

Celebrating 85 years of Catholic education

By CARRIE GILPIN

The Immaculate Heart of Mary School celebrated its 85th birthday Dec. 11 with an hourlong prayer service in the auditorium that included clergy, students, administrators and teachers. In attendance were several Sisters of Charity nuns, including Paula Holdman, who graduated from the school in 1936.

"The first class of the school graduated in 1932, and it was just as wonderful here then as it is today," said Holdman, 92, addressing the group. "The beloved Sisters of Charity were the teachers and the principals of this school for 40 years. Say a prayer every so often for your teachers. Blessed are those who instruct others unto justice, for they shall shine like the stars."

Monsignor John Ferry, pastor of IHM Church, spoke to the class before blessing two statues: one of Sister Elizabeth Ann Seton, who is credited with founding the Catholic school system in the United States, and a new statue of the Blessed Mother, a gift of IHM's Class of 2012.

"It took 15 years to raise the money to build the school you attend today. Many students passed through these doors," the monsignor said.

Seventh-grader Kerry Travers read a *Scarsdale Inquirer* article from Dec. 16, 1927 describing the laying of the cornerstone. Within the cornerstone is hidden and sealed a copy of the church bulletin from that time, copies of *The Scarsdale Inquirer*, *The New York Times* and *Catholic News*. The cornerstone is made of granite and is inscribed "For God and Country."

Eighth-grader Grace Connelly spoke about the history of Elizabeth Ann

"The Sisters are independent and volunteer in the school and the community, with helping students to read and with teaching adult religious education," said IHM principal Patricia Gatti in a phone interview Tuesday.

The school had 100 students in five grades in September 1928. The building was designed by J.B.C. Synder and built by John J. Cocherill Construction Co. It contained nine classrooms, a library, an auditorium and a gymnasium. For the school dedication, Cardinal Patrick Hayes was escorted from the Scarsdale Train Station to the ceremony in a flag-festooned motorcade, according to reports of the day. Four classrooms were added in 1937, as well as a kindergarten class. The parish and the school continued to expand and in 1948 portions of the parish were given to the new Our Lady of Fatima Parish. This happened again in 1954 when another Catholic church was founded in Scarsdale, St. Pius X Church on Secor Road. Both parishes established schools. By 1964, there were 700 students at IHM School in grades K-8, and a third floor and more classrooms were built.

The Sisters of Charity ended their affiliation with the school in 1967, and the Dominican Sisters of Sparkill assumed operation for the next five years. In 1972, IHM became the first lay-administered and lay-staffed school in the Archdiocese of New York, when Mary Anne Landry became principal. In 1978 she was succeeded by Harold Nielsen, and in 1984, by Robert Billings, who served as principal for 20 years.

Gatti, who was formerly principal of St. Brendan's School in the Bronx, has been principal of IHM School since 2006.



Students listen to Sister Paula Holdman, left, as she addresses faculty and members of the Sisters of Charity at the celebration of the 85th birthday of Immaculate Heart of Mary School Dec. 11.



Seton, who was raised in New Rochelle as an Episcopalian and became the first native-born United States citizen to be canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. Seton established the first Catholic school in the nation, in Maryland, and founded the American congregation of the Sisters of Charity. Five members of the Sisters of Charity live in a convent called the House of Prayer, owned by the church on Gaylor Road.