

Ss. James and John Catholic School celebrates its 170th anniversary

Family, friends and supporters of Ss. James and John Catholic School in East Baltimore celebrated the 170th anniversary of the institutions's founding Oct. 8.

"This is such a historical milestone for us," said Dr. LaUanah King-Cassell, principal. "Here we are, a Catholic school in the inner city of Baltimore, and we've been around for 170 years, so we decided to have a celebration."

Since opening in 1847, Ss. James and John has taught approximately 50,000 children. Today, it has 230 students, pre-K3 through eighth grade.

The celebration began across Eager Street at the Institute of Notre Dame, where Bishop Denis J. Madden led a liturgy in remembrance of the school's rich history and in blessing of the future to come.

"It's not a school that's out on a big street and it's not a (location)where everyone sees it, but it's a loving community," said King-Cassell. "I call it a small beacon of hope."

According to a history supplied by Ss. James and John, it began in the basement of the former St. James Church, with the School Sisters of Notre Dame, who opened IND the same year, teaching the girls and laymen teaching the boys. The Brothers of Mary arrived decades later; both orders were represented at the celebration.

The school merged with neighboring St. John's in 1966, and in 1989 became part of the Queen of Peace cluster. Today, it is one of the Archdiocese of Baltimore's Partners in Excellence schools, along with Cardinal Shehan, Archbishop Borders and Holy Angels Catholic School.

The service at IND included remarks from a representative from the School Sisters of Notre Dame and the Mayor's office; other office-holders; Dr. Camille Brown, associate superintendent of Catholic Schools; and Richard Braun, a former student.

Afterward, there a walk to the school building, and a blessing and re-dedication.

King-Cassell points to improved technology and the support of the archdiocese and parishes in the Queen of Peace cluster: St. Vincent de Paul, St. Francis Xavier, St. Wenceslaus, St. Veronica, St. Ignatius and St. Ann.

“People see this 100-year-old building, but we have the technology,” said King-Cassell. “We are able to communicate with kids from other countries. We have a 3D printer that we implemented into our science courses.”

Staff, alumni and visitors talked of how proud they were of the students themselves.

“Not only do they learn academically, they learn how to become great people,” King-Cassell said.

During the service, students explained how they saved money to help bring sick and suffering children to Johns Hopkins Hospital from Sierra Leone and then sat in on a hearing on Capitol Hill to build awareness for children in similar situations.

Jersey Scott-McCormick, a 7th- grader, said that she is already anticipating her graduation in 2018, and that she loves all her teachers.

“Everything still looked the same,” said Deon Hayes, who graduated from Ss. James and John in 1987. “Most of the teachers are still here, and Dr. King-Cassell was my principal.”

Hayes has a 21-year-old daughter who graduated from the school, and a 12-year-old daughter currently enrolled there.