

St. Patrick School celebrates 175 years of being rooted in the Carleton community



DANIEL MELOY

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Catholic Schools



Students of St. Patrick School in Carleton form a "175" on the school's lawn at the beginning of the 2023-24 school year, marking 175 years since the school's founding in 1848. The third-oldest Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Detroit, St. Patrick's commitment to providing a Christ-centered education began with a simple log-cabin school built by German farmers along the banks of the Stoney Creek in Monroe County. (Courtesy of St. Patrick School)

One of the oldest Catholic schools in Michigan, St. Patrick's success pinned on generations of community-led support

CARLETON — The roots grow deep in Carleton, both in the fields and in the classrooms.

The two red-brick school buildings that compose St. Patrick School's lower and upper elementary are 98 and 69 years old, respectively, where the growing minds of 128 young learners are being molded with an education rooted in Christ, as has been done for generations.

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But even the buildings are relatively modern upgrades for a rural school that traces its roots to 1848, when German farmers along the Stoney Creek in Monroe County, who had already built a Catholic church a few years prior, built a log cabin school, where the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, arrived to teach.

St. Patrick School — and indeed, the whole town of Carleton — is using its 175th anniversary to look back with pride on one of the oldest still-operating Catholic schools in Michigan, celebrating the lives, vocations, marriages, families and leaders whose roots are intertwined with the school itself.



A sign outside St. Patrick School in Carleton announces the school's switch to a classical-style curriculum at the start of the 2022-23 academic year. (Daniel Meloy | Detroit Catholic)

“There are a lot of people who are really excited about the anniversary,” Carl Lenze, principal of St. Patrick School, told *Detroit Catholic*. “Especially for families that have been here from the beginning. The church itself and the school are built on property donated by the Wickenheiser family, a German family, three brothers who settled in this community long ago. When they settled here, they pushed for having a Catholic church built in this community.”

Shortly after the parish was established, a school came next, with Fr. Egidius Smulders, C.S.S.R., inviting the IHMs to teach out of the log cabin school to the predominately German, and later, Irish immigrants who were populating the area.

“When the nuns came and built a convent on the property, they had two wings on the convent, in addition to where the nuns lived and slept,” Lenze said. “There was a school classroom on both sides of the convent wings, one for the Irish students, one for the German students.”

St. Patrick School has seen its ups and downs over the years — including a fire in 1926, which destroyed the 1909-built school — but families remained, lessons continued and the faith was practiced for all these years, a testament to the dedication of generations of faithful that continues to this day.



Carl Lenze, principal of St. Patrick School in Carleton, said he's consistently amazed at the dedication and support of the small rural town of Carleton, where even parents whose children no longer attend St. Patrick step up to volunteer and support the school's future. (Daniel Meloy | Detroit Catholic)

“We now have 128 students currently; that’s up six from last year,” Lenze said. “It’s the largest we had in 10 years, and we’re hoping it will continue to grow. We just converted to a classical curriculum. Last year was the first year, this is our second year, and we are getting all the nuts and bolts straightened out. We think it will continue to be popular.”

Nicole Jascot, a St. Patrick alum (Class of 2000) and the mother of four children enrolled at the school, is president of the school committee that’s organizing 175th anniversary celebrations at St. Patrick.

“We started Catholic Schools Week with a fundraiser on Sunday night called ‘Big Tips for Little Giants’ (St. Patrick’s mascot is the Giants), and we hosted a pasta dinner this year,

inviting our community to come and support us to kick off Catholic Schools Week with our yearbooks and some new swag with 1848, the year the school began,” Jascot said.

Throughout the years there have been a steady roster of families who for generations have been there to donate, volunteer, build and advocate for St. Patrick School.

Names such as Wickenheiser, Langton, Meiring, Jones, Post, Baker, Esper, Palmer and many others have been staples of class rosters at St. Patrick over the decades.



A young learner completes her assignment as part of St. Patrick School's new classical curriculum. The tight-knit rural community's support of St. Patrick School has allowed the school to thrive over the centuries, one of the longest-running Catholic schools in Michigan. (Daniel Meloy | Detroit Catholic)

“It speaks volumes to have a Catholic school in a smaller community such as Carleton; it shows how people are engaged and supportive in giving back and even generations of students are at St. Patrick School because of that,” Jascot said. “I don’t have the exact numbers off the top of my head, but we have families that go as far back as the fifth generation that keep this school going.”

The small-town atmosphere is a secret to St. Patrick School’s success.

The school, the parish and the town are intertwined, so much so that families who no longer have children at St. Patrick, or even non-Catholic residents of Carleton, support the parish (now Divine Grace Parish) through its festival and events that have become an integral part of the community.

Lenze is in his seventh year as principal, originally hailing from the Livonia area, and is constantly blown away by the community support St. Patrick School receives.

“In other areas, people move on to some other place, but here in Carleton, the roots are deep, which I think is amazing,” Lenze said. “When we hold our festivals, we get people from all over the community to come out. We had to cancel the festival several years ago, but when Fr. Mike (Woroniewicz, priest *in solidum* who serves Divine Grace Parish), brought it back when he became pastor, and people were waiting for the festival to come back. It’s part of the community, even for people who aren’t Catholic, and that’s cool.”

Jascot said the 175th anniversary committee has been engaging with alumni near and far, posting old photos of teachers and classrooms on Facebook, inviting alumni to guess names and dates and reminisce about old times.



The entire community will celebrate the 175th anniversary during St. Patrick's Spring Festival, May 17-19. (Courtesy of St. Patrick School)

“We have generations of Giants because people really value the quality of the academics and the faith being taught,” Jascot said. “At St. Patrick School, we have a group of alumni, men, who come every Tuesday to help out at the grounds, and they are a great role model for the kids to see. We have so many alumni, so many families, reaching out to give back, to show the kids how to serve the community.”

Anniversary celebrations will continue with an open house Feb. 25, where alumni, students, staff, faculty and St. Patrick parents will be walking the halls, touring classrooms, and visiting old memories before a reception in the gymnasium.

The entire community will celebrate the 175th anniversary during St. Patrick's Spring Festival, May 17-19.

Recent changes to the parish structure — the 2013 merger that formed Divine Grace Parish combining St. Joseph Church in Maybee with the original St. Patrick Church in Carleton, as well as the Monroe 1 Family of Parishes that also includes St. Mary Parish in Rockwood and St. Gabriel in Dundee/Ida — have offered more opportunities to expand the St. Patrick School community, which is at the center of the Family of Parishes.

But for all the changes of the past 175 years, one thing has remained the same: the commitment of the St. Patrick community and its neighbors to support Christ-centric education.

“We have a rosary procession twice a year on the school grounds, and the community comes out to do that with us,” Lenze said. “When we start up a prayer service during the school day, we have people from the community who join. People want to support the school, even if they don't have kids there.

“They like that we are here in the community, embracing our Catholic identity. They have a desire to be distinctly Catholic, to show their Catholicism, to celebrate their Catholicism. And we're here to offer that.”

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