Six educators honored with Saint John Paul II Award


During the Eucharistic liturgy, which is traditionally held at the beginning of each academic year to celebrate Catholic education in the Diocese of Scranton, six educators in the Diocesan School System were honored for their commitment to being faith-filled examples to young people.

Each of the honorees received special recognition by being bestowed the Saint John Paul II Award for 25 or more years of dedicated service to Catholic education in the Diocese.

The award recipients included: Robert Andrews, Holy Cross High School in Dunmore; Daniel Banicky, Our Lady of Peace School in Clarks Green; Ann Innocenti, La Salle Academy in Jessup; Jennifer Jones, Good Shepherd Academy in Kingston; Mary Elizabeth “Betsy” Kozak, Holy Rosary School in Duryea; and Janice Puhak, Holy Family Academy in Hazleton.

In welcoming the faithful to the afternoon liturgy, Kristen Donohue, Superintendent of Catholic Schools, said, “As we gather for today’s Mass to celebrate the dedication and commitment of the teachers, staff and administration of the Diocese of Scranton, we also reflect on God’s strength and support for the many blessings and good health we have been afforded to do this great work.”

Donohue noted that the Diocesan Teachers Institute being held throughout the day afforded an opportunity for reflection on the unending efforts within the various roles in the 19 Catholic schools throughout the Diocese.

“This day offers us a unique learning experience which ultimately creates the opportunity for growth,” she said.

As he announced the recipients of the Saint John Paul II Award, Diocesan Secretary of Catholic Education/Chief Executive Officer Jason Morrison lauded all Catholic school educators for creating an environment where students grow and learn.

“Most especially, they are witnesses to the faith, serving as sharers in the mission of Jesus Christ by leading young people to know, love and serve God,” he said.

Those Catholic school teachers who were on hand to receive their award from Bishop Bambera all concurred they feel blessed and honored to have been called to the “education vocation.”

“It truly is a ‘calling,’” Andrews said about his role as a geometry teacher at Holy Cross High School. “I never feel like it’s a job. I really love what I do and look forward to every day.”

Innocenti, who teaches third grade at La Salle Academy, said she is living a “wonderful vocation.”

“I loving being with the children,” she remarked, quickly adding that is of utmost importance to always bear in mind that God is “our Master Teacher. He is always with us.”

As a seventh and eighth grade instructor of science and social studies at Our Lady of Peace School, Banicky remarked, “I totally enjoy teaching.”

“There’s a new adventure every day,” he said. “No two days are alike.”

Her fellow educators and award-recipients echoed Kozak’s comments when she offered, “It’s a blessing to be able to do what we do.”

They were also in total agreement with the Holy Rosary School fifth grade teacher’s strong belief that each Diocesan Catholic school and its students form a unique, close-knit community. “We are really like an extended family,” she noted.
The Diocese of Scranton is committed to educating our students in an environment that is academically excellent and facilitates the development of moral judgment and Christian decision-making. We are proud to share the following successes of our students in the classroom and in their service to others. Each day, our schools are fulfilling their mission of preparing today’s youth and young adults to become tomorrow’s faith-filled leaders.

Oscar Navas-Mendoza, a fifth grade student at Notre Dame Elementary School in East Stroudsburg, works on a mass and volume experiment in science class.

Maddie Szura and Leah Skudalski, students at Good Shepherd Academy in Kingston, present Luke Malonis, program manager, Saint Hedwig’s Veterans Village in Kingston, with a donation to continue its work. The funds were raised during the school’s annual “Back to School Bash.”

Emma Bride, a fourth grader at Saint Agnes School in Towanda, watches as Rev. Edward Michelini, pastor of Saints Peter & Paul Parish, blesses her cow Abby during the school’s annual Blessing of the Animals Ceremony.

Tom and Judy Lambert enjoy spending time with their grandchildren, Carmin and Natalie, at the annual Grandparents Day Liturgy, hosted by Holy Rosary School in Duryea.

Students at Holy Family Academy in Hazleton are “budding” artists and love showing off their beautiful sunflower paintings.

Let’s Get Poppin’ is the theme for Saint Jude School in Mountain Top’s annual Race for Education fundraiser. As more money is donated, the students add popcorn to their counter so they can see how close they are to their $15,000 goal.

Students at Saint Nicholas/Saint Mary School in Wilkes-Barre brought their favorite furry friends to school on Oct. 4, the Feast of Saint Francis, so they could receive a special blessing.

The Living Rosary was led by the eighth-grade class at Wyoming Area Catholic School in Exeter on Oct. 7, the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.

It was Spirit Week at Notre Dame Jr./Sr. High School in East Stroudsburg as they prepared for the Oct. 9 Homecoming 2021 celebration. Each day had its own theme including, “Wear Your Favorite Jersey,” “Matching Accessories,” and “Decades Day.”
Second grade students at Our Lady of Peace School in Clarks Green examine plant parts using microscopes to help them collect data.

As part of their celebration of the Blessing of the Animals on the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, students at Epiphany School in Sayre collected $815.25 in donations for Saint Francis Kitchen in Scranton.

Callie Cummings, a kindergarten student at Saint John Neumann Elementary School in Williamsport, is learning about counting groups of 4 and 5.

Eighth graders at Saint Clare/Saint Paul School in Scranton work collaboratively in science class to answer clues about the human body to solve a mystery.

The Class Olympics, a tradition of Homecoming/Spirit Week activities at Holy Cross High School in Dunmore, was held on a beautiful fall day. Students competed against one another in robust games and enjoyed a BBQ/picnic-style lunch.

On Oct. 2, the Feast of the Guardian Angels, the first grade class at All Saints Academy in Scranton created their own Guardian Angels to watch over and protect them.

Students are hard at work using technology to assist in their research at Saint Mary of Mount Carmel School in Dunmore.

Congratulations to Kathryn Apolinario, Joseph Connolly, Annabella Tayoun and Cole Lipinski, the 2021-22 Student Council Officers at La Salle Academy in Jessup.

AP Chemistry seniors at Holy Redeemer High School in Wilkes-Barre perform experiments involving volume and mass.

Kylie Cendoma and Emma Henderson, seniors at Saint John Neumann High School in Williamsport, pose with miniature ecosystems they created for their Environmental Science Class. Materials were collected at a local park and students will observe the changes over the next few weeks while learning about matter and energy flow in ecosystems.