



Catholic schools benefit from proximity

05/13/2004 [Ed Langlois](#)

In Portland's north end, the Catholic Church has education covered, from kindergarten to master's degrees.

The parish known as the North Portland Catholic Community is unique in that within its bounds lie a Catholic grade school, high school and university.

A web of connections seems to benefit Holy Cross School, De La Salle North Catholic High, the University of Portland and the parish.

- The university's education department sends student teachers to Holy Cross and De La Salle and the experienced faculty guide the fledglings in the classrooms.
- Holy Cross has graduated 40 students to De La Salle.
- University grounds are open for Holy Cross events such as the annual jog-a-thon and retreats.
- The university helped develop curriculum at De La Salle.
- To help them adjust to what's coming up in life, many Holy Cross School eighth-graders attend a summer session at the university.
- De La Salle students do internships at Holy Cross and the university.
- Once each year, student nurses from the university come to Holy Cross. They get experience doing checkups on students and students get to know their height and weight and other health measures.
- The Holy Cross principal and the university's dean of education have served on the De La Salle board.

"There is a lot of synergy among schools in North Portland," says Matt Powell, president of De La Salle.

This spring, one North Portland family had students at all three schools. The Culligans live off North Lombard Avenue, equidistant from the three institutions.

"They are all within walking distance from my house. That is pretty cool," says Patrick Culligan, a junior at De La Salle.

His brother Ben is in sixth grade at Holy Cross, and his sister Megan graduated earlier this month from the university. Two older brothers have graduated from UP in recent years. Patrick may become a Pilot, too.

He liked having Megan nearby to talk things over. Through her, he learned about college life. He is keen on De La Salle, where he has excelled at math and entered an accounting internship.

Culligan also has good memories of Holy Cross, which he says gave him a sound education.

"It was a good opportunity to have a Catholic school so close," he says. "We had small classes and got to know everyone really well. There are great teachers who really care. You could tell they wanted you to succeed."

Culligan has no urge to get out of the neighborhood where he has spent his life.

"Right now, I'm pretty happy where I am," he says.

Patrick's parents, Tim and Jonni Culligan, grew up just a few blocks from where they now live.

He attended Holy Cross for grade school and she attended Queen of Peace in the very building where son Patrick now goes to high school.

The Culligans appreciate being able to have their children attend school on familiar turf. They also like the results of the education.

"I think these schools give the kids a good knowledge of their faith, but of a lot of other things, too," says Tim.

Reflecting on business attire that is code for Patrick at De Salle, Tim says, "After watching these kids for three years, I think it is more than just the surface. There are the clothes but there is the going out and working and the stuff they do in school. It has all been really good for Pat. You can see how he has matured."

De La Salle is a recent addition to North Portland. It has begun its third year on the grounds of Queen of Peace Parish, which was combined into a larger community that now worships at Holy Cross Church. Plans call for an ambitious school building campaign to begin soon.

For 30 years, Catholics here hoped for a new high school to replace North Catholic, which burned in 1970 and was never replaced.

"Even when I came in 1998, people were talking about that fire as if it had happened just the previous summer," says Father Dave Gutmann, pastor of the North Portland Catholic Community. "Those people know how important a Catholic high school is here."

"None of this would have happened without many communities coming together," says Powell, the De La Salle president. "And the North Portland Catholic Community and UP have done the most. No doubt about it."

De La Salle is leasing land from the parish, and that relationship, which could be volatile in other circumstances "has been wonderful," says Powell.

He calls Father Gutmann and St. Mary of Oregon Sister Ruth Frank and Holy Names Sister Mary Ryan — Holy Cross School's principal and development duo — "our biggest supporters."

Father Gutmann has made efforts to be part of the high school's life, volunteering to preside at liturgies.

"He likes being a priest and is committed to a value system of Catholic education," Powell says, admitting that it would have been hard to get off the ground were it not for a supportive pastor.

"People had to take a risk and Father Dave supporting us gave us credibility."

Father Gutmann sees the institutions as ways of bringing Gospel values and faith into people's lives. The North Portland Catholic Community has welcomed 30 to 40 new Catholics at Easter for the past five years at least. About half of those who embrace the faith do so through schools.

Parish gratitude to the University of Portland goes way back. In 1904, the university apparently sold the land for the church and school for the amount of \$1.

The parish was named Holy Cross, and the priests who founded the university administered it until 1916. Holy Cross priests still help out when the diocesan priests need aid.

"The university has been very generous, and we try to be as cooperative as we can," says Sister Ruth. "It's good for both places."

Of De La Salle, Sister Ruth says, "We'll do anything to support the school."

De La Salle allows North Portland students an affordable choice and keeps them in their neighborhood. Before, they traveled 10 or 20 miles to attend a Catholic high.

"It's good for the neighborhood," Sister Ruth says, noting that the De La Salle students offer people a positive look at youth. "They dress up professionally and I think they mature a lot faster. I think we're lucky." v

'The ultimate graduation'

Catholics in North Portland note they have schools for every age. They also have an institution for the last years of life, the final kind of education.

In 2002, Assumption Village retirement center opened on the grounds of a parish that was merged.

"We just wheeled a casket into the church this morning and that is the ultimate graduation," says Father Dave Gutmann, reflecting on the institutions in his neighborhood.

Students from Holy Cross School and De La Salle High visit elders and make cards for elders at Assumption Village, which includes the old Assumption Church as its chapel.