

# Severna Park parish and school grow with new building

SEVERNA PARK – St. John the Evangelist Parish and School in Severna Park have grown with the opening of a shared 14,600-square-foot Parish Activities Center.

The pews and parking lot were packed with parishioners, school families and students in their red and grey uniforms Jan. 27, when Archbishop William E. Lori celebrated Mass and blessed the new building.

“It will indeed be a center for parish activities, for school activities. A place where young people will learn their Catholic faith. A place where adults will deepen their commitment to live as Christ has taught us,” said Archbishop Lori in his blessing. “May we come to know one another here to love one another and to give witness to our faith in Christ.”

The opening came just in time for students to celebrate Catholic Schools Week, which runs from Jan. 28 to Feb. 3.

“The addition of a building like this – it just makes my heart overflow,” said Casey Buckstaff, principal. “We are blessed every day to be growing here at St. John.”

The focus of the Parish Activities Center, on the north side of the campus on Ritchie Highway, is the multipurpose room, which can be used for both spiritual events and sports. The 8,800-square-foot space can be divided, using an extendable wall, with one side being used for physical education classes, and the other for meetings.

Without the divider, the Parish Activities Center’s maple hardwood floor is large enough for a high school basketball game. It can simultaneously accommodate two middle school games, or two volleyball courts. Electrically powered bleachers seat up to 260.

The PAC has four floor-to-ceiling windows, paned with frosted glass, creating the shape of the cross and keeping the mission of faith at the center of all parish and

school events. It includes a lobby, an 1,800-square-foot mezzanine, sound-deadening features, retractable basketball standards, storage rooms, offices and restrooms.

Sherry Boomer, parent of eighth-grader Madison and alum Parker (now a junior at Archbishop Curley High School in Baltimore), recalled her time as a recess volunteer when the PAC's footprint was a blacktop basketball court.

"I never thought it was going to be this big and this expansive," Boomer said. "Every child in this school is excited about this center."

Pre-K teacher and class of 2006 alum Stephanie Gorski has a keen appreciation for the impact of the institution.

"It's so much bigger than you know (as a student)," Gorski said. "In general, there's this light here. Everyone is so happy."

The thriving Anne Arundel County parish and school were in desperate need for new space, according to Father Jim Proffitt, pastor.

"Our facilities are just overextended," Father Proffitt said. "There was just no other space."

The PAC is the first step in completing the parish's master plan, which was first defined in 2008 but put on hold due to the economic downturn.

Church renovations were to be done first, but after asbestos was found in the church ceiling, the master plan was altered. First came the building of the PAC, where Mass will be celebrated during a repair and remodeling of the church that is to come.

The parish's goal is to create a friendly, welcoming space. Church improvements will focus on adding light and accessibility for those with disabilities. The parish already offers childcare during Mass, staffed by paid providers, to make families feel more welcome.

Father Proffitt said that the parish's main mission is to form disciples.

"The only purpose the buildings serve are to house the ministries," Father Proffitt said. "Otherwise, we're just putting up buildings."

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