

IHMs IN ACTION



When Sister Jane (Mary Jane) Herb, IHM, Ph.D., finished graduate school in 1997, she hoped for a ministry within a diocese or as a superintendent of schools.

She got both.

As superintendent of diocesan schools in Albany, N.Y., Sister Jane provides oversight and strategic planning for the 26 Catholic elementary schools and four high schools located in 14 counties and spread out over more than 10,000 square miles.

In spite of the challenges involved with such a large geographic area, Sister Jane makes a point of visiting each school at least once during the year, spending time with principals, faculty, students and school

board members.

"I look for different ways to connect with the schools every year," Sister Jane says. "The connection is what energizes me.

"This past year, I provided an accountability report to the different school boards. How does their school stack up to others within the district? It has provided an important measurement for the boards to see where the school excels and where it can improve. Parents have many choices for the education of their children. It is important that the Catholic schools are providing a quality education in a faith-filled environment."

Sister Jane has drawn on her experience as a classroom teacher as another way to connect with the schools.

"I'm a former math teacher," she notes. "So when I visited classrooms this past year, I brought books that incorporate math with stories. I'd read the stories to the students and then work with them on a math activity."

At faculty meetings, Sister Jane has presented information on the documents of the church that deal with Catholic education. "But more importantly," she says, "I talk to the teachers. I want to know why they do what they do. Why do they choose to teach in a Catholic school?"

Sister Jane sees making Catholic education accessible to families as an important part of her ministry.

"Two years ago, we started the [Beacon of Hope Scholarship Fund](#) to help families in need," she reports. "In the first year, we were able to provide 30 scholarships of \$1,500 for three years. This year, we awarded an additional 28 scholarships. It's a wonderful start, but it's also a drop in the bucket compared to the needs.

"I've had parents tell me that they see Catholic education as an investment that lasts a lifetime," Sister Jane says. "Because of that, they are making a lot of sacrifices to send their children to Catholic schools. We have a responsibility to ensure their children's education is top-notch."

Sister Jane was recently elected to a three-year term as vice president of CACE (Chief Administrators of Catholic Education), a department of the National Catholic Educational Association. She also went to Washington, D.C., this past spring as part of a delegation of education leaders to meet with Pope Benedict XVI. The educational leader of each diocese, the bishops and the presidents of Catholic colleges gathered to hear the pope's message on education.