



*50 years*  
of CATHOLIC  
EDUCATION  
*Mission, Legacy & Community*

Dear Alumni, Parents, Students, Faculty and Staff of St. Thomas More Catholic School,  
 As we begin our celebration of the school's golden jubilee, with its theme of *Mission, Legacy & Community*, it is the perfect time to reflect on its history, its influence on the lives of its students, and its impact on the local community. From its meager beginnings and throughout its first 50 years, St. Thomas More Catholic School has provided a stable and nurturing God-centered environment in which its students have been able to develop intellectually and spiritually--an environment in which my own three children thrived.



Although the facilities have been expanded, administrators have changed, and teachers have come and gone, the foundation on which the school was started still remains. The love and support of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and the Sisters of St. Joseph, along with the lay faculty and staff, have provided the moral background and educational tools necessary for St. Thomas More Catholic School graduates to prosper in this ever-changing world. The spiritual guidance of our pastor, Fr. Scott McCue, our Parochial Vicar, Fr. James Labosky, as well as the leadership of our bishop, The Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge, and principal, Dr. Michael Ashton, and those who served before them, have grounded St. Thomas More Catholic School in the principles on which the school was founded. It is on this cornerstone that the school will thrive for another 50 years.

Happy 50th Anniversary, St. Thomas More Catholic School!

Sue Walsh  
 Chair of 50th Anniversary Planning Committee

*St. Thomas More, if hearts grow cold,  
 Warm them with kindness, keep them true  
 So we'll remember, when we're old,  
 The teaching we once had from you.*

(excerpt from the school song written by Kenneth Reckford)

### St. Thomas More Catholic School - 50th Anniversary Planning Committee

Sue Walsh, Chair

Margaret Ashness  
 Dr. Michael Ashton  
 Natalie Dekle  
 Cathy Elmore  
 Sue Ann Glower  
 Sharon Jones  
 MJ Krafte  
 Sean Lennard

Carlos Lima  
 Denny Marcin  
 Megan Mazzocchi  
 Marci Morgenlander  
 Michele O'Donnell  
 Jill Rengan  
 Rick Steinbacher  
 Barbara Ulam

#### Additional support from:

A Better Image Printing  
 Susan Anderson  
 B & J Custom Printers

Big Frog of Durham  
 La Residence/The Gualtieri Family  
 Rachel Moltz


Linda Raymond  
 Signs Now  
 David Tyll

*Heartfelt thanks to those who have supported St. Thomas More Catholic School's 50th Anniversary Celebration with their generous financial contributions.*

Dr. Donald and Sue Ann Glower  
 Stewart and Sharon Jones

Jim and Linda Murray  
 Rick and Val Steinbacher

Sue Walsh and Family  
 and others



The administration,  
faculty, staff,  
and families  
of  
St. Thomas More Catholic School  
welcome you  
as we gather to begin  
our celebration of  
fifty years  
of Catholic education.

Friday, January 31, 2014





DIOCESE OF RALEIGH

Office of the Bishop

7200 Stonehenge Drive • Raleigh, North Carolina 27613-1620 • (919) 821-9731 • Fax (919) 821-9755

January 31, 2014

Dr. Michael W. Ashton  
Saint Thomas More Catholic School  
920 Carmichael Street  
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Dear Saint Thomas More Catholic School Community,

I extend congratulations on the 50th Anniversary of Saint Thomas More Catholic School. I join you and the entire faculty, staff and the students and their families in thanking Almighty God for the many blessings He has showered upon your school throughout the years and in praying for His continued guidance and protection. In addition, I convey my appreciation to all in the Saint Thomas More Catholic School Community for everything you do to assist parents in the teaching of the Catholic faith to their children and in leading them closer to Our Lord Jesus.

Saint Thomas More Catholic School is well known throughout the Diocese for its sense of service. Students are continuously challenged to aid and assist those in most need through a variety of school sponsored service projects. The school is also known for its academic excellence and its commitment to helping its students grow in their faith. For 50 years, it has partnered with parents and provided families with an environment where students learn about the world around them but most importantly, they can worship, pray, and learn about their faith every day.

As the school and parish celebrate this great milestone, may Our Lord Jesus bless all those associated with Saint Thomas More Catholic School now and always.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge  
Bishop of Raleigh



The Catholic Community of

*St. Thomas More*

January 31, 2014



Dear Parishioners, Families and Friends of St. Thomas More,

What a great joy it is for me to be the Pastor of The Catholic Community of St. Thomas More as we celebrate 50 years of Catholic Education in Chapel Hill. During those 50 years, St. Thomas More Catholic School has stood as a witness to the proclamation of the gospel. How blessed we are to be able to teach subjects like math, science, language, the fine arts and athletics in the context of faith. Our faith in Jesus Christ is the foundation of all we do here at STM. As we mark the 50<sup>th</sup> year of our existence as a school we can be proud to look back and see all that has been done to further the mission of our school over the years.

What an honor it is for us to have Bishop Burbidge as the principal celebrant for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary mass. We are honored as well by the presence of Jonathan Reckford, CEO of Habitat for Humanity International, and a distinguished alumnus of St. Thomas More.

I extend my gratitude to our faculty and staff who day in and day out dedicate themselves to forming our children and preparing them well for High School. I am thankful too for the leadership and example of Dr. Michael Ashton, Principal, and Mrs. Kathy Sullivan, Assistant Principal. To all our parents and volunteers, thank you for what you do to further our mission. I offer my gratitude as well to the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee members for your work and devotion.

We have a rich history as a school and we have a bright future. We come together this day as a community, recognizing the legacy of so many who have made STM into the school we are today. And we are always mindful our mission to educate children in a God-centered environment. Thank you for joining us as we mark this milestone in our history as a Catholic School.

In His Love,

Very Reverend Scott E. McCue, V.F.  
Pastor

————— 940 Carmichael Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27514-4203 —————  
(P) 919.942.1040 • (F) 919.942.6193 • <http://church.st-thomasmore.org>



# St. Thomas More Catholic School

920 Carmichael Street, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514  
Lower School 919-929-1546 Middle School 919-929-2241  
FAX 919-929-1783

<http://school.st-thomasmore.org/>



January 31, 2014

Dear Parishioners, Families and Friends of St. Thomas More Catholic School,

It is a great honor and privilege to be a part of the St. Thomas More Catholic Community during this celebration of the school's 50th Anniversary Jubilee. Our theme of *Mission, Legacy & Community* encapsulates the rich and Christ-filled tradition from these first fifty years.

We are indebted to those of vision and courage who began this journey in 1964--the donation of land by the Carmichael family, the leadership of Father Murphy, and the dedicated service of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. Pastoral guidance and service continued from devoted Bishops, Pastors, and the Sisters of St. Joseph. Countless lay educators, ministers, families, and community organizations have also been vital to the growth and vitality of our school. We continue to prosper under the guidance of gifted and impassioned educators and staff, the support of Bishop Burbidge and the Catholic Schools Office, the prayers and gifts of our parishioners, the dedication of our families, and the efforts of our fine students.

Our celebration could not have happened without the extraordinary "Team 50" led by chairperson, Sue Walsh. These current and former parents, staff members and volunteers have joined forces to create an array of events that will appeal to all generations. Our Home and School Association, School Advisory Board, parish office, and athletics Booster Club have all pitched in to make this a truly unified commemoration with the entire St. Thomas More Community. Special thanks goes to Orange County Habitat for Humanity, whose members have joined us in celebrating the partnership our parish has enjoyed with their ministry, and in sharing their time with our distinguished alumnus, Jonathan Reckford, CEO of Habitat for Humanity International.

In the wake of what will prove to be a joyous and memorable observance of this anniversary, we hope to leave footprints for others to follow. Generous donors have already made possible not only the Jubilee events, but a significant contribution to our local Habitat for Humanity chapter and the beginnings of an Alumni Association, as well as a contribution that will cover the entire tuition for one student for the 2014-2015 school year. Moving forward, this alumni group will endeavor to raise funds for tuition assistance, support extraordinary capital projects, and provide high quality and targeted staff development.

Could Father Murphy and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur have envisioned that their humble elementary school serving students from kindergarten through fourth grade would one day grow to serve students from the age of three through eighth grade? The prayers and support of our parish and school families continue to strengthen and extend educational opportunities for children. Thank you for joining us in our journey to see where St. Thomas More Catholic School has been, is now, and will be--with Christ daily in our hearts as we love, and in our minds as we learn.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael W. Ashton".

Michael W. Ashton, Ed.D.

Principal, St. Thomas More Catholic School



**National Catholic Educational Association**  
Leadership. Direction. Service.



Saint Thomas More Catholic School  
920 Carmichael St  
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Dear Saint Thomas More Community,

On behalf of everyone at the National Catholic Educational Association and especially the Department of Elementary Schools, I congratulate you on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of your school. What a gift you are to all you serve!

Your history is rich and will continue to grow as you continue to teach our students our faith, as well as “reading, writing and arithmetic.” We are grateful to your parish community that has sacrificed for the benefit of your students. Without their benevolence, Saint Thomas More Catholic School would not exist and we are grateful for their generosity.

May your mission to serve your community continue to be a beacon for families choosing Catholic education and for those who are called to minister at Saint Thomas More. May your motto of “Reaching Minds, Touching Hearts and Shaping Souls” serve as inspiration to all who learn, teach and serve at Saint Thomas More.

All of us at the National Catholic Educational Association wish you God’s continued blessings. May you continue to shape the souls of the students you teach.

Sincerely,

Kathy P. Mears  
Executive Director Department of Elementary Schools

Serving Catholic Educational Ministries Since 1904

NCEA • 1005 N. Glebe Road • Suite 525 • Arlington, VA 22201 • 800.711.6232 • Fax 703.243.0025 • [www.ncea.org](http://www.ncea.org)



Dear Families, Students, Alumni and Friends of St. Thomas More Catholic School,  
I am honored and pleased to be a part of the celebrations for St. Thomas More Catholic School's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. For some of us who have been around since the early days of the school, it is hard to believe that this day has arrived so swiftly. The school, like the St. Thomas More Parish and larger Catholic community in North Carolina, has evolved dramatically over the last 50 years.



The school opened its doors in September 1964 with 94 students in kindergarten through fourth grade, and today, it offers a rich educational and spiritual foundation for 3 year olds through eighth graders with an enrollment of over 430 students. The School is a leader in our diocese for its achievements both inside and outside the classroom. St. Thomas More Catholic School students and alumni are leaders in our Church and communities!

I am from a family of three St. Thomas More Catholic School alumni. I am a parent of an STM alumna and two current students. St. Thomas More Catholic School has been a vital part of my life for as long as I can remember. It is with age and perspective that I have come to appreciate all that STM offers. First and foremost, there is the emphasis on the love of Christ and the deep-seated belief that we each have a path and calling to follow. I cherish the love and support I was given by my teachers and school staff. I always felt appreciated by my teachers for who I was and an excitement for whom I could become. I was constantly encouraged; corrected when needed; and praised when I succeeded. Even when I walk the halls of the school today, I have a feeling of belonging, being a part of something bigger than myself, and a sense of possibility and hope.

The school's 50 years have not been without their challenges and uncertainty. During one of my first years at STM back in the late 1970's, the school's enrollment dipped below 100 students and there were discussions about the long-term viability of the school. Parish and school leaders at the time understood the uniqueness and value of a Catholic education and decided to keep the school doors open. Because of their faith and leadership, over 3,000 students including myself have benefited from the God-centered environment and superb education offered at St. Thomas More Catholic School for the last 50 years.

Thank you for being here with us to celebrate this momentous and grand occasion and let's all promise to be a part of helping to ensure St. Thomas More Catholic School is here another 50 years!

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeffrey V. Caiola". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and personal.

Jeff Caiola, '82  
Chair of School Advisory Board

### **St. Thomas More Catholic School - 2013-2014 School Advisory Board**

Jeff Caiola, Chair  
Maihan Vu, Vice Chair  
Jo Williams, Secretary  
Gregory Miklos, Treasurer

Margaret Ashness  
Dr. Michael Ashton  
Victor Dudley

Gwen Eldred  
Mary Catherine Geradts  
Andres Henao  
Carlos Lima

Very Reverend Scott E. McCue, V.F.  
Michelle O'Donnell  
Barbara Ulam

**Mass of Thanksgiving**  
**50th Anniversary of St. Thomas More Catholic School**  
January 31, 2014  
Memorial of St. John Bosco

*The Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge*  
*Bishop of Raleigh*  
*Principal Celebrant*

**Opening Hymn**

Praise to You, O Christ, Our Savior

Refrain



Praise to you, O Christ, our Sav-ior, Word of the Fa-ther, call-ing us to life;



Son of God who leads us to free-dom: glo-ry to you, Lord Je-sus Christ!

Verses



1. You are the Word who calls us out of dark - ness;  
2. You are the one whom proph - ets hoped and longed for;  
3. You are the Word who calls us to be ser - vants;  
4. You are the Word who binds us and u - nites us;



you are the Word who leads us in - to light;  
you are the one who speaks to us to - day;  
you are the Word whose on - ly law is love;  
you are the Word who calls us to be one;



you are the Word who brings us through the des - ert;  
you are the one who leads us to our fu - ture;  
you are the Word - made - flesh who lives a - mong us;  
you are the Word who teach - es us for - give - ness:



glo - ry to you, Lord Je - sus Christ! D.C.

**Introductory Rite**

**Penitential Rite**

Collect

First Reading: Philippians 4:4-9

Responsorial Psalm:

Psalm 103: The Lord is Kind

The Lord is kind and mer - ci - ful;  
the Lord is kind and mer - ci - ful.

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of the psalm, and the second staff contains the melody for the second line. The lyrics are written below the notes.

Gospel Acclamation

Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia!

The image shows a single staff of musical notation in G major and 4/4 time. It features three distinct melodic phrases for the 'Alleluia' acclamation, each starting with a number (1, 2, 3) and a 'Cresc. rit. all!' marking. The lyrics are written below the notes.

Gospel: Matthew 18:1-5

Homily: *Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge, Bishop of Raleigh*

Prayer of the Faithful

Preparation of the Gifts: Shout with Joy (*school choir*)

Eucharistic Acclamations

Holy, Holy, Holy

Ho - ly, Ho - ly, Ho - ly Lord God of hosts.  
Heav-en and earth are full of your glo-ry. Ho - san - na,  
ho - san - na, ho - san - na in the high-est.  
Bless-ed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Ho -  
san - na, ho - san - na, ho - san - na in the high-est.

The image shows five staves of musical notation in G minor (two flats) and 4/4 time. The melody is written across the staves with lyrics underneath. The piece includes a key signature change to 3/4 time for the 'Ho-san-na' section.

Memorial Acclamation

When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we pro -  
claim your Death, O Lord, un - til you come a - gain.

Great Amen

A - men. A - men. A - men.

Lamb of God

*Cantor* *All*  
\*Lamb of God, you take a-way the sins of the world, have  
*Cantor* *All*  
mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you take a-way the  
sins of the world, grant us peace.

\*Other titles for Christ may be sung.

Communion Hymns

Here I Am, Lord

Verses

1. I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my  
2. I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my  
3. I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the  
peo - ple cry. All who dwell in dark and sin  
peo - ple's pain. I have wept for love of them.  
poor and lame. I will set a feast for them.  
My hand will save. I who made the  
They turn a - way. I will break their  
My hand will save. Fin - est bread I

stars of night, I will make their dark-ness bright.  
 hearts of stone, Give them hearts for love a-lone.  
 will pro-vide Till their hearts be sat-is-fied.

Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?  
 I will speak my word to them. Whom shall I send?  
 I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?

Refrain

Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you

call-ing in the night. I will go, Lord, if you

lead me. I will hold your peo-ple in my heart.

I Come with Joy

1. I come with joy, a child of God, For -  
 2. I come with Chris - tians far and near To  
 3. As Christ breaks bread, and bids us share, Each  
 4. The Spir - it of the ris - en Christ, Un -  
 5. To - geth - er met, to - geth - er bound By

giv - en, loved, and free, The life of Je - sus  
 find, as all are fed, The new com - mu - ni -  
 proud di - vi - sion ends. The love that made us,  
 seen, but ev - er near, Is in such friend - ship  
 all that God has done, We'll go with joy, to

to re - call, In love laid down for me.  
 ty of love In Christ's com - mu - nion bread.  
 makes us one, And stran - gers now are friends.  
 bet - ter known, A - live a - mong us here.  
 give the world The love that makes us one.

Prayer after Communion

## Final Blessing

## Recessional Hymn

### I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light

1. I want to walk as a child of the light.  
2. I want to see the bright-ness of God.  
3. I'm look - ing for the com - ing of Christ.

I want to fol - low Je - sus.  
I want to look at Je - sus.  
I want to be with Je - sus.

God set the stars to give light to the world. The  
Clear sun of right - eous - ness shine on my path, And  
When we have run with pa - tience the race, We

star of my life is Je - sus.  
show me the way to the Fa - ther.  
shall know the joy of Je - sus.

In him there is no dark - ness at all. The

night and the day are both a - like. The

Lamb is the light of the cit - y of God.

Shine in my heart, Lord Je - sus.

*All music is reprinted with permission - LicenSing #601635.*

## St. Thomas More Catholic School Song

Dr. Kenneth Reckford

*Traditional English melody, 16th century*  
*“Greensleeves,” i.e., “What Child is This?”*

St. Thomas More, you watch us grow  
Through joy and sorrow, work and play;  
Your loving spirit tries to show  
How we might walk a better way.

### *CHORUS:*

So might we grow in faith,  
And hope forever, and charity  
So might our joy be great  
As every day leads onward.

St. Thomas More, when we are grown  
And take on us the world's affairs,  
Still keep us as your very own,  
So we may smile amid our cares.

*(chorus)*

St. Thomas More, if hearts grow cold,  
Warm them with kindness, keep them true  
So we'll remember, when we're old,  
The teaching we once had from you.

*(chorus)*



# A History of St. Thomas More Catholic School: *The First Fifty Years*

## Introduction

During 2014, St. Thomas More Catholic School, listed among the hundred oldest non-public schools in North Carolina, celebrates the 50th anniversary of its opening. For all those students who have entered its doors--from the first year's less than 100 to this year's over 400--the school has provided a stable and nurturing setting, where they have been able to develop intellectually, socially, and spiritually, in fulfillment of the school's mission to educate each child in a God-centered environment.

From its beginnings as an elementary school and convent set amid the trees on twenty acres of land, to the current configuration of the campus--which includes the church and middle school, art and music building, gymnasium, and athletic field--the school has come through the last part of the twentieth century and made its way into the new millennium guided by a number of dedicated leaders. Over the years, other individuals, both lay and religious, have played significant roles in the school's development. The generosity and efforts of all of these men and women made the school what it is today, and it is their successors, holding true to their original vision, who will lead it into the future.



Gen. Davis Shore, gifts chairman; C. C. Woods, Jr., contractor; Julian Altobellis, architect; and Fr. Francis Murphy, pastor, with plans for the school, 1963.

## Parish Beginnings

The Catholic Community of St. Thomas More can trace its roots to the University of North Carolina, where, as early as 1917, several Catholic students gathered for regular worship. From this small group's days as a mission to its eventual designation as a parish in 1940, mass was celebrated in various spaces on campus, which increased in size as the congregation grew. The arrival of some 1,000 Catholics with the Navy Pre-Flight program and the parish's continued growth after the war warranted a larger, more permanent worship space.



St. Thomas More Catholic Church, ca. 1966.

Among the regular attendees, from his student days on, was William D. Carmichael, Jr., who, by this time, was an officer of the university. It was his father, William D. Carmichael, Sr., who donated four acres of land at the end of Gimghoul Road in memory of his wife, which made a church building a possibility. A drive to raise funds began, and after a decade and several pastors, this led to the November 1955 groundbreaking for the original church. Completed in just over a year, it was dedicated on March 31, 1957.

With a permanent worship space and over 150 children among its membership, the idea of a parish school soon arose. By the early 1960's, Bishop Vincent Waters was in communication with the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, inviting them to lead and staff the school. With a convent in South Carolina and school in Greensboro, the order had a positive reputation in education, having operated schools in the United States, as well as in Europe and Africa. After repeated pleas from both the Bishop and Fr. Francis Murphy, pastor of St. Thomas More, the order committed to the venture in January of 1962, and a Catholic school in Chapel Hill was soon to become a reality.

## Groundbreaking and Construction

A three-acre parcel of land about a mile from the church site was donated by the Carmichael family, and the remaining seventeen acres of land that made up the twenty-acre campus of the school were purchased from the Chapel Hill Country Club for \$59,000. A portion of the money came from parish contributions, and the balance was financed by a low-interest loan from the Knights of Columbus.

Ground was broken in October of 1963, and construction began in early December. Designed by Julian Altobellis of Wilmington, and built by C. C. Woods, Jr., of Durham, the 330,000 square foot project was comprised of two buildings--the school and a convent which could house nine sisters--connected by a breezeway. Surrounded by play areas, the school had eight classrooms, administrative offices, a library, a chapel, and an auditorium with a stage and two dressing rooms. With a design that incorporated skylights and rooms painted in pastel colors, the school gained immediate attention and its fair share of coverage by the local press.



Construction of the school, 1963.

## The Seven Sisters

Seven Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur moved into the convent adjacent to the school in August of 1964. They included fourth grade teacher, Sr. Jane Raphael; third grade teacher, Sr. Edward Patricia; second grade teacher, Sr. Maureen James, and first grade teacher, Sr. Catherine Anne. Also residing in the convent were Sr. Maura Christine, who was studying at UNC; Sr. Marguerite, and Sr. Berchmans Julia,





Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur outside convent, 1964.

who served as Superior, maintaining order and providing structure and guidance to the teaching sisters and the others in residence.

Chosen to lead the school as its first principal, the fourth grade teacher, Sr. Jane Raphael, attended a course in school administration over the summer, after which she and the other sisters spent a brief time in Greensboro before making their way to Chapel Hill. Once the sisters arrived, they found the campus was still covered in post-construction mud. With beds not yet delivered, the convent had only mattresses on the floor. The library shelves were empty, and the classrooms lacked textbooks. While these conditions were not optimal, the young sisters were undaunted and moved forward in their mission.

### Opening and Dedication

In September of 1964, *The Chapel Hill Weekly* announced an Open House to be held Saturday, September 5, at the newly completed school, promising a look at the school and the rare opportunity to visit the convent in which the school's faculty of teaching sisters would live. With North Carolina having a less than 2% Catholic population at the time, and with St. Thomas More Catholic School being the first private or parochial school in Orange County, people were understandably curious. In this "mission territory," the general public was not used to seeing young women dressed as the sisters were--with covered heads and wearing long dark dresses that had rosaries tied at the waist. The Open House brought many local residents to the new school and, by all accounts, it was a well-attended event.

Ready with a staff of seven and numerous volunteers, the school officially opened its doors with a half day on September 9, 1964, serving students from kindergarten through fourth grade. With no public kindergartens in North Carolina at that time, the kindergarten led by a lay teacher, Mrs. Josephine Dugger, was popular and made up about 30 of the school's 94 students. The school began with around half its students being non-Catholics, and an annual tuition of \$150 per student for St. Thomas More parishioners and \$250 per student for non-parishioners.



Open House flyer, 1964.

Dedication of the new school was held December 8, 1964, with Fr. Murphy, Bishop Vincent Waters, and the Diocesan Superintendent, Reverend Monsignor Edward T. Gilbert, concelebrating. Attendees included community members and university officials, both Catholic and non-Catholic. Fr. Gerald L. Lewis served as Master of Ceremonies for the dedication festivities, which included a dinner catered by the Chapel Hill Country Club and served in the auditorium after mass, followed by an open house for the community.

### The First Year

The first year was laden with new experiences for all those involved with the school--faculty and staff, as well as students and parents. The sisters worked countless hours in their classrooms during the week, helped with religious education on weekends, and spent their remaining waking hours cleaning, organizing, and making both the convent and the school their home. Praying together and supporting each other, the sisters worked to fulfill their order's mission to "make known God's goodness" as they educated the students.



Working in the classroom, ca. 1964.

As distinctive as their style of dress, the sisters' educational practices were equally unique. The first grade followed a readiness program, the length of which depended upon individual student needs. The Spaulding method of phonetic reading was utilized, and printing was taught until halfway through second grade, when cursive writing was introduced. In addition to the basics, the school's curriculum included French, art and art appreciation, and a physical education program which was followed for 15 to 20 minutes a day. While religion was taught as a subject, non-Catholics were not required to answer questions or to take tests. Mass was celebrated weekly, during the lunch hour, so as not to conflict with instruction.

The students were enriched by the sisters' resourcefulness, which allowed for strong academics despite limited materials. With the library lacking books, contributions were welcomed, and the shelves did not stay empty long, thanks to book fairs and other fundraising efforts. Spearheaded by dedicated volunteers, these included the sale of items as diverse as golf socks and Christmas trees. Shipped in from Canada, the Christmas trees began a fundraising tradition that would last some forty years. As that initial year progressed, the sisters educated the students, brought Catholicism into the community, and remained quite a novelty around town, especially when they introduced their black and white dog, Sir More, the first four-legged resident of the convent.

### The Early Years

Adhering to its original plan of adding one grade a year, the school began its second year nearly doubling its enrollment with 165 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. With such growth, additional support was necessary, and parents stepped in to fill the need. An article in *The Durham Morning Herald* spoke of the high level of parent involvement at the school. More than twenty mothers volunteered in the reading program that year, augmenting the teaching staff and enabling the formation of small reading groups within classrooms. Another group of parents formed the Adult Science Committee, providing classroom presentations on topics coinciding with areas of study.

St. Thomas More Catholic School very quickly became the school of choice. An area principal enrolled his son to see what it was like; university families attended, and naval officers brought their children. Catholics and non-Catholics alike were drawn to the unique educational opportunity the school presented, and by the third year, enrollment had tripled, growing to 288 students in kindergarten through sixth grade. The Home and School Association (HSA) made its debut that year, first meeting in September of 1966, and the

school continued to blossom, even earning recognition from the Chapel Hill Garden Club.

Maintaining high enrollment into the 1967-1968 school year and earning national recognition from the Freedoms Foundation in Valley Forge, it was clear that the school was a success. This can be attributed to the innovative methods and enthusiasm of the dedicated young women who were the school's first administrator and teachers. Sr. Jane led the way with boundless energy, embracing every opportunity: fundraising, local events, parish dinners, even serving as an American Heart Association volunteer, repaying her education in service to the community over the summer. She engaged area educators, artists and musicians, parents, and other community members for the students' benefit. The Triangle Repertory Theater provided cultural enrichment programs, and parent volunteers offered instruction in sewing and golf. The auditorium was rented for dance and movie nights, with proceeds going towards items needed by the school. Through it all, the school continued to receive plenty of publicity, with *The Chapel Hill News* covering every event. As time went on, the parish's founding members continued their support as well, promoting the Catholic faith and Catholic education in the community. The ties to the parish's early home remained strong--the UNC athletic department loaned basketball setups for the auditorium, football coaches assisted with physical education, volunteering to present demonstrations and lead exercise, and students scoured area stores for construction paper in the distinctive "Carolina blue" for their projects.



Kindergarten class with principal, pastor, and teachers, 1966.

Concerned about maintaining adequate staffing as the school continued to grow, Fr. Murphy made a request to the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur for an additional sister, but with fewer young women entering religious life, the need could not be met. Change came at the start of the 1968-1969 school year, with Sr. Agnes Joseph replacing Sr. Berchmans Julia as Superior, and Sr. Eileen Hope replacing Sr. Jane Raphael as principal. Tragically, Sr. Eileen's tenure was short-lived, as she died of spinal meningitis on January 2, 1969, and Mrs. Lorraine Goldsmith, a veteran teacher and experienced principal, was appointed at the recommendation of Sr. Jane Varano (previously Sr. Jane Raphael). The year was not without its high points, as the sixth grade presented a play on the life of St. Thomas More, directed by Dr. Kenneth Reckford, and held a display of dolls in March, simulating the annual Festival of Dolls in Japan. With Mrs. Goldsmith's return to Canada that summer, Sr. Bernadette Sykes was named principal for 1969-1970. Through these early years the student population remained comparatively diverse, including 40 to 50 percent non-Catholic students each year, as well as about 10 percent African-American students.



#### A Time of Transition

As the school made its way into the next decade, it was clear that times were changing. Some orders of sisters were moving toward modern dress, and moving away from wearing habits. Disagreements over dress, direction, diocesan guidelines, and local goals may have affected the stay of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, who were considering whether or not to remain at the school. Suddenly faced with a possible school closing or the increased cost to hire lay teachers, parents were worried. The return of Sr. Jane as the principal for 1970-1971, at the request of Fr. Murphy, helped allay their fears, and the school had a successful year. Enrollment was at nearly 300 students, and there was an abundance of activities, including Math and Sewing Fairs, a Chinese Dinner, a Christmas program, and the sale of 250 Christmas trees! In addition, vocational guidance was offered for sixth grade male students, who visited local businesses to learn about different types of jobs. Newspaper clippings of the day recognized the school for its pleasant surroundings and individualized approach, along with its grading system.

Christmas tree sale, 1970. Parents received written reports at quarterly conferences rather than report cards with only letter or number grades.

When the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur officially withdrew in the summer of 1971, a parish bulletin indicated their departure and addressed staffing plans for the year, announcing that Sr. Jane would remain as the principal and that lay teachers would replace the sisters, with the Diocese subsidizing the parish for the financial burden. Sr. Jane guided the school through this transition even as she underwent a change of her own, leaving religious life, and going from being known as Sr. Jane Varano to being known as Miss Suzanne Varano.

As the year progressed, concern over the cost to continue with only lay teachers, along with the desire to have a religious presence in the school, led to a search for a new order, and Fr. Murphy began a dialogue with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania, through Sr. James Gregory (now Mary Adamson) late in 1971. From Charlotte, and a member of St. Ann's parish, Sr. James Gregory had attended UNC before moving to Pennsylvania to follow her religious call. While she was visiting her sister over Christmas and attending mass at the church, Fr. Murphy recognized her as a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph. He mentioned the school's need for sisters, invited her to tour the school and convent, and asked her to share her findings and his request with her order. When she contacted her Superior, she was told the order could not take on another school at that time. However, upon her return to Chestnut Hill, she let the sisters know of the school's proximity to several universities. The order re-evaluated its decision and dialogue resumed. Members of the parish community, including Fr. Murphy, Dr. Duncan Getsinger, and Miss Suzanne Varano, went to Pennsylvania to meet with the order to discuss the possibility of their leading and staffing the school. The talks were successful, and in the summer of 1972, the Sisters of St. Joseph made the journey from Chestnut Hill to Chapel Hill, beginning a relationship with the school that would last nearly forty years.

#### A New Order = A New Era

The 1972-1973 school year saw staffing by the new order and leadership by a new principal, Sr. Columba O'Neill. Teaching sisters included first grade teacher, Sr. Regina Rosarii, and sixth grade teacher, Sr. Margaret Roberta. Sr. James Gregory, now studying at UNC, was in

residence as well. Despite the change in leadership, traditional school events, including the Christmas program, continued. Hot lunches were introduced in the form of hot dog days, a favorite with the students, and a reunion held for the school's first graduating class (the class of 1967) was a testament to the affection the school, though young, inspired in its students.

While Sr. Columba continued as principal into 1973-1974, change came in the form of a new pastor, Fr. Raymond Donohue. Sr. Stella Immaculate arrived as library assistant and offered resource support, and a new teaching sister, Sr. Francis Irene, replaced Sr. Regina Rosarii. The next year, when Sr. Columba was named the Assistant Superintendent of Diocesan Schools, Sr. Stella Immaculate took over as principal, and Sr. Charles Christopher replaced Sr. Francis Irene. A number of other sisters came and went over the next ten or so years, residing at the convent while studying at local universities. In exchange for living there, these sisters taught in the parish's religious education program. The Catholic community and the local universities were welcoming to the sisters, doing what they could to support them. A station wagon was purchased for those teaching at the school, and a Fiat was purchased for those residing at the convent, to make area travel less challenging.



Sisters of St. Joseph with Fr. Murphy, ca. 1972.

Although those first years with the new order were during an era of educational experimentation, the school remained traditional in its structure and practices, eschewing the open classrooms and free movement that were a trend of the day. Classes were limited to 25 students, but few reached that number. Students in fourth through sixth grades went to different teachers for different subjects, an approach well-received by parents. Even with about half its students from non-Catholic homes, the school continued to incorporate Catholic teachings into the curriculum. The students performed well academically, scoring higher than the national average on the standardized tests that were administered. While there was no seventh or eighth grade at that time, students easily made the transition to public schools or other private schools, thanks to the strong academic background they had been provided.

By the mid-1970's, yearly tuition was at \$430 per student for St. Thomas More parishioners, and twice that for non-parishioners, with families enrolling more than one child receiving a multi-child discount. Even with the income from tuition, however, the school was not operating with a surplus, and in fact, was struggling to make mortgage payments. It was at this time that Miss Daisy Moseley, a longtime parishioner and lifelong Catholic originally from the Halifax area, offered her home on Gimghoul Road in Chapel Hill to the parish for the good of the school, and Fr. Donohue sold the property for \$55,000, applying the proceeds from the sale to pay down the school debt.

1975-1976 saw the departure of Sr. Charles Christopher, the arrival of a new pastor, Fr. John (Jack) Richardson, and a drop in enrollment, yet the students continued to thrive, learning and achieving success in area competitions, with several Daughters of the American Revolution American History Month Essay Contest winners that year. In 1976-1977, the school introduced a new principal, Sr. Grace Martina, who served for four years, while Sr. Stella Immaculate remained as librarian for a year. Other staff changes during Sr. Grace's tenure included the departure of Sr. Margaret Roberta in July of 1978, who was replaced by Sr. Marian Teresita for 1978-1979, followed by Sr. Walburga for the next three years. While these years were not without challenges, as enrollment remained below 200 students, traditions were upheld and new ones began, with events like the kindergarten Thanksgiving Feast, Catholic Schools' Week, and Field Day making their first appearance around this time. The school continued to gain community recognition from the students' participation and success in the American Association of University Women's annual creative writing contests, and from service projects done in the classroom that supported local agencies. In a school this small with limited resources, parent involvement was critical, and attendance at two HSA meetings a year was mandatory. With \$5 for membership dues, HSA meetings included committee reports and guest speakers, who addressed such topics as parenting and communication. Fundraising efforts at the time included a fall carnival, which raised money for classroom supplies, and the sale of collectible bells, in addition to the ever-popular Christmas trees.

### Room for Growth

The next decade began with a new principal, as Sr. Marie Elizabeth Alspaugh arrived in 1980-1981, and remained for six years. From Winston-Salem, she attended UNC-Greensboro before entering the convent. Since becoming a sister, she had been a teacher and principal in High Point, and had taught in Winston-Salem and Baltimore. Although she had been educated in public schools, Sr. Marie was dedicated to religious education, and even with the student population still about 40% non-Catholic, all students took part in religious instruction and participated in weekly mass and other liturgical events. In her first year, Sr. Marie spent time just observing in order to get a sense of where the school was and where it could be. She firmly believed that school needed to be engaging and fun, that teachers needed to keep their students excited, and that building and maintaining a strong connection between home and school was critical to student success.



Groundbreaking for new wing, 1983.

1981-1982 saw a jump in enrollment and the introduction of a new pastor, Fr. J. Paul Byron, and the next year brought a new teaching sister, Sr. Anna Gerard, who served two years. Under the leadership of Fr. Byron and Sr. Marie, the school flourished, and it seemed anything was possible. By the fall of 1983, enrollment had gone from under 200 students to nearly 300, for several reasons: (1) increased enrollment in the after school program more than tripled its numbers; (2) a switch to full day kindergarten more than doubled its numbers; and (3) the introduction of a pre-kindergarten class added another twenty students. Sr. Marie Elizabeth predicted that, at this rate, the school would soon have two classes per grade, and a total enrollment of 350 students. More space was needed to accommodate such growth, and in December of 1983, ground was broken for an 11,000 square foot addition--five classrooms and a multi-purpose room--at a total cost of \$400,000.

Along with the expansion project came another innovation: the introduction of technology. The school's fledgling computer education program was designed for all students--from kindergarten through sixth grade. Starting with a single Apple II computer, basic software, and educational materials, it was soon realized that one computer was not enough, and funding for additional computers was approved. All students learned basic computer terminology; then while younger students used educational software, older students were taught programming. Parents donated time and additional software in support of the program, and students who had attended Duke's Computer Camp shared their knowledge. The school was moving forward in other ways as well, with students earning accolades through their participation and success in events like the Science Fair, Dental Health Parade, Talent Show, and the Durham Association of Insurance Women's Poster Contest.

It was a busy time, and fortunately, the school was not lacking in volunteer support. Both community members and parents shared their expertise, so for students who had special needs, there was special help, and for students who had extra need, there was enrichment. With parent volunteers at the helm, the lunch program expanded its offerings to hot dogs and pizza. The involvement of local residents was strong, with generous individuals like W. Everette Blackwood, a grandfather to several students and uncle to a number of alumni, grading and landscaping a 2-1/2 acre area just beyond the school to create a playing field, where a wooden play structure--"The Ark"--was built.

The school was like a large family, pairing older students with younger students to encourage cooperation and understanding. Caring for and about others extended beyond school with students' involvement in community service--raising money for St. Jude's Children's Hospital and providing Thanksgiving meals for the less fortunate. Competition was kept to a minimum; instead, it was recognized that all students had their own unique gifts, which they were encouraged to use and share for the benefit of others. All were accepted in this environment. At mass, while non-Catholic students could not receive the Eucharist, they got a blessing so no one felt left out.

1984-1985 saw the completion and dedication of the addition, a testimony to the commitment of the entire community--pastor and principal, parish council and school board, and students and parents, many of whom had pledged \$1000 per family toward the project. With the school now serving students from pre-kindergarten through sixth grade, total enrollment once again topped 300. Just as the school was thriving, fundraising efforts were too, with a record 700 pumpkins sold in a pumpkin patch on school grounds, and what would become a much-loved annual event--the Halloween Carnival--was first held. Even Christmas tree sales were on the rise, with 1,300 trees sold, far more than in the early days. The year also saw the arrival of Sr. Theresa Cargan, as well as Sr. Francis Dolores, who served as librarian through 1988-1989. Although by this time the school had mostly lay teachers, several sisters remained in residence at the convent.

By the next year, Sr. Marie's last, the total enrollment at the school was approaching 350 students just as she had predicted, and the school was recognized for its continued success. Her leadership had clearly made a difference, yet Sr. Marie did not take credit, but asserted that she had simply surrounded herself with competent people and put them to work. She displayed deep affection for faculty, parents, and students, working to create an environment where students could feel valued and respected, and, most importantly, where they could grow. She knew all the students by name, and made a practice of grading a set of papers for every class, writing a personal note on each one.

### **Celebrating 25 Years**

1986-1987 brought a new principal, Sr. Bernadette Rochford, who led the school for three years of continued growth, and made plans for its upcoming 25th anniversary. As enrollment edged towards 390 by Sr. Bernadette's last year, there were three first grade classes and plans to extend the school to seventh and eighth grade. Among its accolades that year, the school was honored to have one of its faculty, Mrs. Liz Jochum, win the Diocese of Raleigh's Distinguished Teacher Award.

The 1989-1990 school year, the school's 25th anniversary year, saw the arrival of a new principal, Sr. Colleen Dauerbach, a new pastor, Fr. Tim O'Connor, and just one teaching sister remaining, Sr. Theresa Cargan. Even with tuition increasing to \$1,300 per student for St. Thomas More parishioners and \$1,800 per student for non-parishioners, the school continued to flourish and to gain recognition. Enrollment crept toward 400 students, necessitating three classes in kindergarten and second grade, and Mrs. Peggy Mazzola was the second faculty member to receive the Diocese's Distinguished Teacher Award.



Celebrating the school's 25th Anniversary, 1989.

It was a year of celebrations, beginning with the Jubilee kick-off mass in January of 1990. Even Catholic Schools Week became a time to celebrate the school itself as much as to celebrate Catholic education. The week's special events included a school-wide "birthday" party, complete with a giant paper-maché cake, and the creation of a collage to commemorate the school's first 25 years. In late April, a special mass was held with Reverend Monsignor Murphy, pastor during the building of the school; Fr. J. Paul Byron, pastor during the building of the addition; and Fr. Tim O'Connor, the current pastor, concelebrating. A barbecue dinner with musical entertainment was held afterward. In late May, students buried a time capsule of wishes for the next quarter century. Even the yearbook recognized the significance of the year, with the "25" emblazoned on its silver-toned cover. Associated with the celebrations, and the brainchild of Fr. Byron, was the establishment of the school's Jubilee Education Fund. Thanks to the foresight of those involved, the earnings from this fund have helped to defray the cost of tuition for families needing financial assistance since that time.

### **Moving Forward**

With the departure of Sr. Colleen, 1990-1991 brought a second lay principal, Mrs. Su Russ, who had served as a teacher at the school for many years. As enrollment numbers remained high, there were again three classes, this time in both first and third grades, and Sr. Theresa Cargan, now teaching fifth grade, was the third of the school's faculty in as many years to earn the Diocese's Distinguished Teacher Award.

In 1991-1992, the aging up of three classes of first and third graders created three classes of second and fourth graders. There was a change in the teaching staff with Sr. Theresa Cargan moving on and Sr. Grace Christi joining the faculty through 1993-1994, and there was a change in leadership, with the arrival of Sr. Marie St. Leger. The balance of the decade brought several different pastors, with Fr. Philip Leach serving in 1992-1993, Fr. Gerald Lewis serving from 1993-1995, and Fr. Michael Clay serving from 1995-1999. More changes came



Sr. Marie St. Leger and  
Fr. Rob Currie, 1995.

with a return to uniforms in the middle of the decade, and the initiation of new fundraising efforts, such as gift-wrap sales and an annual auction, by the HSA. Amid it all, the school held firm to established traditions, with ongoing activities like prayer partners and events like the Halloween Carnival, the kindergarten's Thanksgiving Feast, Catholic Schools Week, and Field Day remaining popular among students and fostering fellowship among families.

It was also during the 1990's that the school began a relationship with Fr. Rob Currie, S.J., to support the Arenal, Nicaragua mission where he had lived and ministered since 1987. What began as a small project--sending supplies to help keep the community's school open--grew over the years as, to date, more than \$110,000 has been raised through First Friday mass collections, ice cream sales, parishioners' contributions, and coffee sales at weekend masses. These funds have helped to restore the community's health center, and continue to assist in providing higher education to Arenal's young people, and in purchasing vehicles and supplies that enable the community to be self-sustaining.

### Building for the Future

During 1996-1997, the school's continued growth was evident in rising enrollment numbers as, in addition to having three second grade classes, a seventh grade class was added. With the parish as a whole exhibiting a significant increase in membership, a decision was made to proceed with a construction project, Phase I of the Master Plan for New Facilities, which would include a new church and middle school located just beyond the current school building. Violet DeKnikker served as parish administrator over the course of the project. Ground was broken on Pentecost Sunday 1997, and "The Ark"--long a fixture as a favorite playtime site--was dismantled and removed to allow for construction. Recognizing the changes to come, the yearbook featured a two-page spread declaring, "The Future is Here: the Seventh Grade is It" and included pages dedicated to middle school students separate from those highlighting the younger students. With the advent of a middle school came the beginning of an athletics program and the opportunity to be "Knights" as both boys' and girls' basketball teams had their first season. The older students also took on new responsibilities, staffing a school newspaper and the yearbook.

Even with construction underway for most of it, the next school year saw total enrollment over 400, three classes in both second and third grade, and several milestones--the first officers elected to student council, the first eighth grade trip to Washington, DC, and the first eighth grade class graduation, which included ten students who had attended the school since kindergarten. In other developments, the convent had its last year of use as a residence, as it was converted into office space for the priests and parish staff, and the sisters moved into a private home the parish had purchased in Colony Woods.



Construction of the middle school building, ca. 1997.

The 1998-1999 school year brought a new principal, Sr. Catherine Michael Fee, and the completion of the \$7-million construction project, which provided a new church that could seat 1,000, and an eight-classroom addition--including a computer lab and science lab--which housed the middle school. Bishop Gossman dedicated the new facilities on December 12, 1998, and the school held its first graduation in the new church in the spring. With the arrival of the new principal came honors assemblies to recognize achievements in academics and community service, and the introduction of a yearly theme. Enrollment peaked at 460 students, necessitating three classes in both third and fourth grades, and, with a full complement of sixth through eighth grade students now occupying the middle school, the athletics program expanded to add junior varsity basketball for both boys and girls.

The next school year marked the dawn of a new millennium and introduced the students to a new pastor, Fr. John Durbin, and a new parish administrator, Bob Weikert, who consolidated the operation of the church and school. With enrollment still over 450, there were three fourth grade classes and three fifth grade classes. The first hardbound yearbook was produced that year and marked the many benefits of middle school life, among them social events like dances, new team sports options, like boys' and girls' soccer, and girls' volleyball; and the opportunity to participate in electives--including offerings like debate, guitar, drama, stock market, student store, and newspaper--as well as the addition of additional extracurricular activities, like Web Masters and a chess club.

A landmark year followed as St. Thomas More Catholic School earned its initial accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI) in 2000-2001, with the school's faculty and staff completing a self-study that led to the development of the School Improvement Plan for 2001-2005. Areas to be addressed in fulfillment of that initial plan included enhancing school security, performing facility updates, improving scheduling, and integrating technology across curricular areas. There were three classes in both fifth and sixth grades that year, and the Booster Club, formed to provide financial support to the athletics program, held its first annual golf tournament that spring.

### Forty Years and Growing

By 2004-2005, its 40th anniversary year, with enrollment holding at about 450, St. Thomas More Catholic School reflected on its past even as it looked toward its future. The school's 40th anniversary was celebrated the first weekend in October of 2004, with festivities including a Friday evening welcome reception and cocktail party, a Saturday evening buffet dinner and dance, and a Sunday afternoon barbecue luncheon. With the parish membership now exceeding 6,000 registered individuals, the need for additional meeting spaces and other



Sr. Catherine and Sr. Marie at the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Mass, 2004.

facilities became increasingly evident, and Fr. Durbin convened a new Building Committee to fulfill Phase II of the Master Plan, which would include new parish offices and meeting spaces, a parish hall with a full kitchen and library, a columbarium, and some new facilities for the school.

Even with a drop in enrollment the next year, faculty and staff were no less busy, as they were involved in the re-accreditation process. Reviewing the standards used to create the School Improvement Plan for 2001-2005, they completed another self-study that formed the basis for the Accreditation Renewal Report and School Improvement Plan for 2006-2010. Goals included increasing professional development, strengthening the resource program, developing new strategies towards tracking and reporting student progress, enhancing communication with stakeholders, and maintaining a standing committee to monitor

continuous improvement. In the spring, the School Advisory Board's Tuition Model Study Committee presented its findings, which led to a decision that, beginning with 2006-2007, part of the annual parish subsidy would go toward tuition assistance, in order to increase the amount of funds available so that the school could serve a broader cross-section of students. A new parish administrator, school parent and former HSA President, Carlos Lima, was introduced that year as well. The next year, the parish kicked off its *One Campaign* to raise funds for the new facilities, encouraging support from all community members--parishioners and school parents, teachers and staff.

The second half of the decade saw enrollment numbers ranging from 400 to 450, but fluctuating from year to year. Two new sports were added to the athletics program--boys' baseball and co-ed cross-country. In the classrooms, teachers continued to use innovative educational practices, integrating new technologies and implementing a school-wide writing curriculum. Extracurricular and enrichment opportunities included new offerings, such as Junior Great Books, Math Counts, and Girls on the Run (for ages 8-13). Students and staff alike shared their time, talent, and treasure to serve the school and parish community through onsite efforts like prayer partners, first Friday mission collections, and campus beautification and maintenance initiatives. In addition, students engaged in outreach by participating in Shoebox Christmas and Scholastic Books' Classrooms Care program, and in other projects to benefit local senior citizens, the parish's Caring and Sharing Center, and Chapel Hill Ronald McDonald House. They also supported the efforts of numerous agencies and organizations, including the American Heart Association, American Red Cross, Catholic Charities, UNC Children's Hospital, and Scottie's Place, a camp for homeless children. Parent involvement remained strong, with school parents actively volunteering in many capacities, participating in the various efforts of the HSA, and serving on the School Advisory Board.

Overall, the decade was memorable for extracurricular and athletic successes, professional achievements, and technological advancements. The middle school team found victory in Battle of the Books, the boys' soccer team earned four consecutive championships, and the boys' basketball team won the Shamrock Tournament. The school was well represented among nominees for the Diocese's Monsignor Gerald L. Lewis Award for Excellence in Teaching as well, with two winners--Marilyn Misa Ferguson (2001-2002) and Michelle Silva (2004-2005), and one Finalist, Courtney Kuczynski Coward (2004-2005). Progress came in the area of technology with internet access, the establishment of faculty and staff e-mail accounts, the development of school and teacher websites, the addition of a mobile laptop lab to the school's technology resources, and the first yearbook to be created online. While many traditions were maintained, from holiday events like the Halloween Carnival and Thanksgiving Food Drive to singing carols on Franklin Street, and new ones began, like the Teachers-Coaches basketball game, middle school project nights, and an annual musical--this era marked the end of at least one longstanding tradition, the sale of Christmas trees.

### New and Improved

By 2008-2009, the parish's fundraising efforts were complete and Phase II of the Master Plan was approved by the town of Chapel Hill. In May of 2009, ground was broken for the project--one of the largest in the history of the Diocese at a total cost of \$12 million--and construction was in full swing by the following school year, making 2009-2010 a year of challenges and adjustments. The chapel was repurposed as the art room, drop-off and pick-up followed new patterns, and many teachers' wardrobes included rain boots, useful for traversing the muddy campus. Besides the growth to come in the form of new campus facilities, there was growth in the athletics program as well, with the addition of boys' lacrosse and co-ed golf. With all that was going on, the year's theme--"Building God's Kingdom"--was especially appropriate.

Construction was complete by the 2010-2011 school year, and the school was reaping the benefits in new facilities and in classroom improvements. The campus now included a gymnasium, a fine arts building, and an athletic field, and the classrooms were enhanced by the installation of Smart Boards. Existing spaces even got new names, with the old gym now known as the "lower school hall." Dedication events took place on October 23, 2010, beginning in the new gym, where the day began with basketball clinics for younger students, followed by an alumni basketball game. Bishop Burbidge celebrated Saturday evening mass and blessed the new facilities. Alumni and current students shared their music and dance talents with performances in the new art and music building, and a reception followed in the new parish center's Friends and Family Hall. Besides the additional facilities, the year brought other changes, especially visible in the middle school, where the students now wore green shirts, new electives were introduced, and students could continue foreign language instruction through Spanish II and pursue math courses beyond Algebra I.

The year also included another journey through the re-accreditation process, this time with AdvancEd, and the development of the School Improvement Plan for 2011-2015. Goals included improving data analysis, ensuring equity of learning, monitoring classroom interventions,



Groundbreaking for the Phase II building project, 2009.

allowing for more teacher collaboration, identifying stakeholder resources, and re-evaluating and clarifying staff functions. The school year ended with the departure of Sr. Catherine, the last religious sister serving at St. Thomas More Catholic School, and the school faced the prospect of a future with a lay administrator as well as a lay faculty.



Fr. Scott McCue, pastor, greeting students before Friday mass, 2012.

### A New Direction

The 2011-2012 school year began with personnel changes--a new principal, Michael Ashton, Ed.D., and new priests, with Fr. Scott McCue arriving as the Pastor and Fr. James Labosky arriving as the Parochial Vicar. While Fr. Scott was familiar with the parish, having served as Parochial Vicar in the previous decade, Dr. Ashton was new to the school and to the South, hailing from Pennsylvania. Even amid all that was different in the day-to-day, such as the recognition of birthdays at morning gatherings, and over the course of the year--such as the institution of pep rallies to celebrate students' athletic and extracurricular involvement, and the implementation of an environmental education initiative--the months passed with some constancy. Students continued to enjoy field trips and athletic and social events, attend weekly mass, mark the passing of the liturgical seasons, participate in community service, and maintain longstanding school traditions.

The next year included new developments with the addition of a three-year-old preschool program, and the broadening of the school's curriculum to encompass both Diocesan and State Standards, as well as the newly introduced Common Core. To support the faculty in adjusting to this change, a curriculum coordinator was added to the staff. The middle school saw a new writing program for seventh and eighth grades, schedule adjustments which included twice weekly physical education classes and learning labs for Spanish and math, and movement from homerooms to an advisory system--placing students in smaller groups with a teacher as advisor. With more active efforts toward differentiated instruction school-wide, additional resource personnel were added to allow for enrichment as well as for remediation. Other improvements included the addition of a scoreboard to the athletic field, the acquisition of an iPad lab, and the purchase of cafeteria tables so that students could enjoy lunch in a common area rather than in individual classrooms.

As 2013-2014 began, yearly tuition was \$6,950 per student for St. Thomas More parishioners and \$9,040 per student for non-parishioners, with eighty students from fifty families receiving financial aid. Enhancements to the school's instructional program at the middle school level included additional electives, such as dance and martial arts; more varied ability grouping in non-math courses, and independent study options in world languages and math. In continuing efforts toward improved data gathering and analysis, AIMS Web academic skills monitoring was implemented, allowing teachers to better track the effectiveness of curriculum and instruction and to analyze the strengths and needs of individual students.

### Today and Tomorrow

Just as the parish has grown from a mission of fewer than a dozen Catholics in the 1920's to over 12,500 registered individuals at the present time, the school has grown through the years as well. Today St. Thomas More Catholic School serves 438 students total, with 362 in first through eighth grades, 43 in kindergarten, 19 in pre-kindergarten, and 14 in its three-year old program. Even through significant leadership change--fourteen principals and ten pastors--much remains constant.

Parent involvement is still a critical component of the school's success, with parents regularly participating in numerous volunteer opportunities, from helping in the classroom or lunchroom, to organizing various cultural and academic programs to better serve the educational experience of the school's students. Their backing also helps to maintain a strong connection between home and school, and it truly makes a difference.

The all lay faculty and staff of more than forty educators and ten administrative and support personnel use the best educational practices and latest technology to make the school experience engaging for each and every student, and by all accounts, they are successful, as students continue to consistently score above the national, state, and local averages on standardized tests. Upon graduation, they are prepared to enter the most challenging high school programs. The school's young alumni have emerged as leaders in student government in their high schools, and a number have been named valedictorians and salutatorians. The pool of adult alumni is accomplished as well, numbering among it individuals who have been recognized for their contributions and their achievements in business, education, sports, and the arts.

Over the course of its existence, St. Thomas More Catholic School has maintained the philosophy verbalized in its mission statement and executed it with compassion, as faculty and staff have always worked to nurture the whole child--intellectually, socially, and spiritually. In this, the school's 50th year, we rededicate ourselves to upholding the school's mission to educate each child in a God-centered environment, and to maintaining our enduring standards of academic excellence and service to others. Our faculty and staff will continue fulfilling this mission only with the continued involvement of parents, the stewardship of our parishioners and alumni, and the growth of the endowment fund established at the time of the school's 25th anniversary. With these goals in mind, we look forward to another fifty years of Catholic education here in Chapel Hill!



St. Thomas More Catholic School students and staff prepare to celebrate 50 years, 2013.



## MISSION STATEMENT

*Our mission is to provide an education for each child in a God-centered environment.*