



# *History of Saint Brigid School as told by Maureen Becker Principal 2003-2013*

Father James Bessert, pastor of Saint Brigid Parish, initiated "The Saint Brigid School Renaissance" in the summer of 2003. This was done to increase school enrollment, which had dropped to an all-time low with sixty-seven students in grades K-5. There were many challenges to face to restore the school to its former student population. Saint Brigid School was known for its academic excellence and had a reputation as a school devoted to developing the Catholic faith of its students.

Principal Christine Szatkowski had resigned in June 2003. The principal position was advertised, and interviews held during the summer. When school was to begin, and there was no principal in place, Father Bessert asked retired sixth grade teacher, Ms. Sandy Slicker, if she would take the position to begin the school year until a principal was hired, which she did.

To facilitate the school transformation, parents and staff members joined together during the summer to give the school building a facelift. Classrooms and hallways were painted. With the determination of Father Bessert, the school secretary, Marge Vernon, parents, and teachers, Saint Brigid Catholic School opened with a fresh look and a renewed spirit. To provide an improved educational environment, school uniforms were implemented for all students. There had never been a school uniform policy.

To make our community aware of Saint Brigid Catholic School and its religious teaching of the Catholic faith and our academic excellence, Saint Brigid Parish hired a marketing person. Information packets were created, advertisements were placed in local papers. As a result of the combined efforts of many dedicated people, enrollment began to increase.

In September of 2003, it was decided that Ms. Maureen Becker, a former Saint Brigid teacher and the current librarian, would join and share the principal duties and responsibilities with Ms. Slicker. The co-principals shared that position until the end of the school year 2003-2004 when Ms. Becker was hired as the full-time principal.

With the school year of 2003-2004, many changes evolved through our Renaissance program. The community became more aware of and interested in the educational and spiritual life which Saint Brigid had to offer.

- ❖ A state licensed After School Care program was implemented which offered care from 2:20 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., as well as Before School Care for working parents. This program has proven to be an asset for the school.
- ❖ The addition of a paraprofessional to the staff in grades K-3, provided additional assistance to the homeroom teacher, thus providing more time for attending to the individual needs of the students.
- ❖ To accommodate students who were performing below grade level in reading, a state certified teacher/reading specialist was hired. The specialist worked with those students identified by the classroom teacher. As the program developed, advanced reading students were included.

These changes were extremely effective to the over-all goal of our Renaissance program and drew the attention of families interested in our school and enrollment began to increase.

In the spring of 2006, with a growing enrollment, there was a sincere interest by the school parents in having a Catholic middle school. It was decided to add the sixth grade. There had been a sixth grade until 2001 when fifth and sixth grades were combined. As enrollment declined at that time, sixth grade was discontinued.

The next problem to solve was the physical location of the newly formed sixth grade because a classroom in the main school building was not available. Father Bessert and staff located a space across the street from the main building on Larkin Street. It was rented and renovated. A full-time paraprofessional was hired to help in the classroom. This would house the sixth grade for the fall of 2006.

With a sixth-grade class, Saint Brigid staff began discussions with the other two parishes (Assumption Parish & Blessed Sacrament Parish) in Midland, as well as Bishop Carlson, to build a Midland Area Catholic Middle

School. However, there was not a commitment to participate by the other two parishes. As a result, members of the Saint Brigid team searched for options to house a middle school, as we continued to outgrow our building.

In the fall of 2007, we began our “middle school” concept project. The first step was to move classrooms around to accommodate the various grades. During the summer, Kindergarten was relocated across the street to the rented classroom vacated by the sixth grade. They would remain in that location until 2010. Precautions for the students’ safety crossing the street to the main building were provided by a full-time kindergarten paraprofessional working in the kindergarten classroom with the teacher. Her help was essential to the success of our kindergarten program.

During the summer of 2008, there was much activity and movement. The library was relocated from the school to the basement of the rectory, the “Rainbow Room.” Maintenance staff, teachers, and parents provided time and much effort into converting the school into an organized physical space for the teachers and students.

Principal, Ms. Becker, and middle school teachers worked throughout the summer to provide a solid and well-rounded curriculum. The teachers worked with Midland Public Schools to learn of the necessary credit’s students needed to enter high school. Teachers were hired to teach Spanish, drama/journalism/public speaking, band, etc.

Establishing an “atmosphere” of being in middle school, no longer elementary, was addressed. One of the additions were lockers for the middle school students. They liked the independence these lockers offered. Lunch schedules and “recess” was addressed to give the students more independence as well.

At this time, a lunchroom coordinator was hired who provided an outstanding lunch program for our students. The lunch program grew to the point that we were providing lunches to other local schools, even one that had provided lunches for us earlier. A successful program!

Plans were underway to add on to our current building. It was obvious that the other parishes did not want to participate. Under the direction of our Pastoral Administrator, Deacon Al Oliver and Sacramental Minister, Nick Coffaro, a capital campaign began for this parish-wide project.

Three million dollars was needed to cover the cost of the expansion, as well as a renovation of the sanctuary of Saint Brigid Church. A portion of

money from the Cardinal Hickey Endowment fund was allocated for this purpose. This project, also, included added classrooms, a gymnasium, and new updated kitchen in the school. Fundraising projects began: Fish Frys, bake sales, fantasy football, euchre nights, parish rummage sales and a holiday bazaar. Parishioners and student families generously gave toward this endeavor.

Groundbreaking took place in April 2010, with Bishop Cistone, Fr. Nick Coffaro, and Deacon Al Oliver, Principal Maureen Becker, and the Saint Brigid student body in attendance. Gerace Construction was the general contractor with parishioner Jesse Fitzgibbon overseeing the project.

Although the entire remodel/construction was not complete by fall, 2010, as expected, school did open on time. The teachers, staff and students encountered construction-related difficulties until the remodel of the old parish hall into classroom, which was the final phase to the completion of this renovation in January 2011.

On Sunday, January 30, 2011, the beginning of Catholic Schools Week, Bishop Joseph Cistone dedicated our new space!!

Ms. Becker continued as principal until June 2013 at which time, Mr. Lon Medd was hired as principal. Ms. Becker went back to teaching fourth grade.