

## **CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF ST. JOHN BERCHMANS SCHOOL**

### **A CENTURY AGO**

St. John Berchmans School began on September 3, 1907 when four Dominican Sisters of St. Catharine welcomed 62 children to the new school. The first school was just two classrooms located on the first floor of a wood frame building east of the current church and rectory. To avoid crowded conditions, the school moved to the church hall on September 23, 1907 with the completion of five classrooms. The school remained in the church hall for the next 18 years; a separate, permanent school building could not be constructed until the construction costs for the church and rectory had been paid.

Before getting into a greater discussion of the school history, we need to take a few steps back and briefly discuss the establishment of St. John Berchmans Parish which substantially affected the development of the school.

The parish was originally established as a national parish for Chicago's Belgian community. In 1905, Archbishop James E. Quigley asked Fr. John B. De Schryver, S.J., an educator at St. Ignatius College, now known as St. Ignatius College Prep, to organize our parish. Fr. De Schryver was born in Belgium and also spoke French and Flemish. Not surprisingly, this Belgian Jesuit priest chose a Belgian Jesuit saint as the new parish's patron. John Berchmans lived from 1599 to 1621, dying in Rome at the age of 22 while studying for the priesthood in the Society of Jesus. He is the patron saint of young people, students, and altar servers. Though he longed to become a missionary, John Berchmans died before he could attain his goal. His life presents an example of how sainthood can be achieved in the routines of ordinary life.

In addition to his religious duties as Pastor, one of Fr. De Schryver's primary activities was fund-raising. He, along with prominent Belgian-American laymen, went house to house within Chicago's Belgian community seeking the necessary funds for the construction of the church and rectory. Fr. De Schryver's stay as Pastor was, however, limited to just one year, as he was called back in 1906 to teach Latin and French at St. Ignatius College.

To succeed Fr. De Schryver, Archbishop Quigley invited a Belgian missionary working in Nebraska, Father Julius De Vos, to take over as Pastor. Fr. De Vos arrived on December 1, 1906 and stayed for twenty-one years, overseeing the completion of the church, the Logan school building, the convent, and the rectory. A listing of all the Pastors who served at St. John Berchmans is attached to this history.

### **A CALL TO THE DOMINICAN SISTERS OF ST. CATHARINE**

One of Fr. De Vos' most important decisions was to invite the Dominican Sisters of St. Catharine of Siena, headquartered near Louisville, Kentucky in the town of Springfield, to start a parish school. Fr. De Vos was familiar with the teaching excellence of the Dominican Sisters having previously asked the Sisters in 1901 to assist him at a parish in Spalding, Nebraska. Mother Magdalene Norton, the prioress of the Order and who was to later serve as school Principal and Superior from 1914 to 1923, answered Fr. De Vos' request by sending four Sisters in 1907. These Sisters were: Sr. Madeline Ferriel (who professed her vows in 1901), Sr. Marcella Dunnigan (1907), Sr. Cecelia Kennedy (1879), and the oldest, Sister Antoninus Nealy (1876), who served as the school's first Principal and Superior. The Sisters lived on the second floor of the wood frame house next to the rectory and devoted themselves to the instruction of the parish children on the first floor. The school later moved to the church hall and partitions were set up within the church hall to create five classrooms.

As Edward Kantowicz noted in the St. John Berchmans Centennial 1905-2005, most national parishes used their schools as vehicles for preserving their language and culture as well as their religion. The Belgians did not have this option available to them. The Dominican Sisters of St. Catharine, the first Dominican order to be established in the United States in 1822 to educate the children of the early pioneers, was an all-American order. Unlike many other religious orders established in Europe, the Sisters of St. Catharine brought to the school their diverse American backgrounds and experiences.

### **THE SCHOOL MOVES TO A NEW HOME**

The school expanded along with the parish, though it remained in the church basement longer than most had expected. The parish bought the remaining four and a half city lots on their block for \$17,500 in 1916 from Elizabeth and William Irwin who had lived in a house at Campbell and Logan for many years. Nothing happened in the construction of a school building until after the First World War. In 1920, Fr. De Vos mounted a fundraising drive, and in 1924 the cornerstone of the school building was laid. The new school building opened in September 1925. A graduate from the class of 1929, in starting 4th grade, recalled the excitement of the Dominican Sisters and students when the school moved from the church hall basement to the very new Logan school building where separately constructed classrooms (no longer partition separation) created privacy and reduced the noise between classrooms. The Logan school building was still, however, overcrowded, as Fr. De Vos desired to use the first floor of the school building as a parish hall. In 1926, 311 students, 167 boys and 144 girls, attended the school occupying the 6 classrooms on the second floor. The Dominican Order received \$350.00 as salary per year for each of the 6 sisters who taught. Since the

school receipts totaled only about \$1,000, the tuition must have been only about \$0.35 a month.

In 1927, Fr. De Vos, a priest for over fifty years and Pastor at St. John Berchmans for over 21 years, retired. The Golden Jubilee Book described Fr. De Vos as a hard, tireless worker, a skilled and gifted scholar, a writer of history books, and a spiritual man who appreciated good music. Fr. DeVos' replacement was Fr. Lawrence Hurkmans. Cardinal Mundelein, impressed with the work done by Fr. Hurkmans in organizing housing for the thousands of visitors to the Eucharistic Congress held in Chicago in 1926, asked Fr. Hurkmans to leave his suburban parish in Forest Park and become Pastor at St. John Berchmans. Like our prior Pastors, Fr. Hurkmans was born in Europe (Holland). He spoke fluent English, French, Flemish and Dutch. Fr. Hurkmans arrived in July, 1927 and stayed for the next 27 years.

Fr. Hurkmans agreed to the Sisters' requests and converted the entire Logan school building to classrooms with six classrooms per floor in September, 1927. That same year, the parish completed a brick convent for the Sisters adjoining the school and expanded the rectory to its present dimensions. The parish and school buildings along Logan Boulevard between Campbell and Maplewood were now complete.

In 1930, school records show that 14 Dominican Sisters taught 508 students in the school. The enrollment appears to have remained relatively stable over the next 20 years with the teaching staff entirely composed of the Dominican Sisters.

Memories from the older school alumni provide a glimpse of the school during these earlier years. One graduate from the class of 1939 recalled her third grade teacher, Sister Carmel, reading Bobsie Twin books when the class was good. She also remembers the "ugly terrible hats we wore for our graduation." Another graduate from the class of 1944 said that St. John Berchmans School and the Dominican Sisters gave me the "best education I could hope to receive providing me with a sound background for high school, college, a master's degree, and a successful career in the business world." He remembers the discipline as being "tough," but that it brought respect to the whole class. Two graduates, also from the class of 1944, recalled Sister Berchmans and her work in preparing for the graduation play "Queen by the Grace of God" and the humor that developed. A graduate from the class of 1945 recalled the shock in Principal Mary Robert's face when Fr. Hurkman's announced after the daily 8:15 Mass that "Today is my birthday, so it's a school holiday. Go home!" Another graduate, class of 1950, had fond memories of her kindergarten teacher, Sister Thomas Aquinas, as being sweet and effective, and Sister Mary Henry as a great teacher and disciplinarian who sent her back from 4th grade to 1st grade for a "disciplinary learning experience."

Surviving records provide a profile of the school's 1952 graduating class. Edward Kantowicz noted in the St. John Berchmans Centennial History 1905- 2005 that a total of 45 students graduated in 1952, 24 boys and 21 girls. Nearly half of them (21 out of 45) were of Polish background, with the rest German, Irish, and Belgian; but only two of the children were foreign-born and only three were born elsewhere in the United States. A full 40 out of 45 were native-born Chicagoans. Nearly all of the parents of the graduates were Catholics; only three listed their religion as Lutheran and the religion of three more was unknown. Most of the fathers reported their occupations as skilled crafts or white collar jobs. About half of the mothers were housewives and half worked outside the home. Only three of the students listed an address outside the boundaries of the parish. All of the 1952 graduates went on to high school, 32 of them to Catholic schools and 13 to public high.

The retirement of Msgr. Hurkmans in the summer of 1953, after serving as Pastor for 27 years, marked the end of an era in parish life. The Golden Jubilee Book described Msgr. Hurkmans' "Success Story." During his time as Pastor, the original parish debt of \$150,000 had been paid off with another \$130,000 made in repairs and improvements, including the expansion of the church in 1949. In recognition of his work in the Belgian and Dutch communities of Chicago, Msgr. Hurkmans was knighted by the King of Belgium and later by the Queen of Holland in 1948.

In August 1953, Fr. Thomas V. Liske, who had grown up nearby in Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish, was appointed Pastor. Fr. Liske was an educator having previously taught English, creative writing, speech, Greek theology and moral theology at Quigley for over 20 years. Fr. Liske was also an accomplished writer having written radio plays, records for RCA-Victor, and a book entitled "Effective Preaching" which was used in many seminaries. Not only was Fr. Liske a priest, a teacher, and a writer, he was a doctor, a doctor of theology! His distinctive four-horned biretta, which became his trademark, signified his Doctorate in Sacred Theology which only a few priests had achieved. Fr. Liske, well educated and creative, took an active role in being part of the education of the schoolchildren. He learned the names of all the children and began taking the children on special educational trips, a tradition that continues at St. John's and which many alumni remember dearly.

#### THE BABY BOOMERS AND SCHOOL EXPANSION

As the postwar baby boom increased the number of children in the Logan Square community, the school and the Sisters struggled to keep up with enrollment demands. Under Fr. Liske's leadership, the land for a second school building was purchased. In 1958, a second school building was built to address enrollment demands. The new Altgeld school building had three classrooms each on the first and second floors and a gymnasium and stage which occupied the entire rear half of the building. Grades 1 through 5

remained in the Logan school building and grades 6, 7, and 8 moved into the new Altgeld school building. The total enrollment reached 812 in 1960, with 12 Sisters and 6 lay teachers. Because of the high enrollment, the 1960 kindergarten graduation would be the last for almost another generation. The school just didn't have enough room for kindergarten and grades 1-8! 290 more children attending public school received religious education from the Dominican Sisters with school dismissal at 12:30 PM on Wednesdays. Tuition during the mid 1950s was \$2.00 per month with the tuition rate going up to \$8.00 per month per family in 1961. One graduate from the class of 1961 recalled the plays performed during 5th and 6th grades with Sister Leo Martin and the determination of Sister Florence in making sure that her 8th grade class had a strong foundation to begin high school.

The new school was needed and it was used. The gym was regularly used for holiday assemblies, fun fairs, Class Night, graduation, 8th grade dance lessons, courtesy of Mrs. Henner, and even gym classes and stage productions. In February of 1960, the 8th graders brought to the stage a play about the life of Joan of Arc, "The Maid of Lorraine" which was written by our very own Fr. Liske. In 1963, another play was staged: the 8th grader who had been chosen to play the Virgin Mary in that year's Christmas play writes "we all had a great time at the practices." Fun was something that the 8th graders had in mind as they looked forward to joining the Teen Club upon graduation. Father O'Brien, who moderated the Teen Club, is remembered fondly by more than one graduate from this era.

In the wake of the tragic Our Lady of the Angels fire in 1958, the entire old school was retrofitted with a sprinkling system. Fire and air raid drills were a regular part of the school preparedness program.

Sister Joseph Leo taught at St. John Berchmans during those baby boom years, from 1952 - 1962. Thanks to Sister Joseph Leo, many, many children learned to read and write, add and subtract, and most importantly, they were taught that God loved them. The class picture of her 1958 first grade class had 53 students; her 1961 first grade class had 59 children. Her students will tell you that she had great spelling and math bees and maybe that she was even a little mischievous, much like her own students.

In the 1960's, the financial burdens of the school were not substantial because the majority of teachers still continued to be the Dominican Sisters, and their expenses were minimal. An old ledger found in the basement of the convent provides a snapshot of how the Sisters lived in the 1960's. Ten or twelve sisters lived in the convent and the parish paid them salaries totaling \$18,100 from July 1, 1966 to June 30, 1967. This was about \$1,800 per year or \$180 per month for each Sister. Their only other source of income was private music lessons bringing in about \$500 for the entire year. The convent budget provided for the food, clothing, and personal expenses for the Sisters. It paid \$749 for janitorial services, but did not cover utilities which were provided by the parish. A surplus in the convent budget allowed the Sisters to send back \$2,450 to the motherhouse in Kentucky. The Golden Jubilee Book contained the 1955 pictures of the Dominican Sisters who dedicated many years of their lives to the school. While pictures of the many other Dominican Sisters who taught at the school are not available, their dedication to the school is not forgotten. The names of the 180 Dominican Sisters who taught at the school are included in a separate attachment to this history along with the Sisters who have served as Principals. In total, the Dominican Sisters have dedicated 750 years of teaching service to St. John Berchmans School.

From the comments of the alumni, it is clear that the Dominican Sisters of St. Catharine, since the very beginning of the school in 1907, have fulfilled their mission to educate children. In accordance with the Dominican tradition to praise, to bless and to preach the Word of God, the Dominican Sisters gave the children of St. John Berchmans an education rich in Christian values. In their service to God, our Dominicans have always taught the children of St. John's how to learn and how to live and how to be children of God.

Fr. Liske died suddenly on April 3, 1964 while on a speaking engagement in New York. All the children mourned Father's death and many, many of us remember him fondly in his black cassock, his four horned biretta and his constant, gentle smile. Alumni from this era remarked in their school memories of their sadness upon learning of Fr. Liske's death.

Msgr. Donald Masterson, who had been working in the Archdiocese's chancery office, was appointed Pastor and served for the next 6 years. St. John's had a new Pastor and it was post-Vatican II. It seemed that everything was changing, but so many things were still the same. Sr. Helen Ann was the Principal and the Superior. For most of the next 6 years, there were two classes for every grade, usually a sister taught one of the classes and a lay teacher taught the other section of that grade with about 40 - 50 children in a class. There were 18 classrooms between the two school buildings: 16 devoted to classrooms, one was the principal's office and the 18th room was, well, our memories are not clear enough to state what its use was. The Logan building was always called the "old school," and the school building on Altgeld was always called the "new school." The big kids, grades 6, 7 and 8, went to the new school. The little kids, grades 1 through 5, were in the old building. It was great fun for the little kids to go to the new school for anything! While President Kennedy was in office, he introduced the "President's Physical Fitness Program." After his death, the program continued and the big kids had P.E. class once a week in the gym of the new school.

It was the days before closed campuses and daily chauffeur services. Those who could walk home for lunch did. Those who lived too far away or whose mothers or fathers weren't at home at lunchtime brought their lunches to school and ate in the church basement that doubled, and still does, as the lunchroom. CCD was still taught on Wednesday afternoons in our classrooms to the

Catholic children who attended public school, so St. John's students had an afternoon off to be in the choir, go to the library as an excuse to be with your friends, take some specially-offered extracurricular class like art or recorder lessons, or maybe even private music or dance lessons, go to the dentist, get into a little mischief or just hang out at home.

Around 1965, the girls' uniforms changed. Until 1965, the girls in 1st through 5th grade wore navy blue jumpers with white blouses, and the older girls wore navy blue skirts. Navy blue beanies were worn, especially when going to Mass during the week. But then around 1965, the girls in 6th through 8th grade wore green plaid skirts and were given the option of wearing dark green clip hats. The little girls wore green plaid jumpers and green beanies. The due date for the new uniform rolled so as not to create a hardship on those that had recently gotten a new navy blue uniform, and the blue beanie could be worn without being out of uniform. For many of these years, the boys wore tan shirts, blue ties and dark pants.

The Mothers Club was very active, and the once a month meeting always had a great turnout. It was not only a night out for mothers away from the kids, it was a night where they planned how they would help the school - weigh in on a school problem or raise some money for the hundreds of things that the school needed. One graduate recalls the practice of bribing to get mothers to participate. "My favorite memory was winning ice cream for the whole class, if we had the most of our Moms attend the Mothers Club meetings!"

Hot dog days were a big hit. On a certain day of the week every month, each child, in exchange for a very reasonable price, would get a hot dog, a soda and a bag of chips. That was a day most kids did not go home for lunch!

The boys became red cassock boys, altar boys, choir boys and patrol boys and enjoyed all the privilege and honor of those positions of responsibility.

Some students took piano lessons in the convent from Sr. Germain, and some actually learned to play the piano!

Sr. James Vincent was appreciated for the advice she gave to her pre-teen 8th graders. A graduate of the class of 1964 recalls that "JV" really understood the 8th grade personality. A graduate from the class of 1966 remembers some of Sister's proverbs, i.e., "It's your baby, you rock it; it's your little red wagon, you pull it; and your rights end where the next guy's nose begins."

Every year, the second graders would be excited about what would be the biggest and happiest event that any of them had yet experienced in their young lives: their First Confession and First Holy Communion! Each child received his own rosary and his own missal. The girls wore white dresses and veils and the boys white shirts and ties. For the moment, they were so pure and so sweet and so happy. For years, the children at St. John Berchmans made their First Holy Communion on the last Sunday in October, on the Feast of Christ the King. Somewhere along the years, the children began to make their First Holy Communion in May instead of October.

Every two or three years, the Cardinal or one of his auxiliary bishops would visit St. Johns for a very special day. Usually somewhere around fifth, sixth or seventh grade, months of exciting preparation began in anticipation of Confirmation: selecting sponsors, picking new names, memorizing catechism questions and answers. The Confirmation candidates were ready for the Holy Spirit, ready to become young Christian soldiers, and certainly didn't want to be embarrassed when called by upon the Cardinal or one of his auxiliary bishops.

There was a May Crowning every year. The schoolchildren would crown our Lady with flowers, walk in procession and sing "Ave, Ave, Ave Maria!" and all the other Marian hymns. The prettiest, nicest girl in eighth grade would be chosen to have the honor of crowning the Blessed Mother.

Eighth grade meant planning for high school and taking an entrance exam. It meant an over-night class trip, the 8th grade picnic, working on the Class Night program for the parents, graduating and looking forward to joining the Teen Club. Each of the graduating students wore a graduation ribbon and collected classmates' signatures in their autograph books. The girls looked for their Class Night/Graduation dress, and the boys wore what their mothers told them to wear.

## THE CHANGING SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

By 1969, St. John Berchmans was feeling the effects of the changing neighborhood and the end of the Baby Boomer explosion. For most of its history, the school had been grappling with overcrowding. Now the parish had too much school for the number of children in attendance. In the Fall of 1969, the entire school was consolidated into one building. A graduate of the class of 1970 recalls moving back to the "old" school for 8th grade after having spent 7th grade in the now-closed "new" building. The enrollment in 1960 was 812 students. In 1969, the enrollment was 544 students.

In the Spring of 1970, Msgr. Masterson left St. John Berchmans to become the pastor of a parish in Park Ridge. Fr. Casimir Szatkowski became the new pastor of St. John Berchmans on June 15, 1970. He stayed for 14 years. For Fr. Casey, it was all about St. John Berchmans. He was given a great gift and a great challenge: a school full of children that needed to be taught, but a school with falling enrollments, a neighborhood that was changing, fewer Dominican Sisters available to teach, rising

salaries, and rising energy costs. Fr. Casey knew he had a job to do, and he started to work on the solutions. If the school was to survive as part of the parish, things had to be done differently. Though the school had not moved, the world in which St. John's lived was different.

In 1970, there were 8 Dominicans and 7 lay teachers. Sr. Phyllis was the principal. By 1972, there were 396 students. When the 1973-74 school year began, only 2 Dominicans were on the teaching faculty at St. John's. With the shortage of Sisters throughout the Order, the Kentucky Dominicans needed to re-allocate its Sisters. Instead of leaving St. John's completely, as they were forced to do at so many other schools where they had taught, the Kentucky Dominicans decided that their work at the school was very important, and they stayed. Happily, the Kentucky Dominicans are still at St. John's today. However, in 1972, for the first time in the history of the school, the principal was no longer a Kentucky Dominican. Fr. Casey hired Mr. Nicholas Zangara as St. John's first lay principal. In 1978, Mr. Zangara hired Sr. Margaret Rose to become his secretary. Sr. Margaret Rose left St. John's in 1994.

In this environment, many lay teachers needed to be hired to teach the children, and lack of money was a problem in the face of rising costs and fewer students. But, despite these difficulties, the schoolchildren of the 1970's still did many of the things that earlier St. John's children did: First Holy Communions, Hot dog days, May Crownings, First Fridays, 8th grade ribbons, class trips, Class Nights, graduations, school assemblies, etc. A graduate of the class of 1973 remembers Sr. Estelle's devotion to the properly diagrammed sentence. A 1974 graduate remembers being confirmed by Cardinal Cody. A 1975 graduate remembers the forced segregation of the sexes during recess: the sidewalk was reserved for the girls while the boys played in the street which was blocked off with yellow horses.

Innovation, vision and hard work were keys to saving and making money so that the school could stay open to address the needs of the children and their parents. Those in charge needed to keep their eyes, ears and hearts open in order to respond to the needs of the time; and they did. Revenue was found by renting the Altgeld building to the Chicago Public Schools to help relieve the CPS overcrowding problem. In order to address the high cost of fuel to heat the school buildings, a new school year was adopted: the school was closed for several weeks during the coldest part of the winter and the children had an extended school year into the warmer months. The students sold World's Finest chocolate to raise money for the school.

The Mothers Club was active in those days. The mothers worked hard to keep the school open. Fr. Casey was known to be a regular at the meetings. Proceeds from the 10-day parish carnival and the Tuesday night church basement bingo were used to keep the school afloat. Service hours were required of the students' parents, and Fr. Casey worked as hard as any of the parishioners and parents.

There were other changes: children no longer had the option of going home for lunch, even if they lived within walking distance. There were more families where there was no parent at home during the day. As enrollment shrank, the school tried the concept of split classrooms where one teacher simultaneously taught 2 grades in one classroom. Imagine the challenge of keeping those children focused. In addition, Sr. Joyce, the only Dominican remaining at St. John's, recommended adding kindergarten to the curriculum. Taking advantage of the empty classrooms on the 1st floor of the Logan Building, space was set up for two kindergarten sections. In 1976, Sr. Joyce became the first kindergarten teacher at St. John's since the 1959-1960 school year.

In 1979, taking on the job of principal, Sr. Barbara joined Sr. Joyce and Sr. Margaret Rose at St. John Berchmans. There were 258 children at St. John Berchmans. Fr. Casey noticed that many mothers needed someone to leave their preschool children with so that mothers could go to work. He recognized that St. John Berchmans School was conveniently located near the Kennedy Expressway and that the Altgeld building was not being utilized. So, in September 1979, the St. John Berchmans Early Childhood Center, with Sr. Joyce at the helm, was established in the basement of the Altgeld Building. Sr. Joyce and Fr. Casey believed that this would be an important ministry. The Early Childhood Center's mission was to provide the working and single parents with a safe, loving, quality daycare and to teach and to care for our children. In addition, it was hoped that the experiment would bring more children to the primary and upper grades. The Center was opened from 7 A.M. to 6 P.M. In the first year, 30 preschoolers and 40 kindergarteners attended the Center. Sr. Joyce, Sr. Mary and Mrs. Kaminski were the Center's first teachers. The rest of the Altgeld Building was rented until the growth of the Center required that the entire Altgeld building be given over to the Center. Under Sr. Joyce's leadership, the Early Childhood Center was a great success. By 1990, 100 pre-schoolers and 75 kindergarteners were enrolled at the Center, and 364 students were enrolled in the grade-school.

INSERT picture of Mrs. Kaminski playing with children in the Gym at the Early Childhood Center 'circa 1979.

The decade of the 1970's was a time of change in the school's history. For the first 18 years of its existence, St. John Berchmans School was located in the church hall. For the next 50 years or so, it was a traditional, middle-class school composed of students who attended church in the parish and lived within walking distance of the school. The majority of the teaching staff were Sisters who worked for a reduced salary with parish funds supplementing the school expenses. Since the 1970's the school has had a smaller, more Latino immigrant background student body, with many single mothers or working mothers seeking pre-school day care or after-hours care.

In 1992, Fr. William Gubbins became the new pastor of St. John Berchmans Parish, and like the pastors before him, he proudly watched how the school children entered as pre-schoolers and left as SJB graduates. In 1994, St. John's was re-organized again when the Archdiocese required the pre-school program be reconstituted back into the school. The upper grades moved back to the Altgeld building and the several first-floor classrooms in the Logan Building were used for the pre-schoolers.

In 2000, Fr. Eugene Gratkowski became the new pastor, and in 2002, Sr. Joyce became the principal. On February 23, 2005, the Archdiocese informed Fr. Gratkowski and Sr. Joyce that the Archdiocese would no longer subsidize the school; thus, the school would have to close because of its outstanding debt. Following parish and school meetings, Fr. Gratkowski wrote to Cardinal Francis George informing him that the school buildings were sound and that student enrollment was healthy and requested an opportunity to pay off the accumulated debt. Cardinal George directed the Archdiocese school board to listen to the parish appeal, and the board gave the school a little over a month to raise funds towards paying down the debt.

The Save Our School campaign brought the parish and school together in a concerted effort to raise the necessary funds. No large donor or "angel" came forward, but hundreds of individuals made donations into an escrow fund designated for debt repayment. The parents of schoolchildren organized fundraisers, including the first "Glimmer Auction," and wrote personal letters to parishioners, former-parishioners, and friends seeking donations, large or small. Alumni support during the Save Our School campaign was also significant. Seventh-graders from the School camped outside the local Starbucks coffee house at California and Logan, asking the patrons to help them Save Our School which was reported in the Chicago Tribune.

By the April 15, 2005 deadline, the parish and school had raised a substantial amount in reducing the accumulated debt. The school leadership met with the Archdiocese school board on April 18 and presented their case. They offered the funds that had been raised in the past month as a down payment on the debt and presented a break-even budget for the following year. After just a few hours of deliberation, the Archdiocese informed the school officials that the school could remain open. While all of the outstanding debt has not yet been repaid, the school has now importantly achieved a balanced budget for the past three fiscal years and is current in all of its bills through careful financial management, successful fund-raising and grants. Additionally, contributions from the Big Shoulders Fund and our Patron family have been invaluable.

The students contribute too: each fall, the students hold the Crusade of Eagles Walk-a-Thon down Logan Boulevard, showing that their school spirit is as far-reaching as an eagle's wings.

For the last three years, St. John's has hosted its Glimmer Auction in the spring as its main annual fund-raising event. Each year, the party has gotten bigger and better. Please visit our [Glimmer Auction](#) site to see details about this year's event. We hope to see you there!

#### LOOKING FORWARD -- A CENTURY TO GROW

While certain things may have changed over the past 100 years, St. John Berchmans continues to provide Christian based quality education to the families of the Logan Square and nearby communities. Under the current leadership of Pastor Wayne Watts, Head of School Peggy Roketenetz, and Director of Early Childhood Sr. Joyce Montgomery, the school has experienced substantial growth. Enrollment continues to climb and is now up nearly 20% over last year's starting school numbers.

Today, the school has a full staff of dedicated teachers with fine arts, music, physical education, and Spanish taught in all grades. A third pre-school classroom has been added this year to continue the school's commitment to small class size. The preschool has a wonderful reputation. In addition to the preschoolers who stay all day, there are many preschoolers who come for a few hours a day. Their parents appreciate the care, love and attention that their little ones receive at St. John's. The services of a counselor have been added to help our students with any academic, developmental or emotional issues. More children who live outside the parish boundaries are being enrolled as their parents discover the impressive quality of the academics and the location conveniently near the expressway and public transportation. The school continues its tradition of innovation by hosting a Tuesday morning playgroup that is well attended and enjoyed by the babies and their moms.

Capital improvements during the past year include a new science lab, the addition of 36 new IBM computers, and a new playground. To enhance reading skills, new libraries have been constructed in the Logan and Altgeld school buildings. The school continues to upgrade its technology. Soon interactive white boards will be added in certain classrooms to enhance the instructional day.

The commitment to quality education steeped in Christian values continues as St. John Berchmans School begins its second century.

*This Centennial History was prepared by Allan Syc and Jane Kaminski Simers with the help of Sr. Joyce Montgomery, Peggy Roketenetz, and Melissa Skinner-Liberman. Valuable resource documents were the St. John Berchmans Centennial 1905 - 2005 written by Edward Kantowicz in 2005 and the St. John Berchmans Golden Jubilee Book written in 1955. Special thanks to the alumni who provided the school memories referenced throughout this Centennial History which will be posted on the school website at [www.stjohnberchmans.org/alumni](http://www.stjohnberchmans.org/alumni). Additional comments, facts, clarifications and/or corrections from and by our readers are invited and welcomed.*