

Extra

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Taking a break during art class at Our Lady of Good Counsel School in Tompkinsville are seventh-graders Daniel Hyland and Andrew Blois, in back, and Ryan Friar, Thomas Fitzgibbons and Jack McGinley, in front. Photos by Claire Regan, for the Staten Island Advance

SPOTLIGHT ON SCHOOLS

At Good Counsel, scholarship and faith go hand-in-hand

Claire M. Regan For the Staten Island Advance

She may only be 13, but Makaylee Barbara already has the future mapped out. The eighth-grader at Our Lady of Good Counsel School who loves history and excels at soccer, drama and debate plans to become an attorney. And she's narrowed down her choice for high school to Staten Island Tech in New Dorp or Xavierian in Brooklyn. She also won scholarships to Notre Dame in Manhattan and St. Joseph Hill in Arrochar, making the decision especially difficult. "I went to all the open houses because I wanted to keep my options open," explains the articulate teen. "I took a lot of notes, I asked a lot of questions, and I shadowed." As they prepare to graduate on June 8, many of Makaylee's 33 classmates at Good Counsel have been faced with the same good problem of multiple scholarship offers. Their Tompkinsville school, a North Shore centerpiece for more than a century, is thriving with a healthy enrollment of 320, strong academics and a clear mission of instilling the virtues of faith, hope and love in every child.

STEEPED IN HISTORY

Established in the Augustinian tradition, Our Lady of Good Counsel parish and school have gone through sweeping changes over the decades. Augustinian Academy had its beginnings on the property before it moved across Grymes Hill and educated young men through 1969. The original Good Counsel church, which opened in 1898, is visible on Austin Place. That space now serves as the school gymnasium. The current parish church, a modern structure facing Victory Boulevard, is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. There are reminders of the original church throughout the school building, most notably a series of exquisite stained glass panels hanging in a sunlit hallway.



Vibrant stained glass windows hang in the hallway at Our Lady of Good Counsel School.

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COUNSEL

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Perhaps the most profound change at Good Counsel occurred in July 2016 when, after 118 years, the parish lost its Augustinian identity. Citing dwindling ranks of friars and a dearth of vocations, the Order of St. Augustine withdrew, and the parish and school are now administered by the Archdiocese of New York.

Principal Hynes says the transition has been seamless, and Good Counsel's new pastor, the Rev. Ambrose Madu, is a frequent visitor to the school. "Father Ambrose is very involved and supportive," she says. "The children have taken to him."

WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE

A lifelong Staten Islander, Hynes grew up in Bulls Head and attended St. Adalbert School in Elm Park. She graduated from Notre Dame Academy High School in 1987 and earned a bachelor's degree in English with a minor in education from Fairfield (Conn.) University in 1991. She taught part-time at the former Francis School in Eltingville while pursuing a master's degree in English and education at New York University, and later completed the School Building Leadership program at St. John's University, Grymes Hill. Hynes taught briefly in Rockland County before joining the English Department at Monsignor Farrell High School, Oakwood, in 2003 - first as a teacher and later as department chair.

She appreciates the experience she gained during a dozen years at Farrell. "There was the challenge of being very well prepared" for high-caliber classes, she recalls, and the pleasure of working with Monsignor Edmund Whalen, Farrell principal. She marveled at how the monsignor knew the names of all students and vowed to accomplish the same if she got the opportunity to lead a school.

Hynes is proud of the drama program she started

when she was named Good Counsel principal three years ago. Students are busy rehearsing for "Shrek Junior," to be presented on June 15-16. "I wanted there to be an outlet for kids who are not athletes," she explains. "To see shy kids get on that stage and sing - it takes your breath away."

The kindergarten-to-grade-8 program is run by Nicole Hermansen and Fiona Gannon, founders of Standing Ovation Players. After-school activities at Good Counsel also include Lego robotics, a book club, Bible journaling and ScouS.

TRADITIONAL APPROACH

Students and faculty agree that a strong sense of family is front and center at Good Counsel School. "Teachers get to know you as a person, not just as a student," eighth-grader Makaylee Barbara says.

Grandparents Day, an April tradition at the school, draws close to 400 guests for brunch, Mass and a concert.

The Class of 2018 will be celebrated at the annual spring luncheon on April 22, and again at a post-graduation party on June 9.

A father's club chaired by Robert Kasegrande and Robert Castelli hosts a golf outing in May and a gala dinner in November, and an alumni association is in formation, led by Tim Hicks '92. "We're very old-school in many ways. There's a lot of tradition here," Hynes explains. "That's what's great about a Catholic school education - the orderliness of it. Children need order and do much better when they know what to expect and what's expected of them."

She laments families she sees sitting in silence at restaurants as children text on their iPhones. "Technology is wonderful, but we must balance it. We want the children to socialize with each other, with us. We want them to be able to make a point and be clear. When students leave Good Counsel, they feel secure in technology. But they also feel confident and secure using their own voice."



Fiona Gannon of Standing Ovation Players, center, joins the students who will play tap-dancing rats in "Shrek Junior." Photos by Claire Regan for the Staten Island Advance



Salvatore Ragucci, Aidan Finn and Gianna Iacono are kindergarten friends.



Eva Myssura and Stella Cavallo are all smiles as they read a book together in class.



Principal Tara Hynes is joined in her office by Mackenzie Schaming, left, and her sister, Erin.



Nico Puccio and Caroline Kasegrande are fourth-graders at Our Lady of Good Counsel School.