

MSJ diversity press release

For immediate release
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Mount St. Joseph Academy an increasingly diverse community

RUTLAND-- Mount St. Joseph Academy in Rutland was once a Catholic high school with a homogenous student body: local Catholics.

Although Catholics are still in the majority, Buddhists, Muslims, Protestants and those who have no religious affiliation are making MSJ their school of choice. They come not only from Rutland but from throughout Rutland county and from as far away as New York City, Haiti, China, Korea and Honduras.

“These kids are very accepting of each other,” said Principal Sarah Fortier.

There is a growing multi-cultural community at the high school, which this year enrolls 85 students.

They all take the same required Catholic religion classes, are schooled in Catholic morality and attend Mass. “It’s neat to see the Catholic religion spread,” Fortier said. “They respect it, and we respect their religion.... We are all different but accepting of each other.”

Fortier likes the diversity. Students of different religious affiliations and those from outside Rutland County “bring a different flavor” to the school environment, she said. “They teach others about their culture. It’s fun.”

She speaks about the diversity with enthusiasm because she finds it enriching not just for herself but also for the community.

Cedric Lyonel Andre, a senior from Haiti, likes attending school at MSJ. “I find the people here very welcoming,” he said. “I feel there is no one I can’t interact with or talk to.”

A young man of color, he said students at the school are motivated to be themselves and accepted for who they are. “It matters how you treat people and if you respect yourself and other people.”

Sophomore Fatima Hussnane, a Muslim born in the United States, agreed that the school is a welcoming place. "I'm not afraid to talk to people, even juniors and seniors," she said.

In previous schools she had to deal with other students' comments like "Your Dad is a terrorist" or "How many hand grenades do you have in your bag?"

At MSJ, "it's a relief" because no one makes such comments, she said. "It's human nature to spot the differences in people...but at MSJ there is a certain standard that is not necessarily spoken, but the aura the school is giving off is you know what you should and shouldn't do."

"We all assimilate with each other," she added.

Senior Jenna Eaton said students like Fatima help others learn about different religions so they can appreciate one another's faith. "At MSJ, we talk about and embrace the differences."

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