the boys will be educated and the girls would marry well," Fran said. For a while, she dated Art Houtteman, pitcher for the Detroit Tigers.

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James Ignatius Butler: Embraced from Birth by Gesu

By M.B. Dillon

On July 29, 1922 when Winifred Kennedy Butler realized her firstborn was well on the way, she walked from her LaSalle St. home to Fenkell, boarded the



Young Jim Butler

streetcar to W. Grand Boulevard, then walked to 14th St. and admitted herself to Detroit's Providence Hospital.

"That's what happened the day I was born," said Jim Butler, 92, of Plymouth. "My dad was a worker at Ford's—I think at the Highland Park plant—in the days

when there were no unions and not very many benefits for the workers. And of course we didn't have an automobile."

One of the Butler family's first visitors at the hospital was Father John P. McNichols, S.J., pastor of the newly established Gesu mission church. He asked the Butlers what they planned to call their new son. "My mother told him I was going to be named Pierce, after my father," said Jim. Fr. McNichols said, 'He is one of the first babies to be born in Gesu Parish; he should be named after the founder of the Jesuit Order, St. Ignatius Loyola.'

"I guess my mother was agreeable. She said, 'Well, Pierce Ignatius wouldn't sound too good, so we'll call him James Ignatius.'" Two years later, the Butlers got their Pierce. Jim's brother and only sibling, Pierce Joseph, Jr., was born July 7, 1924. He died in 2001 of complications from Parkinson's disease.

Winifred and Pierce Butler, who met in Detroit, had grown up in rural Ireland. Both left school at an early age to start working. "My mother may have gone to eighth grade, but I don't think my father did," said Jim. The Butlers had bigger plans for their sons.

Because Gesu School started at first grade, Jim and Pierce went to kindergarten at Fitzgerald Public School.

"My first-grade teacher at Gesu was Sister Rosalee, a short little person. First graders were almost as tall as she was. She was nice," Jim said of the IHM sister. "We used to play sports on the parking lot between the school and where they eventually built the church in the mid-1930s. Due north was the Sisters of Mary Reparatrix convent."

Jim remembers attending Mass in the basement of the school. "It was long and narrow, and the altar was a distant reality," said Jim. "The new church cut off some of our playground, but it was like a cathedral. It was a real treat to be able to go to Mass at a new church like that." As a University of Detroit student years later, Jim often returned to Gesu for Mass.

Jim wanted to be an altar boy. "I was training to be an altar server when my sixth grade teacher, Sr. Seraphia, caught me either writing on the blackboard or throwing erasers around," Jim said. That was the end of his altar boy hopes—at least for then. "I finally became an altar server after I got into military service" during World War II, he said.

Students received a good education at Gesu, said Jim. "I remember the IHM sisters teaching us the Palmer script way to write letters correctly and neatly. And I used to enjoy geography classes. I got the reading and writing down pretty good, too."

Catholic education came at a price during the Great Depression of the 1930s. "My dad got laid off at Ford and he also got pneumonia back then," said Jim. "When my brother and I were in school, our only income was what my mom was able to get from working at Gesu as a janitress, emptying wastebaskets and cleaning blackboards," he recalled. "The sisters were good to give my mother work and pay her for it."

Gesu in those days was a *Who's Who* of local and national luminaries. The Holy Name Society in the parish frequently had Communion breakfasts, Jim said. "My dad was an usher, and he took me to some of those." The group brought in prominent speakers, not all of them parishioners. "I remember hearing

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Jim Butler

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Frank Murphy, mayor of Detroit and later governor of Michigan and a U.S. Supreme Court justice,” he said. “Another great speaker was Raymond Kelly, corporation counsel for the City of Detroit and commander in chief of the American Legion.

But some of the big names were right down the pew on Sunday. “Tommy Dorais, son of Gus Dorais (of Notre Dame/University of Detroit/Detroit Lions football fame,) was in my class,” Jim remembered. “So was Harry Heilmann, Jr.” His dad, Harry Heilmann, played baseball for the Detroit Tigers and later became a radio announcer for the team.

The Demerys, owners of Demery’s Department Store, were parishioners also. “I remember my dad taking me down to Demery’s on Woodward and Milwaukee to buy a suit for First Communion,” said Jim.

Jim recalled road trips he took as a Gesu student. “I remember the sisters taking us to the Bonstelle Theater to see a play. They went beyond the classroom to make sure we received a well-rounded education.”

“They used to bus us down Livernois toward Grand River to a public school on American St. for phys. ed.,” said Jim. “We did have a football team that played in the C.Y.O. League. To practice, they used to have to go across McNichols to a field just north of the University of Detroit stadium, which was called Dinan Field.” It was named for the Dinan family, major U. of D. donors who became Jim’s lifelong friends.

Jim had to leave Gesu after seventh grade. “Through my dad’s Irish connections downtown, he was able to get a job as a guard at the Detroit House of Corrections in Plymouth, so we moved out there,” he said. “I was really disappointed. I was looking forward to completing eighth grade and going to U of D High.”

Instead Jim graduated from Plymouth High School and enrolled at the University of Detroit to study accounting in the fall of 1942. When his draft number came up during the war, he joined the Navy’s Pre-Officer Training School rather than wait to be drafted into the Army.

In early 1955, life came full circle. Jim’s brother Pierce and his new wife Ruth Ann happened to be living in the same house on Quincy where the Butlers had moved shortly after Jim was born. “Pierce and his friend Leo Pigott had been roommates at U of D. I guess they got together and decided Leo’s sister Mary and I should meet each other. Pierce and Ruth Ann invited Mary and me to dinner and the story went on from there. I guess we clicked.”

Jim married Mary Louise Pigott in November 1955. The Butlers had five children: Peter, Maureen, Kathleen, Eileen and Colleen, and five grandchildren. Mary died in the summer of 2013. She was buried from Redford’s St. Hilary Catholic Church, where the Butlers were active parishioners throughout their married life.

Jim retired after 45 years working in a variety of clerical positions. In 1996, he was named grand marshal of Detroit’s St. Patrick’s Parade in recognition of his decades of service with Irish-American organizations. Jim served several terms as Sir Knight of the Knights of Equity Detroit chapter. He also was elected to the K. of E.’s highest national office, serving as Supreme Sir Knight. While Jim’s auburn hair has long been white, the parade remains a high holy day for the patriarch of the Butler clan. As he relished this year’s parade from his usual spot on Michigan Avenue, resplendent in his grand marshal’s sash and surrounded by family and friends, more than 60 people asked to be photographed with Jim.

No doubt Winifred and Pierce, Father McNichols and Sister Seraphia—and maybe even St. Ignatius himself—would be happy to see that at age 92, James Ignatius Butler remains a strong, practicing Catholic and family man, a few tossed erasers notwithstanding.



Jim Butler at the St Patrick's Day Parade in Detroit

Gesu, U-D Mercy, Marygrove

Celebrate Ongoing Partnership

By M.B. Dillon

Something historic happened in the Gesu Catholic School gymnasium on April 21. As part of Gesu School's 90th anniversary celebration, the school's longtime collaboration with University of Detroit Mercy and Marygrove College was officially recognized.

Setting the tone was Gesu Music Director Carl Clendenning at the piano, as guests arrived. Gesu Principal Christa Laurin welcomed dignitaries and introduced them to the students, staff, parents and guests who filled the bleachers. UDM and Marygrove students also took part in the festivities.

"Gesu has enjoyed a "longstanding, very exciting relationship" with UDM and Marygrove," Mrs. Laurin said. "We intend to keep it going."

The program began with prayers from seventh graders, a performance by Gesu's Preschool Dancers and remarks from pastor Father Robert Scullin, S.J.

Father Scullin traced the history of "three great institutions, so close to each other" dating to the 1920's. Gesu students can be proud that over the decades, a lot of leaders were educated at this school. "We want that to continue," the pastor said.

Mrs. Laurin, Fr. Scullin, Marygrove President Dr. David Fike and UDM President Dr. Antoine Garibaldi signed a banner-sized Proclamation of Collaboration. The document declares that the three institutions "share a special bond through their affiliations with the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary,

the Religious Sisters of Mercy and the Society of Jesus."

The proclamation also notes that the schools are united with those religious orders in their dedication, respectively, to "promoting a deep faith, courageous spirit and action for justice... education for women and the poor... and efforts to form young women and



(From left to right) Dr. Antoine Garibaldi, Dr. David Fike, Mrs. Christa Laurin and Fr. Robert Scullin display the Proclamation of Collaboration.

men for others, all for the greater glory of God."

"It is quite moving to be part of this community; and not just this community of our shared Catholic faith," said Dr. Fike. "We also share a belief in the bright future of this neighborhood, and of this city." He noted that Marygrove has long welcomed Gesu to participate in drama productions and in summer and weekend enrichment programs.

Dr. Garibaldi also vowed that the partnership will continue. He cited various programs that allow Gesu students to work side by side with students from the university's schools of architecture, physician assistance, and education.

Greg Cascione, consultant and parishioner at Gesu, said there is no other school in the state that has

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Gesu's preschool dance troupe entertained the audience at the alliance celebration.

Gesu, U-D Mercy, Marygrove Reaffirm Ties

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exposure to two neighboring world-class universities. "It is an extraordinary collaboration for Gesu students," he said. "They are really able to interact with college students and faculty, and it creates a very special educational environment."

Gesu students know exactly what he's talking about. Eighth grader Christoffer Hardaway said the college students have helped him in the classroom. "We got to go to UDM on Tech Day, and they taught us about technology. I won a poetry contest and my poem about Dr. Martin Luther King was on display in Calihan Hall," Christoffer said.

Gesu third grader students commented that they love their school, and the "extras" at Gesu like soccer, dance, scouts, basketball, baseball and softball to which UDM and Marygrove contribute.

"I like the nice things the college students do," said one student. Another added that student teachers and tutors "help us read." and "They play with us after school and help us with our homework."

The arrangement also benefits the college students. Brennen Moloney, a UDM education major from St. Clair, Mich., said that student teaching at Gesu has been an invaluable experience. "I have learned a lot about my philosophy overall and my goals of going into education. I've gained firsthand experience with giving lessons as well."

Gesu students visit Marygrove, too, said Jane Hammang-Buhl, the retired vice president of academic affairs. "Our 'Gentlemen's Roundtable' mentoring program is exclusively for eighth grade males from Gesu. They shadow Marygrove students studying business, criminal justice, and biology," among other disciplines. "This was an idea that came from the kids," she said.

Gesu Associate Pastor Father Nathan Wendt, S.J., credits the unusual alliance for helping grade schoolers to set big goals. "Gesu students are exposed to college from an early age," he said. "Looking to the future, they know college is accessible and can be a reality."

All three institutions are dedicated to aiding Detroit's recovery. "We see ourselves as part of Detroit's revitalization," said Father Scullin. "We want to propel Gesu forward so we can have an even greater impact."

Retired Congressman Credits Gesu with “Superb” Education

By M.B. Dillon

Retired Congressman John D. Dingell, Jr., longest-serving member of the U.S. House of Representatives in history, is not surprised that Gesu School is still educating children three-quarters of a century after he graduated.

“Remember, it’s the dedicated people of Gesu who do it,” said Dingell, 88, during a recent interview in his Dearborn office. “I was taught at Gesu by the IHM nuns, who are superb educators. I still maintain a good relationship with them. I would recommend Gesu and a Catholic education to families in Detroit now.”

Dingell was born on July 8, 1926 in Colorado Springs, Colo., where the family was living temporarily because of his father’s health. “My family moved back to Detroit and into Gesu parish when I was two years old,” recalled Dingell, the oldest of John and Grace Dingell’s three children. “Our family home was built by Moritz Kahn, a famous architect and a relative of Carl Levin,” one of Michigan’s U.S. senators.

John Dingell, Sr., whose previous jobs included printer at the Detroit Free Press, was elected to Congress in 1932 and went on to serve 12 terms. “They didn’t pay a lot of money to members of Congress then—not enough for plane tickets—so we went with Dad,” said Dingell. “When I wasn’t at Gesu, I was at St. Patrick’s Elementary, run by the Sisters of Notre Dame in Washington D.C.”

At Gesu, Dingell remembered “40 kids in a class and very few lay teachers” during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Two nuns come to mind as

favorites: Sister Marie Stella, and Sister Mary Lorenza, who was “a saint,” he said.

The Dingells lived on Pennington, about six blocks west of Livernois and three blocks north of McNichols. “I walked to school and carried a lunch bucket,” he said. “School was a business. You didn’t mess around. My favorite part of the day was recess.”

Dingell recalled the advantages of attending a school just across the street from the University of Detroit: “We would get our educational benefits from both places.” Not to mention the proximity of the U of D Stadium. “Most people don’t realize it, but that was where the Lions played.”

The alumnus remembers some “firsts.” He made his first appearance on the House floor at the age of 6, the year his father was elected. “Dad and I attended the first Mass in the new Gesu Church in the mid-1930’s. It was, and still is, a beautiful church,” he said. “I used to usher at 7 o’clock Mass.”

Dingell admitted he wasn’t a daily regular at church. “Frankly, I thought I needed to sleep more than go to Mass,” he said. Besides, “if you went to Mass, you fasted from midnight on if you wanted to receive Holy Communion.”

But he did like his job as a safety patrol boy. “I wore a white belt, and helped kids cross the intersection at McNichols and Birchcrest, just west of the school. Nobody ever got hurt,” he said. Who knew then that for decades the future Congressman John Dingell, Jr. would watch out for the same constituency in the nation’s capital?

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John Dingell Jr. (left) is sworn into the U.S. House of Representatives by Speaker Sam Rayburn in 1955.

John Dingell

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Dingell's family had changed its surname from Dzieglewicz well before John Jr. needed to fit his name on a bumper sticker. But he and his father remained very proud of their Polish ancestry. Not to mention his maternal heritage. Dingell said, "My mom's maiden name was Bigler. She was Scotch-Irish, English and Swiss, and she converted to Catholicism."

His brother James, five years younger than John, also attended Gesu although their sister Jule did not. "Dad was sick most of his life, so I was the big brother and took care of my brother and my sister," Dingell said. During the Great Depression of his childhood, he noted, "there was no Social Security and no welfare. People had a very, very difficult time making ends meet. Mother and Dad had to work very hard. People had a terrible time, but people were happy."

"My mother had to stuff newspaper in her shoes," he recalled, because there was no money for new soles. "But she didn't view herself as poor. Families came together and took care of all their members. We gave them a square meal and a place to sleep overnight," he said. "People did the things that needed to be done to help each other."

Dingell remembers Gesu using plenty of ingenuity to keep the doors open. "We had turkey raffles; whatever it took," Dingell said. "The standard of living has gone up so much from those days.

His teenage years took Dingell to U of D Jesuit High School and Georgetown Preparatory School when the family was in D.C. He served as a page in the House of Representatives from 1938 to 1943 and was on the floor when President Franklin Roosevelt gave his famous "Day of Infamy" speech after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Dingell joined the U.S. Army at age 18. After serving in World War II, he returned to earn bachelor's and law degrees at Georgetown University. Dingell worked as a forest ranger, a private-practice lawyer, a



Dingell with President John F. Kennedy Jr.

Congressional staffer and assistant prosecuting attorney for Wayne County until John Dingell Sr. died in 1955. John Jr. won his father's seat in a special election later that year.

During his 29 succeeding terms in

Congress, six-foot-three "Big John" Dingell wielded power as chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee known for speaking his mind. He has said his most important vote was in support of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, a decision Dingell feared might cost him his seat in the next election.



Dingell at his retirement in January

The Michigan Congressman adopted his father's crusade for national healthcare, a goal that was finally realized in 2010 when the Affordable Care Act was signed into law. The avid hunter, he also championed wildlife protection, and stricter standards for clean air and water. Dingell was also a staunch supporter of the U.S. auto industry and its workers.

Last year Barack Obama awarded the Gesu alumnus the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Dingell, who has four children—Jennifer, John, Christopher and Jeanne—from his first marriage, wed Deborah Ann Insley in 1981. After he announced in February 2014 that he intended to retire, Debbie Dingell was elected to his 12th District Congressional seat. In January the "Dean" of the House retired after serving more than 59 years.

John Dingell has graciously agreed to be chairperson of Gesu school's 90th birthday Gala on October 24, 2015.

CLASS NOTES

Henry Chambers '55: Retired professor enjoying California sunshine!

Peggy Wescott '59: I spent 8 wonderful years at Gesu (1950-1959) and loved my years there.

Jim Knaus '60: Fr. Bob Scullin (and staff), Keep up your excellent work!

James Gallagher '60: Classmate of (Gesu Pastor Father) Bob Scullin at U of D High.

Sue Skibley '65: I got such a kick out of the front-page story in the last newsletter about the Vincents, who were my next-door neighbors on Parkside. My brothers and I have very fond memories of Gesu.

Kathy Witkowski-Jacobs '72: I love attending our Gesu reunions, Mass the next day and the tour of our

beloved Gesu school. Gesu is always in my prayers. I am so thankful that I went to Gesu School K-8.

BrIDGET Kramer '73: This donation is on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Richard L. Kramer. Our family lived in the parish for many years and all graduated from Gesu.

Robert Toohey '74: Go Giants!

Dennis Rodriguez '76: I would like to make this donation in the name of Gesu teacher, Judy Kuzniar. I believe you are lucky to have her as a teacher.

Suzanne Tanguay '77: I have so many fond memories of Gesu. After Mercy H.S., I went on to earn chemistry degrees at Albion College (B.A) and University of Michigan (M.S. and Ph.D.) I've worked in R&D at Procter & Gamble since 1991.

Fran Vorys

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But he couldn't hold a candle to Harry Vorys, a student at Highland Park Junior College, whom Fran met on a blind date. "I guess it was love at first sight. We went together for four years. We decided where we were going, and that we were going to make it last. On Sept. 30, 1950, I married the right man. It was worth the wait. He was the joy in my life."

As newlyweds, Fran and her husband rented an apartment near Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit. Wearing a hat, high heels and white gloves, Fran rode the bus to the Fisher and Madison theaters, where she was assistant manager. Fran later worked for an attorney in the General Motors building for 16 years.

The childless couple made education a high priority. A favorite cause was—and still is—Harry's alma mater, St. John's Northwestern Military Academy in Wisconsin, where he was a trustee for 40 years.

Fran belonged to the South Oakland County Suburbanettes, a chapter of the Sweet Adelines, and chaired its international convention in Detroit in the 1960s.

When Harry's job took the two to Kalamazoo,

Fran volunteered there. While on the board of the Kalamazoo Institute of Art, she raised money to buy "some wonderful art work," Fran said. Later she was president of the city's Friends of the Art Center.

In 1985, the couple moved to Saugatuck, where they built a three-story home on a small, wooded lot with a magnificent view of Kalamazoo Lake.

Fran and Harry were avid skiers and sailors. While many people went south on winter vacations, they'd ski at Vail and Aspen. Harry competed in the Port Huron-to-Mackinac races. She'd drive up to meet him, so they could sail their 40-foot sailboat back home.

Sadly, Harry died in 2007. Fran said she feels blessed to have a dear friend, Charles Harthy, in her life now. "I joke that I lost my first heart, but I gained another one," she said. "I'm glad God sent him to me."

It lightens Fran's heart to know that Gesu, 90 years strong, is still dedicated to educating the youth of Detroit. She'd like to ask Detroiters now, "Are you happy with your school? Think about sending your children to Gesu. It worked for me."

Gesu School History

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and Oak Drive. Spring bazaars in 1924 and 1925 helped cover construction costs.

Even before the current Gesu Church was dedicated in 1935, the parish had already expanded the school twice as it became one of the fastest growing Catholic elementary schools in Detroit. By 1930, Gesu had about 950 students and 21 teachers, including six lay instructors. It had also become the observation school for education students at the IHM's nearby Marygrove College, and the archdiocese used Gesu as a pilot school for new academic programs.

During World War II, part of the school served as a



The school's first group of First Communicants in 1926



Vocational playlet, November 1959 (above); May procession, 1961 (below)



mess hall for soldiers quartered at U. of D. The last expansion of the building was completed in 1953 with the addition of a gymnasium, which freed up space for a first kindergarten. The library was created in 1961.

Gesu's Board of Education was appointed in 1964—the first such body in the Archdiocese of Detroit.

Gesu reached peak enrollment of roughly 1,500 students in 1968 as Baby Boomers packed its 31 classrooms. More Catholic parents were sending their children to parochial schools instead of public ones. Some classrooms housed more than 40 students. The space shortage was so acute that for three years, Gesu third-grade classes were held in rented space at the recently closed St. John Vianney School. Gesu was the largest Catholic elementary school in the diocese until the mid-1970s.

Today, Gesu School again has about 200 students, although the faculty no longer includes any nuns. As its 90th anniversary approaches, the school remains a vibrant center of Catholic education and a symbol of the vitality of northwest Detroit.



Gesu's 2015 May students of the month

Gesu Catholic School
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Gesu School's Annual Fund Needs Your Support

Gifts to Gesu's Annual Fund help the school continue to provide students with an outstanding educational experience. The Annual Fund plays a crucial role in maintaining Gesu School's excellence and in helping families who need financial assistance. Gesu School's fiscal year ends June 30, so if you haven't made your annual gift yet, please do so today. The school is grateful for all gifts, no matter the size. For further information, please visit our website at gesuschool.udmercy.edu. Thank you.

Have We Made A Mistake?

Have we made an error in your name or address? We apologize. Please help us correct any mistakes by calling the school, sending a note or emailing the correct information to Anita Sevier at: sevier.a@gesudetroit.org. We want to be accurate and we thank you for your support.

