‘ACE’ is the place

Notre Dame teaching-service program has rewarding relationship with diocesan schools

By Cathy Harasta
The Texas Catholic

A daily routine of teaching, coaching soccer and cooking for a crowd didn’t seem to sap any pep from Maria Eugenio on a recent Friday afternoon at Bishop Dunne Catholic School.

Students from Eugenio’s science classes smiled at her as the week’s last classes ended and a lively pep rally began with a hallway parade of musicians, cheerleaders and athletes.

High energy, profound faith and a supportive school community have helped to make the learning curve a rewarding experience for Eugenio, who is teaching at Bishop Dunne as a first-year participant in the University of Notre Dame’s Alliance for Catholic Education program, known as “ACE.”

“ACE is my way of living out my mission,” said Eugenio, one of six ACE teachers in the Diocese of Dallas this school year. “It’s wonderful to see so much diversity among the students. That is a great way for them to learn about the world. I love being able to be part of their lives.”

Schools in the Diocese of Dallas long have welcomed teachers from ACE, a two-year teaching and service program that leads to a master’s degree in education from Notre Dame.

The diocese’s four ACE teachers at Bishop Dunne and two at St. Mary of Carmel Catholic School said that their schools’ nurturing environments have enhanced their growth spiritually and as educators.

Notre Dame’s ACE officials said that the program’s partnership with the diocesan schools has been a successful endeavor.

ACE will mark its 20th anniversary during the 2013-14 school year. The program collaborates with dioceses and school leaders nationwide to strengthen Catholic schools, with a special focus on under-resourced schools.

The ACE program’s three pillars—professional service, community and spirituality—motivate the young teachers and unify their purpose, they said.

“There is a big support of community at Bishop Dunne,” said Eugenio, a graduate of Canisius College, a Jesuit school in Buffalo, N.Y. “The teachers’ doors are always open.”

Eugenio said that ACE’s pillars particularly appealed to her after she took a service trip to India, where she observed the positive results at a school built by the Jesuits.

She said that she enjoys ACE’s concept of community living. ACE program coordinators arrange housing for the participants, who receive modest stipends.

The Dallas Diocese’s six ACE teachers share two apartments in University Park. They gather for prayer and meals, including frequent dinners cooked by Eugenio, whose work day seasonally includes after-school duties as an assistant soccer coach.

“I love cooking and community dinners,” said Eugenio, a native of Nassau, Bahamas. “I like to let people know that I care by feeding them.”

The ACE teachers have lessons to plan, student papers to grade and online homework assignments for their Notre Dame classes to fill their evenings and weekends.

But second-year Bishop Dunne ACE teacher Keaton Van Beveren, who is from Portland, Ore., said that ACE provides plenty of preparation and support.

“During our summers on the Notre Dame campus, we take classes and meet with our supervisors to problem-solve,” she said. “We have a lot of discussions about what’s gone on during the school year in our classrooms.”

Sister Gloria Cain, SSND, the superintendent of Catholic schools for the Diocese of Dallas, said that she is requesting to expand the ACE presence in the diocese next school year.

“It’s a wonderful program,” said Sister Gloria, who had members of ACE’s first teaching group in 1994 in her schools when she was the superintendent in Lake Charles, La. “Many who come to Dallas stay on to...”
Local administrators praise teaching partnership

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After my Dunne in 1997 after he taught in the diocesan teaching career at Bishop as they educate their patients,” said drawn to the ACE program.

“He tells us that we should look...” said Brandt, a St. Monica parishioner. “It’s a good fit for maturing Catholics in those years immediately after college graduation.”

During the school year, most ACE teachers assist in extra-curricular activities. Brandt, who majored in theatre at Notre Dame, started a drama club at his school.

“Teaching is important for doctors...” said Rawlings, a Dallasite who attended Christ the King Catholic School and Jesuit College Preparatory School before graduating Fordham College in 2011, said that the ACE program appealed to him because of his high regard for Catholic education. Rawlings, who is a theology major at Notre Dame, felt he gained a firm academic grasp of his faith but lacked the experience of living it in a work setting.

“The ACE program has got the...” said Carlin, who is from Corona, Calif. “It’s a blessing.”

“Having a very positive experience at...” said Rawlings, whose father, Mike, is the mayor of Dallas.

“The ACE program after his graduation from Notre Dame in May 2012. He is teaching sixth- through eighth-grade language arts at a school in the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

“The ACE program has got the professional development but it was its unique emphasis on spirituality and service that I just couldn’t find in any other program,” said Brandt.

“Nice! They are mission-driven, enthusiastic, positive, and immersed in that great Catholic tradition of educating the whole person for the common good, all the while integrating 21st-century skills,” Dailey said. “Our mission are a natural partnership of the highest quality of college preparatory education, while nurturing Catholic identity, stewardship, exploration, and learning.”

Christ the King Catholic School principal Patrick O’Sullivan said that he aimed for medical school while a student at Notre Dame undergraduate but felt drawn to the ACE program.

Teaching is important for doctors as they educate their patients,” said O’Sullivan, who started his Dallas diocesan teaching career at Bishop Dunne in 1997 after he taught in the ACE program in Charleston, S.C. “After my first year of teaching in ACE, I got hooked.”

O’Sullivan, who attends ACE retreats and remains active in the program, has become acquainted with the ACE teachers in the Diocese of Dallas.

“They’re passionate about education,” he said. “They’re passionate about service. They’re founded in the faith.”

ACE tends to place its teachers outside of their hometowns and dioceses.

Nicholas Brandt, a graduate of Cistercian Preparatory School and St. Patrick Catholic School, said that his Catholic education in the Dallas area prepared him superbly and helped him decide to participate in the ACE program after his graduation from Notre Dame in May 2012. He is teaching sixth- through eighth-grade language arts at a school in the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

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“In my own faith journey, I have always had more experience with the knowledge and concepts and a lot less experience with service,” said Reed, who is from Jefferson City, Missouri. “The opportunity for me has been to experience God through the work I am doing.”

For more information, please visit http://ace.nd.edu/teach.

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BEN TORRES/ Special Contributor

ACE teachers (from left) Maria Eugenio, Keaton Van Beveren, Stephen LaBrecque, Greg Schettini, Nick Reed and Blair Carlin, before eating dinner at their apartment building near SMU, on Nov. 1, 2012 in University Park.

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