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New Chinese Catholic school opens in San Francisco

Monica Clark | May. 4, 2011

SAN FRANCISCO -- While urban Catholic schools across the country are closing or consolidating, a new state-of-the art elementary school opened yesterday (May 2) in San Francisco?s Chinatown.

One hundred students of St. Mary?s School and Chinese Catholic Center, led by their famed St. Mary?s Drum and Bell Corps, marched from their parish church to their new school, located next to the Hilton Hotel and adjacent to a 15-story low-income housing tower also built by the parish.

San Francisco?s Auxiliary Bishop Robert McElroy was there to meet them and bless the nine classrooms, which will have student and teacher computers and are wired for other high-tech capabilities.

The school has been at a temporary site since 1994 when the original 80-year-old buildings were determined to need high-cost renovations for earthquake safety. Instead of retrofitting the old buildings, the community, under the leadership of Paulist Father Daniel McCotter, raised funds for a new six-level school that includes a rooftop playground and a community center.

The $28 million school and senior housing occupy the space where the International Hotel stood until the 1970s when it was razed as part of a San Francisco redevelopment plan that was never fulfilled. The property was purchased by the San Francisco Archdiocese with funds from HUD and the Mayor?s Office of Housing.

Occupants of the senior housing will participate in intergenerational activities with the students.

The school offers Chinese language/Mandarin education as part of its curriculum, as well as after-school classes and sports activities.

Nancy Fiebelkorn, principal, hopes the school?s location near the Financial District will attract new students whose parents work in the area and want their children to have a Catholic education while learning Mandarin, a key language for many of today?s international business transactions.

[Monica Clark is a West Coast contributor to *NCR*.]

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