

Archbishop Lori helps usher in new school year in Fullerton

FULLERTON – As students arrived for their first day of classes at St. Joseph School in Fullerton Sept. 5, their principal was on hand to open car doors and greet them.

“Welcome home,” Kenneth Pipkin said to every child.

Across the Archdiocese of Baltimore, similar scenes played out as schools opened their doors after Labor Day for the first time in many years.

Gov. Lawrence Hogan Jr. mandated that public school systems move their opening dates to after Labor Day this school year. The archdiocese also has chosen to follow a similar policy.

At St. Joseph School, located between the Perry Hall, White Marsh and Overlea communities, a caterpillar-like string of cars climbed the S-curved uphill driveway toward St. Joseph Church on Belair Road in Baltimore County.

The nationally recognized Blue Ribbon school’s enrollment jumped 17 percent from last school year, according to Pipkin.

“It’s the people, it’s our faith, and it’s the people who have faith that drive us,” the principal said.

Following a “great summer,” eighth-grade student Ethan Floyd said he was glad to be back at St. Joseph and “excited” to learn something new.

His fellow eighth-grader, Joshua Aung, dressed in the school’s new wolf mascot costume, and offered high-fives to everyone as they entered the parish hall. The mascot will be named later this fall.

“We’re excited to have you back,” said Archbishop Lori, who led students and teachers in the opening prayer to officially kick off the school year. “Being in a Catholic school is an opportunity to know your faith, to love Jesus ... and get a first-class education.”

Students were treated to a short video presentation celebrating the summer and school upgrades. The biggest student cheers came when the new bathroom, technology and science lab appeared on the screen.

Archbishop Lori and Pipkin were joined by Father Jesse L. Bolger, pastor of St. Joseph; and James Sellinger, chancellor of Catholic schools, for the dedication of a new state-of-the-art science lab and PreK-4 classrooms that are now full-day programs.

Following the blessing and ribbon cutting, Archbishop Lori made a point of personally welcoming each student and faculty member to the new space.

"It's been a busy 12 weeks this summer," Pipkin said, noting that six classrooms received new carpeting, the nurse's suite suite was renovated and a bathroom was renovated. New technology was also added to the school.

"It didn't seem we took a breath," he said.

Katie Stowers is the mother of incoming kindergartener, Bella Stowers.

It was "very upsetting" Bella's mother said with a smile, while describing her emotions on her eldest child's first day of school.

"I love it here," Stowers said. "It's a great community...great teachers."

Jolene Sosnowski has been teaching kindergarten at St. Joseph School the past 15 years. "They're going to learn how to read and write and add and subtract. They even go to the science lab. They have a lot to do. I'm excited."

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