

Findlay school is cool with kids, staff at new St. Michael

4/19/2006



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FINDLAY Sixth grader Kristin Schmidt couldn't contain her excitement as she glanced around the two-story atrium and winding staircase that greets students at the new St. Michael the Archangel School and Formation Center.

It's just so big, she said yesterday. When I walked in this morning, it hadn't totally hit me yet that we're in this school.

On Monday, fourth through eighth graders from the parish's original 1894 school building just west of downtown moved into their new \$8 million digs at the parish's Sutton Place campus. The 70,000-square-foot addition is connected to the elementary school built in 1968 and the new St. Michael Catholic Church that opened in 2003.

The Rev. Michael Hohenbrink, pastor, said the building project is part of an overall \$19 million revamp of parish facilities, the largest building project ever undertaken in the Toledo Diocese.

It's a lot of God's blessings given by a lot of very generous and dedicated people, Father Hohenbrink said. We still have a ways to go, but the miracle is we're able to have this much done.

Still on the drawing board is the renovation of the 1968 portion of the school this summer and relocation of parish offices from the downtown site to Sutton Place. A year later, the parish plans to remodel the former east-side church, which in recent years has been used as a performing arts center for the school and church.



First graders Kate Wilson, 6, left, and Olga Budke, 7, play catch in the gym in their new school. Previously, students had physical education in a room that doubled as a cafeteria.

In the diocese, St. Michael the Archangel is the second largest parish. St. Joseph is the biggest but St. Michael's new 35,000-square-foot church is considered the largest. With 10,000 parishioners, St. Michael's is the only Catholic parish in Hancock County.

Father Hohenbrink, who said about \$15.5 million has been raised or pledged so far for the building projects, stressed that the school also is a formation center where many other activities will take place.

At the present time, we have 121 ministries in the parish, and technically one of those is the school, he said.

Staff, not to mention the 546 students in preschool through eighth grade, seemed pretty pleased with their new climate-controlled surroundings and the idea that they were on one campus.

It's wonderful to have the students all together, said Principal Anne Brehm. I think it's a real advantage for our families. One of the kindergartners told me [Monday], I saw my brother at lunch.

Mrs. Brehm was one of several staff members who spent their day traveling between the elementary school and the old middle school about 10 minutes away. Music, art, and physical education teachers along with the librarian and other specialists worked with students at both buildings.

Michele Lichtinger, a parent and president of the School Advisory Council, said the full-sized gymnasium that was included in the new school is a particular point of pride. Previously, students had physical education and music classes in the activity center, which doubled as a cafeteria.

Eighth grader Nick Taylor will only get to spend the last few months of school in the new building, but he said he was glad to make the move.

It's great because we're the first class to graduate from the new school, he said.

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