

**W**hat do Catholic leaders from American Samoa and Arecibo, Puerto

Rico—two dioceses located 7,500 miles apart—have in common? It turns out they have a lot in common, as one particular initiative created by Catholic Extension vividly demonstrates.

Development of Catholic educators and administrators is often identified as a strategic concern for Extension dioceses across the country. Although these leaders represent incredibly diverse regions and cultures, they are all trying to carry on the tradition of Catholic education, especially in the poorest regions and communities of the country.

In response, Catholic Extension partnered with Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in 2012 and established an initiative offering a graduate-level online certificate in Catholic school administration to new and prospective Catholic school administrators nationwide.

Offered through LMU's Catholic School Leadership Academy with substantial funding from the university, the unique educational program provides participants professional development opportunities in a multitude of areas combining faith and administration. Topics include Catholic identity and spiritual leadership along with budget development, human resource administration and mission integration.

To date, the program has had 121 graduates from 38 different Extension dioceses. Participants have come from Anchorage, Alaska, to Savannah, Georgia, and every-

where in between since the program's inception 10 years ago. In a survey conducted this year among program alumni who were at least two years out of the program, nearly 80 percent had already been promoted to a higher administrative role, such as principal or vice principal, at their Catholic school.

James Evans was a middle school math and science teacher at Madonna del Sasso Catholic School in Salinas, California, before being asked by his former principal, who was set to retire, if he was interested in assuming the school's principal position. His superintendent recommended him for the Certificate in Catholic

## CATHOLIC EXTENSION'S 10-YEAR PARTNERSHIP WITH LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY'S SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

# FORMING CATHOLIC SCHOOL LEADERSHIP NATIONWIDE



School Administration program at LMU, which Evans said was crucial in preparing him to take over the principal role.

"The LMU program was amazing in helping shape my leadership skills and building other tools that I would need to run a campus," Evans said. "The thoughtfulness and dedication of the professors allowed me to become more comfortable in assuming a leadership role."





Dr. Lauren Casella, academic program director for Loyola Marymount University's Catholic School Leadership Academy, leads a class for the 2022-2023 Certificate in Catholic School Administration cohort at their retreat weekend.

**RIGHT** The Certificate in Catholic School Administration program at Loyola Marymount University has had **121 graduates from 38 different Extension dioceses**. Several alumni gathered on campus this past summer.

Evans essentially assumed the role of principal at his school on March 13, 2020, right at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Simultaneously, he was finishing up his coursework for the LMU program. Evans said having the opportunity to go into meetings with very seasoned principals and participate in the program were both extremely helpful during his transition in such an unprecedented time.

"This program has been an amazing opportunity," Evans said. "To be honest, it would be tough to be a principal without doing a program like this, and LMU does it so well."

#### TAPPED TO LEAD

Evans was one of many program participants who were tapped by

someone as having the potential to be a leader in their Catholic school. Dr. Michelle Young, dean of LMU's School of Education, believes the component of just being called by someone to be a leader plays a significant role in motivating educators to apply for the LMU program in the first place.

"How is it that a person transforms from a person who's kind of in charge of a small group or not in charge of anything into a leader?" Young asked. "Part of it is tapping somebody and saying, 'I think you would really benefit from this program if you ever thought of being a leader.'"

"Many of them will say over and over again, 'I never really thought of myself as a principal,' or 'I never really thought I would take on a leadership position,'" Young continued. "But they each will say that they saw so many things that they wanted to help with. So, I think it's a couple of things. It's being

tapped by someone as a potential leader, and it's being provided with resources to know how to actually be that great leader that you have the potential to be."

Maddie Bodden is a newcomer to the program in the 2022-2023 cohort from the Diocese of Shreveport, Louisiana, an Extension diocese that has produced multiple graduates since the Certificate in Catholic School Administration program's inception. A first-grade teacher at St. John Berchmans Catholic School, Bodden too was tapped to lead. She was recommended by her principal, Trey Woodham, a 2017 graduate of the program.

"My current principal is a product of this program, and he said, 'I think this would be a great program for you,'" Bodden explained. "It's pushing me out of my comfort zone and into something I didn't know was in the cards for me. I'm really hoping to pick the





**Antonio Trujillo**, a 2014-2015 alumnus of Loyola Marymount University's Certificate in Catholic School Administration program, continues to serve as principal at St. Joseph Mission School, which serves a largely Native American student body in San Fidel, New Mexico.



**Christy Miron**, coming from the corporate world, completed the Loyola Marymount University program in 2014-15 as she began a new career as principal for Sacred Heart Catholic School in the Diocese of Marquette, Michigan.

brains of everyone involved in administration."

Stepping out of the comfort zone is something that Christy Miron had to do when she was called to lead Sacred Heart Catholic School in the Diocese of Marquette, Michigan. She had been serving the school as director of religious education but had never been trained as a school teacher. Her day job was in the corporate world. When the school's principal left abruptly, the church's pastor came to Miron and told her he wanted her to be the principal.

While going through the interview process with her superintendent, he recommended her for the LMU program supported by Catholic Extension. Miron has now served as Sacred Heart's principal for nearly eight years. She completed the LMU certificate program during her first year as principal.

"[The LMU program] was incredibly challenging, but it was amazing," Miron said. "I know that I am a better leader. ... How I lead, the way I lead, and the way I

approach things really came out of what I learned. I don't think I would still be in this career, ministry and mission if I hadn't learned what I learned through this Catholic leadership program."

The leaders that apply to and emerge from the LMU program each have a staunch commitment to not only serving but improving both the educational and spiritual components offered at their schools. Dr. Lauren Casella, academic program director for the Catholic School Leadership Academy at LMU, sees each leader from an Extension diocese that enters the program as having a particular combination of qualities.

"I think first and foremost they have faith-filled joy," Casella said. "I put those together in tandem because the leaders that come from Extension dioceses have a commitment and a mission. They truly see their role as a vocation. And they do it joyfully. They are happy and joyful to be serving their communities."

## A DIVERSE NETWORK

This past summer, LMU and Catholic Extension hosted roughly 50 principals and school leaders from dioceses across the country for the program's 10th anniversary "Together in Mission" retreat. The weekend retreat brought together alumni from the Certificate in Catholic School Administration program and students enrolled in its 2022-2023 cohort.

"This weekend brought to life all that makes LMU's program a transformational experience—faith

**Dr. Michelle Young**, dean of the College of Education at Loyola Marymount University, believes the Catholic School Leadership Academy and "Together in Mission" retreat weekend provide Catholic administrators with the skills, knowledge and network to address problems and practices at their respective schools.







2019-2020 program alumna **Teri Schneider** is the principal at St. Mary's Catholic School in Kodiak, Alaska. Catholic school administrators from all corners of the country participate in the Loyola Marymount University program, creating a diverse network of leaders.



**Maddie Bodden**, right, a participant in the 2022-2023 Loyola Marymount University Catholic School Administration cohort from the Diocese of Shreveport, Louisiana, learned about the program from her school's principal, Trey Woodham, a 2017 program alumnus.

formation and professional growth all shaped within a joyful community of learners," Casella said.

"I believe in networking our Catholic schools together so that the principals are learning from each other," said Sister Rosemarie Nassif, SSND, who leads LMU's Center for Catholic Education. "Many of these alums are here because they now have these lifelong relationships with their cohort. They came to be together and learn where everybody is together."

The ability to network with col-

leagues both throughout completing their coursework and now at their retreat weekends is highly beneficial for its alumni. Teri Schneider, principal at St. Mary's Catholic School in the Archdiocese of Anchorage-Juneau, Alaska, and a 2019-2020 program participant, is grateful for her network of cohort colleagues. She is especially thankful she had them to talk with through the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"At the beginning of COVID, I was in desperate need of communication with others," Schneider said. "I networked with the folks I met at LMU and had many conversations with them and the professors through that whole transition. Just talking to them about the idea of, 'Do we have what it takes to start up again, and what do I need to do?'"

"Thank goodness I had this program and the folks to network with. I was reenergized in my own personal faith and as a teacher and leader. I just wasn't ready to give up," Schneider added.

With administrators and educators from all corners of the country and its territories participating in the program, they bond over the similar challenges they face such as enrollment, budgets and the new hurdles brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The diverse regions that each Catholic school leader comes from and their ability to come together to form new ideas for how to improve Catholic education and grow in their roles are part of what makes the program and partnership between LMU and Catholic Extension so worthwhile.

"My heart and spirit are in deep gratitude to Catholic Extension because their partnership allows us to be all that God really wants us to be for everyone, which is to come together with the richness of differences," Sister Rosemarie said. "Our partnership with Catholic Extension gives this program an asset that we could never achieve alone. This is a rich, diamond asset because of the diversity." ❧







## CATHOLIC EXTENSION

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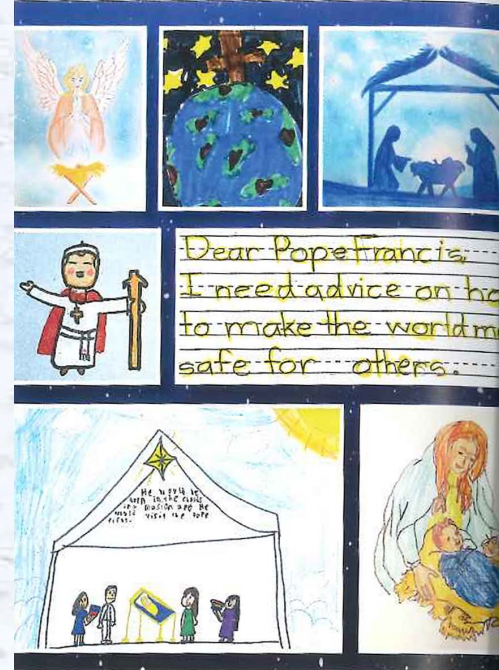
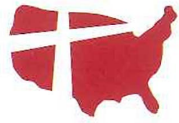
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STORIES OF FAITH FROM CATHOLIC EXTENSION



## Let there be peace on earth 10

Our cover presents the artwork drawn by two groups of children who suffered horrendous tragedies in their communities this year: Ukraine and Uvalde, Texas. As we end a year marked by terror, violence and war, we invited them to lead us in reflection this Christmas season through their drawings and letters. Their art reveals how their faith offers them hope for a better future and shapes the way they see our God and our world.