The Cardinal's Circle members ‘planting seeds’ for growth in Inner City Catholic Schools

HOUSTON — Members of The Cardinal's Circle were recognized for “nourishing the seeds of education” for Inner City Catholic School (ICCS) students and families at the annual Mass and Dinner of Thanksgiving on April 19.

Daniel Cardinal DiNardo celebrated the Mass at St. Mary’s Seminary, Auxiliary Bishop George A. Sheltz, Superintendent Debra Haney and Inner City Catholic School principals and parents joined The Cardinal's Circle members for the dinner following.

Founded in 2010, the mission of The Cardinal’s Circle is to help the schools maintain a standard of academic excellence in curriculum and staff. Through an annual contribution of $5,000 each, members of The Cardinal's Circle invest in the lives of students at the 13 Inner City Catholic Schools of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

Shortly before the dinner, students from Assumption Catholic School shared a special message of appreciation to Cardinal DiNardo and members of The Cardinal’s Circle.

“(The Inner City Catholic Schools) are very close to my heart, as they are to my predecessor,” Archbishop Emeritus Joseph A. Fiorenza, Cardinal DiNardo said. The cardinal recalled a conversation he had with Archbishop Fiorenza when he arrived in Galveston-Houston in 2004.

“He said to me, ‘I don’t want our Catholic schools to only be for the wealthy. I want us to be able to draw and attract students and get them help so they can stay in these schools.’” Cardinal DiNardo said. “(Archbishop Fiorenza) was particularly concerned about the Inner City schools. I’m totally in agreement with him, we must be attentive to Inner City Catholic education.”

All of the dinner guests received seed packets from individual ICCS students with a note thanking the members for “planting the seeds” that are helping them grow.

“We are most fortunate to have a Cardinal and Catholic community that wants to see Catholic schools thrive and bloom,” Haney said in her “State of the Schools” address. “And we are truly thankful to have administrators, leaders and teachers as well as parents and students that are willing to think outside the box. It is going to take every person to help us pull the weeds in our garden so that our flowers can bloom and grow.”

She went on to thank members for “allowing us to nourish the seeds of education for our students in our Inner City Catholic Schools.”

Tom Macrini, one of the founders of The Cardinal’s Circle and a committee member, introduced the evening’s keynote speaker, Mathew Mendoza. Mendoza, an alumnus of St. Pius V Catholic School, is a student at the University of Houston. Mendoza credits his “parents’ zeal” and the generosity of The Cardinal's Circle members for being with him during his educational journey.

“No matter what roadblock I have faced throughout my life, I would have been lost without God’s direction. But we are all here in this room at this very moment through God’s grace. Thank you for establishing scholarships for individuals like myself so that we may continue our Catholic education.”

He closed with a quote from Barbara Bush, the former First Lady and Houstonian who died only days prior to The Cardinal’s Circle event.

“Giving frees us from the familiar territory of our own needs by opening our mind to the unexplained worlds occupied by the needs of others.”

By taking on those needs, “the harvest is coming in from those first seeds planted eight years ago through The Cardinal's Circle, according to Christina Mendez, principal of Holy Ghost Catholic School.

“While the work can be challenging, I promise it is so rewarding,” she said. “Together, we have done great things and imagine the greater harvests to come in the future.”

During his closing remarks prior to the benediction, Bishop Sheltz highlighted the important work of the Cardinal’s Circle by sharing his own testimony of being a proud local product of an Inner City Catholic School education.

“I know my father and mom sacrificed a great deal to send three kids to school,” he said. Bishop Sheltz said his participation in The Cardinal’s Circle was “a thank you to mom and dad for making the sacrifices they made to get me a good Catholic education. I’m a proud member of this organization and I make that sacrifice every year because I want to see other young people, like Mathew, have that ability to succeed and grow and be good witnesses of God’s love in this world of ours.”

The 13 Inner City Catholic Schools

Assumption Catholic School · Holy Spirit Catholic School · Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School in Galena Park · Our Lady of Guadalupe School · Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Catholic School · Queen of Peace Catholic School · Resurrection Catholic School · St. Augustine Catholic School · St. Christopher Catholic School · St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School · St. Mary of the Purification School · St. Peter the Apostle Catholic School · St. Pius V Catholic School

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• Moral formation through the constant example of those who surround them and involvement in projects to help others in their community
• Perseverance to succeed in tough times in an atmosphere of safety, trust

The Cardinal’s Circle

To learn more about The Cardinal’s Circle, call 713-652-4417 or visit choosecatholicschools.org/cc.

The 13 Inner City Catholic Schools...
The Cardinal’s Circle provides ‘salvation’ for Inner City Catholic School families

HOUSTON — Jane Bemko is a longtime member of The Cardinal’s Circle, which provides tuition assistance and school improvements to the Inner City Catholic Schools of Galveston-Houston. A former teacher at St. Peter the Apostle Catholic School and St. Mary of the Purification Catholic School, the 81-year-old Bemko has seen firsthand the kind of impact that level of support has on families in the Archdiocese, referring to it as “the salvation for this generation.”

“Inner City Catholic Schools have kids who really need a good education. They just need a boost,” Bemko said. “My theory of giving is that this is not our money or our goods. As St. Luke states in his Gospel of seeking a donkey for Jesus and the owner is told, ‘The Master has need of it;’ that is our spirit of stewardship.”

Founded in 2010, the mission of The Cardinal’s Circle is to help the schools maintain a standard of academic excellence in curriculum and staff. Through an annual contribution of $5,000 each, members of The Cardinal’s Circle invest in the lives of students at the 13 Inner City Catholic Schools of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

“These schools are incubators of opportunity for urban children and their families faced with incredible financial challenges,” Daniel Cardinal DiNardo said. “Donors are giving our students the opportunities for academic, spiritual and communal success.”

Cardinal DiNardo said that the generosity of The Cardinal’s Circle donors “enables us to preserve the treasure the (Inner City Catholic Schools) represent to the students, the families and their neighborhoods.”

As an Inner City Catholic School, Queen of Peace Catholic School “would not exist without Cardinal DiNardo’s support and all of the support from donors of The Cardinal’s Circle,” said Father Michael Minifie, CC, pastor of Queen of Peace Catholic Church. “Those donations help us to pay our teachers a living wage so we can keep our best and brightest.”


“We have been able to provide tuition assistance for families that were negatively impacted by recent circumstances in their life, and we were able to rebuild our technological infrastructure (cabling and wireless) to better serve the needs of students,” Bates said. “The infrastructural updates will also provide us an opportunity in the future to expand the use of technology in the classroom.”

With help from The Cardinal’s Circle, Inner City Catholic Schools are able to serve communities that seek a Catholic school education but typically cannot afford such opportunities, according to Bates.

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The 13 Inner City Catholic Schools
Assumption Catholic School - Holy Ghost Catholic School - Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School in Galena Park
∙ Our Lady of Guadalupe School - Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Catholic School - Queen of Peace Catholic School - Resurrection Catholic School - St. Augustine Catholic School - St. Christopher Catholic School - St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School - St. Mary of the Purification School - St. Peter the Apostle Catholic School - St. Pius V Catholic School

Inner City Catholic Schools provide students...
The Cardinal’s Circle makes Catholic school education possible for families

HOUSTON — Founded in 2010, the mission of The Cardinal’s Circle is to help Inner City Catholic Schools maintain a standard of academic excellence in curriculum and staff. The Cardinal’s Circle also helps the 13 schools provide tuition assistance required by a large portion of their student population.

“The operational needs of our Inner City Catholic Schools are extensive and ongoing,” Daniel Cardinal DiNardo said. “Members of The Cardinal’s Circle play a vital role in ensuring that students who attend these schools are given the best Catholic education possible.”

Burt and Allyson Martin have been members of The Cardinal’s Circle for five years.

“We became members because we believe that it is our responsibility to provide financial support for students, families and schools who do not have the necessary resources,” Burt Martin said. “It is a way for us to join with others in our Archdiocese, so that together, we all can make a meaningful difference in the lives of children and families in the Houston area.”

Through an annual contribution of $5,000, The Cardinal’s Circle members invest in the lives of students at the Inner City Catholic Schools, which provide opportunities for urban children and their families faced with incredible financial challenges.

Juan Evangelista knew his children needed to attend a Catholic school. Although it was a financial challenge, he sent his daughters Stefany, 19, and Natalie, 16, to Holy Ghost School in Houston. His 11-year-old son Erick is currently a student at the school.

Juan is a cook at Rice University and his wife Evelyn is a housekeeper. They were married at Holy Ghost 21 years ago. Faith and family are the most important aspect of their lives. They closely watch their expenses to enable them to pay what they can for school tuition.

“I wanted my children to attend Catholic schools for the spiritual values, to learn respect for God and to follow Jesus,” Juan Evangelista said.

Stefany graduated from Cristo Rey Jesuit and is now attending Texas State University. Natalie is a student at Cristo Rey and Erik is entering the seventh grade at Holy Ghost this fall and has been recognized by the Duke Talent Identification Program.

“Catholic schools are unique environments where we have the ability to form the whole child — academically, physically and most importantly, spiritually,” said Christina Mendez, Holy Ghost principal. “Our goal is to help every child to discover their unique gifts and talents given to them by God to serve others. We are able to walk hand-in-hand with parents to support them in their role as primary educators of their children. By helping our students to discover their gifts and talents we are able to help them understand that God gave them these talents to serve others in the community.”

Members of The Cardinal’s Circle give Inner City Catholic School students opportunities for academic, spiritual and communal success.

“We believe that Catholic education is vital to providing a stronger moral, religious and academic foundation to our youth and ultimately, our future generations,” Martin said. “As Pope Francis said, Catholic education ‘gives them a solid basis on which to build their lives.’ The opportunity to have a Catholic education is not a privilege reserved for a few but should be available to all who seek it.”

Martin said it is an honor to support The Cardinal’s Circle.

“The Catholic education received at the Inner City Catholic Schools enables these students to better themselves and their families,” he said. “In addition to the support of the students and their families, The Cardinal’s Circle supports those teachers, staff and administrators who have unselfishly devoted themselves to the Inner City Catholic Schools.”

By joining The Cardinal’s Circle, members have the ability to make a life-changing impact on countless children and families, Mendez said.

“Students who would not otherwise be able to afford to come to Catholic school are supported by these gifts,” she said. “Holy Ghost and other Inner City Catholic Schools support those who are poor and often marginalized in society — the very people Jesus called us to serve. In becoming a part of The Cardinal’s Circle, (members) join us in our mission to serve our students and community, bringing the joy of the Gospel into the world.”

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MORE INFORMATION TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CARDINAL’S CIRCLE, VISIT THE WEBSITE ONLINE WWW.CHOOSECATHOLICSCHOOLS.ORG/CC

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EDUCATION † 12 | ESPAÑOL † 19-20 | WITHIN THE ARTS † 21 | AROUND THE ARCHDIOCESE † 22
HOUSTON — Ariella Ortega said her education at Queen of Peace Catholic School intrinsically linked academics with faith and service, a standard that still resonates with her as a student at the University of St. Thomas in Houston (UST).

“Moral values are instilled in the lessons,” she said. “Catholic schools do not just intend for us to be well-educated and prepared for the real world; but educated and prepared while equally holding onto Catholic values that influence our decisions and the way we treat others and ourselves.”

It is that high standard that makes Inner City Catholic Schools such as Queen of Peace an integral part of the Archdiocese and the Galveston-Houston community as a whole.

Founded in 2010, the mission of The Cardinal’s Circle is to help Inner City Catholic Schools maintain that standard of academic excellence in curriculum and staff. The Cardinal’s Circle also assists these 13 schools to provide tuition assistance required by a large portion of their student population.

“A Catholic school education shapes our young people for the future — morally, spiritually and academically,” Daniel Cardinal DiNardo said. “That support is of preeminent importance to carry out our mission, especially for the Inner City Catholic schools.”

Members of The Cardinal's Circle invest in the lives of Inner City Catholic Schools' students through an annual commitment of $5,000. Contributions support the needs of each school from tuition assistance to investment in technology, curriculum and quality teachers. For the last seven years, members of The Cardinal’s Circle have made a substantial difference in the capability of these schools to keep pace with the rapidly changing requirements for student information and learning.

Inner City Catholic Schools offer students a daily connection to their faith, their education, athletics and relationship to family, Church and the community. Providing a holistic formative experience for these students continue to pose serious challenges to the principals, teachers and volunteers, especially as they operate with limited budgets. The financial support they receive from The Cardinal’s Circle help to bridge the gap.

“These schools are grateful beyond measure for the gifts and the confidence demonstrated in them by those support The Cardinal’s Circle each year,” Cardinal DiNardo said. “(At Inner City Catholic Schools), you will find some remarkable behavior amongst the students. There is an air of quiet discipline that allows children to learn, to contemplate, to reflect and to be creative. Their faith emanates from their hearts in a way that makes them kind to each other and to their teachers. They are models of Jesus Christ and the Gospel.”

What sets apart Inner City Catholic Schools is this continual formation of discipleship by building a “deep and ever-present relationship with Christ,” according to Dr. Julie Vogel, Superintendent of Catholic Schools for Galveston-Houston. Through this formation, “our students can transform the world not just today but tomorrow and always.”

“This is the primary reason our families choose to entrust their children to our care,” she said. “We all believe that every child is made in the image and likeness of God and therefore deserves the best of who we are every single day. We are raising young men and women with the skills necessary to be critical thinkers, creative problem solvers and productive leaders in our communities for the greater good of society.”

Speaking from her own experience, Ortega agrees that Inner City Catholic School education forms well-rounded individuals not only in the classrooms but within the community and at home. The Cristo Rey Jesuit Preparatory graduate is currently studying engineering at UST.

“With charity being one of the Catholic virtues, Inner City Catholic School students are encouraged to participate in their community by helping others,” Ortega said. “These interactions encourage individuals to humble themselves and become aware of issues in a community.”

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- Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Catholic School
- Queen of Peace Catholic School
- Resurrection Catholic School
- St. Augustine Catholic School
- St. Christopher Catholic School
- St. Francis of Assissi Catholic School
- St. Mary of the Purification Montessori School
- St. Peter the Apostle Catholic School
- St. Pius V Catholic School

Inner City Catholic Schools transform students into models of the Gospel.
Cardinal’s Circle helping Inner City Catholic School students, families

HOUSTON — Ariella Ortega realizes her Catholic school education shaped her into the person she is today. Just as notably, the senior at Cristo Rey Jesuit College Preparatory acknowledges the sacrifices her parents made to make that experience a reality.

“I wish it to my parents who became models for me because of their faith and dedication,” Ortega said. “They were unable to finish school because they did not have the financial resources and opportunities in Mexico. Through all the obstacles, they held onto their faith and looked past their struggles. Financially, it was very difficult, but they knew it was worth it (for me).”

Ortega was recently accepted at the University of St. Thomas and the University of Texas. Ortega shared her personal success story during The Cardinal’s Circle Mass and Dinner on April 14. Before attending Cristo Rey, Ortega was a student at Queen of Peace School in Houston, an Inner City Catholic School of the Archdiocese. More than 2,300 students from diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds are currently enrolled in the 13 Inner City Catholic Schools.

The Cardinal’s Circle members invest in the lives of these students through an annual commitment of $5,000. The generous donors form a “giving circle” committed to Inner City Catholic Schools in recognition of a shared responsibility to educate future generations. Each gift is an investment in the future of students in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. The Cardinal’s Circle also welcomes parishes and organizations who would like to be part of this worthy cause, which supports unique needs of students at schools from tuition assistance, professional development, teacher salaries, textbooks, technology and curriculum upgrades and classroom materials.

“Members of The Cardinal’s Circle have answered the call to assist us educate the whole child — mind, heart and spirit,” Dr. Julie Vogel, superintendent of Catholic Schools, said. “With this financial support, we have been able to provide access, programs, infrastructure, experiences, materials and much more for our students. We will continue to work diligently with the sole purpose of forming disciples who will transform the world.”

“The Cardinal’s Circle recently surpassed 200 members; 90 of those supporters are founding members of the Circle six years ago.”

“I would encourage anyone interested in joining The Cardinal’s Circle to visit these schools and see the great things the students are doing and learning from their experiences,” Tom Macrini, founding member of The Cardinal’s Circle, said. “There are many families and parents like Ariella’s making great sacrifices to give their children a Catholic school education. The students and the parents, they value their education in the Inner City Catholic Schools.”

Ortega thanked The Cardinal’s Circle members for their generous contributions and support.

“The most important and beneficial aspect of Catholic education was experiencing everything I learn, do and said through faith and service,” she said, “I learned this through the values that my parents instilled in me and what I was exposed to at Queen of Peace and Cristo Rey Jesuit. I learned not to take things for granted based on my parents’ experience, which also taught me to become responsible and independent.”

Ortega said that Catholic schools became a second home to her.

“It created a spiritual atmosphere where I could be myself, but still practice my faith,” she said. “Catholic schools did not just intend for us to be well-educated and prepared for the real world, but educated and prepared while equally holding on to Catholic values that influence our decisions and the way we treat others and ourselves.”

Our Catholic Schools help interiorize in our young people a beautiful sense of faith, and that is a gift that keeps on giving.

DANIEL CARDINAL
ARCHBISHOP OF GALVESTON-HOUSTON

The Cardinal’s Circle
To learn more about The Cardinal’s Circle, call 713-652-4417 or visit chosecatholicschools.org/support.

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Inner City Catholic Schools provide students with high academic expectations, daily encouragement to develop their God-given talents and a moral foundation through projects that benefit the community around them. The schools also offer students the perseverance to succeed in tough times in an atmosphere of safety and trust, as well as a commitment to allow each student to develop a relationship with God and an understanding of their faith that will serve them well for a lifetime.

“One of the things our Catholic schools do is to help to interiorize in our young people a beautiful sense of faith — and that is a gift that keeps on giving,” Daniel Cardinal DiNardo said.

Father Gerosa said Cardinal DiNardo’s commitment is a sign of strong pastoral leadership and displays an understanding that education is a “sure harvest in the future.”

“The support of the Church’s leaders is evident, but also the Church as ‘people of God’ are heavily involved in making this possible,” Father Gerosa said. “Assumption and other Catholic schools are an expression of the vision of faith and charity and love of the Catholic Church in Galveston-Houston.”

During her dinner presentation,
The Cardinal’s Circle seeks to enable the Inner City Catholic Schools of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston to maintain a standard of excellence. In addition to tuition assistance, the group enables schools to meet the other challenges in education today: competitive teacher salaries, classroom technology, and provide for a safe environment.

Inner City Catholic Schools educate the whole child
- An academic excellence emphasizes a core curriculum that prepares them for high school and beyond.
- Faith formation that fosters a lifetime relationship with God, the development of morals, character and caring for others.
- A safe, disciplined, joyous small class environment where they can learn and thrive.
- Principals and teachers who are committed to their development in mind, heart and spirit.
- Virtually all students from Inner City Catholic Schools graduate from high school, most seeking college education.

Facing today’s challenges
- Making a Catholic education available to students regardless of ability to pay tuition.
- Maintaining competitive teacher salaries to retain the most effective and creative teachers.
- Providing state-of-the-art technology and instructional materials for classrooms.
- Updating information systems for effective administration of school resources.
- Renovating aging facilities, campuses.
- Continuing to provide first-rate professional development for our teachers.
- Average Age of ICCS Buildings: Over 60 years old.

The Cardinal’s Circle, visit www.choosecatholicschools.org/donate. If you have a question or are interested in becoming a member of The Cardinal’s Circle, contact the Development Department at 713-652-4417 or visit www.archgh.org.