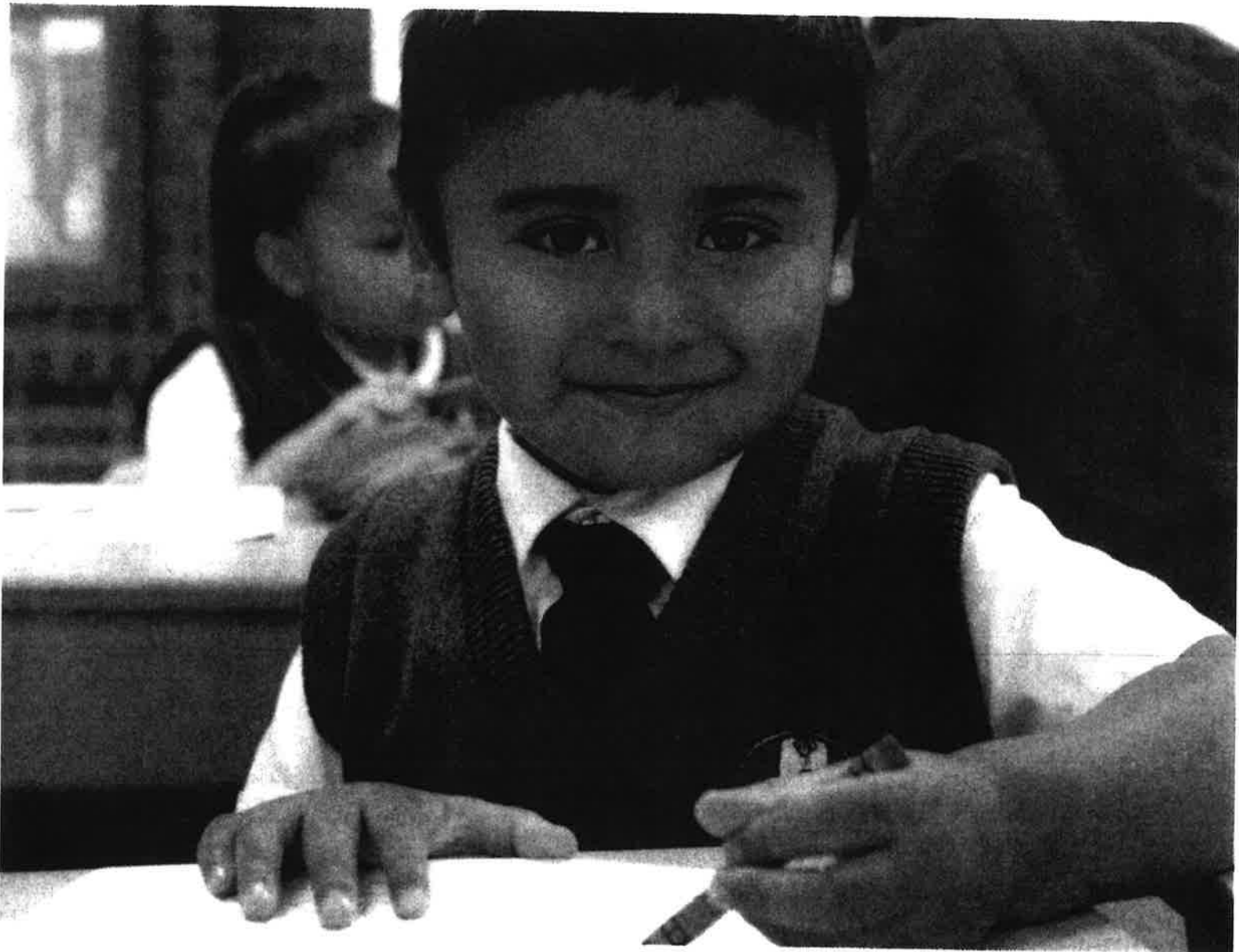
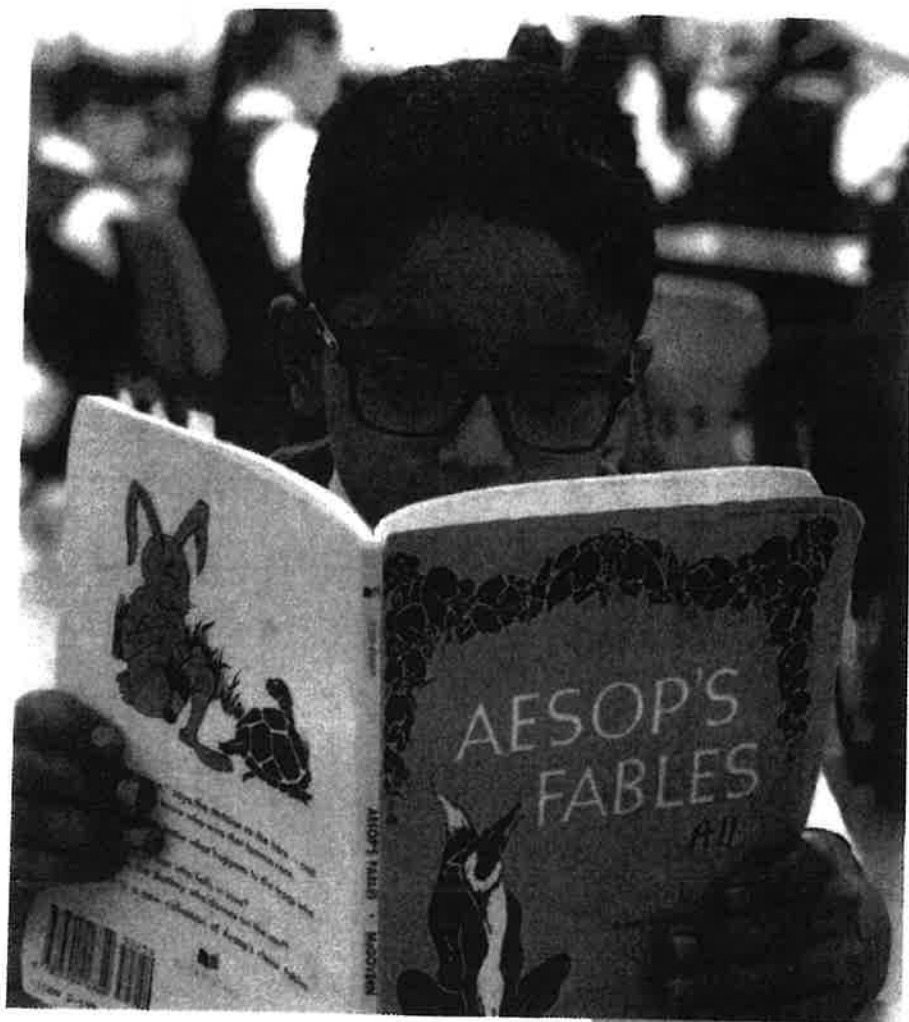


EVER ANCIENT, EVER NEW:

The Most Promising
Innovation in Catholic
Education Today
Springs From a
Surprising Source

| Elisabeth Sullivan |





One year ago, Cyril Cruz, the second-grade teacher at Holy Innocents School in Long Beach, Calif., stepped into her new role as principal. With ample support from the pastor, Fr. G. Peter Irving, she was tasked with leading a renewal at the low-income school that seemed incongruous to many. Today, the sudden and remarkable transformation has breathed new life into teachers, students and families.

"What is happening here at Holy Innocents is a quiet little explosion!" exclaimed Sister Benedicta Marie, O.C.D., who teaches eighth grade. "I have heard children themselves tell me, 'I am learning so much more!'" And, parents tell her they are discovering their faith more deeply from their own children.

Third-grade teacher Lisa Nguyen points to another dramatic difference: "It is just the joy, and love for learning. They just love to learn! Last year I saw them fade out as we got closer to summer. But it has been the opposite this year. ... And, they are making these connections!"

What sparked this excitement? Holy Innocents has joined the rapidly growing number of Catholic schools around the country that are flourishing

"Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would have not been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace." -St. Augustine.

through their rediscovery of the Church's distinctive, proven tradition of education in the classical liberal arts and sciences. Dying schools have been revived. New ones have been launched. Entire diocesan school systems have been reoriented. This rebirth can be seen in a variety of settings – urban and rural, affluent and low-income, "high-achieving" and otherwise. Success is evident in a variety of measures, from rising enrollment to the vibrant communities of faith and learning that result when educators discover new ways to ensure that Catholic identity is not simply added on, but instead permeates curriculum, content and pedagogy.

"We decided we needed to go back to our roots and really reevaluate what Catholic education is, how best to share that with our families and students, and how to ingrain in them a love for Our Lord through the curriculum," Cruz said. "And that led us to examine what our curriculum really was. We realized that it was segmented and skills-based. Yet, even while trying to focus on those skills, we were not hitting the mark."

Over the course of their careers, these educators have found that "innovation" simply for the sake of change has a short shelf life. It often leads to frustration and poor outcomes. However, when "innovation" is based in eternal truths, the results are striking. As teachers reclaim the principles and practices of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition to reinvent their schools, they see why it set the gold standard of education for centuries.

Long before the state controlled education, the Catholic Church developed education. The Church took up the ancient tradition of the liberal arts and sciences and ordered it toward Christ, producing some of the finest minds and the wisest saints in the history of the world. At the heart of this flourishing is a clear conviction about the nature and purpose of reality, of the

From California to Kentucky, from Colorado to Maryland, from New York to Texas, a surging number of Catholic schools are finding renewal through the Church's own proven tradition of education in the classical liberal arts and sciences. A sampling:

St. Jerome Academy, Hyattsville, Md.:

The first parish/diocesan school to make the transition in 2010, SJA was saved from imminent closure due to dwindling enrollment and massive debt. The now-vibrant school with a diverse population is debt-free and at maximum capacity with waiting lists, and is returning to a two-track model.

Our Lady of Lourdes, Denver, Colo.: Saved from closure with 90 students in 2011, Lourdes' dramatic turnaround and roaring enrollment led it to open a second campus this past year, with 262 students and waiting lists.

St. Agatha Academy, Winchester, Ky.: As regional Catholic school enrollment plummeted, St. Agatha has seen modest increases. Faculty and students are thriving with the new approach. Though the student body is 75 percent non-Catholic, school leaders note that "the more Catholic we become, the more attractive we are to Catholic and non-Catholic students alike."

St. Mary's Catholic High School, Phoenix, Ariz.: A diocesan high school that aims to serve all students who want a Catholic education and are willing to work hard, St. Mary's introduced a classical liberal arts track in 2016 that became highly popular. Average SAT scores have soared 150 points since the change.

St. Augustine Academy, Ventura, Calif.: Founded 25 years ago as an independent school in the Catholic liberal arts tradition, this K-12 academy is now a star in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles network of schools. Noted for its excellent track record in faith and academic formation, the school continues to buck the trend of enrollment declines at Catholic schools in the region.



human person, and of God – all of which are missing from any secular approach.

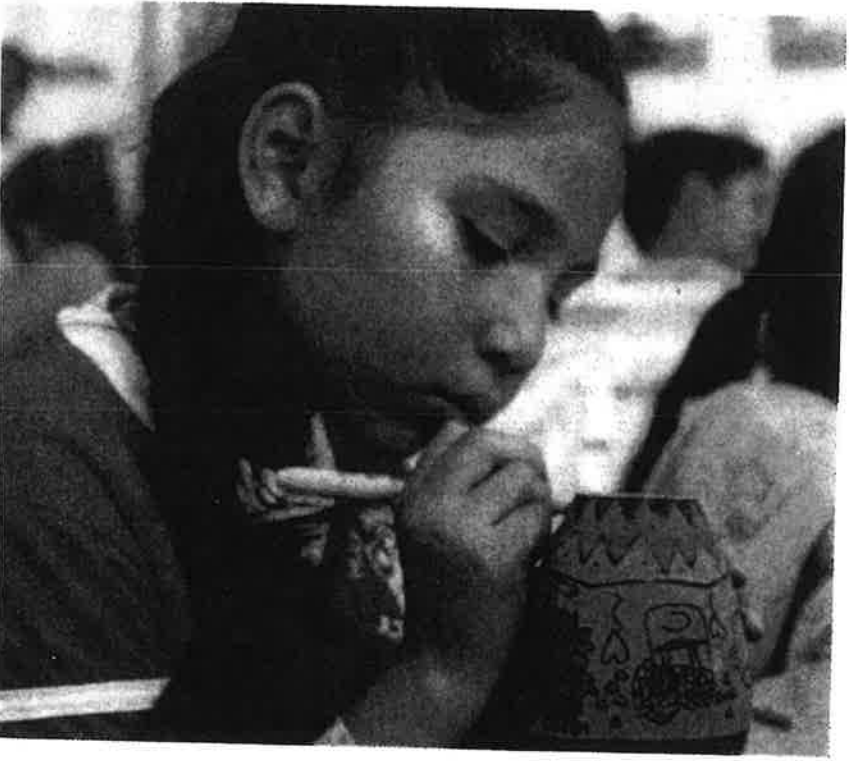
As Catholic educators across the country rediscover and adapt this deeply human and engaging tradition, they are struck by the immediate reaction of their students. "This way of teaching – and what we are teaching – really changes the lives of students because it truly forms them," said Nguyen.

Without any background in liberal arts education, the faculty of Holy Innocents were equipped for the change last summer with training, programs and coaching offered by The Institute for Catholic Liberal Education (ICLE). ICLE's mission is to promote this vision of authentic Catholic education and to help educators bring it to life in their classrooms. Over the past two years, ICLE has seen skyrocketing demand from schools and dioceses that seek this path to renewal.

Disproving the notion that a liberal arts curriculum is elitist, Cruz cites its success in her "classical barrio." Many students who previously struggled have found motivation and success in the rich content and lively discussions that require them to think deeply. Every type of learner benefits from being drawn in to a greater world of thought.

"We definitely do a lot more reading; we ask a lot of questions," said eighth-grader David Tuliau. "It is not cookie-cutter thinking. You have to think for yourself. ... They will give you the tools to help you find the answer. It directly translates to the way you need to think going forward in life."

This hunger for discovery spills over into the students' lives of faith. "I thought I was learning about



Jesus, and I thought I was going to Mass, but after coming here, it is like stepping into another world," Tuliau added.

Holy Innocents' experience illustrates the best-kept secret in Catholic education today: After five decades of plummeting enrollment and waning belief, the remedy lies not in secular solutions, but in the Church's own proven wisdom in the formation of the whole person. The evidence is growing. Teachers, students and parents find deepening faith and renewed joy in learning.

After only one year, Cruz needs no further convincing. "I think this is the answer to all the problems that we are having in Catholic education right now," she said. "The finances, the curriculum changes, the (need for) vocations. I think this is it. This is where we will see the fruits in the future. "

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