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Same principles, different methods Holy Trinity School marks 100 years

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WALLINGFORD - Since its doors opened in 1913, numerous children have sat in the classrooms and walked through the halls of **Holy Trinity** School. For the past year, students and teachers have organized a number of events and projects to celebrate the school's 100th anniversary - a time span in which the school on North Whittlesey Avenue has seen changes both internal and external.

The centennial celebration will take place tonight at 6:30 at the Aqua Turf Club in Southington. It will begin with a dinner, include speeches from alumni and town and school officials, and dancing throughout the night.

"It's a night of celebration. Speeches and proclamations will be read by dignitaries," said Christine Mansfield, chairwoman of the **Holy Trinity** School board. "It's a night of getting people together from many, many generations."

In November, Archbishop Henry J. Mansell, of the Archdiocese of Hartford, led a Mass celebrating the 100th anniversary at Most **Holy Trinity** Church. The Mass was the official kickoff to the year-long celebrations, said Sister Kathleen Kelly, who has been the principal of **Holy Trinity** School for the past 26 years.

"It was standing room only," Kelly said. "The church holds about 800 people and there were probably close to 800 people."

Since then, students have worked on projects in which they learn the history of the school and the town, Mansfield said. As they look back 100 years, much is different from today, including the role of technology in education.

Holy Trinity School was founded by the Rev. John Carroll to "provide Catholic children with an education that would include faith development as well as academic instruction," according to the school's website. Originally, the school's proposed construction plan included two side wings, according to a Wallingford Post article from July 1970. However, Bishop John J. Nilan of Hartford "perceived the winged design to be identical to that of the cathedral school in Hartford and forbade such duplication," the article states. In 1914, the school was dedicated to Nilan.

During the early days, the staff was made up of the Sisters of Mercy, who taught classes up to the sixth grade. Its first principal was the Rev. Alexander Mitchell, and Sister Mary Cecile served as superior. During the school's first year, the Sisters of Mercy lived in a home adjacent to the school on Center Street, according to the Wallingford Post article.

Today, all classes at the school are taught by lay teachers, according to the school website. The K-8 school has about 230 students. It received accreditation by the Archdiocese of Hartford in 1985 after a self-evaluation was

completed - one of the first Catholic schools at the time to complete one, according to a Record-Journal article published on Sept. 26, 1988.

Time marches on

Since its early days, the school has seen extensive renovations. In 1967, a \$90,000 renovation resulted in two new cafeterias in

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the basement and the installation of windows to allow more light into the classrooms, according to a Morning Record article from July 28, 1967. More recent building projects included renovating bathrooms, a new roof, a new furnace and updating the electrical and fire protection systems.

In her tenure as school principal, Kelly said, she hasn't seen a greater change than technology. This generation of children grew up with the advancement of technology, she said, which has its positives and negatives. Students today prefer to work on computers, using the Internet to find answers to questions. But because of this, technology often gets in the way of their learning and poses a challenge for teachers and administrators, Kelly said.

"Getting focused, sustained attention has become increasingly more difficult because of the influx and influence of technology," Kelly said. "We know that is their preferred mode of learning, so we've been the ones who have needed to adjust and to provide those opportunities for 21st Century learning skills."

Today, there are Smart Boards in classrooms and handheld student response devices available to keep children engaged, she said.

It may be difficult to keep up with the rapid pace at which technology advances, but since becoming principal in 1986, Kelly has made it a priority.

"When I first came, they really weren't doing anything with the computers. There's really been an influx in technology," Kelly said. "The basic skills of 21st century learning need to have students being computer savvy and literate."

According to a Record-Journal story published on Sept. 26, 1988, students were carrying out coursework on computers and learning advanced math. And in 1995, 12 new IBM computers were purchased for the students, according to an R-J story printed on March 16, 1995.

The curriculum for today's students gives them the opportunity to learn Spanish. The school has labs with updated computers and wireless Internet throughout the building.

Staying engaged

Keeping up to date with technology isn't the only obstacle Kelly and other administrators have faced. Maintaining enrollment from year to year was a challenge.

"Catholic schools will never see the numbers they had in their heyday, but they maintain a place in education," Kelly said in the Sept. 26, 1988 story.

But about 25 years later, Kelly is pleased by "the fact that we keep consistent enrollment and there's not a fluctuation with enrollment," she said. She also said she is glad "to be able to maintain a full complement of teachers and paraprofessionals who have a long history of service at **Holy Trinity**."

Keeping children engaged and making learning an interactive process is something Kelly strongly believes in, saying "a silent classroom, in my book, does not ensure that children are learning. Best practices say that learning should be interactive ... a blend of being collaborative and encouraging students."

Projects such as this year's work to research the school's and town's history provides that type of opportunity. Similar to the students today, there was an emphasis placed on the students of the past to be a part of the community.

A third-grade class wrote a letter to Mayor William W. Dickinson Jr. to recommend placing stop signs at all railroad crossings after the death of a resident, according to an R-J story published on Feb. 23, 1990. A prayer campaign was organized in 1990 to help prevent war in the Persian Gulf. Students at the school decorated windows with paper cutouts, according to another published report.

Having a role within the community was something for which administrators strived, though not always with success. In 1968, the school participated in Project Concern, a program that allowed children from New Haven to attend **Holy Trinity**, according to a Morning Record article from Jan. 1, 1973. The program was opposed by town residents and ended in 1972.

Catholic administrators and teachers "are in the business of educating children. We constantly bring children to mind their responsibilities as leaders," Kelly told a reporter in 1992.

Although the times have changed and administrators are moving toward a curriculum of 21st century learning, **Holy Trinity's** mission has stayed the same.

"The mission of Catholic education has always been the same in terms of teaching the Gospel message and the traditions of the Catholic faith," Kelly said.

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The windows told the story - "CELEBRATING 100 YEARS" - at **Holy Trinity** School in Wallingford, founded in 1913, as Heather Lawrence and her daughter Harley, 5, came down the stairs at the end of the school day Wednesday.

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