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Among the Nation's Elite

Holy Cross Academy in Oneida enjoys spotlight of success

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Staff writer

Nettie Periard, of Morrisville, said she has known for several years that Holy Cross Academy is a good school. It's exactly what she wanted for her three sons, she said.

So the 7-year-old school's ranking as one of the top 50 Catholic high schools in the nation, she said, was pleasing, but not surprising.

"It makes me feel good that they were recognized for the great job they do," she said. "I've been pleased with the academics. The teachers do a good job. I really wanted a Catholic school that . . . taught the real message of Jesus, the message of love and respecting others."

Holy Cross in Oneida was named last week as one of the best Catholic schools in the United States, according to the first Catholic High School Honor Roll. The school was cited for overall excellence, as well as its strong Catholic identity and civic education. It is one of five schools on the list not affiliated with a diocese.

The honor roll is the culmination of about a year of research by the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, an international research and educational organization based in Michigan. All Catholic schools serving grades nine to 12 in the nation were invited in the spring to apply for inclusion, and about 250 completed the three necessary surveys.

The list equally considers the schools' responses in three categories: academics, Catholic identity and civic education.

Bishop Ludden Junior-Senior High School in Geddes also made the Top 50 list and was cited for its civic education. All Hallows High School in the Bronx and Our Lady of Mercy Academy in Syosset, Nassau County, round out New York state's contributions to the Top 50 list.

This is the first time a list like this has been compiled, said Kevin Schmiesing, project director. He said the only "good information" out now comparing Catholic schools comes through word of mouth and doing your own research.

"There are no organizations or programs like this, that specifically assessed Catholic schools in this way," he said. "There are other similar programs, but they don't address Catholic identity and civic education, which we think are very important."

Schmiesing said the Acton Institute plans to release an honor roll list each fall.

Margaret Miller, immediate past principal of Holy Cross Academy and a current religion teacher, said earning a place among the Top 50 shows the school is well on its way to accomplishing its mission.

"We don't have many graduates yet, which, I think, is part of why we're not on the academics list," she said. "But I'm sure we will be in a few years."

The school opened in 1997 with just four students. There are now 64 students in grades seven through 12, said Principal Kelley Harrigan.

Harrigan said the recognition is especially helpful because the school is so young and still relatively small.

"It's great that people are starting to notice us," she said. "It will help our school grow."

She said the school hopes to improve its facilities next summer by expanding the library and science wing and adding a gymnasium.

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