

Diocesan PTA responds to COVID, shines in national award

By Jennifer Mauro
Managing Editor

Paula Pangilinan knows exactly where she would have been April 14 if it hadn't been for the COVID-19 pandemic – in Baltimore, accepting the National Catholic Educational Association "Lead, Learn, Proclaim" Award.

"It was exciting to be recognized for what we've been trying to create, which is a communications strategy for the 21st century," said Pangilinan, Diocese of Trenton PTA president.

The NCEA awards honor those whose ministry is Catholic school education and who have demonstrated a strong Catholic educational philosophy as well as exceptional efforts, devotion and achievements. The diocesan PTA was one of 27 recipients selected from more than 150,000 teachers, administrators, diocesan leaders and organizations.

Among the initiatives for which it was recognized: biennial retreat days for PTA units, the fall and spring PTA conferences, and a PTA extranet for idea-sharing and community-building.

"Our biggest initiative at the diocesan level is to create a unified group among all of our PTAs," Pangilinan said. "Each school PTA is unique to that school, and that's important. Our goal is to unify everybody to part of the larger PTA while still keeping their individual personalities. So the award celebrated the fact that we have been coming up with new and innovative ways to accomplish that."

Recipients learned in March of their awards and had been set to be recognized during the NCEA's annual convention in April. Coronavirus restrictions may have prevented that from happening – but the diocesan PTA has been busy doing exactly what it was awarded for.

Early on in the pandemic, Pangilinan explained, the diocesan PTA kept the lines of communication open with school PTAs in the Diocese's four counties. The members held a virtual meeting and made some immediate decisions to get monies back to the school PTAs. They canceled a few fees that would have typically been collected in the spring, reimbursed certain funds and allocated stipends.

Members also created a Facebook video outlining what was being done during the pandemic and reassured the school PTAs that they are not alone.

JoAnn Tier, diocesan superintendent of Catholic schools, called the award and current efforts underway proud moments for the Diocese, especially as the diocesan PTA supports 29 elementary schools, six high school communities and 12,267 students.

“The PTA members give of themselves to benefit students, their families, and the Catholic schools that many call home,” she said. “The membership of the diocesan, regional and local PTA units give of themselves in leadership, in building community and in supporting Catholic education. For over 94 years, the work of the PTA has been evidenced in building a strong foundation. The roots run deep.”