

Search Our Site

 Go
Sponsored by  
[Catholic Knights](#)

# Catholic Herald

Click to  
Subscribe

## LENT IS THE TIME TO REFLECT ON CHRIST'S SACRIFICE AND LOVE...

FOOD FOR THE POOR

[About Us](#)[Links](#)[Classifieds](#)[Events](#)[Sports](#)[Home](#)[Herald of Hope](#)[Nation/World](#)[Past Issues](#)[Photo of the Week](#)[Submit Information](#)

### Local News

Feb. 15, 2007

## Messmer, Capuchins extend commitment to education

*Will manage St. Leo Catholic Urban Academy*

By [Sam Lucero](#)  
Catholic Herald Staff

**MILWAUKEE** — The Archdiocese of Milwaukee has turned over management of St. Leo Catholic Urban Academy, 2458 W. Locust St., to Messmer Catholic Schools. The announcement was made at a press conference at Messmer Catholic High School Feb. 12. The change begins immediately.

St. Leo Catholic Urban Academy is one of two inner-city Catholic elementary schools operated by the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. The new arrangement leaves St. Rose Catholic Urban Academy as the sole elementary school under management of the archdiocese.

In announcing the change, Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan commended Messmer Catholic Schools and their administrators for accepting the new arrangement.

“I’ve asked Br. Bob Smith (president of Messmer Catholic Schools), the Capuchin Franciscan Fathers and Brothers, Jeff Monday (principal of Messmer High School) and the board at Messmer High School to welcome one of our Catholic Urban Academies, St. Leo, into the Messmer enterprise, and they have graciously answered yes,” said Archbishop Dolan.

According to the archbishop, the new direction will assure quality Catholic education in the central city.



Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan speaks at a press conference Feb. 12 at Messmer High School, announcing that Messmer Catholic Schools will assume administrative management of St. Leo Catholic Urban Academy. Standing at left is Capuchin Br. Bob Smith, president of Messmer Catholic Schools, which also includes a K4-8 elementary school. (Catholic Herald photo by Sam Lucero)

“This is the first step to strengthen and expand our schools in the city,” said Archbishop Dolan. “Messmer has a proven track record of Catholic education. It just makes sense to hook up with what’s working well. That’s good for St. Leo’s, that’s going to be good for St. Rose, that’s good for Messmer, for our city, and best of all, that’s good for our kids.”

Messmer Catholic Schools is an independent Catholic institution with more than 1,000 students. Its history dates back to 1926, when Messmer High School opened by the archdiocese as the first Catholic high school.

Following a decline in enrollment in the 1980s, the archdiocese announced closure of the high school in 1984. However, a group of parents and alumni re-opened it as an independent Catholic school, with an initial enrollment of 115 students. Enrollment today is more than 600. In 2000, Messmer added a K4-eighth grade school, Messmer Preparatory Catholic School, when it assumed operation of Blessed Trinity School, Milwaukee. Its enrollment today is more than 400, with a waiting list of students.

Br. Bob, a member of the Capuchin Franciscan religious order, said that when the archdiocese proposed the new arrangement, the first question Messmer officials asked was whether the institution could do a “high quality job.”

“The answer to that was yes,” he said.

“We are excited about this venture. We know that it’s going to be a challenge. We know that there is a lot of work to do, but we knew that 23 years ago (when the high school was re-opened),” said Br. Bob.

“It’s not something that intimidates us. It’s something we embrace, because the Catholic Church is really making a statement today,” he explained. “A lot of people are running away. A lot of people are saying the city can’t get better. We are saying today that we are not among those people. We are saying that things are going to get better.”

Although the new arrangement affects only St. Leo, Br. Bob said an evaluation is under way to consider adding St. Rose Catholic Urban Academy.

“Immediately we will be involved with St. Leo’s and we’ll evaluate the addition of St. Rose for next year,” he said. “The reason being, we couldn’t add two schools at once. We want to make sure there is a smooth transition and we can get the right people in place.”

The Catholic Urban Academies were formed in 1994, following a period of inner-city parish and school closings. While St. Rose Church remained open, St. Leo Parish was closed. Both parish schools were slated to close, but outcry from alumni, parents and parishioners helped keep both schools open, although without parish support.

St. Rose sits in the Merrill Park neighborhood and St. Leo is located three miles north in the Moody Park neighborhood.

The academies owe their livelihood to the Milwaukee School Choice Program, which funds about 85 percent of their operating budgets. The remaining funds come from third party sources, including donations from alumni, parishioners and other benefactors.

The academies also receive funds from a home mission appeal. School representatives visit 10 to 12 parishes annually and speak during weekend Masses. Second collections are taken and this nets between \$20,000 and \$30,000 for the academies.

Although the Choice program took much of the \$20,000 and \$30,000 for the academies.

Although the Choice program took much of the academies’ financial burden off

the Milwaukee Archdiocese, the parish stewardship and school development office continues to provide professional assistance.

With an enrollment of 164 students, St. Rose includes 65 percent African-American, 20 percent Asian, 20 percent Hispanic and 5 percent Caucasian students. Thirty-five percent of the student body is Catholic.

At St. Leo, all 158 students are African-American, with a small percentage of Catholic students.

Br. Bob said that details must be worked out with the archdiocese regarding the financial obligation Messmer Catholic Schools will absorb in the new arrangement.

“It’s not a secret that St. Leo’s building is in need of significant repair,” he said. “During this first year we’re going to do an evaluation of the building and see if it makes sense, depending upon the level of work that has to be done, to put (money) into those buildings or look into some other options.”

Br. Bob believes Messmer can offer St. Leo an immediate infusion of new students. He said Messmer Preparatory School has a waiting list, especially in the lower grades. “What we would be doing is recommending to parents that their children attend St. Leo’s for those grades. That again is another thing we’ve got to work out.”

Another issue to address is school busing. Br. Bob said that new and creative ways will need to be offered to address dropping off and picking up children.

Eventually the additional students from St. Leo will impact the enrollment of Messmer High School, which is also dealing with high enrollment. Br. Bob said that Messmer may have to look at creating a satellite campus in the future.

“We’ve got to come up with an answer for the demand,” he said. “We’re suggesting to people to consider some of the other Catholic high schools as one answer. But for people who only want one answer, we’ve got to create some options.”

[Back to the top](#)

[Home](#) | [Herald of Hope](#) | [National/World](#) | [Past Issues](#) | [Photo of the Week](#) | [Submit Information](#)  
[About Us](#) | [Links](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Events](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Sports](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Subscribe](#)  
[Parenting](#) | [Mature Lifestyles](#) | [Catholic Weddings](#) | [Vocations](#) | [Wisconsin Pastoral Handbook](#)

---

Copyright © 2006 by Catholic Press Apostolate, Inc., Milwaukee, Wisconsin.