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## 75th Pueri Cantores celebration features School of Saint Elizabeth's liturgical choir

By Heather Angelastro  
Special Contributor

Beneath the beautiful vaulted ceilings and stained-glass windows of Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church, 14 students from the School of Saint Elizabeth's liturgical choir joyfully raised their voices in harmony with a dozen other schools to celebrate the 75th anniversary of *Pueri Cantores* in Morristown.

The event, led by Diocese of Paterson Bishop Kevin J. Sweeney, drew hundreds of attendees last month who packed the pews. *Pueri Cantores*, which translates to "singing children" in Latin, was founded in France in 1907 and became recognized by the Vatican in 1953.

Today, it includes national federations in 43 countries and approximately 70,000 young singers worldwide. According to the official American Federation of *Pueri Cantores* website, its mission is to "evangelize and catechize choristers through the medium of sacred music, aiding them in growing in their faith and rooting them ever deeper in the Church."

It's an event that the School of Saint Elizabeth liturgical choir, led by Music Director Bill Alford, has participated in for the past four years and for good reason. "First of all, it is an opportunity for them to see that there are other people like them in other schools doing what they are doing," Alford explained.

"Second, I think it is an affirmation of their devotion to music and the liturgy that they have become really passionate

about. *Pueri Cantores* also offers a level of musical accomplishment that would be hard to create in an individual parish like ours. So, it's their parish experience but amplified and elevated," he said.

School of Saint Elizabeth choir students eagerly look forward to *Pueri Cantores* every year. Sixth-grade student Klari points out, "It is important to me because we are a Catholic school and we want to show our faith by doing what we love by singing and making new friends."

Bella, an eighth-grade student, echoes similar sentiments. "It is such a great opportunity not only to be with your choir and all of your friends, but you get to meet other people and have a really cool experience. Not only do you improve vocally, but it is also a really great spiritual opportunity," she said.

In the weeks leading up to the festival, choir students from fourth through eighth grade rehearse at their home schools, preparing the *Pueri Cantores* music program, which includes Gregorian chants, traditional hymns, and newly composed anthems. On the day of the event, students have three hours to rehearse together with the other participating school choirs under the direction of a guest conductor.

This year, *Pueri Cantores* welcomed conductor Dr. Alfred Calabrese, who added to Alford's excitement. "Dr. Alfred Calabrese is a very well-known musician not only in the U.S. in Catholic church music and in college and university music, but is also internationally

recognized," Alford revealed.

"He has very high standards for how he wants them to sing and how they express themselves in the liturgy, all the way down to instructing them how to greet each other at the Passing of the Peace."

Reflecting on the experience, eighth-grader Victoria shared, "It's definitely one of the most memorable events because it brings our choir out of our comfort zone. It brings us to a new church with new music. At this point, it is almost like a Saint E's choir tradition, and I think it also brings us closer as a choir."

Alford is always proud of his highly-accomplished choir, but the way his students demonstrate their musical talent and dedication at the Vatican-approved *Pueri Cantores* truly touches his heart.

"It's a big deal. And it's something that helps you feel connected not only in the Tri-State area, but globally to people who are doing the same thing," he concluded.

"I'm going to tear up, but the number of times people said to me, 'You should be so proud of your kids,' is just a testament to their upbringing, their connection to each other, their love of the school, and their understanding of their faith, because it just seems effortless to them. Whenever a question was asked by the conductor, our kids' hands went up first. It's a long day, and their ability to stay focused, attentive, and constantly participating was really magical," he said.

Heather Angelastro is a member of the School of St. Elizabeth, Bernardsville, marketing staff. — Maria Kordell photo

## Maeve O'Connor of Somerset selected to attend New York Times Summer Academy

Mount Saint Mary Academy, Watchung, sophomore, Maeve O'Connor '28, has been selected to attend the New York Times Summer Academy in N.Y.C. from July 5 -17.



Judith Furnari, English teacher, shared, "Maeve will hone her craft in writing arts reviews and cultural features, interview artists, and performers, and examine how culture is covered in the media. She'll also attend cultural events across the city and report on them with guidance from professional journalists. Maeve's curiosity, sharp eye, and love of storytelling make this an exciting next step in her journalism journey. The Mount Saint Mary community proudly celebrates her achievement and wishes her a summer full of great stories."

Maeve, who selected the "Arts and Culture" reporting track, said, "I'm especially interested in how journalism can explore literature, film, and other forms

of storytelling while maintaining strong reporting and interview techniques."

"I have been interested in writing for many years, but journalism is more of a recent pursuit. A career in journalism would be exciting, and I'm definitely viewing it as a possibility for the future," said Maeve. "While I attend the New York Times Summer Academy, I hope to gain polished pieces for my portfolio, develop stronger interview strategies, and learn ways to incorporate journalism more actively into my everyday life."

At Mount Saint Mary Academy, Maeve is responsible for writing a new column in the *Peeks* newspaper which is dedicated to book recommendations. She has also written articles covering school events and activities. Her work is also published in several small literary magazines, and she has recently begun exploring freelance opportunities.

When asked about a specific journalist that she looks up to, Maeve responded, "I admire journalists like Christiane Amanpour for her intentional reporting. Anyone willing to put themselves into dangerous situations to shed light on stories often kept in the dark is incredibly admirable to me."

## Annika Jeena, Mount Saint Mary Academy sophomore, selected to attend national FBLA Competition in June

Annika Jeena, a sophomore at Mount Saint Mary Academy in Watchung, represented the Mount with incredible skill at the New Jersey FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America) State Leadership Conference (SLC) which took place from March 9 to 11. Her hard work in marketing, customer service, and retail strategy truly paid off, and we couldn't be prouder of her dedication.

"FBLA has given me an incredible

opportunity to grow by strengthening my confidence and leadership skills," said Annika, a resident of Edison. "This achievement has inspired me to continue exploring business and pursuing future opportunities in the field."

The next stop for Annika is San Antonio, Texas, where she will participate in the National Competition in June! We wish Annika the best of luck as she takes her talents to the national stage.