

# Brooklyn Jesuit Prep: Response to a Real Need

By Peter Feuerherd

Jesuit education in Brooklyn is alive and well. Testimony to this fact is in evidence every school day at 3 p.m., as middle school students at Brooklyn Jesuit Prep break for recess, enjoying basketball, drama rehearsals and other activities in the schoolyard until, in the spirit of academic dedication Jesuit schools are known for, the students march back into their classroom an hour later for study hall.

Father Vincent DeCola, SJ, was instrumental in the establishment of Brooklyn Jesuit Prep (BJP) which opened five years ago at the site of the former St. Teresa of Avila parish school in Crown Heights. At the time, there was interest among religious communities in establishing a Nativity-type school in Brooklyn. At Nativity-model schools, students attend summer leadership training programs and after-school study halls in an intensive outreach in education for immigrant children in large cities. Fr. DeCola hoped to make the school a Jesuit project, noting, “I said to myself if we hit green lights we would go forward.”

The green lights kept coming. At an early meeting about the project that brought together alumni from the former Brooklyn Prep, Fr. DeCola was handed a check for \$2,500. “That was a sign to me that this could work,” he recalled. Other Brooklyn Prep students, now successful in business and the professions, gave generously, some telling stories about how their own tuitions were cut or waived by understanding Jesuits when their parents ran into financial



difficulties during their school years. BJP was a way to complete the giving cycle. Father Michael P. Corcoran, SJ, teacher, coach and mentor, is one of just two Jesuits at BJP. Besides teaching and coaching, much of his work is in educating its young staff, many recruited from Jesuit colleges, in the art of Jesuit-value education.

The 80 students at Brooklyn Jesuit Prep, grades five through eight, live in a neighborhood wracked with poverty. Parents pay \$35 per month, with the rest of the money coming from fundraising efforts. BJP is subsidized through a wide network of donors, including the alumni from the old Brooklyn Prep, a school that educated immigrants from its era, many of them Italian, Irish and Polish. Now BJP is educating Hispanic and West Indian immigrants. “In a sense, we have the same mission,” said Fr. Corcoran.

An annual academic summer program

*Students at Brooklyn Jesuit Prep.*

provides students with an opportunity to explore the world of higher education. BJP holds its program at the Jesuits’ Fairfield University in Connecticut. The campus experience acquaints students, most of whom come from families with little experience of college education, with the possibility that they, too, one day can return to a university campus as matriculating students imbued with the confidence a Jesuit education delivers.

Father James F. Keenan, SJ, former President of the Nativity schools in New York City, including BJP, said that the Crown Heights school “is desperately needed in that section of the city.” Its future, he noted, is still dependent upon the generosity of its donors, particularly from corporations and alumni of the former Brooklyn Prep.