

INSTITUTE

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Brother John serves as a consultant to the six archdiocesan central schools as well as to Pope John Paul II High School in Slidell. He first pitched the idea of the summer institute in a talk to administrators at the Catholic Administrators Conference in Bay St. Louis last December, and he was thrilled with the first-year response.

"We were thinking if we just got 60 people to come we would break even, but the archdiocese kept saying we'll have 100, and it kept growing." Brother John said.

The final count was 125, including 115 from the archdiocese. The others represented Catholic school systems in Lafayette and Shreveport, La., and in Vicksburg, Jackson and Hattiesburg, Miss. About two-thirds of the participants were principals or presidents, and the other third were development directors, department heads and business office personnel.

Brother John said the institute's curriculum was generic in the sense that many challenges experienced in New Orleans – such as making the transition from religious to lay staffs, keeping schools economically viable and strengthening Catholic identity – are common to Catholic schools across the country.

Katrina's challenges

But the faculty also knew that Katrina had posed unique experiences for the school in New Orleans that had to be addressed.

"The Archdiocese of New Orleans has been in a rebuilding mode and has done a lot of nuts-and-bolts stuff, but the time to reflect on why you do what you do is necessarily very limited," Brother John said. "Here they have 3 1/2 days with their peers and with really good practitioners to reflect on those deeper questions. This is still an ongoing recovery. People are still healing."

Brother John said he tried to give the presenters an idea of what had happened in New Orleans and how that

might affect what they would teach. It took about a day for the New Orleans participants to really open up about their Katrina experiences.

"They began to talk about the impact of Katrina because it profoundly changed their schools," Brother John said. "If you take a school of 300 kids and all of a sudden it becomes 400 kids, you have to hire new faculty or double up in the classroom. You

have a whole bunch of new parents.

"And then you have the central schools, which have different kids in different buildings with different principals. That's enormous change. Plus, even the teachers and the principals lost their houses, and they had to go in every day and heal everybody else up. We tried to minister to that, not just by patting people on the back

but by giving them a very nice venue and lovely meals, and by acknowledging that that went on. Nobody here has used Katrina as an excuse, and I'm amazed by that."

Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes and Jesuit Father Kevin Wildes, Loyola's president, also welcomed the participants to the conference. Brother John said he hoped the conference would identify up-and-coming school lead-

ers and give them tools to develop their strengths. Since participants concentrated on one track, they could come for the next several years and take the other strands.

"What we're hoping is that we have future leaders with potential," Brother John said. "We hope principals can bring people along who will eventually replace them. You have to do that. We're also hop-

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