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O'Hara Catholic School, Eugene, Oregon

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Enter to learn. Go forth to serve. That seven-word motto summarizes the reality and accomplishments of O'Hara Catholic School in Eugene, OR, whose roots go back well over a century. Named in honor of Archbishop Edwin Vincent O'Hara, the first superintendent of Catholic schools in the state, the school originally served only St. Mary's parish. In 1971, it became an area school serving multiple parishes, and in 1978 it received its present name. For the past five years, O'Hara has enjoyed the inspired leadership of Dianne Bert, already the longest-standing lay principal in the school's history.

Although students are drawn from a wide area with varied backgrounds, community binds them together in this Christ-centered environment. O'Hara parent Amy Daniel says, "The collaborative staff, strong parental involvement, and parish support give O'Hara the profound sense of community you feel the minute you walk in the door."

Fr. Mark Bachmeier, pastor of St. Mary's parish and school enactor, adds, "Every day, our students witness the positive role models in the religious life at our school; and this has contributed significantly to the strong, loving community that we share at O'Hara."

The many opportunities available to students at O'Hara are unusual for a school of just over 500 students. In addition to the regular grade school classrooms, the preK-8 school boasts a full-time music teacher, three piano teachers, an art teacher, a computer instructor, two Spanish teachers, and separate pre-school teachers for 3- and 4-year-olds. Students also participate in clubs and activities that appeal to such multiple interests as art, chess, sports, and newspapers. There is even a Chinese club sponsored by a retired University of Oregon Chinese professor. Much-anticipated annual events include a fall piano recital, the Blessing of the Animals, a spring ensemble, a Living Saints Presentation, the May Crowning, and two musicals—one at Christmas and one in the spring.

There is no doubt that the first half of the school motto is alive and well; but equally important is the call to service, and O'Hara students respond in many ways. In addition to several school-wide community service projects throughout the year, each grade level,

preK through 8, adopts a different age-appropriate area organization for which it provides hands-on involvement. Each grade also sponsors a local priest or other religious, who then maintains a close relationship with the class.

The adoption program started four years ago at the suggestion of Principal Bert, with the purpose of providing students with a more personal experience with area organizations. One such adopted organization is Eugene's nationally recognized Relief Nursery, which works with low-income families in which young children may be at risk of child abuse or neglect. Sixth graders have assisted in a number of ways: cleaning and disinfecting children's toys and the outdoor play area, labeling books donated for the children, and even washing buses inside and out.

Parent Cindy Montgomery comments, "Volunteering with other children and families instills in our children compassion, responsibility, and community involvement, not just for the school year but for a lifetime."

Sixth grader Lauren Chapman agrees. "It is fun because we get to help a lot of people and it makes me feel really good."

At O'Hara, learning and serving are integral components of a successful Christ-centered school. ▲

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