



"It Takes a VILLAGE..."

Alumni & Students
Unite to Honor Former Teacher

Junior Board Connects
Young Professionals
to Support Gesu

Award-Winning Teacher
Builds Gesu Community

Thanks to Our Generous
2014-2015 Donors



GESU SCHOOL

2014-2015 Annual Report



From the
PRESIDENT



Dear Friends of Gesu School,

Gesu School embraces the African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child.” Each member of our community enables 450 students to maximize their potential.

Thanks to your support, Gesu offers an innovative curriculum and enrichment programs. We remain committed to non-selective admissions and meeting each child’s academic needs and abilities, from remedial programs that address unique learning needs to advanced programs that challenge high-level critical thinking and creativity. The Gesu community also nurtures students’ character formation, spiritual growth, and emotional well-being.

Each individual helps us fulfill our mission to offer the highest quality education for our neighbor children to empower them to break the cycle of poverty and violence.

Teachers are dedicated to educating the whole child with professionalism and genuine care. **Volunteers** staff our library, tutor, and share cultural experiences from dance to fine art.

Parents and **guardians** give their time at lunch, in the classroom, and at home for their children to thrive. **Counselors** provide ongoing support for families and guide them through high school admissions to discover the best fit.

Our **Board of Trustees** governs with vision and compassion, charting the course for institutional success. Our **Junior Board** promises sustainability and serves with enthusiasm.

Sponsors and **corporations** provide invaluable tuition assistance for students in every grade. **Foundations** and **donors** fund resources and programming that enable our students to grow.

Students support each other as class “buddies” and engage in their community through service. **Alumni** return to give back to their Gesu community.

Thank **you** for being an integral part of the Gesu community. Together, we stand united in investing in the collective care and prosperity of our children.

Peace and blessings,

Bryan Carter
President and CEO

I invite you to visit Gesu School to experience our community in action. To schedule a tour, contact the Development Office at 215-763-9077 or development@gesuschool.org.

Front Cover: [Top left] Gesu's Pre-K program ensures that students experience the joys of learning and creativity within a culture of achievement. [Top right] Science Lab Coordinator, Ms. Pat Leaf, engages students in Gesu's fully-equipped science lab, which enables students to develop 21st century skills. [Center left] Gesu Chaplain and Assistant Principal, Rev. Neil Ver'Schneider, S.J., presides over Mass in the Gesu Chapel, nourishing students' spiritual and character formation. [Center right] To build reading fluency and confidence in public speaking, grade 2 students read to specially trained dogs in the WAG Tails program, part of Gesu's Youth Education for Tomorrow (YET) literacy program. [Bottom right] Temple University students volunteer daily in Gesu's Pre-K classrooms through Jumpstart, a national early education program that helps students in low-income communities develop vital pre-literacy skills.

Gesu Students & Alumni : to Stage an Original Play
COLLABORATE : in Memory of Ms. Shirley Bright.



Thanks to your support, the creative arts and cultural experiences abound at Gesu and enrich our community.

On May 22, 2015, in a gesture of unity, Gesu School students, alumni, and volunteers staged the drama, “Snake Magic” as a tribute to Ms. Shirley Bright, beloved Founder and Director of Gesu’s Akybra Theater/Drama Club, Coach of the award-winning Gesu Forensics Team, and Gesu Teacher for 25 years. For five weeks, energetic high school volunteers not only finished writing Ms. Bright’s original script, but also coached 16 Gesu students in grades 3, 4, and 8 through their lines and stage direction.

Dedicated Merion Mercy Academy students and Gesu alumnae, Kimberly ’12 and Taylor ’12, asked Gesu Principal, Sr. Ellen Convey, IHM, to complete the play and serve as co-directors, along with a friend from Merion Mercy. Alumna Lauren ’12, from the Woodlynde School, took charge of props, stage crew, and costuming to help students step into character. Gesu’s young actors eagerly committed to the play to honor Ms. Bright—practicing twice a week after school and diligently studying their lines at home.

The play, written in the African tradition, is narrated by the Griot, an African storyteller, who invites the audience to listen to a story about a wood cutter and his family: “Listen my children of the bright country, Africa...and I will tell you stories passed down to me by my father and his father’s father before him. Stories of brave deeds of ages past. Stories filled with wonder and truth.”

The play depicts moral lessons about valuing family and the earth over material possessions.

The children of a wood cutter are in conflict after their father’s passing. The son, Kawabana, chooses to inherit his father’s possessions, while Akybra, the daughter, chooses her father’s “good blessings.” The play chronicles the siblings’ divergent paths—Akybra’s as a selfless, hardworking farmer who cares for the earth and Kawabana’s as a jealous man focused on wealth. Brother and sister later reconcile through acts of compassion, transforming their lives.

“Snake Magic” was a moving testament to Ms. Bright’s creativity and her role in sharing this important cultural tradition with Gesu students. As a Gesu alumna who is flourishing at Merion Mercy in academics and theater, Kimberly reflects on the significance of returning to mentor students and stage the play: “It makes me feel closer to Ms. Bright. It’s like she’s still here. I hope I can come back and do another show.”

Christian, an eighth grader who performed as the Griot and participated in many plays directed by Ms. Bright, recalls her constant encouragement and celebratory spirit. He plans to continue with theater and music at SS. Neumann & Goretti Catholic High School. Like Christian, Kimberly will always remember Ms. Bright’s sage advice to students before taking the stage: “Do your best, and let God do the rest.” In fact, the older students passed on that wisdom to the third and fourth grade actors to inspire them before their rehearsals and performance.

Thanks to these dedicated students and volunteers, and the many Gesu parents, guardians, and friends who attended the play, Ms. Bright’s legacy carries on and continues to strengthen the Gesu community.

Kimberly ’12 directs Gesu students in rehearsal. At Merion Mercy Academy, she has excelled academically and landed roles in productions such as “Mary Poppins,” “Almost Maine,” and “Legally Blonde.”



Ms. Shirley Bright, Gesu School Class of 1961, touched the lives of many students in her 25-year career and service to Gesu. We remember her joyful spirit, her passion for teaching and theater, and her genuine love of Gesu School.

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS JOIN THE GESU COMMUNITY

**to SHARE Expertise
& DEVELOP as Nonprofit Leaders.**



The Junior Board routinely participates in Gesu events, such as Dr. Seuss Day.

In just one year, the Junior Board has made an indelible impact on the Gesu community through service and philanthropy. These dedicated young professionals not only surpassed their fundraising goal, but also cemented solid relationships—from volunteering in the classroom to building corporate partnerships.

Julianne Mesaric, who established and manages the Junior Board and serves as Director of the Annual Fund & Special Events, applauds the group’s ability to “transform their ideas from their first meeting into tangible accomplishments.” She observes, “What could have taken years, happened in months because the group recognizes the power of innovation, compassion, and commitment.”

The Junior Board’s monthly giving program garnered nearly 100 percent participation from members. For the cost of a cup of coffee, a cocktail, or one dinner out, donors help to offset the cost of a child’s education through Gesu’s Sponsor a Child program.

Single-handedly, the Event Committee executed Gesu’s first-ever Gala After Hours Soiree, raising over \$5,000. The event drew eight corporate sponsors and close to 100 guests. Reflects Co-President, Brianna Taylor, “The group has also expanded Gesu’s network and begun to develop a pipeline of young professionals who are dedicated to the success of the school.”

In 2014-2015, the Junior Board raised \$8,000, with \$7,000 allocated to the Sponsor a Child program. To continue capitalizing on this success, a new finance committee is in development.

To build community, the Volunteer Committee plans service activities that target Gesu’s neighborhood and connect Gesu families, staff,

and volunteers. They partnered with Smith Memorial Playground & Playhouse in Fairmount Park for two clean-up days and will continue service projects in 2015-2016.

The Volunteer Committee will soon launch the Gesu Transitions Mentoring Program to help seventh graders navigate academic and social challenges and explore careers. Its vision is well founded, harnessing the expertise of Co-Chairs Rachel Krol, Founder and Principal of Connect More, which creates negotiation workshops, and Elle Carolan, former Director of the Mentoring Program at Philadelphia City Rowing. Mentors will meet monthly with student groups and attend events, such as graduation. “We hope this will be the start of a sustainable program that will help support students as they transition from Gesu to high school, to college, and beyond,” state Krol and Carolan, who aim to expand the program to grades 5-8.

To sharpen the Junior Board’s leadership skills, Gesu’s experienced Board of Trustees provides trainings and mentors the Executive Junior Board. In 2014, Gesu Board Chairman, J. Gordon Cooney, Jr., presented on nonprofit board governance. This year, trainings will include innovation leadership and conflict resolution and negotiation.

“Young professionals are a unique group,” explains Megha Kulshreshtha, Co-President. “They can relate to a student’s experience, while also bringing their own professional experience. The Gesu Junior Board hopes to be an idea hub, make an impact for Gesu School, and thrive in a supportive community with fellow young professionals.”

They already have.

The Gesu Junior Board exceeds expectations in its inaugural year!

Junior Board members attend quarterly meetings and trainings. The Executive Junior Board governs activities and goals.

The Executive Junior Board

Megha Kulshreshtha
Co-President

Brianna Taylor
Co-President

Elle Carolan
Volunteer Co-Chair

Rachel Krol, Esq.
Volunteer Co-Chair

Mary Kate Ruffing
Event Co-Chair

Meg Weber
Event Co-Chair

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Desmond Shannon '02

Jared Smith '98

Molly Sharbaugh Unterseher

Event Committee

Joseph Blancuzzi

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Katelyn Joyce

Matthew Rafferty

Mike Wham



Executive Junior Board members Rachel Krol, Elle Carolan, Mary Kate Ruffing, Megha Kulshreshtha, and Meg Weber spend quality time with their sponsored student, and a student sponsored by Aberdeen Asset Management, at Gesu's Spring 2015 Scholarship Breakfast.

Grade 1 TEACHER Builds Community in the Classroom and School Wide.

Your generosity ensures teachers have the resources to educate life-long learners and global citizens.

Erin Williamson’s first grade classroom fuels active learning. Students participate in math relay races, care for the class turtle, and act out literary classics, such as “Frog and Toad.”

“My students learn best through getting up and moving,” Ms. Williamson explains. “Our students at Gesu do not spend a lot of time outside and do not get a lot of opportunities to release some of the energy they have.”

Ms. Williamson’s student-centered teaching philosophy also has a long-term purpose. “I want my students to leave my classroom really loving the learning process, so they continue to seek out knowledge well after they are out of school,” she affirms.

Ms. Williamson’s creative teaching methods span every subject. An avid traveler, she collects artifacts from abroad to inspire students to explore beyond Philadelphia. She explains, “I try my best to make my students citizens of the world and incorporate cultures that they have not been exposed to into our daily classroom culture.”

After visiting Hawaii, Ms. Williamson carried back lava rocks for each student and incorporated them in interdisciplinary lessons—a volcanic eruption experiment, painting, and informative writing. The class pen pal, whom Ms. Williamson befriended in China, even visited to share customs and teach Mandarin. This year, she will teach about Australia, focusing not only on geography and animals, but also the Aboriginal people, using an authentic art project to explore their struggle for equality.

While Ms. Williamson stretches students’ global awareness, she also forges a tight-knit classroom. She ensures that students enjoy simple childhood moments, like tasting a root beer float, and celebrate such milestones as the 100th day of school.

Observes grade partner, Kirsten Echelmeier Sams, “Erin knows each child and truly, in line with the Gesu mission and Jesuit and



Erin Williamson devotes her time to the Gesu community inside and outside of her classroom. Here, she teaches students to weave bracelets in the Gesu Extra Mile (GEM) program, which, thanks to you, offers academic enrichment, recreational and service opportunities, and practical applications, such as financial literacy and nutrition.

IHM identities, strives to educate the whole person. This dedication does not just run September to June for the 25 students in her class, but is a cumulative and ongoing relationship well into students’ years at Gesu and beyond.” She recalls a poignant story of Ms. Williamson’s “sensitive and generous approach” to teaching a first grader hygiene and self-care, even providing a toothbrush.

With her commitment to collaboration and innovation, it’s easy to understand why her colleagues nominated Ms. Williamson for the 2015 Knetzger Outstanding Teacher Award. Says Ms. Echelmeier Sams, “Erin has found the perfect balance between challenging her students academically, socially, and emotionally while also recognizing and meeting their individual needs.”

What does she find most enriching about first grade? For Ms. Williamson, teaching students to “become readers is most rewarding.” In fact, she supports students after they advance to second and third grade. For five years, she has worked with the Youth Education for Tomorrow (YET) program, providing individualized instruction four days a week after school to

build literacy skills.

Ms. Williamson’s dedication to Gesu extends beyond the classroom. She stages the Christmas play, organizes an Easter egg hunt with Rosemont College, and serves as a Catholic Schools Week coordinator. She is invested in building “camaraderie” among faculty and staff, regularly volunteering to plan social events.

Ms. Williamson began her Gesu career in 2008, teaching Pre-K for one year and remaining in first grade since. She holds a B.A. in Sociology from the University of Tampa and is pursuing an M.A. in Elementary Education at Saint Joseph’s University. We know that her ingenuity and compassion will continue to strengthen our community and prepare her students to flourish.

The Knetzger Outstanding Teacher Award, endowed by a gift from Jay and Kathy Sherrerd in memory of Gesu Trustee Edwin Knetzger, is presented annually to that faculty member demonstrating the highest quality of teaching ability and commitment.

Memorable Moments

in 2014-2015



THE 2014-2015 SCHOOL YEAR BEGINS with a newly refurbished entrance greeting the Gesu community and reminding us of our Jesuit identity, "For the greater glory of God." Thank you to Gesu Trustee, Susan Martinelli Shea, and the M & S Foundation for sponsoring this project and creating such a welcoming space to enter Gesu!

OCTOBER The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA), among the premier accrediting associations in the world, "unanimously recommends to reaffirm the Middle States accreditation of Gesu School" after an in-depth review process and a three-day visit.

NOVEMBER The Anti-Defamation League designates Gesu School as a "No Place for Hate" school for the second consecutive year. Gesu is proud to be recognized as a school where all are welcome and treated with dignity and respect.

NOVEMBER Gesu hosts our 17th Annual Symposium on Transforming Inner-City Education: The Journey Through an Independent School, including a screening of the film, "The Prep School Negro" by André Robert Lee, a panel discussion, and a parent workshop. Read a summary of the events on our website at www.gesuschool.org/symposium.

DECEMBER Gesu's Dancing with the Students Troupe performs at the Philadelphia 76ers game! Thanks to Susan Martinelli Shea, Gesu Trustee and President of Dancing with the Students, for bringing this program to Gesu for 10 years.

FEBRUARY Gesu renews its Jesuit Sustaining Agreement with the Maryland Province in collaboration with the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM), celebrating its official recognition as a Jesuit School.

SEPTEMBER Tony Luke's and Ajungo raffle a Johnny Mac's Chopper House custom-built chopper on our rooftop to raise \$5,000 and awareness for Gesu School. Thank you!



MARCH Volunteers come out in record numbers to participate in Gesu's very own Dr. Seuss Day! Over 35 volunteers read and create artwork with students in grades Pre-K through 2. Thanks to all for sharing their time with our youngest students.

MARCH Wolf Performing Arts Center presents Celeste Raspanti's play, "I Never Saw Another Butterfly," to students from Gesu, Young Scholars Charter School, and St. Joseph's Prep through the Butterfly Project. Youth actors from Wolf PAC gave a powerful performance memorializing the children who passed through Terezin Concentration Camp. In a spirit of collaboration, Gesu School students read original poetry commemorating the Holocaust. Gesu School is deeply grateful to Trustees, Ellen and Winston J. Churchill (Chairman Emeritus), who so generously sponsored this event.



APRIL Gesu's first-ever One Day Challenge surpasses our goal! Our heartfelt thanks to The Z Foundation of Sarasota Florida and the over 500 donors who contributed, including many Gesu students, families, and alumni! The Z Foundation of Sarasota Florida graciously awarded Gesu a \$10,000 challenge grant. Their sponsorship generated a wave of support, and we more than doubled our goal of 250 gifts. In total and including the \$10,000 challenge gift, Gesu raised \$34,569.80 in just one day!



Financials

At Gesu School, we strive to steward your gifts wisely so as to have the greatest impact for our 450 students. We invite you to review our audited financial statements and Form 990 on our website at www.gesuschool.org/financials.

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MAY The 2015 Gala is an evening of "firsts," demonstrating that Gesu Works! The Gala raises a record \$400,000 and has our highest number of guests ever—420. Other notable firsts include the premiere of the Gesu School video; video comments from the 2015 Gesu Spirit Medal Winners, Keith Pension and Tad Decker; a live auction; and the Junior Board After Hours Soiree. View the videos and photos from these events on the Gesu blog at www.gesuschool.org/gala15_success.



Pictured with Gesu School Principal, Sr. Ellen Convey, IHM (left) are 2015 Gesu Gala Co-Chairs, Steve Piltch & Sunny Greenberg; Gesu School President and CEO, Bryan Carter; Co-Chairs, Aliya & Reggie Browne; and Co-Chairs, Paula & Mark Solomon. The 2015 Gesu Gala at the National Museum of American Jewish History was our most successful ever! We extend a special thanks to the dedicated 2015 Gala committee members and co-chairs, as well as all Gala sponsors, in particular, Susan Martinelli Shea and the M & S Foundation, as Presenting Sponsor.

A highlight of the 2015 Gala was presentation of the 2015 Spirit Medals, Gesu School's highest honor, to Gesu Trustee and volunteer, Keith Pension (left center), and Gesu Trustee and Vice Chairman of Cozen O'Connor, Tad Decker, Esq. (right), with Bryan Carter (left), Gesu School President and CEO, and Sr. Ellen Convey, IHM (right center), Gesu School Principal. The Gesu Spirit Medal honors individuals who have shown extraordinary commitment to Gesu School through their loyal advocacy and actions, and who have made a significant contribution to Gesu School's success as a model inner-city elementary school.



Photos by David DeBalko

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Gesu mourns the loss of Phil Kendall, devoted friend and longstanding Gesu Trustee since 2007. We acknowledge the wisdom he shared with Gesu School and his dedication to our mission.

Gesu also mourns the passing of Kathryn L. Swope, member of the original Gesu Development Board, and Kathleen Sheehan Tarquinio, who organized Gesu's first strategic plan. Both played pivotal roles in our successful transition from a parish school to an independent Jesuit school.

We hold their families in our prayers.

Thank you to our 2014-2015 Fiscal Year Donors.

You are an essential part of the Gesu village!

Pierre Toussaint Society

\$50,000 & Above



Gesu School recognizes our leadership-level donors who have made gifts of \$50,000 and above with membership in the Pierre Toussaint Society. Venerable Pierre Toussaint, the society’s namesake, is a hero from our Catholic heritage. Born into slavery in Haiti in the early 19th century, Pierre Toussaint was brought to New York City, where he became a successful hairdresser. He used his earnings to free many slaves and finally himself. Once a free man, he performed many acts of charity, including the establishment of an orphanage and a school for black children. When most fled the city during a yellow fever epidemic, he stayed to nurse the sick. His dedication to the well-being and education of the poor makes Pierre Toussaint a fitting patron for Gesu and our donors.

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