

La Salle Academy begins year celebrating its bi-ritual Catholic identity

JESSUP – As the new school year began at La Salle Academy, students did something that few other Catholic school students in the country can say they have done: They began their school year worshipping in two Catholic churches, experiencing two distinct liturgical traditions, but being reminded that both lead them to Christ.

On Thursday, Sept. 10, 2026, students began their day at Saint Michael Church in Jessup, the principal worship site of Queen of Angels Parish, which is located directly across the street from their school. The students gathered for a Roman Catholic Mass celebrated by Father Andrew Kurovsky, Pastor of Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Peckville.

Father Roman Vasylynka, Administrator of Holy Ghost Byzantine Catholic Church in Jessup, concelebrated the Mass.

But the morning did not end when the final blessing was given.

The students then crossed the street to Holy Ghost Byzantine Catholic Church, located directly beside La Salle Academy, where they received a special blessing and an introduction to the Byzantine Catholic tradition from Father Vasylynka and Father Bert James Olechnowicz, Parochial Vicar.

The experience highlighted one of the things that makes La Salle Academy unique.

It is a bi-ritual Catholic school, where both the Roman Catholic and Byzantine Catholic traditions are recognized and celebrated. La Salle Academy believes it remains the only elementary school in the United States with this distinction.

La Salle Principal Shaina Aquilina believes the school's Catholic identity is enriched by its bi-ritual heritage.

"Our students are blessed to experience the beauty of both traditions and to see that – although we may express our faith differently – both lead us to the same Christ," she said.

The morning's Mass gave Father Kurovsky an opportunity to reflect on another form of difference – the differences students encounter in one another.

Reflecting on the Gospel's call to love others, including those who may be difficult to love, Father Kurovsky



Father Andrew Kurovsky, center, celebrates an opening Mass for the new school year of La Salle Academy on Sept. 10, 2026, at Saint Michael Church in Jessup. Following Mass, the students also received a blessing at Holy Ghost Byzantine Catholic Church, since the elementary school is bi-ritual. (Photo/Eric Deabill)



Father Bert James Olechnowicz, Parochial Vicar; and Father Roman Vasylynka, Administrator, Holy Ghost Byzantine Catholic Church in Jessup, sprinkle La Salle Academy students and families with holy water at the conclusion of a blessing ceremony to begin the new school year on Sept. 10, 2026. (Photo/Eric Deabill)

encouraged students not to dismiss people simply because they belong to a different group or see the world differently.

"Every day of our lives, in every class, at every assembly, during every minute, we're given the opportunity to shine God's light through us. Don't miss it and don't ever miss the opportunity to find that light – to see that light – in one another," Father Kurovsky told the students.

After crossing the street and entering Holy Ghost Church, the young people got even more lessons in symbolism.

Father Olechnowicz introduced students to some of the distinctive features of a Byzantine Catholic church, including the icon screen, or iconostasis, which separates the sanctuary from the nave.

He explained that Byzantine Catholic churches engage the senses through icons, incense, and bells, noting that icons historically served as a way of teaching the faith to people who could not read.

"The important thing is we recognize we are all Catholics," Father Olechnowicz told the students. "No matter how we celebrate – we come from Byzantium, the other side of the church comes from Rome – but we are all Catholic."

He reminded them that Roman and Byzantine Catholics share the same Pope, Sacraments, faith, and theology.

"Whether you're Roman Catholic or Byzantine Catholic, you're always welcome here," he added.

The students and teachers then received a special blessing and were sprinkled with holy water before returning to school.

Father Vasylynka said the morning represented more than a unique educational experience, it was a sign of two Catholic communities coming together.

"I believe it is a great sign and great example for other communities in this area

as well," he said.

Father Vasylynka also welcomed the opportunity to build on the relationship between Holy Ghost and La Salle Academy throughout the school year.

"We are the two lungs of the Catholic Church. It is nice to see both communities united in prayer and moving forward. We do the same things, we serve the same Catholic Church," he added.

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Wyoming Area Catholic School family turns to prayer after fire

LAFLIN – Just 24 hours after fire forced the evacuation of Wyoming Area Catholic School in Exeter, its students, families, teachers, staff, and administrators gathered at Saint Maria Goretti Parish – not simply to pray – but to express gratitude.

The school community came together Wednesday morning, Sept. 2, 2026, grateful that every student and adult made it safely outside the building.

“This is step one, to come together before God, to come together as a school community to give thanks to one another and to be thankful for our safety,” Father Michael Drevitch, Pastor of Saint Maria Goretti Parish, said during his homily at the 11:00 a.m. Mass.

Throughout his homily, Father Drevitch returned to a theme he had shared with the students just two days earlier at their first school Mass of the year: Sometimes, God is found in the least expected places.

Earlier in the week, he had encouraged students to recognize God’s presence not only in the Eucharist and the Word of God, but also through sports, academics, the arts, and other ordinary moments of school life.

“Then yesterday,” he said, “we came to recognize that God definitely presents himself in unexpected ways.”

Father Drevitch acknowledged the fire could be viewed as a disaster and a loss. Classrooms were damaged and books and supplies were lost.

But Father Drevitch urged the community to see something more.

“You can look at what happened yesterday as a disaster, as an emergency,



Just 24 hours after fire damaged Wyoming Area Catholic School in Exeter, students, families, educators and administrators gathered for Mass at Saint Maria Goretti Parish in Laflin. They offered prayers of gratitude that no one was injured in the fire. (Photo/Eric Deabill)

as a loss,” he said. “Or you can look at it and recognize how God was present in our teachers and staff, how God was present in the first responders who literally put their lives at risk for our sake, and you can recognize how God was present in our children who stayed safe, brave, and listened to instructions and did what they were expected to do.”

Near the end of his homily, Father Drevitch, who teaches religion at Wyoming Area Catholic School, added a short example to emphasize how the situation had students reflecting God’s love.

“As students were dismissed, I saw some siblings come out, who sometimes would normally be fighting with one another, yesterday, they were holding hands and embracing one another. I saw it in a very beautiful way,” he said.

For Wyoming Area Catholic Principal Eileen Rishcoff, the sight of so many families gathered at Mass made her emotional.

“I am overwhelmed at the number of people that are here,” she told families and students before Mass.

Rishcoff reminded them that a school is

about far more than books, supplies and belongings that were left behind when students evacuated.

“Sometimes things happen,” Rishcoff said. “But the most important thing is that we got out of the school safely.”

And they did so quickly.

Just after 10:00 a.m. Tuesday, Sept. 1, a teacher noticed that lights were flickering in the lower end of the school, near the younger grades.

When Amy Rosencrance, School Safety and Security Coordinator, went to investigate, she noticed smoke in the area.

“We quickly evacuated all of the kids from there and basically made sure that everyone got out of the building,” Rosencrance said. “At that moment, as I was checking to make sure everyone was safe and all of the kids were out, there were flames.”

The fire alarm was pulled, and students immediately began evacuating.

Seventh grader Victoria Sabetta had just finished math class when the fire alarm sounded.

“I was about to put my books away and all of a sudden we heard the fire alarm, so I dropped my books and I just went out,” Sabetta said.

It wasn’t until Sabetta was outside that she first saw smoke.

“It wasn’t until we got outside and the police officers started coming,” she added.

Ironically, the school had planned to conduct its first fire drill of the school year that same day. Instead, the students and staff found themselves responding to a real emergency.

“It was definitely well executed,” Rosencrance said while thanking first responders for their quick response. “I absolutely thank each and every one of them. Two police officers showed up immediately and we were inside the building together and they started to put out the fire. Within minutes, we had Exeter, West Pittston, Hughesstown, Pittston city, Pittston Township, Kingston, every fire person was here. We had the Greater Pittston Ambulance and their response and how quickly they got here, I’m so thankful for that, because that really helped contain it and save this building.”

Students were transported to Wyoming Area High School, where they were reunited with their families.

The Pennsylvania State Police fire marshal is investigating the cause of the fire. School officials said there was considerable damage to at least two classrooms, with smoke and water damage affecting other portions of the building.

As school administrators face the work of beginning cleanup and restoration, students have been continuing their education at Saint Maria Goretti Parish in Laflin.

The parish opened its religious education facilities, including classrooms and other spaces, to Wyoming Area Catholic School beginning Tuesday, Sept. 8, following Labor Day.

Since that time, school operations have been moving forward seamlessly.

For Father Drevitch, the temporary relocation is itself an expression of what a parish is meant to be.

“A parish isn’t just a group of people who go to church,” he said. “A parish is a community who helps people when they need something. A parish is God’s hands at work as we take care of our children, as we keep them safe and provide them an education.”

“The Light Still Shines at WAC”

A Fire Recovery Campaign has been established to help Wyoming Area Catholic recover from the fire. Visit:

<https://boostmyschool.com/wacs-fire>



A fire truck’s ladder extends to the roof of Wyoming Area Catholic School in Exeter on Sept. 1, 2026, following a fire in the school that morning. (Photo/Eric Deabill)



Students from **All Saints Academy in Scranton** were all smiles during their return to the new school year. First graders pictured, from left, are Patrick Gallagher, Joey Holland, Adriel Torres, Jackson Spindler, Dean Kofira, Evan Powell, Jack Hinton and Angelo DePrimo.



Father Andrew McCarroll blessed the Falcons at **Our Lady of Peace School in Clarks Green** on the first day of school, wishing them a happy, healthy and safe school year.



Physics students at **Holy Cross High School in Dunmore** started off the school year by putting their teamwork skills to the test with a cup-stacking competition. While working together, communicating and thinking strategically, students discovered that success takes more than just speed – it takes teamwork, too!



Holy Redeemer High School in Wilkes-Barre recently held its first Alumni Connections & Career Day. Current students were invited to meet with alumni from Holy Redeemer, Bishop Hoban, Bishop O'Reilly, Seton Catholic and Bishop Haffey to talk about their professional experiences.



Ayla Chmielewski, Elliott Dudley, Riley Fennie and Violet Franklin, fifth graders at **Saint Mary of Mount Carmel School in Dunmore**, organize their lockers at the start of the new school year.



Students at **Epiphany School in Sayre** participated in a special 9/11 Memorial Prayer Service which was led by third and fourth graders.



Kerry Blaum, Gracie Holtz, Olivia Medico, Emmerson Gulyas, Emily Benyo, Grace Fox and Karly Welgosh, sixth graders at **Saint Jude School in Mountain Top** have fun together at the school's annual 'Back to School Bash.'



Members of the Class of 2027 at **Saint Clare/Saint Paul School in Scranton** pose together at the start of the school year. The Class of 2027 will be the 100th graduating class from Saint Paul School!



Seventh grade and first grade students at **Holy Rosary School in Duryea** began their “Buddy Program” by introducing themselves and illustrating drawings of one another. Pictured are Zaiah Lubinski, Vincent O’Haire and Thomas Dohman.



Father Brian J.T. Clarke celebrated Mass for the opening of the new school year at **Notre Dame Elementary School in East Stroudsburg**. Sixth grade students were responsible for planning the liturgy, and students Luke Stillmayer and Madison McGeehan helped to serve.



Good Shepherd Academy in Kingston started the school year with a visit from its mascot, Dash. Students Joseph Woloski, Jacob Woloski and Julian Biscontini joined principal Jim Jones for a photo with Dash.



What better way to start the school year than with a little Crescent pride! On the first day of school at **Saint Nicholas/Saint Mary School in Wilkes-Barre**, first grader McKeena Crawford and sixth grader Brayden Crawford stopped for a photo with the school’s giant Crescent to kick off the new year.



Students at **La Salle Academy in Jessup** show what solidarity looks like – coming together to help fellow Catholic school students at Wyoming Area Catholic rebuild after the fire. With the help of our neighbor, Holy Ghost Byzantine Catholic Church, families donated new school supplies.



Students from **Saint Agnes School in Towanda** welcomed Bishop Ambrose Puthenveetil of the Diocese of Kottapuram in Kerala, India, to their school recently. He spoke about his country, his job as a Bishop, and sang songs with the students.



A large group of upperclassmen from **Notre Dame Jr./Sr. High School in East Stroudsburg** gave up part of the last day of their summer vacation to help out at the school’s new student orientation.

Three longtime Catholic educators honored for 25 years of service

WILKES-BARRE – For 25 years, Deborah Brady, Candice Lee and Jeanine Queralt have walked into Catholic school classrooms with a shared mission: to educate young people while helping them know, love and live their Catholic faith.

Their quarter-century of service was celebrated on Monday, Sept. 14, 2026, as the Diocese of Scranton held its annual Diocesan Teachers' Institute at Holy Redeemer High School in Wilkes-Barre.

The day began with Mass celebrated by the Most Rev. Joseph C. Bambera, Bishop of Scranton, followed by a keynote address, lunch and breakout sessions for the educators.

At the conclusion of Mass, Bishop Bambera and Kristen Donohue, Diocesan Secretary for Catholic Education/Superintendent, presented the three longtime educators with the Saint John Paul II Awards, which recognize Catholic school educators who have completed 25 years of dedicated service in Catholic education in the Diocese of Scranton.

This year's honorees were Brady of Holy Rosary School in Duryea, Lee of La



Three educators were presented with the Saint John Paul II Award for 25 years of dedicated service in Catholic education on Sept. 14, 2026. Participating in the award presentation, from left: Charlene Haggerty, Assistant Superintendent; Christopher Tigue, Assistant Superintendent; Deborah Brady, Holy Rosary School; Bishop Joseph C. Bambera; Jeanine Queralt, Our Lady of Peace School; Candice Lee, La Salle Academy; and Kristen Donohue, Diocesan Secretary for Catholic Education/Superintendent. (Photo/Eric Deabill)

Salle Academy in Jessup, and Queralt of Our Lady of Peace School in Clarks Green.

"Catholic school educators impart a distinctive character to the education

profession," Assistant Superintendent Christopher Tigue said in introducing the awards. "Most especially, they are witnesses to the faith, serving as sharers in the mission of Jesus Christ by leading young people to know, love and serve God."

Brady, who teaches students in sixth through eighth grades, said she has seen a lot of changes since first walking in the doors of Holy Rosary School.

"I've seen a lot of growth. I've seen a lot of change," she reflected. "To see the growth in the kids that you start off with ... and they come back to visit you, it's actually life changing to see that you can make an impact in somebody's life."

Brady previously taught at a public high school in New Jersey, but she said becoming part of Catholic education quickly became a calling. She said one of the greatest blessings has been the opportunity to share her faith with her students.

"What is the big hook for me? Sharing the faith," she said. "I am very faithful and faith-filled, so to be able to present that to the kids, and live it, is incredible."

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25 Years of Faithful Service: Diocese honors Catholic educators

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Lee also began her Catholic school career at Holy Rosary School before spending the past decade teaching first grade at La Salle Academy.

For her, like Brady, teaching in a Catholic school is more than a profession.

“I feel Catholic education is truly my vocation,” Lee said. “Teaching in particular in a Catholic education system is my vocation. Just learning and living the faith and teaching it to the children and families.”

Her favorite part of teaching first grade is watching children grow throughout the school year.

“Just to get to see their smiling faces where they love school,” she said. “They walk in so young and they leave being able to read and so confident, I love it.”

Queralt currently teaches Pre-K at Our Lady of Peace School in Clarks Green. She spent 20 years at Monsignor McHugh School in Cresco before its closure during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Queralt’s own Catholic education experience helped shape her vocation. She attended Catholic schools beginning with Saint Patrick’s School, later



Bishop Joseph C. Bambera celebrates Mass during the Diocesan Teachers’ Institute on Sept. 14, 2026. (Photo/Eric Deabill)

attending Bishop Hannan High School.

“I couldn’t imagine teaching and not being able to talk about God,” she said.

At the Pre-K level, Queralt said faith formation often begins with something as simple and profound as kindness.

“How would Jesus treat other people? What would Jesus do?” she explained. “Just setting an example for them, modeling for them, it’s a lot about kindness at that age.”

And even at such a young age, she said, children respond to learning about their faith.

“They love hearing about God. They love religion class. They love to hear the stories,”

Queralt said. “They quiet down and they’re so interested in it.”

During his homily at Mass, Bishop Bambera reminded all Catholic educators that their ministry extends far beyond academics.

“As Catholic educators, we entrust to you our most sacred treasure – our children,” Bishop Bambera said. “You sacrifice daily to give them the very best of what you have – your wisdom, your common sense, your patience.”

But he added, educators offer

something even greater: the love they have received from God.

“At the heart of who you are, that is your greatest gift,” he said. “Thank you for sharing your love and thank you for sharing your faith.”

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Irish heritage celebrated

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“It’s just really nice to have an event where we can celebrate all those things that are important to us, in terms of our heritage and our faith,” she said.

Galvin, a third-generation Irish American, said her family has deep ties to Saint Mary Church, where she and her husband were married and where their son is receiving his sacraments.

“I think it’s important to

remember where you came from,” she said. “Our ancestors came here for a better life and to help build America.”

The turnout of parishioners was especially encouraging for organizers, who hope to hold similar events in the future.

“Everybody was so happy. The food was delicious,” McMahon said. “I’m glad everybody showed up and I’m looking forward to doing it again.”



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