

REBIRTH: MENOMONEE FALLS PARISH 'RESETS' ITS HISTORIC SCHOOL

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At a time of transition for many parishes and schools in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, St. Anthony the Hermit parish school in Menomonee Falls is taking a bold step forward. School principal Linda Joyner announced this summer that when the 160-year-old school opens its doors for the 2018 fall semester, it will drop its traditional K-8 curriculum in favor of a brand new Catholic Montessori program. St. Anthony will be the first parish-based Catholic Montessori school in the state of Wisconsin.

After taking the role as school principal in 2016, Joyner quickly saw that the parish school was experiencing a drastic decline in enrollment.

"I didn't realize the extent," she admits, but she was determined to keep the school open as an independent entity. She began envisioning the Catholic Montessori transformation after seeing the demand in the greater Milwaukee community for Montessori education, but noticing how few institutions there were in the area.

What makes Joyner's Catholic Montessori model unique? It combines a traditional Montessori education with the increasing popular Scripture-based Catechesis of the Good Shepherd religious education program.

Catechist Rose Von Rueden said, "the two programs go together perfectly," as they both emphasize a hands-on, individualistic approach to learning with various work spaces set up around the classrooms for the students to work at their own pace. St. Anthony has used the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd in its religious education classes since the 1990s, making for a seamless transition.

Changing St. Anthony from a traditional school to a Catholic Montessori school will take some renovation. Helping with that is a \$42,000 first-year grant from the Archdiocese of Milwaukee's Faith In Our Future trust. The grant will go toward classroom renovation, teaching materials, personnel training and marketing.

Architect and St. Anthony Parish Pastoral Council Chairman Greg Nagel, with whom Joyner developed renovation plans for the classrooms, said, "I think it will allow kids to really develop a love of learning. It sets them up to be their own teacher for their lifetime."

What is Joyner's end goal for St. Anthony? "It all depends on where God wants to take it," she said. "If it grows outward, then St. Anthony could become a hub for early childhood education. If it grows from preschool to K-8, then it offers a different model of education that isn't found anywhere else in the community."

Joyner admits that there is a lot of pressure to make this program successful, but she is confident in the concept and encouraged by the support she's received from the parish and the archdiocese.

"I think our new program offers a unique educational model for this community that is not currently available anywhere else," Joyner said. In keeping with the traditional mission of St. Anthony school, "our Catholic Montessori program will offer a highly individualized, child-centered approach to education which values the child's natural eagerness to learn and grow socially, emotionally, academically, and in his relationship with God."



St. Anthony School in Menomonee Falls will convert to a Montessori style of educating Catholic children for the 2018-19 school year. (Submitted photo)

For more information about St. Anthony Catholic Montessori, call 262-251-4390, ext. 30.