



Pinwheels point to church's child abuse prevention efforts

By Matthew Gambino

Archbishop Charles Chaput led about 150 Catholic school children in an event Thursday, April 7 observing April as National Child Abuse Prevention Month and explaining the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's work of abuse awareness and prevention.

The students who came from 13 Catholic schools and the archbishop displayed the blue and silver pinwheels, which he called "symbols of a carefree childhood," at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center in center city Philadelphia.

Due to expected rain in the morning, the event was moved inside but organizers for the archdiocese plan to display the pinwheels publicly outside the center's doors on 17th Street.

In his remarks Archbishop Chaput noted that all children in Catholic schools and Parish Religious Education Programs in the Philadelphia Archdiocese receive safe environment training, which can enable them to spot potential child abusers and guard against abusive behavior.

Speaking to the children, the archbishop told them each person is created by God as "a precious gift; each one is unique, each one is loved." All people "have a duty to love one another as God has loved us," he said, and they also have a duty to protect one another.

He said the church shares in that duty "with motherly care," but added, "we haven't always lived up to our responsibilities." He went on to stress the church's commitment to continue its child protection programs.

In addition to more than 100,000 students completing safe environment training each year – more than a million children have received the training through church educa-



Archbishop Charles Chaput leads about 150 students April 7 at the Archdiocesan Pastoral Center in the "Pinwheels for Prevention" event, part of the National Child Abuse and Prevention Month, in April. (Photo by Sarah Webb)

tional programs since 2003 – the archbishop also said 92,000 adults who have regular contact with children in any Catholic setting throughout the archdiocese have been trained on child protection and safe environment best practices since 2003.

Leslie Davila, director of the archdiocesan Office for Child and Youth Protection, said between 6,000 and 9,000 adults in the archdiocese are mandated to receive the training each year. They also must obtain

criminal background checks and child abuse clearances. The adults include mandated reporters (a class of child supervisors required by Pennsylvania law to report suspected abuse) as well as clergy, lay and religious employees and volunteers.

The office she leads has spent \$2.4 million on education and training programs in the archdiocese since 2006.

It also reaches out to help survivors of childhood sexual abuse — men, women and children — and their families heal from their experience. A fact sheet from that office indicated that in the fiscal year ended June 30, 2015, the archdiocese spent \$1.7 million for the needs of survivors. Services included counseling, medication, help with travel and child care, and vocational assistance.

By training adults and children on how to recognize improper conduct and to report it, the goal of the archdiocese is to build a strong network of awareness of the issue of child abuse throughout society in order to prevent future crimes against children.

The annual pinwheel event on Thursday was an outgrowth of the national "Pinwheels for Prevention" movement that was developed as a grassroots initiative by a secular organization, Prevent Child Abuse America.

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Parishes in South Phila. and Delaware County will partner in June

Two groups of parishes in South Philadelphia and Delaware County are about to engage in a “partnership,” a relatively new concept in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia’s pastoral planning process that calls for parishes and their churches not to close but to be managed jointly by one pastor.

Under a plan recommended by parish leaders, St. Rita and Annunciation B.V.M. parishes will merge for worship at Annunciation Church and Annunciation will partner with St. Nicholas Parish, all in South Philadelphia.

The National Shrine of St. Rita will continue to operate as a separate entity from the parishes.

Key to the partnership arrangement is the Augustinian order of priests, who currently staff both St. Rita and St. Nicholas parishes, each with a pastor and three to four Augustinian priests serving as parochial vicars or in residence.

The partnership calls for one pastor, one pastoral council and one parish staff to serve the three churches and parishes, which retain their own finance councils and maintain their own finances.

A total of 3,076 Catholics are registered at all three parishes, with 501 at St. Rita’s, 975 at Annunciation and 1,600 at St. Nicholas, according to the latest figures from 2014.

Because of the presence of many Augustinian priests and the close proximity of the parishes in South Philadelphia — St. Nicholas is located only seven blocks from Annunciation — the pastoral service to parishioners in the partnership differs from that announced for Delaware County.

Sacred Heart Parish in Clifton Heights and St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Drexel Hill will also enter a partnership. Just eight-tenths of a

mile’s drive separates St. Charles, on the southern end of Drexel Hill, from Sacred Heart, a Polish and territorial parish located across Baltimore Pike in Clifton Heights.

Each parish currently has a resident pastor. Sacred Heart had 520 registered households in 2014 and St. Charles 2,220, for a total of 2,740 households among the two.

Under the partnership, as in South Philadelphia, one parish administration will serve both parishes and their churches will remain open.

Both partnership plans go into effect in June, according to a statement from the Philadelphia Archdiocese.

Transition plan aims to ease sting of Hilltown Catholic school’s closure

St. Agnes-Sacred Heart School in Hilltown, Bucks County, will close after the current term this June. Families and faculty of the school, plus parishioners of the two parishes whose children attend it — St. Agnes in Sellersville and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Hilltown — learned the news on Sunday, April 10.

As is the case with most school closures, declining enrollment is the leading cause. But a new “transition plan” will provide subsidies from the two parishes for students to attend nearby schools.

At this time school enrollment is 138 students but is projected to drop to 106 in the next academic year. As enrollment has declined and with it less tuition revenue, educational costs continue to rise, including teacher salaries, utilities and building maintenance.

According to a statement from the Philadelphia Archdiocese, the two parishes “can no longer subsidize school operations without risking their own fiscal stability.”

Currently the in-parish tuition rate \$3,935 tuition per pupil. If school operations were to continue next year under a balanced budget, the tuition rate would need to rise and the multiple student discounts be eliminated.

The parishes would also need to provide a combined subsidy of \$560,000 to the school, draining parish coffers.

The transition plan announced by the pastors provides for fiscal stabilization at the parishes and would open options for families of St. Agnes-Sacred Heart School.

For next year families may choose to send their child to one of six neighboring Catholic schools located five to 16 miles from both churches.

St. Agnes and Our Lady of the Sacred Heart parishes will provide a \$1,000 subsidy per student each year they are enrolled in one of the partnering schools. The Foundation for Catholic Education will also provide a \$1,000 grant for the first year’s tuition to one of the schools.

Between the two, families participating in the transition plan may pay about half the current tuition for the first year.

The school families have received a packet of information detailing the tuition options and maps for the neighboring schools, which will soon host visitation programs for the St. Agnes-Sacred Heart School students.

Families must tell their pastors which school their children will attend by June 1.

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