

High School News

Immaculate goes solar

By ALEXANDRIA FAIZ

Anthony Rizzo, Jr., calls Immaculate High School in Danbury a “hidden jewel.” Over the summer, he helped to change that. Now any aerial photograph

save Immaculate 20 percent annually in energy costs. Even with a steadily increasing enrollment and generous contributions from the Immaculate community, raising that amount of money required finding another financial

a particular building the most energy can quickly overwhelm anyone. Even finding the right professional to call could mean hours of research.

The wrong approach is to replace a single fixture without studying the whole energy flow. “A building really needs to be thermally wrapped,” advises Rapice.

To find the right approach, Catholic parishes and schools simply need to contact Rapice.

A Connecticut licensed architect and building official, he arranges free comprehensive energy audits. A team of professionals covering all of the facets of energy conservation are offering their expertise on a pro-bono basis. These audits can take half a day or a few days, but in the end, a thorough outline of the options available is laid bare.

Rapice’s contacts can also assist in applying for various public programs like C-PACE. Thus far, his office has performed over 30 energy audits. His deep experience gives access to some insider tips. Solar panel installations, for instance, are often based on a twenty-year lease, which costs the parish or school very little.

However, the roof they’re being placed on needs to last that long. So a roof replacement may be needed, which was the case for Immaculate High School. Also, after looking at the whole building and how it is being used, some upgrades may be more useful—and cost less—than others. “Switching to LED lighting and upgrading HVAC controls may offer a far better return than installing low-flush toilets or green roofs,” he says.

This energy-efficiency service formally started just over a year ago, one of the outcomes of the Diocesan Synod. However, Catholic dioceses have been shining a light on ways to better manage their buildings well before Pope Francis’s 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si’*. Between 1989 and 1994, dioceses from Baltimore, the District of Columbia, Virginia, and Pennsylvania gathered their facility managers together, an effort that grew into the annual, and national, Conference for Catholic Facility Management or CCFM.

“Baltimore and Chicago have really taken the lead in this area,” said Rapice in a recent interview. “We’re looking to do many more

clean energy and renewable energy projects throughout the Bridgeport Diocese.” He’s currently overseeing projects at St. Joseph High School in Trumbull and St. Bridget of Ireland Parish in Stamford, along with others.

The Pope advised in his encyclical: “Environmental impact assessment should not come after the drawing up of a business proposition or the proposal of a particular policy, plan or program. It should be part of the process from the beginning, and be carried out in a way which is interdisciplinary, transparent and free of all economic or political pressure.”

Anthony Rizzo from Immaculate agrees. He detailed how the high school’s renovation has been an ongoing focus area for the board for many years, from converting the library into a learning commons, redoing the gymnasium, and expanding the chapel to increasing security measures. Saving dollars on the next energy bill wasn’t the main reason to put cranes on the roof this summer. “Everything we do is for the students,” Rizzo emphasized. “If something helps them learn or perform better, that becomes a priority.”



GLEAMING NEW SOLAR PANELS top the roof of Immaculate High School in Danbury. The project, now complete, should save Immaculate 20 percent annually in energy costs.

of the school shows gleaming new solar panels on the roof—topping off numerous other energy efficiency upgrades completed in August.

Rizzo, serving as chair of the school’s advisory board, worked closely with Richard Rapice, project manager in the Diocese of Bridgeport Real Estate Office, and fellow Immaculate board members, Gerry Hatcher and David Cappiello, to replace the 50-year-old roof and the boiler as well as every single light bulb. The renovation also gave the students a new energy-efficient physics laboratory.

The complete project cost \$700,000, but it’s projected to

partner. That role was filled by the Connecticut Green Bank, which runs the Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy program, commonly known as C-PACE. C-PACE enables property owners to gradually pay for certain energy-related improvements with an additional charge on their property tax bills. It was this program, according to Rizzo, that made the major renovations at Immaculate possible.

Under the direction of Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, all parishes and schools are undergoing self-assessments, which often include facility reviews. Choosing the correct types of devices and building materials that can save