

Sister Mary Brendan O'Donnell, C.V.I.: Impacting the lives of Catholic school students for 60 years

By HEATHER WIEDERHOEFT
Herald Correspondent

HOUSTON – Life often is a series of decisions that can greatly affect the next step of the journey. For Sister Mary Brendan O'Donnell, C.V.I., recognizing and committing to her calling and following her heart from the western shores of Ireland to Houston to join the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and the Blessed Sacrament more than six decades ago not only changed her life but the lives of countless students with whom she came in contact.

Though she has been in Houston since the young age of 19, O'Donnell's Irish brogue is as much a part of her personality as her quick wit, friendly manner and her admitted inability to never say no. Her presence in classrooms at several archdiocesan Catholic schools and her persistence as a development official for several of these schools are legacies that will be remembered for many years to come. Surprising to many, Sr. Brendan recently celebrated her 80th birthday and has made the decision to retire from her current position as Director of Development for Incarnate Word Academy (IWA) at the end of the school year.

"Sr. Brendan simply doesn't take no for an answer," shared Josie Patel, art teacher at IWA who also worked with Sr. Brendan at Resurrection School. "She brings out the best in people and is very, very caring. She never forgets anybody and

she always has time to talk. Sr. Brendan teaches by example and is such a role model for our students."

Making the move to Houston

As her high school days were drawing to a close in 1947, Sr. Brendan knew she was called to join a convent but she was having a problem deciding where her calling would lead her. She originally was considering convents in India, Africa and Ireland but a letter from a secret source to the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and the Blessed Sacrament added a fifth convent to her list.

"When I received a letter from Sr. Sebastian in Houston saying that she'd heard from a 'little bird' that I was looking to join a convent, I was quite surprised and I didn't even find out who had recommended me for almost a decade," Sr. Brendan re-



Photo by Erik Noriega/Herald

Sister Mary Brendan O'Donnell, C.V.I., poses in the chapel at Incarnate Word Academy, where she has served as development director for the last 12 years. During her 60 years of service to her religious order, Sister Brendan has worked at numerous schools in the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. She will be retiring this coming May.

called. "I really was unsure of where to go and so my mother suggested I spend time with my high school

mentor, Sr. Annunciata, and ask for her guidance."

As the two sat on a rock looking over the Atlantic, Sr. Brendan shared the letters and information about the five convents. After much discussion, Sr. Annunciata said, "I feel God is calling you to Texas." Upon her return home and with much prayer, Sr. Brendan asked for and received her family's permission to begin a new life in Houston. On Feb. 2, 1948, one month to the day after her 19th birthday, she arrived in New York and less than two weeks later, she came to Houston and began her novitiate with the Sisters of the Incarnate Word.

A life dedicated to Catholic education

Leaving her parents, her 10 brothers and sisters and her native land was a challenge but a true blessing for the students whose lives she would touch. "Sr. Brendan has influenced so many by living her Catholic faith and always having a smile on her face," IWA senior Kelli Walker explained. "She makes us want to mirror her qualities and her love of God and then go out and spread this love."

Walker's fondness for Sr. Brendan can be heard in the recollections of both former students throughout the archdiocese. She began her teaching career at Holy

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PARISHES CONDUCTING ADULT CONFIRMATION CLASSES

DN	PARISH	CONTACT	DAY/TIME	START DATE	PHONE
BA	St. Frances Cabrini, Houston	Dcn. Robert Stevens	Wednesday, 7:00 pm-8:30 pm	May 6	713-946-5768
BA	St. Paul, (Nassau Area)	Heidi Clark	Monday, 7:00 pm-8:30 pm	April 20	281-335-7228
BA	St. Helen, Pearland	Donna Patlach	Monday, 7:30 pm-9:00 pm	March 2	281-485-8862
BB	St. Edith Stein, Katy	Chris Twardowski	Monday, 7:00 pm-9:00 pm	April 20	281-492-7500
BB	St. Bartholomew the Apostle, Katy	Dcn. Bill Wagner	Wednesday, 7:00 pm-9:00 pm	April 22	281-391-0839
BB	Immaculate Conception, Sealy	Dcn. Robert Kent	Tuesday, 7:00 pm-8:30 pm	April 14	979-885-5868
E	St. John the Evangelist, Baytown	Dcn. Dan Foley	Tuesday, 7:00 pm	April 21	281-424-2244
E	St. Jude Thaddeus, Highlands	Claudine Lewis	Wednesday, 5:00 pm-6:30 pm	April 22	281-426-6800
E	St. Andrew, Channelview	Hazel Lintag	Thursday, 7:00 pm	April 16	281-452-9865
NO	Sacred Heart, Conroe (Eng)	Rick Cross	Sunday, 10:30 am	April 19	936-756-8186
NO	Sacred Heart, Conroe (Spa)	Sr. Martina Cabrira	Tuesday, 7:00 pm-9:00 pm	February 3	936-756-8186
NW	St. Cecilia, Houston	Sr. Adele Brennan	Sunday, 10:10 a.m.	March 1	713-465-3414
NW	St. John Vianney, Houston	Marguerite Campos	Tuesday, 7:00 pm-9:00 pm	April 21	281-584-2028
NW	Christ the Redeemer, Houston	Dcn. Phillip Jackson	Sunday, 12 pm-1:30 pm	April 19	281-469-5533
NW	Epiphany of the Lord, Katy	Dcn. Don Kish	Thursday, 7:30 pm-9:30 pm	April 30	281-578-0707
SE	Queen of Peace, Houston	Tammy Juarez	Wednesday, 7:00 pm	April 1	713-926-4494
SE	St. Pius V, Pasadena	Alicia Alvarado	Wednesday, 7:00 pm-8:30 pm	February 4	713-473-9484
SJ	St. Martha, Kingwood	Joanie Nugent	Thursday, 7:00 pm-9:00 pm	April 16	281-358-1959
SJ	St. Ignatius, Spring	Gloria Scoyola	Tuesday, 7:00 pm	April 14	281-370-3401
SJ	Prince of Peace, Houston	Maggie Ragusa	Tuesday 7:00 pm	January 13	281-469-2686
SJ	St. Edward, Spring	Dcn. Nick Thompson	Monday 7:00 pm-8:45 pm	April 13	285-507-0847
SJ	St. John Neumann, Houston	Harold Stanley	Sunday, 12:00 pm	March 22	281-367-9885
SO	St. Jerome, Clute	Jaime Morales/Agustin Cruz	Thursday, 7:00 pm	April 16	979-258-0718/979-265-0541
SO	St. Mary, Star of the Sea, Freeport	Marilyn Saccomanno	Sunday, 10:35 am-12:00 pm	March 1	979-233-1726
SW	St. Cyril of Alexandria, Houston (Eng)	Margaret McDermott	Tuesday, 7:00 pm-9:00 pm	February 17	713-789-1250
SW	St. Cyril of Alexandria, Houston (Spa)	Blanca Dolpher	Sunday, 11:00 am-1:00 pm	February 15	713-789-1250
SW	St. Michael, Houston	Mary Caprio	Wednesday, 7:00 pm-9:00 pm	April 1	713-403-4115
SW	St. Theresa, Houston	Ginger Tamborello	Thursday, 7:00 pm	April 16	713-869-3783
W	Holy Family, Missouri City	Yolanda Pena	Wednesday, 7:00 pm	March 4	281-499-2612
W	Sacred Heart, Richmond	Virginia Ewald	Sunday, 11:00 am	January 18	281-342-8371
W	St. Laurence, Sugar Land	Mary Visser	Thursday, 7:00 pm-9:00 pm	April 23	281-265-5774

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Name and also served in teaching, administrative and development roles at St. Cecilia, St. Vincent de Paul, Annunciation, Marian High School, Resurrection and IWA. For the past 12 years, she has been solely focused on raising funds at Incarnate Word.

"Sr. Brendan has done so much to not only raise funds but also awareness of our Catholic schools," said Mary Getschow, principal of IWA. "For example, her fundraising has enhanced our fine arts program, music grants and scholarships. The scholarships have made Catholic school a true choice for many girls in the archdiocese. When she retires,

she'll be leaving behind a community of supporters who will continue to support Catholic schools because of her hard work."

When Sr. Brendan speaks of her years of teaching, her true joy of being in the classroom is evident. "I have missed teaching but being in development has given me the opportunity to meet so many people I wouldn't have met otherwise, many of whom are now my friends."

Retirement may bring her official duties in development to an end but certainly will not slow down Sr. Brendan. Her enjoyment of an Astros or Rockets game or her daily walks will certainly continue as well

as a busy schedule where she'll continue her duties as archivist for the Sisters of the Incarnate Word, as a driver for many of the other sisters and probably still saying yes when someone needs help. "You never really retire in the convent because there is plenty to do," she said.

Even when her days at IWA draw to a close, the Catholic school community of Galveston-Houston will continue to have a vocal, enthusiastic supporter in Sr. Brendan. "In our Catholic schools, our students receive both academics and values," she said. "In today's world, you can't succeed without having a strong set of values." †

Around the Archdiocese

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to serving the uninsured, is seeking healthcare professionals, especially physicians and dentists, to volunteer their professional services at its downtown location. For more information, please contact San José Clinic's Volunteer Department at (713) 228-9413 or volunteer@sanjoseclinic.org.

DOMINICAN SISTERS - The retired Dominican Sisters living at St. Dominic Villa, 6504 Alameda Rd. at Holcombe, are in need of kind men and women to join their volunteer program. Any assistance, such as providing transportation for a doctor's appointment, assistance in typing/computer work, receptionist, medical assistance, light indoor/outdoor maintenance, gardening, etc. would be greatly appreciated. Please contact Dottie Ross, volunteer coordinator, at (281) 293-7767.

SOCIETY OF ST VINCENT DE PAUL - From the beginning, the central and most basic activity of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul has been the "Visit that Consoles" - visiting those in need in their homes. This action is the clearest symbol of the Vincentian charism which dictates the highest respect for the dignity of those in need: the visitor becomes the guest and the person helped is the master. If you would like to assist the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in this effort, please contact Pura Santangelo at (713) 741-8234 x105, pura.santangelo@svdphouston.org.

Discernment

ADORATION - The Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament have Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in their convent chapel on the first Sunday of every month from after the 8:45 a.m. Mass until noon. Women who are discerning a religious vocation may wish to avail of this opportunity to pray with the Sisters and join us for lunch afterwards. Another opportunity is Shared Prayer (on the Sunday Scriptures) every Saturday, 7 to 8 p.m. The address is 3400 Bradford, Houston. For more information, call 713-668-0423.

LAY MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY - Those interested in the charism of Mother Teresa and living her 'Simple Path' are invited to 'Come and see.' For more information about the Lay Missionaries of Charity and when we meet, contact Kathy Behrendt at (713-592-8230).

LAY CARMELITES - is one of the oldest religious orders, following a contemplative way of life in the active world. We go about our daily lives as husbands, wives, mothers and fathers, working in a secular society but following the examples of Elijah's zeal and Our Lady's love of prayer and detachment. For inquiry, contact Linda Thomas at 832-381-4215 (cell) or 281-673-6352 (work).

Potpourri

CORPUS CHRISTI SCHOOL - In celebration of their 50th anniversary in 2009, Corpus Christi School is searching for alumni, parents, former students and former teachers. We want you to be included in our anniversary celebration! If you are a graduate, former student or former teacher, or know of someone who is, please notify Advancement Director Stephanie Reilly at 713-664-3351, or e-mail sreilly@corpuschristihouston.org. Please send us your name, maiden name, your current address, phone number and email address. Check our website for more information: www.corpuschristihouston.org.

ST. AMBROSE ALUMNI - St. Ambrose School is attempting to establish an alumni database directory in celebration of their 50th Anniversary in 2010. Please help us locate all former graduates of the school. If you are a graduate or know of someone who is, please notify Helen O'Brien at 713-686-6990, or email ho'brien@sashornets.org. We will need current address, phone number, email and married names for women graduates.

FASHION SHOW & LUNCHEON - The Knights of Peter Claver and Ladies Auxiliary, St. Monica Council and Court # 151 is hosting its Fashion Show & Luncheon at Brady's Landing, Saturday, Jan. 24, at 11 a.m. The featured models are the Forty Plus Models. Supreme Knight Gene A. Phillips, Sr. and his wife Elsa Phillips, past National Counselor of Junior Daughters, along with Texas State Representative Sylvester Turner and Joyce Jacquet, president of the Humble Chapter of Top Ladies, will be recognized.

OPEN HOUSE - St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School, 6646 Addicks-Satsuma Rd, Houston, Texas, 77084, invites you to an Open House, Wednesday, Jan. 28, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. and from 6 to 8 p.m. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton is a fully accredited Catholic school which enrolls students from the kindergarten through eighth grade. Our school has a small family environment but big opportunities. At St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, we strive to create an environment where children learn to love and love to learn. For more information, call the school office at 281-463-1444 or visit our website at www.seascos.org.

GET FIT - PLAY HARD KIDS ONLY RUN - St. Laurence School is hosting its 5th Annual Get Fit - Play Hard Kids Only Fun Run, Saturday, Feb. 28. The fun run is open to all children, toddlers through 8th grade, and will promote the importance of physical fitness to the youth in the community. The fun run will start and finish at the St. Laurence Religious Education Center. The fun run will consist of four events, beginning with a 25-yard Toddler Trot for kids four years of age and under at 9 a.m. New this year will be the addition of a 1/2 mile run. The 1/4 mile and 1/2 mile run will be open to all children through 8th grade. The fun run will conclude with a one mile run for children in Grades 1-8. The events

will be run in heats based on grade/age. Each participant will receive a custom finisher medal, an official Get Fit - Play Hard race t-shirt and race number. Post race refreshments and activities will also be provided. For a race entry form or more information on the 2009 Get Fit - Play Hard Kids Only Fun Run, call St. Laurence Catholic School at 281-980-0500 or visit www.stlaurence.org and click on the link for the Fun Run.

GARAGE SALE - Pope John XXIII High School, Franz Rd. and W. Grand Pkwy., is hosting a community-wide garage sale, March 7, 7:30 a.m. to noon. A minimum of 50 families are participating. Furniture, electronics, clothes and more! Huge bargains! If you would like to rent a space for \$30, please contact Jari Lynn Ring at 281-395-0968, or e-mail at jring@comcast.net for more information. This annual event is always a huge success. Pope John is in the perfect location, and we will handle all advertising. There will be a local charity available at the end of the day to collect any items you may wish to donate.

HOLY GHOST SCHOOL 60TH - Holy Ghost School is hosting its annual "Catch the Spirit Auction and Dinner" on April 4, 2009. This year the school will be honoring all of its alumni as a way of celebrating the school's 60th Anniversary. The event will begin with an open house from 5:30 to 6 p.m. The auction and dinner will follow beginning at 6:30 p.m. in the Holy Ghost Community Center (gym). The dinner is being provided by Carrabas in Copperfield. Alumni are encouraged to plan now to reserve a table in recognition of your class. For more information, please call the school office at 713-668-5327.

ST. JOSEPH ALUMNI - The St. Joseph School Alumni Search Committee in Baytown is looking for graduates, former students, teachers and staff as part of its planning for the school's approaching 60th birthday. The reunion activities are scheduled for the weekend of April 24-26, 2009. In addition to name, current address, phone number and e-mail address, information should include year of graduation/attendance, and maiden and spouse's name, where applicable. This information will be entered into a new database that will allow the committee to send out reunion plans, updates and news of former classmates to all interested parties. The committee hopes to receive as many entries as possible before the projected mailing of an initial newsletter in the fall of this year. Submissions may be e-mailed to sjalums@gmail.com or sent to the St. Joseph School Alumni Search Committee, c/o St. Joseph Catholic School, 1811 Carolina Street, Baytown, Texas, 77520.

QUEEN OF PEACE SCHOOL ALUMNI REUNION - Sunday, June 14, 2 to 6 p.m. at the Ragin' Cajun Restaurant, Woodlake Square, 9600 Westheimer. Contact Paula Vigadamo for cost and more information at pvigadamo@comcast.net or at 713-962-3032. RSVP payment must be received in order to attend.

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Herald deadline
Deadline for material submitted to The Texas Catholic Herald is noon on the day indicated below:
Deadline January 27 for February 6
Deadline February 10 for February 20
Mail or bring copy to Chancery
1700 San Jacinto
Houston, TX 77002
Fax: (713) 659-3444
Email: enoriega@archgh.org.