

## GREENWICH CATHOLIC SCHOOL

As Seen In  
Greenwich Post  
February 17, 2010  
Circulation: 16,000



### Principal is putting more holy in her school's spirit

*Written by Kristan, Zimmer, Editor*  
Wednesday, 17 February 2010 10:07

Principal Patrice Kopas with kindergarteners from Cassie Furtek's class. — Kristan Zimmer photo

United prayer, greetings of "God bless you" and more participation in the monthly Masses are among the ways Patrice Kopas is shaking up Greenwich Catholic School as its new principal.

Ms. Kopas was named principal there in July.

She began her career in education teaching math and writing at All Saints Middle School for seven years. She has a master's degree and recently earned certification in administration at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield.



After her certification she returned to teaching. However, she was offered a post as an interim principal at Saint Catherine of Siena School in Trumbull, where she served as principal from February 2009 to July 2009. When the position opened at Greenwich Catholic for a permanent principal she applied.

New to administration and to the school — since she said she was not familiar with Greenwich Catholic at all before she came to serve as principal —she is bringing her fresh set of eyes to the campus and making changes that teachers say are making all the difference.

"When I came in summer I didn't see a Catholic identity beyond the front doors," Ms. Kopas said.

First she changed individual classroom morning prayer to be school-wide over the loudspeaker — led by an eighth grade student. She created a student mission statement based on the fundamentals of Christianity. She also requires students to greet each other and faculty by saying, "Good morning, God bless you."

"These little things on a regular basis kind of make the rest happen," Ms. Kopas said.

Since her arrival students also participate more in the monthly Mass students attend on the first Friday of the month.

"It has become much more vibrant," Ms. Kopas said. "You can give them the high holy stuff every once in a while but that's not going to reach them."

Teachers say they see a difference among the students, too.

"She is very dedicated to Catholic education," said second grade teacher Nancy Cook. Among the initiatives Ms. Kopas started is a "virtue of the month." Each month a student is honored for exemplifying the featured Catholic virtue of the previous month announced at the monthly Mass. Ms. Cook said Ms. Kopas's programs instantly brought "more Catholicity to the schools."

Third grade teacher Marianne Licare said she sees "a difference of spirituality of the Masses" because of the new music and student participation. As a result, she sees a greater understanding of their faith among students.

"I think they are more aware of what it means to be an all-around good person," Ms. Licare said. "It's not always about what you get but what you do."

The Post's interview with Ms. Kopas was held during Catholic Schools Week while students gathered in the school gymnasium to learn about community service. It is among the many ways students learn to give to others.

Ms. Kopas said the changes at the school help students understand that their faith, their education and their involvement in the community are all intertwined.

As she works to better the school's Catholic identity and teacher/parent/principal relations, she also aims to begin a capital campaign to improve the facilities there.

"It's a great campus," Ms. Kopas said. "It's got a lot of potential. It just needs to be directed."