

Key for Developing the Whole Child

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With the rise of remote learning and the announcement that schools would be closed for the remainder of the academic year, Milwaukee archdiocesan Catholic schools are digging deep to provide students of all ages the tools they need to meet their academic, spiritual and developmental milestones.

Just three days after schools closed due to COVID-19, Waukesha Catholic Schools, comprised of St. William campus, grades K3, K4 and K5; St. Mary's campus, grades 1-5; and St. Joseph Campus, grades 6-8, were learning in virtual classrooms.

According to Meghan Gorzalski, director of admissions and marketing, students begin each virtual school day with morning announcements, the Pledge of Allegiance and morning prayer with one of the three school administrators.

“Our parish priests have made videos for the students, read stories to them and participated in the production of supportive videos with the faculty and staff to remind them that they are here,” she said. “We will host a virtual retreat for our fifth graders the first week of June.”

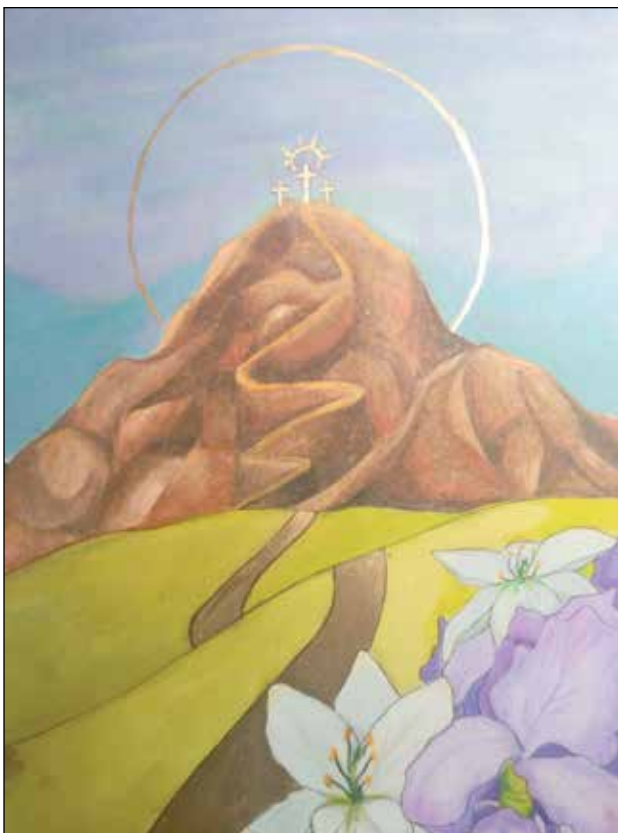
Each morning before virtual school begins, Ellen Knippel, principal of St. Anthony on the Lake Elementary School in Pewaukee, meets with the teachers via Zoom to pray together and learn how each one is doing under the new online teaching modality.

“The teachers have a virtual class meeting at 9 a.m. with their students,” she said, adding, “We are fortunate that a few years ago our school committee made the decision that every student in our school would have some type of device. Those in first through eighth grade use Chromebooks and K4 and K5 have iPads.”

Students meet with teachers through a Google platform at least twice a day in addition to the morning meeting, and teachers hold virtual office hours from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and are available for conferences and phone calls with parents.

“Fr. Tony Zimmer, our pastor, holds virtual Mass for students every Wednesday morning,” said Knippel. “Very often, classes ‘go to Mass’ together. He has often joined us for faculty prayer in the morning just to check in.”

In addition to academics, St. Anthony on the Lake teachers ensure the spiritual growth of their students through religious education classes and praying the



▲ This drawing of the resurrection of Jesus Christ was created by a student at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School. (Submitted photo)

rosary weekly with students. In all, 67 students in grades 3-5 prayed a rosary together via Zoom one week.

Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in West Milwaukee is committed to cura personalis, care for the whole person. According to Luke Sadowsky, marketing and communications coordinator, one of the ways the school shows its commitment during distance learning is through daily, 30-minute formation group meetings.

“Every student is assigned a grade level formation group with one to two teachers and staff members,” he explained. “Every person, student and staff, participates in formation groups. The program provides an opportunity for students to meet with adults in a small-group setting. The daily meetings are themed and help develop students’ abilities to be successful in an online learning environment and includes technology tutorials, wellness practices, and spiritual formation incorporating catechesis, Scripture, and Catholic Social Teaching.”

The light-hearted group time features videos with quizzes, challenges and shout-outs for achievements and

embodiment of CRJ values. The session concludes with prayers led by the campus minister, with some being submitted by students.

Students also receive email newsletters which combine catechesis Scripture reflections, daily Mass readings, student reflections and questions, and options for community service.

“We have weekly campus ministry prayer meetings via Google Meet for students focusing on different styles of prayer, such as the rosary, Lectio Divina and the Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus,” said Sadowsky. “Meetings are led by the campus minister and student volunteers and is time for general hangout and conversation after the prayer.”

To develop the whole child during distance learning, Milwaukee’s St. Joan Antida High School focused on engaging students in ways to live their faith virtually, beginning with Holy Week.

According to Lidia Sobierajski, associate director of development, the school’s theology chair created a Holy Week WebQuest for students to participate in.

“Our theology teachers have adapted curriculum so that students can understand how to use scripture to guide them in processing what goes on around them,” she said.

A scripture assignment from one class spotlighted caring for the sick and focused on four bible passages dealing with the topic: Romans 5:3-4, Proverbs 17:22, Revelation 21:4 and James 5:14-15.

“Our dean of student affairs produces daily prayer videos that are waiting in email for students and staff each morning,” said Sobierajski. “The prayers are often provided by our director of mission and ministry from the Sisters of Charity.”

In addition to daily prayers, food drives and virtual Masses, Milwaukee’s Pius XI High School continues to seek innovative and individualized approaches for spiritual growth, said Renee Lindsey, English department chair.

“Our principal, Mark Ostap has recorded a weekly morning prayer which has come to serve as a reminder of our connectedness and shared humanity,” she said. “Our campus ministry faculty and Pius students traveled all around the greater Milwaukee area blessing homes of Pius family and alumni as a bulwark of fellowship and solidarity.”