

Commitment to Excellence

Rumson school among those to adapt academy model as new year begins

By Mary Stadnyk | Associate Editor for the *Monitor*

With the start of the 2019-2020 academic year a few weeks away, Father Michael Manning, pastor of Holy Cross Parish, Rumson, said students and their families will find measures in place to prepare Holy Cross Academy to become a “a leaner, smarter and holier fit for the future.”

“We are setting down a new path, and we pray the changes equip the school to thrive generations into the future,” Father Manning said of Holy Cross Academy, Rumson. Holy Cross School, which had its beginnings in 1894 when it opened as a one-room schoolhouse, has changed its name to start the new academic year as an academy.

The school is one of three in the Diocese to move toward the academy model this year. All Saints Regional Catholic School, Manahawkin, is reopening as St. Mary Academy under the administration of St. Mary Parish, Barnegat. The school communities of St. Veronica, Howell, and St. Aloysius, Jackson, are setting out as Mother Seton Academy.

Over the years, the Holy Cross Academy had undergone several transitions to accommodate the community’s expanding population and academic requirements. In recent years, however, when the school experienced a shift in demographics, Father Manning said it had become clear to school and parish administration that changes needed to be made. It could no longer be assumed, he said, that recruiting and advertising would “bring back the student enrollment of yesteryear.”

“The demanding academic environment in which our school is located requires us to prepare our graduates to thrive in the local high schools, whether Catholic or public, as they revise their curricula,” he said in explaining the importance of moving to an academy model to maintain academic excellence.

Father Manning and Dr. Mark DeMareo, principal of Holy Cross Academy, announced that the school would adapt the academy model earlier this spring, a decision that received the permission of Bishop David M. O’Connell, C.M. “The name change signifies innovative curricular changes and strategic planning for the next generations along with continued emphasis on Catholic character formation. The school will continue to be owned and operated by Holy Cross Parish and be an integral part of the Diocese of Trenton school system,” Father Manning said.

Through the re-visioning process, Dr. DeMareo reiterated that school administration was very clear in its commitment to strengthening Catholic faith formation, improving academic standards in all subject areas and developing social responsibility and leadership in the young men and women of the school community.

“We are also fully committed to financial well-being, as a strong foundation is necessary for future health and growth of the academy,” he said.

Dr. DeMareo reviewed some of the changes and advancements that faculty and school families can anticipate, including the institution of a new math curriculum in Grades K through eight that includes a restructured math tracking in middle school with one goal of the advanced eighth-grade math students completing high school Algebra 1 before they graduate.

He also indicated that the school has become Project Lead The Way STEM certified, which means that in addition to daily science and weekly technology classes, the students will also benefit from weekly STEM classes in a dedicated STEM lab. Also, a new Catholic virtue-based character education program has been integrated and will pave the way for Virtue-Based Restorative Discipline, “which is a beautiful process for teaching children to recognize, pray over and make up for mistakes they have made in a loving and understanding way,” Dr. DeMareo explained.

Along with upgrading the academic curriculum, Father Manning explained there would be additional focus on the way the students are prepared in the Catholic faith. “We need to emphasize the school exists because of the faith,” Father Manning said, then shared that a parent had recently asked him about what Holy Cross Academy could offer that a private school cannot. My answer was simple - “The faith,” stressed Father Manning.

Dr. DeMareo agreed and added, “The entire impetus for the changes we’ve made is to ensure that a quality Catholic education is available at Holy Cross for many years to come,” he said. “It is my great hope, that we as an academy, in the classroom, at liturgy, on the stage and on the field of play will reinforce and support the deepening of our students’ faith by modeling integrity, compassion, understanding and love in the place which is in many ways the center of their daily lives.”