

Prayer and Publicity: Father Albert Capone speaks about his parish school



Father Albert L. Capone, the pastor of St. Michael Parish in Lowell, believes that a pastor's strong support for his parish's school can make all the difference. He should know. The enrollment for St. Michael Elementary School has risen 13% in the last six years – from 351 students in 2003-2004 to 406 students in 2008-2009. "You have to work closely with your principal, faculty, staff, and children and let them know you believe in them 100 percent," says Father Capone. Making sure that the school exudes a deep sense of Catholic identity is of primary importance, continues the priest, who is a regular presence at the school. "What makes us different as a Catholic school is that we begin the day with prayer and end the day with prayer."

Father Capone also believes in the power of publicity – and has never been shy about helping to promote St. Michael Elementary to the local media. "Whether our students win an essay contest, participate in a canned-good drive for hunger, sing for the elderly, make the honor roll or graduate as valedictorian at one of the area high schools, we let the community know," he says. "We are always seeking new ways to build up the school."

A monthly school Mass – on Sunday – also makes a difference, according to Father Capone. Students who wear their uniforms to the special school Mass receive a "NUT" card ("No

Uniform Today”), which enables kids later in the week to wear an outfit of their choosing to school. “We have coffee and donuts afterwards and the entire morning is a celebration of the St. Michael Elementary School community,” Father Capone says.

What you should know about Father Capone

- Friendships with his brother priests, especially the priests of his Emmaus Group, are a primary source of strength and support for his life and ministry.
- The last book he read was *The Mascot* by Mark Kurzem, in which the author unravels the mystery of his Jewish father's Nazi boyhood. Says Father Capone, “It was excellent!”
- Father Capone enjoys York Beach in Maine and the occasional trip to Aruba. He also loves to ski at Loon Mountain in New Hampshire and Burke Mountain in Vermont.
- The place he most wants to visit again is the Holy Land.
- Father Capone is very close to his family – two sisters and their husbands, a brother and his wife, 6 nephews, 3 nieces, 2 great-nieces and 1 great-nephew. He says, “We will all be together for Thanksgiving.”

By Catherine Walsh