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Cathedral Neighborhood Education Partnership: A Distinctive Catholic Partnership

Joliet, Ill.- The University of St. Francis (USF) has developed a unique partnership with the Cathedral of St. Raymond of Nonnatus Grade School (St. Raymond) in Joliet, Ill. The Cathedral Neighborhood Education Partnership (CNEP) began with a common goal to encourage and support each other, with a shared commitment to Catholic identity, innovation, collaboration, reflection and professional development. The partnership is intended to support USF teacher candidates and St. Raymond teachers and students.

"This initiative is a great example of a true partnership that is mutually beneficial. It's a tremendous opportunity for our institutions to share our resources and create innovative and exemplary learning experiences for the students of St. Raymond Cathedral School and our USF teacher candidates," expressed by Dr. John Gambro, Dean of the College of Education at USF.

The partnership is based on four pillars: professional development, faith formation, student achievement, and social.

Student Achievement Pillar

Student achievement is at the center of both institutions and this partnership has shown to benefit all of the students. One of the unique activities that have been available because of this partnership includes the opportunity for USF teacher candidates to observe in the St. Raymond classrooms. A specific example of this is when USF teacher candidates learn about research based best practices for teaching in their USF course, then spend time at St. Raymond observing the classroom teachers use these best practices with their students. It is a way for the USF teacher candidates to witness theory put into practice.

Connected to observation in St. Raymond classrooms is another distinctive activity, the USF Reading Clinic. During this clinic, USF teacher candidates welcome St. Raymond students to the USF campus for ten literacy tutoring sessions where students work in small groups to improve reading skills. The clinic is free of charge and offers a service to the community.

Professional Development Pillar

Professional development for St. Raymond teachers is an especially rewarding service offered by USF faculty members. St. Raymond is able to identify specific areas that they would like addressed and USF faculty members create professional development opportunities to meet their specific needs. It is rewarding for both groups, as service is a part of the USF mission and the St. Raymond teachers can see the results in student achievement.

Faith Formation Pillar

Sharing the Catholic faith is certainly a binding factor in this partnership. A beautiful tour of the Cathedral and a presentation on the Year of Mercy are just some of the experiences that are made available to individuals from both St. Raymond and USF. Diane Ratajczak, a second grade teacher at St. Raymond, expressed appreciation for USF teacher candidates' assistance in preparing young students for Reconciliation and First Communion. The USF teacher candidates role-play in order to help elementary students feel more comfortable with the process. Ratajczak stated she notices that the students were less nervous, and that both groups enjoyed the experience.

Social Pillar

This aspect of CNEP allows faculty, staff, and administration from both schools to join together a few times a year to get to know each other, have casual conversations and share some laughs. Creating the opportunity for discussion without a formal agenda has contributed to an expanded comfort level. According to Mrs. Aimee Schertz, technology coordinator at St. Raymond's and a USF alumna, "The CNEP partnership provides our grade school staff and students with resources that would be impossible without the partnership. Our grade school benefits incredibly through bringing new ideas and educators into contact with our teachers and students. I believe the university professors and students benefit greatly from the partnership by being able to be immersed in the ideas and concepts that they are teaching, rather just learning them abstractly. In addition, through our partnership, we show our community that a child's education is enriched when we are all invested in the learning and teaching that help our children grow and achieve. Whether we are young children, teachers, adult learners, or professors, learning is a job that is never done. Our CNEP partnership is an outward sign that we are living that belief."

Some of the other benefits offered through CNEP include internship opportunities for USF teacher candidates, and activities for St. Raymond students on the USF campus. "This partnership has still not even reached its full potential. Once it has reached its full potential it will seem as if both campuses are united as one and grow together seamlessly. This will provide a future of professional development and social interaction that most grade schools and universities can only imagine," stated Adam Lewickas, St. Raymond assistant principal.

This partnership is only a few years old and is expected to grow stronger and offer more opportunities to all of the participants each year. For those interested in the Cathedral Neighborhood Education Partnership or with questions about USF's College of Education programming, please contact Donna Metlicka at 815-740-3644 or dmetlicka@stfrancis.edu.

The University of St. Francis, in Joliet, Ill., serves 3,850 students nationwide, offering undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs in the arts and sciences, business, education, nursing and social work. There are 47,000 USF alumni across the globe. For information, call 800-735-7500 or visit <u>stfrancis.edu</u>. University of St. Francis: Bigger thinking. Brighter purpose.

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