



Chicagoland

Mother McAuley students foster friendships with Mercy sisters

By Michelle Martin | Staff writer

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McAuley students Lily Costello and Grace Cahill work on an art project with Mercy Sister Anita Taylor. (Karen Callaway/Chicago Catholic)



Students at Mother McAuley Liberal Arts High School and senior residents at Mercy Circle have been connecting, making crafts and helping their community for the past two school years as part of “MACs with Mercy.”

“So many of the residents at Mercy Circle are sisters who taught at Mother McAuley,” said Michael Levasseur, director of student life at Mother McAuley. “This is a way to honor our past.”

It is also a way to show the former teachers that the legacy of Catherine McAuley, who founded the Sisters of Mercy, is in good hands.

“I love interacting with these young people,” said Mercy Sister Margaret Brennan. “They have their whole lives ahead of them. They just generate a spirit of holiness. It gives me life. It gives me energy to engage with them.” ▼

The program, organized with the help of 19th Ward Alderman Matt O'Shea, brings students from different clubs at Mother McAuley to the senior living community each month to complete a craft together. Those crafts are then donated to community organizations.

"I think it's important to take advantage of any opportunity to bring children and senior citizens together," said O'Shea, whose family has a long relationship with Mother McAuley. His oldest daughter graduated from the school in 2020, and his youngest is a junior there. "It's great for the kids, and it's great for the seniors."

On April 25, members of the Varsity and Respect Life clubs from Mother McAuley joined the senior residents, many of them Sisters of Mercy, in painting sunflower suncatchers to be distributed to clients at Pat's Pantry, a food pantry at Mount Greenwood Community Church.

The school and the senior community have both been sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy, and are next door to each other in the Mount Greenwood neighborhood.

Sister Margaret shared a table with resident Arlene Tyszkiewicz and students Gabriela Martinez, a senior, and Lola Shields, a junior, both members of the Varsity Club, which cheers on school teams.

"I just take it as a really good opportunity to get to know the residents," said Martinez, who also participated last year. "And it's an opportunity to give back to the community as well."

"Our generations are so different," Shields said.

"I just love meeting the girls," Tyszkiewicz said. "They're all so full of promise and looking to find their futures."

Gemma Signorelli and Reagan Kemps, both freshmen and members of the Respect Life Club, enjoyed their conversation with Mercy Sisters M. Anita New and Mary Ann Bergfeld.

Seeing the students takes the sisters back, Bergfeld said.

Kemps said she was surprised at how funny the sisters were.

"They're really quick to joke around," she said.

Loretto Sister Nancy Kennelly, another resident, said the sisters can offer the high school girls a different perspective.

"A lot of these kids, they don't have grandparents, or not close by," she said. "We're the elders. They want to talk about a college, of how they're afraid of making the wrong decision. ... Our lives have taken more twists and turns, and we've done things we never set out to do."

She tells the girls to make the best decision they can at the time they make it, and if it doesn't work out, then try something else, Sister Nancy said.

Lavasseur said MACs with Mercy is one program that he doesn't struggle to get students to show up for. As soon as the sign-up sheet is posted for the year, clubs take all the available slots, and their members come to spend an hour with the Mercy Circle residents even when their schedules are packed.

Dan Lunney, director of pastoral care and mission integration at Mercy Circle, said the intergenerational interaction is good for both groups, but he especially enjoys seeing the senior residents, including the former teachers, light up when the students are there.



That was the case for Mercy Sister M. Cora Finanne, who was a guidance counselor for many years at Mother McAuley. She shared a table with her former colleague Deacon Robert Cislo, a theology teacher and moderator of the Respect Life Club, and Sophia Rowan, a senior member of the club, and her sister Holly Rowan, a freshman member of the club.

“I loved the students,” Sister Cora said. “I loved Mother McAuley. I come to these because I’m interested in the girls.”

Sophia Rowan said she comes to learn from and about the sisters.

“Everything at our school is built on their legacy,” she said. “The spirit behind the education we get is right here, living on in the sisters.”

The last MACs with Mercy event of the year was set to take place May 9, when all the students and seniors who participated this year were invited to partake in refreshments from the Rainbow Cone Truck.

To better view the small images near the top of this story, please click on this link

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/oco90beniphntppww41fj1/2024.05.03-MC-ncl-TDS-Around-the-Southland-McCauley-students-join-MC-project-for-Pat-s-Pantry.pdf?rlkey=br6v736wvt2bufzdsj81ak9ez&st=r01e7dx0&dl=0>