Dayton area Catholic school math teachers are encouraging each other to collaborate for purposes of improved math achievement. Through a grassroots movement among these teachers, math class has become a crucible of innovative teaching methodologies thanks to sharing creative, effective teaching techniques and action research. Were seeds planted by recent professional development?

The St. Remy Initiative and the Excellence Initiative, two distinct professional development programs facilitated by the Catholic Education Collaborative and the Center for Catholic Education, bring a spirit of cooperation and collaboration within and among participating teachers and schools. They bring cutting edge, researched best practice teaching concepts to the faculties of Catholic schools. It was during a June 2009 Excellence Initiative Curriculum Mapping meeting that Dr. Toni Moore, Director of Professional Development and Curriculum for the Catholic Education Collaborative of Dayton, introduced the concept of Professional Learning Communities (PLC). Two innovative teachers, Mollie Mallin of Immaculate Conception School and Chrissy Buschur of St. Helen School, asked each other, “Wouldn’t it be great to have a group of math teachers teaching at the same grade level that could meet to have this kind of dialogue on a regular basis?” After an initial meeting between the two, and an invitation to all fourth through sixth grade Curriculum Mapping math teachers, nine teachers from five different schools made a commitment to meet once a month. The math PLC was formed!

During the first meeting of the newly formed math PLC, three main teaching goals were identified: varying assessment techniques; helping children with a variety of abilities and backgrounds to progress to new heights; and improving critical thinking skills of all children. Additionally, the teachers wanted to expand their “bag of tricks” by trading strategies and approaches, have a place to bounce ideas off one another, and target specific weaknesses in skills or content that challenge students across the board. An online discussion forum has since been established to complement their regular meetings. Through this forum, teachers are able to post professional articles, quality math links, project ideas, frustrations and questions, and good ideas related to instruction, assessment, and differentiation.

Currently, the math PLC is in the midst of an action research project aimed at improving student problem solving. Members have read several articles that promote the use of graphic organizers to help students identify and sort relevant information, develop and carry out a plan to solve the problem, check their answer, and explain their reasoning.

Continued on page 4
Amanda Blais Nobbe (Lalanne 2005-2007) spoke recently to a group of Catholic school principals about her Lalanne experience. Amanda and her husband, Kyle (Lalanne 2004-2006), are parents of baby Ava Marie. They live in Cincinnati where Amanda stays home this year with Ava and Kyle teaches math at Roger Bacon High School.

It was a hot June day. I was going through Columbus rush hour traffic and the roads were under construction. I had my hands clenched to the steering wheel as tractor trailer trucks zoomed by. What the heck had I gotten myself into? This was nothing like the quiet roads I drove in New Hampshire. I was much better at watching for moose crossings than I was at merging. I was on my way to the Lalanne summer-long orientation. I was convinced that as soon as I arrived at the University of Dayton, I would park my car and never venture back out on those roads.

That was five years ago and I have since become quite familiar with I-75 and I-71 delays and bumper to bumper traffic. I lived two years in an inner city neighborhood in Dayton while teaching second grade at Holy Family Catholic School, which later consolidated to become Mary Queen of Peace. I then moved to Over the Rhine and rehabbed an apartment for St. Francis Seraph Church with four other Lalanne alums and taught third grade at Corryville Catholic School for two years. I am currently taking some time off from the classroom to stay home with my daughter, Ava, who blessed the lives of my husband and me in May. I have stayed here because my two-year experience in the Lalanne program was life changing in so many ways.

I think the one word to best sum up the program is GIFT. Yes, Lalanne is a gift that continues to give long after teachers graduate from the program.

Lalanne gave me two years of close supervision during those challenging first years, training each summer on ways to live out my Catholic faith in the classroom, a deeper look into the world of Catholic education (and for me in particular, urban education), the opportunity to receive my masters degree, the eye opening experience of living in the inner city neighborhood in which I taught, the chance to live with other Lalanne teachers in a faith-based community, the opportunity to serve in truly special and unique schools, and relationships that will last a lifetime. I think it might be impossible to come out of Lalanne as the same person who entered.

My husband and three of our closest friends are all Lalanne alumni. After completing the Lalanne program, the five of us relocated to Cincinnati to continue the faith-based community experience that gave us so much during our two-year commitment to the program. We spent one year living on Vine St. in Over the Rhine supporting each other in our teaching ministries and desire to grow in our faith and understanding of the Gospel. Though we no longer live in the same building, we continue our commitment to each other by attending Mass together at St. Francis Seraph, having play dates with our children every Tuesday, and eating dinner together every Thursday. Lalanne provided us with the foundation to build these relationships.

Lalanne experiences often make their way into our conversations. It never fails that we reminisce about those first years, the great guidance that the program provided us, our first students, and how all of these experiences continue to guide the decisions we make in our lives... like the type of schools we wish to serve in, what it means to live simply, the places we desire to live, and the faith-based choices we make not only within the classroom but also for our growing families.
The 2009 holiday season was very exciting and busy for the Urban Child Development Resource Center (UCDRC). Family Advocates Michelle Sherman and Niyata Fanning worked hard to make sure UCDRC families had a good holiday season. Together they secured gifts for each family requesting assistance from the schools for which UCDRC provides services: both campuses of Mary Queen of Peace, St. Anthony, Immaculate Conception, and the Dayton Early College Academy (DECA).

The outpouring of support from organizations and individuals was tremendous! As such, UCDRC was able to provide for all requests. When we had more families than resources, efforts were intensified and prayers were made to our Lord to help us accomplish our goals. Special thanks to Michelle and Niyata for their energy and enthusiasm. Despite a crippled economy, people dug deep into their pockets to make sure those less fortunate had a holiday. The total amount of gifts donated cannot be estimated, and cash donations converted into gift cards totaled $2,575.00. In addition to MANY generous individuals, numerous organizations/agencies supplied items for the holidays.

UCDRC wishes to thank all those who made the holidays special for others. Our families were very appreciative and overwhelmed with your generosity.

A special thanks to our contributors:
- St. Leonard’s Outreach
- Hannah’s Treasure Chest, Giving Angels
- UD Golden Flyers
- WPAFB Knitters’ Café
- Christian Life Center
- St. Vincent de Paul
- Secret Smiles
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- Christ Child Society
- DECA Staff
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- Boy Scout Pack 436

LALANNE (continued)

Continued from p. 2

The Lalanne program would not be possible without dedicated Catholic school principals and teachers. These principals and teachers play a vital role in not only being able to place Lalanne teachers, but also giving Lalanne teachers one more gift, the gift to witness the Gospel at work with each joy and struggle of the school day.

Leaving the classroom to stay home with my daughter was both the hardest and easiest decision I’ve ever made. Easy because I will never get back these first years with Ava, but hard because I feel so committed thanks to Lalanne and to urban Catholic education. Someday I will get back into the classroom. In the meantime, I will find other ways to hopefully spread the gifts that Lalanne has given me.
They have used this information to build their own graphic organizer and create a problem solving pre/post test to help gauge its effectiveness. It will be interesting to see the results come May!

One of the greatest surprises of the math PLC is the positive feedback from principals and fellow teachers who are amazed that teachers actually spend personal time to talk about math with other teachers. As word has spread, there is now desire for PLCs in other subject areas and grade levels. Furthermore, the graphic organizer created by members of the PLC has received compliments from fellow teachers and parents. While improved confidence in teaching problem solving has evolved with use of the graphic organizer, some students now think of word problems as a game!

All nine members of our PLC feel great success for their contributions to the creation of a true professional learning community and the worthwhile goals and camaraderie they share.