

Archdiocese honors 11 longtime workers at Catholic schools



Sister Ellen Powers (center) and Kathy Cronin, who are both retiring after four decades of working in Catholic education, listened to Saint John Paul II Catholic Academy principal Kate Brandley at a reception hosted by the archdiocese honoring 11 longtime Catholic school teachers.

By Reis Thebault | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JUNE 09, 2016

For Sister Ellen Powers, it ran in the family. Of course she would be a teacher: Her mother was, her father was. And so she would be an educator, too. For 42 years.

Christina Meaney knew her calling by the time she got to elementary school. She watched her teachers struggle to explain math to her classmates. So she showed her

years.

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Powers, of Saint John Paul II Catholic Academy, and Meaney, of St. Augustine in Andover, were among 11 retiring teachers, administrators, and staff that the Archdiocese of Boston Catholic Schools honored at a Mass and ceremony Thursday. Together, they spent 318 years in Catholic education.

“It’s because we pay them so well,” said Kathy Mears, superintendent of schools for the archdiocese. She was joking.

“No, it’s not about the money,” Meaney, 66, said. “It’s a calling.”

And it is about more than academics, Powers, 75, said.

“It’s a lesson of the heart,” she said. “Yes, there are lessons of education, but lessons of the heart: teaching the kids to know, love, and serve God, and love their neighbor as themselves.”

Bishop Peter Uglietto, vicar general of the Archdiocese of Boston, struck the same chord during the Mass.

“Educating the heart, isn’t that what Catholic education is all about?” he said during his homily. “Educating the whole person, isn’t that what you all have been up to all these years?”

Mears likes to say that her schools are developing “saints and scholars.”

“We’re trying to get them to heaven and Harvard,” she said.

Not that it’s always easy.

In fact, for Powers, the hard part was also the best part: “When a youngster is struggling with something, and then you see the light go on and they get it.”

Maureen Emde, a nurse for 26 years at St. Augustine, put it simply: “When you’ve

And the Catholic school community gives back, Emde, 67, said. “You become part of the family,” she said.

Charlotte Flynn, who taught kindergarten at St. Augustine, said she could not have found the same community feeling anywhere else. That community was there for her, through two deaths in her family — first her husband, then her son. Having coworkers to lean on every day made all the difference.

Students feel it, too, Powers said. And a student at her school agreed.

“Sister Ellen has helped me in more ways than she knows,” said Nikolas Taylor, 14. “She made me feel at home when she barely knew me.”

And, Mears said, they probably aren’t finished.

“They will enjoy their retirement, but all of them will do something at their schools for a while,” she said.

Powers said that, every year at graduation, she asked her students to repeat a phrase that she drilled into them all year. They yell it back to her: “Always strive, wherever you go, whatever you do, to be the best that you can be.”

“That’s what’s important,” she said. “That’s what it’s all about.”

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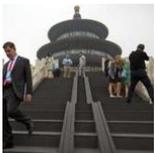
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