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Holy Family Catholic Academy Trains Peers in Inquiry-Based Learning

Northwest Suburbs Newest Catholic School Helping to Shape the Future of Education

*“We need to prepare students for their future, not our past,” Dr. Gretchen Ludwig,
Principal, Holy Family Catholic Academy*

Holy Family opens 2010-2011 Academic Year with Continued Innovation and Growth

(Inverness, IL) – During early August when many teachers, parents and children were still enjoying summer vacation, Holy Family Catholic Academy faculty members in Inverness, Illinois, were training teachers from schools around Chicagoland about inquiry learning.

Inquiry-based learning focuses on teaching students to master the subject matter, and then taking the learning process further by applying that knowledge to real-world issues and problems.

“It is clear that as adults our students will have jobs that are not even created today. As a result we need a totally different preparation for our students,” explains Dr. Gretchen Ludwig, Holy Family’s principal. “Many schools are using teaching methods that worked 5, 10 or 15 years ago, but those practices are no longer sufficient for preparing students for the demands of this century. Our students will be expected to access, organize, and analyze multiple sources of information, and work collaboratively with others to solve problems. We need to prepare students for their future, not our past. ”

Under the guidance of curriculum consultant, Dr. Emily Alford, the Academy has become a leader in implementing this 21st century curriculum. Now the school is actively sharing its knowledge with peer institutions.

This past spring, Dr. Alford and Holy Family staff met with Monsignor Ken Velo, President of Big Shoulders Fund, a non-profit organization that provides financial support to Chicago’s neediest inner city Catholic schools.

“When Holy Family approached me, I assumed they were looking into fund raising efforts for their school,” says Velo. “When I realized they were offering to share their 21st century curriculum with struggling inner city schools I was amazed. I’ve been familiar with the innovation of Holy Family Parish and now I see that the Academy shares this same culture.”

With more than 250 schools in Chicago and surrounding Cook and Lake counties, Sr. Mary Paul McCaughey, Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Archdiocese of Chicago, is responsible for the largest private school system in the United States. She also enthusiastically supports Holy Family's leadership and innovation.

"Our Catholic schools must be preeminent places of faith and scholarship," says Sr. Mary Paul. "Implementing Holy Family's holistic approach to education affirms the research, technology, and critical thinking that must form the new approach for true academic excellence."

To date, teachers from 20 schools have been trained by Dr. Alford and members of the Holy Family faculty. These schools not only receive training on instructional technique, but Holy Family is also sharing science and social studies inquiry learning units that have been created by their faculty using 21st century skills. Additional schools are also scheduled to participate.

Along with elementary and middle school, inquiry learning is also applicable to high school students and educators. St. Gregory the Great High School on Chicago's far north side has adopted the Holy Family model for this school year.

"I've seen such a positive spark and energy with the teachers and students at Holy Family Academy," says Sister Mary Paul. "The students are so engaged that real work of the heart and mind can begin. It is cutting edge work in a climate of service. Isn't this what we want for all of our young people?"

Service to others and social justice are critical components of the culture at Holy Family Academy and have been woven into its innovative curriculum. According to Dr. Ludwig, this is a natural outgrowth of inquiry-based learning.

"We believe that extending academic content to include service learning is a cornerstone of our mission," she adds. "This seamless look at learning creates a distinctly Catholic-Christian environment that not only creates life-long learners, but promotes life-long empathy and responsibility to the service of others."

Located in Inverness, Illinois, Holy Family Catholic Academy continues to strive to be a leader in providing innovative and enriching educational experiences for students in preschool through eighth grade. Holy Family opened nine years ago with preschool and elementary programs. A middle school was added in 2007. Today, the school serves nearly 400 students. For more information on Holy Family Catholic Academy, visit holyfamilycatholicacademy.net, email hrooney@holyfamilyparish.org or call 847.907.3461.