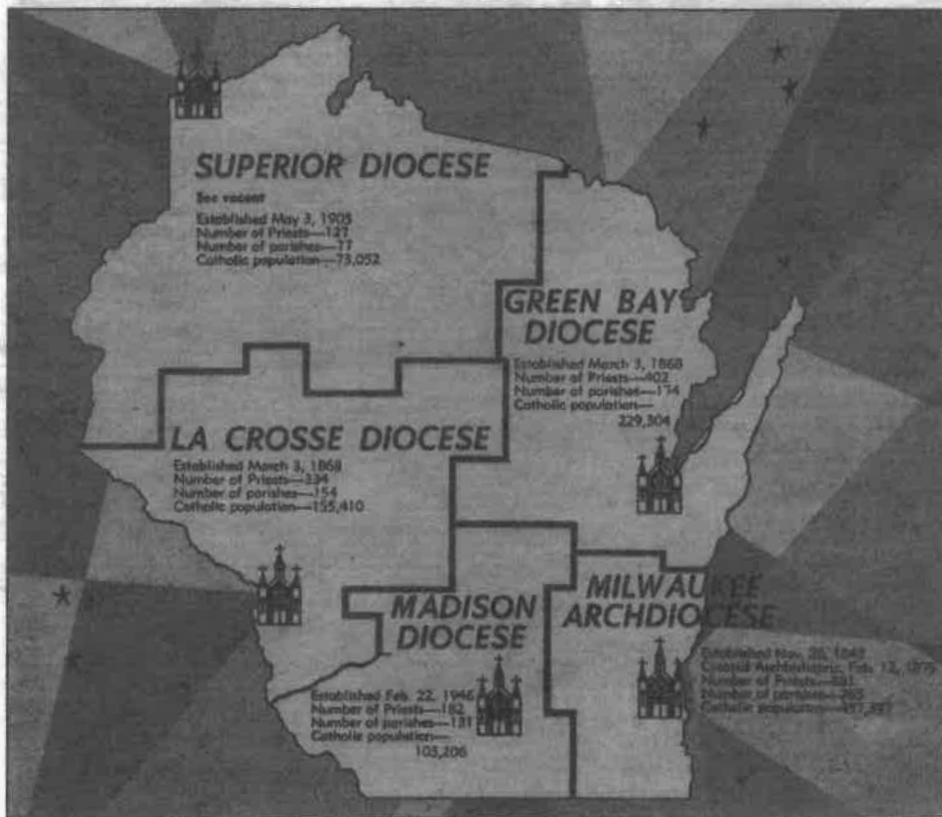


CATHOLIC HERALD



Cristo Rey Students Create Lasting 'Legacy'

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In accordance with the work-study program that is the hallmark of Cristo Rey schools all over the country, students at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School Milwaukee spend one day each week in a corporate setting, gaining real-life work experience that will prepare them for their future careers.

For the four Cristo Rey students who work at St. Camillus in Milwaukee, that work experience can include everything from sorting and delivering mail to playing board games with the residents. From 8:15 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. on their designated working day, the students wear a lot of different hats.

But recently, they were called upon to fill a new role: biographers.

This semester, the students were tasked with delving into the rich and varied pasts of St. Camillus residents to produce multimedia biographical presentations to share with the residents' families and friends as well as with St. Camillus staff. Dubbed the "Legacy Project," the experience involved one hour-long interview between the student and his or her

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designated resident each week for six weeks.

The point of the intergenerational project, said St. Camillus staff, was to build a mutually beneficial relationship between the residents of St. Camillus and the high school students — the seniors were able to share their memories, and the students were exposed to the wisdom and perspectives of their elders.

"It was really inspiring, because she had a really interesting life," said Pierce Gilliam, a junior at Cristo Rey who was paired with St. Camillus resident Mary Ellen Friel, 78. "It was just a really great experience to have."

For freshman Lizbeth Guizar, it was "an opportunity to basically know someone and talk about their life, and be connected with somebody else."

"It made me feel proud," she said of her presentation on the life of resident Patsy Schinner. "I had never done anything like this before."

For her part, Friel said that the project "look me down memory lane; I enjoyed it so much."

"I've never had anybody interview me, and Pierce seemed to ask just the right questions that opened up my life," she said. It was also an opportunity for the two to bond — they had seen one another in the halls at St. Camillus before, but never spoke. "He's a fine young man, and not only did we work with this interviewing but we got to know each other, and that was a double bonus."

Gilliam's final presentation on Friel's past, which took place April 12, included photos and stories about her life. A Wisconsin native and mother of two who enjoyed a long career as a teacher, Friel inspired great respect in her younger counterpart for the barriers she was able to break in a different era.

"She did a lot of things in that day and



Students from Cristo Rey Jesuit High School interviewed residents at St. Camillus and documented their biographies as part of a semester-long project. (Submitted photos)

age (that weren't easy or common) — she went to Marquette," he said. "She wanted to be a nun, but her opinion on that changed and she wanted to become a teacher because the teachers that she had in grade school really inspired her ... they were really caring."

He said he was also impressed by the impact that her loving marriage had on her life. "She said that she had a really good marriage and they hardly argued, anything like that. Their whole household was really caring and influential to one another."

Schinner's family connections were also a highlight of the presentation given by Guilar, which included a poster entitled "The Adventures of Patsy" that chronicled the many trips Schinner has made with her relatives. During

their interviews, said Guilar, Schinner would sometimes become emotional talking about the role her father played in her life, especially as she dealt with a difficult illness.

"(She expressed gratitude) for helping her when she most needed him," she said. "She has this sickness called Cerebral Palsy; it affects the joints and she has a disability walking, and it's pretty hard for her. Every time she had a problem, her father came and made her happy."

At Gilliam's final presentation on Friel's life, her friends and family "were in awe, because it was a lot of things they didn't know about her," he said.

"I really did want them to see what Pierce did," said Friel, who added that

her favorite part of the presentation was the photographs Gilliam included from her past. "Seeing those pictures, it just moved me; it's like entering my life through Pierce."

She said she "feels really blessed to participate in this project" and especially enjoyed discussing her childhood with Gilliam, reminiscing about roller-skating and entire summer days spent playing outdoors.

"I appreciate being able to have Pierce listen to that," she said. "I look back and I thought we were free. We could participate in really healthy experiences and we made many good friends. It was such a change from the young people today, with cell phones and everything ... they're on these phones all the time."