

Mount de Sales Academy named a top 50 high school

October 28, 2004

By CHRISTOPHER GAUL
Senior staff correspondent

Mount de Sales Academy in Catonsville has been named one of the nation's top 50 Catholic high schools by the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, an international research and educational organization.

The 152-year-old all-girls school run by the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia, based in Nashville, Tenn., was the only Catholic secondary school in Maryland selected by the Acton Institute which premiered its "Catholic High School Honor Roll" this year. The institute's advisory board is made up of presidents and faculty members of some of the country's most prestigious Catholic colleges, including The Catholic University of America and the University of Notre Dame.

The awards recognized 50 Catholic high schools that best demonstrated commitment to academic excellence, Catholic identity and civic education. The top 50 were chosen from a total of 250 that responded to the Acton Institute's survey.

"It reflects the diversity of Catholicism in the United States. What's common to all of the schools is outstanding commitment to the educational mission of the church."

Calling Mount de Sales, "a community of faith and academic excellence," the school's headmistress, Sister Elizabeth Anne Allen O.P., said she, the faculty, staff and students, were "honored and absolutely delighted" to receive the honor.

"The three criteria on which this particular honor was based are our strong points; Catholic identity, academics and civic education," Sister Elizabeth Anne said.

Father Michael Roach, president of Mount de Sales' board of trustees, pastor of St. Bartholomew, Manchester, and church history professor at Mount St. Mary's Seminary, Emmitsburg, attributed much of the recent success of the school to the "inspired, motivational and reverent presence" of the Dominican Sisters who wear the traditional long, white habits of their 144-year-old congregation and long, 15-decade rosaries hanging from their belts.

"Our sense of community at Mount de Sales flows out of the Eucharist and from the sacraments," said Sister Elizabeth Anne.

The headmistress also noted her students are active in outreach projects to the community, especially to the homeless, while participating in civic projects such as the legislative page program in the state capital.

"It comes from teaching the whole thing," the headmistress said, "it comes from Catholic identity. We provide for the whole child."

Repeating an observation by St. Clement of Alexandria, Father Roach said that "the primary function of Christian education is to teach students their need for salvation, their need for redemption. The secondary purpose is to teach them how to find that redemption."

That, Father Roach said, is what Mount de Sales does.