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Contact: Jim Pickering
pickering@udayton.edu

NEWS RELEASE

'CATHOLIC EDUCATION: A JOURNAL OF INQUIRY AND PRACTICE' TAKES ON ISSUES OF INCLUSION, STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

DAYTON, Ohio — There has been much talk lately, some of it heated, on what has been described as the “eliting” of Catholic schools. Some critics claim the schools have become the realm of the richest and smartest, while neglecting the poorest and those students with special education needs.

The latest edition of *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* (April 2000), a quarterly publication for U.S. Catholic scholars and educators, addresses those criticisms, concluding that students from diverse backgrounds and those labeled developmentally disabled should be openly welcomed in Catholic schools.

The journal also offers advice and methods, based on the latest research, to Catholic educators on how to implement initiatives toward making their classrooms and schools a welcome place for educational and socio-economic diversity.

This issue showcases Dayton Catholic Elementary as an example of how one Ohio inner-city school is successfully educating “at-risk” students. University of Dayton educator-in-residence Margaret Frey outlines how she began a “collaborative problem-solving model” that involved creating an intervention assistance team comprising a handful of teachers. Their goal: to meet on a regular basis to define a student’s learning problem, set a goal and form a hypothesis on how the goal should be implemented.

Frey taught the team of teachers the skills vital to this approach, including active listening, guided questioning, compassionate confrontation, data collection and evaluation, brainstorming and a general appreciation for the challenges of the classroom.

“This process says you’ve got to commit to sit together as a team and talk openly about your student and his or her needs,” Frey says. “It’s a tool, so that instead of saying, ‘I’ve got the worst student I’ve ever had,’ a teacher is given help in defining a student’s problem, discovering why it is occurring and developing a plan to address it.”

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OFFICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
300 College Park Dayton, Ohio 45469-1679
(937) 229-3241 (937) 229-3063 Fax
www.udayton.edu

The model has been used successfully the last three years, Frey says, and teachers at Dayton Catholic now have the resources to help students with special education needs.

“Inclusion is a timely theme and one that goes to the heart of the purpose and mission of the Catholic school,” says the Rev. Ronald J. Nuzzi, co-editor of the journal and a University of Dayton research associate in the Center for Catholic Education. “The basic thrust of this edition is the historical resistance of Catholic schools and Catholic education programs to welcome students with special needs. We have a tendency to pick and choose our student population.”

He adds, “This issue is about the kids who aren’t the richest or the best and brightest in the class. They have a right to an education, especially a Catholic education, irrespective of learning, physical or mental disabilities.”

In 1997 *Catholic Education* began as a joint effort between UD and three other universities — Fordham University, Saint Louis University and the University of San Francisco — with the support of a grant from the Lilly Foundation. It is held among Catholic leaders as the only scholarly journal dedicated exclusively to research on Catholic educational issues.

Other articles examine legal issues surrounding the delivery of special education to children enrolled in Catholic schools, how to meet the needs of diverse learners when planning for an inclusive classroom, implementing programs to meet the needs of diverse learners at the high school level, providing practical suggestions for individualizing instruction within the context of a large class to meet the needs of diverse learners and research on the benefits and problems of inclusion.

Parents of children with special needs are clamoring for access to Catholic schools but are constantly told by administrators and teachers that they don’t have the money, training or facilities to meet the needs of developmentally disabled students, Nuzzi says.

“Many principals and teachers tell me that the money doesn’t exist to meet the needs of special students,” Nuzzi says. “I recall a time when a mother of a child with a disability stood up during a discussion on this topic and said, ‘My husband and I didn’t have any training, manuals or money to deal with our special child. But he’s our child and a child of God.’”

Nuzzi adds, “They are all our children and God’s children. I believe if our schools are not going to take care of students with special needs, then we shouldn’t baptize them.”

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For media interviews, contact **Father Ronald J. Nuzzi** at (937) 229-3735 or via e-mail at nuzzi@keiko.udayton.edu and **Margaret Frey** at (937) 229-4153. For a review copy of *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* journal, please call **Jim Pickering** at (937) 229-3241.