



GESU | 30
SCHOOL EST. 1993

30
YEARS

Transforming Lives



Thirty years ago, the Roman Catholic Church of The Gesu closed its doors, shaking the foundation of a struggling Philadelphia neighborhood just north of Girard Avenue and west of Broad Street. The fate of the parish's school, known as a beacon of hope to many neighborhood families—Catholic and non-Catholic alike—remained uncertain. At the Archdiocese's request, Gesu School voyaged into uncharted waters as a self-governed, self-financed urban Catholic school under the leadership of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) and the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (the IHM Sisters).

Today, Gesu School provides 400 students in Pre-K through 8th grade with a comprehensive, innovative education that enables them to transcend all forms of poverty. Inspired by the Jesuit and IHM traditions of social justice, faith, creative hope, and love, Gesu empowers its students to develop their strengths, overcome challenges, and become positive, engaged members of the community and the world.

Thanks to the efforts and the contributions of many hardworking leaders, educators, volunteers, and donors, Gesu School has not only survived, it's become a national model for urban education, blazing the way for the many schools that have followed in its path. In 2023–2024, with tremendous joy and hope, we celebrate Gesu's 30th Anniversary as an independent Catholic school—both in tribute to our successful past and in anticipation of our promising future.



A New Model Emerges

The Beginning & 1993–2002

A Matter of Social Justice & Fidelity

The Gesu parish had been a cornerstone of North Philadelphia since the late 1800s. At its peak around the turn of the 20th century, the Church of the Gesu was home to 20,000 parishioners. But during the 1960s through the 1980s, the city experienced significant financial hardship and urban deterioration, and many of the original parishioners moved to the suburbs. By the time Rev. George W. Bur, S.J., transitioned from Gesu's assistant pastor to pastor in 1988, the parish was struggling to support itself. Sadly, it was forced to close its doors in 1993.

As a matter of social justice and fidelity, the Jesuits and the IHM Sisters committed to keeping Gesu's school open—not as a parish-supported institution, but as an independent school—to provide our mostly non-Catholic children from Philadelphia with the highest quality education. Gesu School became Philadelphia's first Catholic school of its kind, lighting the way for the city's independent mission schools that would follow 20 years later.

A Solid Foundation

Fortunately for Gesu School, planning for its long-term viability began well before the parish closed. For five years, Fr. Bur and his former St. Joseph's Prep schoolmate and businessman Winston J. Churchill had been working quietly to fortify Gesu School, gathering around them a group of dedicated supporters, many of whom would become Gesu's first Trustees. With Fr. Bur as Gesu School's first president and Win as chairman of its new Board of Trustees, Gesu embarked on several fundraising campaigns to secure the school's future and enrich the student experience.

During this time, Gesu School's curriculum and programs expanded significantly under the leadership of Principal Sister Ellen Convey, IHM. Enhancements included a Resource Room for students with learning differences; the Backe Advanced Writing program; a full-time art program; a full-time technology program; the Warren V. Musser Young Scholars Program; the Youth Education for Tomorrow (YET) literacy program funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts; a summer camp underwritten by Gesu's longtime friends at Old Saint Joseph's Church; and numerous after-school activities.



In 2001–2002, Gesu installs a playground on the rooftop of the Kelly Fieldhouse at St. Joseph's Prep—leaving behind the days of roping off Thompson Street for recess. The playground is dedicated to Churchill Challenge contributor the Hubbard Family Foundation.



Gesu's first counselors, Margaret Mary O'Neill and Sr. Patricia McGrenra, IHM, grow the school's ever-expanding social supports for Gesu's students and their families.



Churchill Challenge contributors James and Agnes Kim visit the Kim Technology Center, a new computer lab installed in the fall of 2001 to help bridge the technology divide.

Funding the Future

THE MILLENNIUM CAMPAIGN

Chaired by Mark Solomon and Peter Miller of CMS Companies, the *Millennium Campaign* raises \$1.4 million during 1994 and 1995 to help keep Gesu afloat.

CHILDREN SUCCEEDING

Chaired by Ralph Saul, former president of the American Stock Exchange and CEO of Cigna Corp., the *Children Succeeding* campaign reaches its lofty \$4 million goal in the spring of 2000. Many of the curricular enhancements during the school's first decade are a direct result of this campaign's success.

THE CHURCHILL CHALLENGE

In the fall of 2000, Win Churchill announces he will establish an endowment for Gesu School with a gift of \$1 million. He challenges four additional donors to contribute \$1 million each. Gesu Trustee John J.F. "Jay" Sherrerd and his wife Kathy; H.F. and Marguerite Lenfest; Jim and Agnes Kim; and the Hubbard Family Foundation accept the challenge.

ANNUAL FUND

In 1999–2000, Jay Sherrerd establishes Gesu's Annual Fund, which continues to bring in crucial resources for the school to this day.



The first Symposium's panel, discussing "Are Faith-Based Schools an Answer?," includes nationally known figures Tim Russert of NBC's *Meet the Press* (6th from left), former U.S. Education Secretary Dr. William J. Bennett (3rd from left), best-selling author Joe Klein (3rd from right), and Symposium Founder Trustee Dr. John J. Dilulio, Jr. (far left), among others.



3rd grade girls with Shirley Bright



3rd grade boys with Tyrone Myers

1868 The Jesuits send Rev. Burchard Villiger, S.J., to 18th and Stiles streets in North Philadelphia to build a parish, a lower school, and new home for St. Joseph's College.

1873 Grammar school classes begin in the basement of the first parish building. In 1879, a new grammar school building is completed and the Sisters of Notre Dame arrive to staff the school. Foundations are laid for the Church of the Gesu, which is dedicated in 1888.

1891 The IHM Sisters come to Gesu to lead the education of the boys. In 1951, the IHM Sisters assume the education of the girls as well.

1991 Sister Ellen Convey, IHM, becomes principal of Gesu School. During her early tenure, the school adds a Pre-K program, more than doubles its enrollment to nearly 450, and expands into the building's 3rd floor thanks to the Jesuit province's investment in building renovations.

1993 The Gesu parish celebrates its 125th Anniversary but is closed by the Archdiocese. The last Mass is June 27, 1993, presided over by Rev. George W. Bur, S.J., who becomes Gesu School's first president when the parish closes.

1993–1994 Gesu School opens for the school year as an independent Catholic elementary school supported by the Jesuits and the IHM Sisters, blazing a new path for urban Catholic education.

1994–1995 To better address girls' and boys' specific social and learning needs at crucial ages, S. Ellen institutes single gender education in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades, with women teaching the girls and men teaching the boys.

1996–1997 The Pre-K program expands and moves into its new home on the school's ground floor, thanks to a grant from the Connelly Foundation. In addition, Gesu earns its first Middle States Accreditation as an independent school.

Fall 1997 Gesu hosts its first Symposium on Inner-City Education at the University of Pennsylvania. To this day, the annual event continues to bring together leaders in the field while drawing national attention to Gesu's innovation and leadership.

2002–2003 The Jesuits reassign Fr. Bur at the end of the school year, ushering in a new era of lay leadership working closely with the school's religious partners.



Gesu Grows “Up”

2003–2012

Expanded Space

In its second decade, Gesu School continued to grow and flourish under the leadership of President and CEO Christine S. Beck and Principal S. Ellen Convey, IHM, supported by Gesu's dedicated community of faculty and staff, volunteers, donors, and friends. But perhaps the school's most notable evolution during this period was its physical expansion and building renovation, which added a new entrance, an elevator, a new chapel, and two additional floors housing the Sherrerd Gymnasium, a science lab, dedicated art and music rooms, two resource rooms, and other bigger, brighter learning spaces to enhance students' education.

The capital improvements were financed by the *Building for Tomorrow* campaign, which also raised critical funds to increase the school's endowment. Co-chaired by Board Chairman Win Churchill and Trustees Ralph Saul and Jay Sherrerd, the campaign met its goal of \$12 million by 2007, aided by a \$1 million challenge gift from Al and Aline Martinelli to help the school reach the finish line.

Embracing Opportunity

The building improvements enhanced many of the hallmark programs that have defined the Gesu experience for countless children while creating possibilities for innovation—all guided by the IHM philosophy that “every child can learn.”

In 2004, Gesu launched Gesu Extra Mile (GEM)—an after-school enrichment program—and made music a full-time teaching position with the creation of the Knetzger Music Program. In 2005–2006, the school added the Learning Support Program to complement the Resource Room. Gesu became an early adopter of the LabLearner Science curriculum in 2007–2008. In 2008–2009, the school launched the Youngest Scholars program to provide extended enrichment opportunities for high-achieving students.

Without selective admissions criteria, Gesu continued to graduate students who knew how to succeed academically and in life, inspired to live as *men and women for others*.

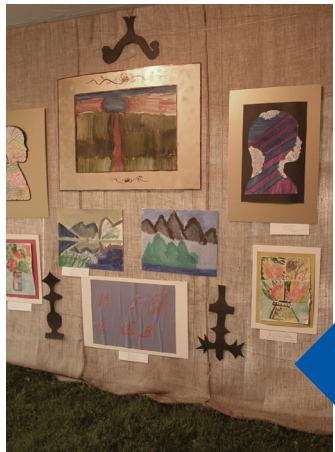
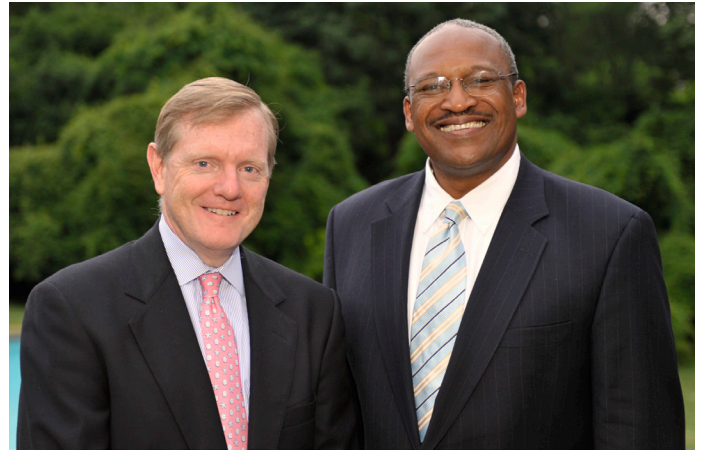


Crucial partnerships with St. Joseph's Prep and the Lenfest Incentive Scholars program at Saint Joseph's University launch to provide qualified students with mentorship and scholarships.

Forensics team members celebrate their successes. Teacher Shirley Bright taught countless students the art of public speaking through the forensics and the Akybra Theater programs.



In 2010, the Gesu Gospel Choir holds its first annual Christmas Concert, led by H.L. Ratliff, award-winning choir director and music teacher.



Donors support a two-year art program for students at the Barnes Foundation inspired by Trustee Keith Pension. The program is one of many donor-sponsored cultural experiences.

Trustee Bob McAlaine, a longtime champion of the Sponsor a Child program, co-chairs the *Gesu Isn't Gesu Without You* campaign with fellow Trustee Julia Rafferty to raise multi-child, multi-year sponsorships and endowed scholarships. In 2013, the campaign exceeds its \$8 million goal. The Sponsor a Child program has long been an important source of funding for the school while forging connections between students and donors.



Gesu alumna Carol Maillard '65 helps Gesu celebrate its 20th Anniversary Gala as part of the Grammy Award-winning ensemble Sweet Honey in the Rock at the Kimmel Center.

2003-2004 Christine S. Beck becomes Gesu's first lay president. She and her husband Leif served on Gesu's Board for several years.

Fall 2004 The book *A Model School: How Philadelphia's Gesu School Is Remaking Inner-City Education* by Jerrod K. Footlick is published, adding to the school's national attention from the likes of *60 Minutes*, *Meet the Press*, and *WHYY*.

Spring 2005 *Dancing with the Students* debuts at Gesu School, thanks to Trustee Susan Martinelli Shea, who was inspired to bring the organization to life by the movie *Mad Hot Ballroom*.

Spring 2005 Gesu breaks ground for its ambitious building expansion, funded by the successful *Building for Tomorrow* campaign. Trustee Rosemary Español and the architecture and design team at IEI Group help to create the perfect "home" for Gesu.

Fall 2005 *Gesu on Broadway*, the forerunner of Gesu's annual fundraising gala, brings Gesu students together on stage with renowned baritone Davis Gaines and musical theater legend Joy Abbot at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

September 8, 2006 Gesu School holds a dedication and ribbon cutting ceremony officially opening the expanded school building. The celebration continues the following day with a neighborhood block party.

2006-2007 Gesu awards the inaugural Gesu Spirit Medal to Founding Trustee Mark Solomon. Mark is presented the award by his adopted son and Gesu alumnus, Daryl Shore '94.

May 9, 2008 Gesu signs a sustaining agreement with the Maryland Province (now East Province) of the Society of Jesus, formalizing Gesu's 100-plus-year identity as a Jesuit-sponsored elementary school and affirming the IHM Sisters' role as co-stewards of the school.

2010 Longtime Trustee J. Gordon Cooney, Jr., assumes the role of Board Chairman, while founding Board Chairman Win Churchill is named Chairman Emeritus.

2011-2012 The school year opens with Gesu's 3rd President and CEO Bryan H. Carter at the helm after an extensive search to replace retiring President Chris Beck.



The Mission Persists

2013–Present

Learning...for Life

Years later, Gesu remains rooted in its mission, continuing to innovate and evolve as a leader in holistic urban education. Through cutting-edge, student-centered programming and extensive partnerships, Gesu provides the resources and social support that empower students to overcome obstacles, maximize their potential, and thrive.

Gesu has always believed that soft skills can be taught, and made doing so a focus in recent years. In its third decade, Gesu researched and implemented its own soft skills curriculum for Pre-K–8th grade, with input from Angela Duckworth, author, professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, and co-founder of Character Lab. Known as MAGIS, the soft skills curriculum includes direct instruction, practical application, and evaluation of: Motivation, Awareness, Grit, Independence, and Social competence.

In addition, Gesu significantly increased the support it provides for students throughout their lives. In 2016, the new Peter Gould & Robin Potter Graduate Support Program established high school preparation and college access initiatives, such as parent workshops on high school fit and financial aid, as well as alumni outreach and support services. Resources

expanded to include the high school fair, lunch-and-learn sessions with admissions counselors, one-to-one family advising, and an alumni council, launched in 2020.

Agility and Care

Gesu has long been responsive to the changing needs of its students and families. In March 2020, this agility was tested as the pandemic uprooted schools and transformed learning. Thanks to Gesu's dedicated teachers and supporters and its strong institutional framework, students never missed a day of school. Drawing on its core values, Gesu nurtured its community through creative, holistic education. The team melded counseling and wellness support with robust academics and spiritual guidance. Gesu also supported families' material needs with weekly food distribution.

During mandated school closures, the Gesu community stayed connected through virtual school-wide initiatives and daily, grade-level meetings for prayer and affirmations, birthday celebrations, service, and spirit days. The facilities team worked tirelessly to assure a clean environment and maintained the technology infrastructure to provide a seamless learning experience. **Whatever lies ahead, the Gesu community remains united and committed to transforming lives through faith, love, and learning.**



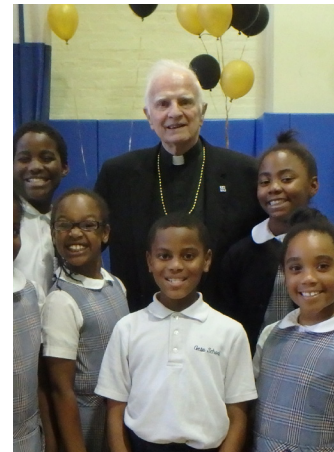
In 2015, the Ziegler family creates a Gesu legacy of giving by launching the One Day Challenge, an essential annual fundraising effort that to date has raised over \$500,000.



Led by Trustee Susan Martinelli Shea, Dancing with the Students performs at the World Meeting of Families during Pope Francis's visit to Philadelphia, garnering substantial media coverage.



The Gesu Gospel Choir performs for the PBS WHYY *Lifting Voices in Praise* competition.



Summer 2015 Gesu families, faculty, staff, maintenance, and friends construct a new playscape on the rooftop, after crowdfunding secures \$75,000. Donors include students from Holy Child School at Rosemont, IEI Group, PENTA Building Group Foundation, and Ethel Mae Hocker Foundation.

Fall 2016 Gesu launches the Graduate Support Program, later named for founding benefactors Peter Gould and Robin Potter, to ensure that students and alumni continue their educational advancement, fulfill their potential, and maintain productive roles in society.

Spring 2016 Gesu's library is dedicated to former volunteer librarian, 2013 Spirit Medalist, and Trustee Vivienne Ehret, who computerized Gesu's library, built a volunteer team, and provided students with access to books and weekly classes. The library now includes a media center.

Summer 2016 Rev. Neil Ver'Schneider, S.J., celebrates his 50th jubilee of ordination. Since 1989, he served as assistant pastor, chaplain, and disciplinarian. He devised the Gesu Extra Mile enrichment program, championed environmentalism and global missions, and counseled families.

2017 Gesu implements its new soft skills MAGIS curriculum. The acronym links the curriculum to broader tenets of Jesuit education, which uses "Magis" to refer to striving to do and be "greater" for the service of God.

2018 The Mission & Ministry Program is established to reaffirm Gesu's commitment to its Catholic identity and nourish its community's spiritual well-being via such initiatives as the Catholic student union, retreats, service projects, DEI work, monthly Mass, and daily prayer.

2020–2021 Gesu responds to the pandemic with care and agility, distributing emergency resources and shifting to virtual learning within days. Ongoing support includes professional development, wellness and spirituality, and academic and social enrichment.

2022 With neighboring organizations, Gesu spearheads multi-year initiatives to curb gun violence. Partners hold a press conference, along with two gun buyback events and student and family programming on violence prevention.

2022–2023 Alana Lee, who has served on Gesu's administrative team since 2015, becomes co-principal alongside S. Ellen to facilitate a seamless transition of future leadership.

2023–2024 Gesu celebrates its 30th Anniversary Gala at Citizens Bank Park, honoring S. Ellen for her 32 years of service. The Spirit Medal is renamed after Founding Trustee Mark Solomon, who was instrumental in transforming Gesu into an independent school in 1993.





Vision 30

A Bold Commitment to Gesu's Future

A Bright Future Ahead

Over the next 30 years, Gesu School aspires to lead the way in setting a new standard for urban elementary education by deepening its lifelong commitment to the children and families it serves—which begins the moment they enter Gesu. To realize this vision, our strategic plan will focus on the following key areas:

CURA PERSONALIS—CARE FOR THE WHOLE PERSON

Prioritize expanding support for students, parents and families, and faculty, as well as the community surrounding Gesu School, meeting everyone with dignity and compassion

21ST CENTURY ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Leverage the latest research on teaching and learning to ensure superior standards in education and the preparedness and well-being of faculty and staff, including the addition of three positions to address instructional improvement, enrollment, and new teacher mentorship

IMPROVED FACILITIES

Invest in improved, re-envisioned facilities and new spaces for group and community activities, including the construction of a new building at 1618–1626 W. Thompson Street to complement the main campus building

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

Maintain the commitment to prudent fiscal management and create a data- and stakeholder-informed plan for a comprehensive fundraising campaign

We hope you will join us on our journey to expand Gesu's impressive academic foundation through investments in enhanced curriculum, better-supported faculty and staff, and facilities that meet 21st-century standards. Together, we stand firmly in our mission and dedication to the collective care and prosperity of Gesu's children.



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TRANSFORMING LIVES WITH FAITH, LOVE, & LEARNING.

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With special thanks to our Board of Trustees, especially our past Board Chairs, whose fearless leadership has made Gesú who we are today:

Winston J. Churchill, *Chairman Emeritus*
J. Gordon Cooney, Jr.
Barbara B. Renninger
John J. Curry
Steve S. Piltch, Ed.D.

It Takes a Village

We acknowledge the many people, partners, and programs that have contributed to the miracle at Gesú School in countless ways. Whether through years of involvement or a one-time occurrence, each of you has added your mark to the overall masterpiece of love and care we've painted together for Gesú's children. ***Thank you!***

