

Help put Rochester Youth First:

Join members of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester
in a grassroots educational effort

We need your help with:

- Spiritually and educationally enriching the lives of children in our area
- Helping a unique faith-based school grow with the support and vision of Episcopalians

Since 2009, representatives of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester have been actively seeking ways to establish or participate in a faith-based school in the city of Rochester. **The aim: to increase quality of education for local children while growing participating parishes in spiritual, missional and potentially numerical ways.** During market research for an Episcopal School, the possibility of forming a partnership with the Sisters of Saint Joseph (SSJ), a Roman Catholic community of women who are independent from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, became apparent. The Sisters fully own and operate Nazareth Elementary School on Lake Avenue – a well-regarded and exceptionally equipped school very close to Ascension Episcopal Church, Rochester. Members of the initial School Exploratory Team asked to be commissioned by Diocesan Council to study the possibility of partnership with the school.

The Nazareth Discernment Commission's work has both broken down barriers and developed a strong vision for a shared future at this school. Diocesan leadership will soon be presented with a formal proposal for such a future; meanwhile, the work of the Commission continues – and we need your help!

How can I help the children at Nazareth?

You or your parish can engage in programs such as:

- Volunteer as clergy: Become involved with the spiritual or educational life of the school
- Volunteer as a parishioner: help at the school, from teacher's aides to enrichment programs for family and children
- Grants: Helping with outreach grants each year to include child sponsorships, direct grants to the school, book buying, etc. You can give money or let those with money know the need!
- Recruitment: Telling interested parents in your parish and your friends about the school

Interested? Contact Rev. Mary Ann Brody (ststephenspastor@frontiernet.net) and read about the history and nature of this partnership.

How did this Commission begin?

In 2009, Bishop Singh requested that a committee be set up to explore the opportunity of creating an Episcopal school in the city of Rochester to address the educational and spiritual needs of city children and their family units.

A preliminary design was put together with the help of an outside consultant. That design was put out to the larger diocese (clergy and lay members) and the Rochester community through a Market Feasibility Study conducted with the assistance of Chuck Hertrick, a former School Administrator. After a thorough review of the data collected, the exploration committee came back to the Bishop and the Diocesan Council in June 2011 with two conclusions and a suggested path forward:

1. Though there was strong clergy support (75% of respondents) and some support among lay members (44%) the biggest concern came in the form of the cost. Starting a school from scratch would be a formidable project, taking a few years and costing hundreds of thousands in facility and preparation costs. There were questions about whether this was the best use of our resources. This is certainly doable (as with God anything is possible) but prior to any child entering the doors, the costs would be significant. Further, Dana Kimberly of Danforth Development, Inc. (a local fund raising firm), advised us that the storyline would not be sufficient to raise funds in a capital campaign in that economic climate and therefore not worthy of pursuit. *¹
2. The Sisters of Saint Joseph (SSJ) (who run a Roman Catholic school at Nazareth Elementary on Lake Ave.) approached the exploration committee and the Bishop to discuss a collaboration targeted toward achieving the same objectives from basically the same location in Rochester. After meetings with several exploratory committee members and several Diocesan staff, we made the decision, with Diocesan Council approval, to discern collaboration with the Sisters of St. Joseph (SSJ) as a potential path forward.

After two years of exploration addressing baseline opportunities and the openness for an Episcopal school, and excited about the prospect of such a historic, ecumenical venture at Nazareth, the committee asked to be 'commissioned' by Diocesan Council to conduct a yearlong discernment beginning in the fall of 2012. The commission would discern further with the leadership team of the SSJ and explore what collaboration might look like, and weigh its appropriateness for both institutions. During this process, the group was charged to periodically report back to Diocesan Council, the Rochester/Monroe districts and the district clergy about their progress.

¹ The fund raising firm Danforth Development (Dana Kimberly, Founder & President) suggested to the exploration committee and the Bishop that raising funds to support an idea versus an existing institution with results is difficult. She felt the fund raising would not be successful as a new school start-up.

What are the key findings of the Commission?

Over the course of the past few years, the commission has worked with the leadership of the Sisters of Saint Joseph to build relationships, trust, and to discern the potential for collaboration. The commission included members who belonged to the Standing Committee, Diocesan Council, and Trustees. They were both clergy and lay members. At different times in the process it included representation from most Episcopal city parishes. The coverage was intended to be representative.

It has been easy – and wonderful – breaking down cultural barriers.

Initially, the commission chose to address the potential barriers and stereotypes associated with a Catholic and Episcopal partnership. In a thorough and open fashion the two groups considered, discussed and discerned further any obstacles to success, including questions that surrounded the dual faiths operating out of one school through a common board. The SSJ are a unique brand of God's tolerance, compassion and understanding. We have all come away humbled by their expressions of love.

Nazareth Elementary is run and owned by the nuns.

The SSJ congregation is not a Catholic Diocese mission. They own the school and its programs 100%. They are already working toward creating a separate 501c3. There is the possibility of a new venture as an independent, jointly owned organization.

All of us are welcome.

All Episcopal priests, including gay/lesbian clergy and females, are welcomed and embraced in providing Eucharist and Morning Prayer in the chapel and working interactively with students as programs may warrant.

In addition, volunteers on site from the Episcopal community are welcome, and the SSJ are open to multi-faith involvement in the future. There is openness to the teaching and example of religious tolerance and social justice; including other religious traditions in their religious education.

Our voice will be heard.

Curriculum review will be held to approve religious content and integration throughout the school day, to respond to Episcopal concerns within the existing framework.

Everybody is in it for the kids.

Among both the Sisters and the Discernment Commission, our goal is very simple: to improve the life and faith formation of families attached to the students and in the community. Note: The Lake Ave. community is home to a majority of the refugees resettled into Rochester in the last decade.

How can I help the Commission?

The Nazareth Partnership Commission will soon present a formal recommendation for a partnership with the Sisters of Saint Joseph. Leaders within the Diocese will determine the institutional form this will take. In the meantime, Commission members are working diligently to build our relationship with Nazareth Elementary – and to assist in our shared vision of delivering affordable, faith-based academic excellence.

We, as the Commission, have developed subcommittees to help with key next steps in both our grassroots and institutional efforts:

- Communication: To take the design and promise of collaboration and begin to lay out the options for involvement at the parish and parishioner level. The commission will begin to recruit clergy, parishes and parishioners to commit their involvement at any level to support the collaboration going forward and join the effort to fulfill the dream.
- School Expansion: To increase the school population through programming, PR, parish discussions and extended discussions with programs in place, for example Day Care Programs already supported in the diocese as potential feeders.
- Spiritual Collaboration: To outline the extent of and possibilities around an Episcopal presence which could include but is not limited to;
 - Morning prayer, Chapel, Children’s programs.
 - Integrating aspects of an Episcopal religious curriculum to enhance what is already being done.
 - Work toward joint chaplaincy.
- Financial Sustainability: Develop a financial plan to sustain the school over time and use this information as the springboard for determining the extent of financial need to achieve the dream. This will address operating fund raising on an annual basis and a capital campaign (or multiple capital campaigns) depending on how that will work best for all stakeholders.
- Governance: The SSJ will create a new school board that welcomes and utilizes the identity and ideals espoused in our Episcopal tradition. Lay and ordained representation will be encouraged at all levels.

Though we imagine a full institutional partnership as a rich opportunity, we have discerned that our grassroots efforts will continue far into the future. This ministry is alive, and God has given growth for its participants and the children it benefits! Come, join us, and see what’s so special about Nazareth Elementary School.