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## St. Joseph Regional High School wins for 'Les Miz' production chosen for its faith-based message

Jenny Hubert • June 24, 2024

St. Joseph Regional High School for its production of "Les Misérables: School Edition" has won Outstanding Overall Production at the 2024 Metro Awards held at the Performing Arts Center at Purchase College on June 10. Academy of the Holy Angels, nominated for Outstanding Overall Production for its production of "Urinetown," took home three awards.

In addition, Immaculate Heart Academy (IHA) garnered one award for "Mamma Mia!" Don Bosco Prep was nominated for five awards for "Guys and Dolls."

On this night recognizing exceptional high school theater productions, it was clear the biggest takeaway for students and staff, whether nominated or not, was the strong community and life skills they've developed through theater.

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"We at St. Joe's are truly blessed," said John Asselta, the producer of "Les Misérables: School Edition," while accepting the award for Outstanding Overall Production.

Known as the Tonys for high school theater, the Metro Awards have celebrated high school talent across Rockland, Westchester, Putnam, and Bergen counties for 25 years. Sixty-three schools submitted their productions to Nyack's Helen Hayes Youth Theatre, which then nominated the productions based on the critics' reviews of their shows.

Winning the night's big award meant everything to St. Joseph's Liam Fahey, who was nominated for Outstanding Performance in a Leading Male-identified Role as Jean Valjean. He pushed for a production of "Les Misérables" his whole high school career. "We pushed for [it] because of its involvement in the faith. The [meaning] is 'To love another person is to see the face of God.' All of our messaging has come through," said Fahey.

Asselta, director of performing arts at St. Joseph, attributes the success of their program to hosting workshops throughout the year with music and choreography from their upcoming shows. That way, the students are already familiar with the process and are determined to create strong productions.

St. Joseph also won Outstanding Achievement in Hair and Makeup Design (Derek Alfano and Chelsey Cavalcante), Outstanding Performance in a Supporting Male-identified Role (Derek Bedell/Marius), and Outstanding Achievement in Music Direction (Ed Ginter). AHA ("Urinetown") earned Outstanding Performance in a Supporting Female-identified role (Eva Zazzali/Little Sally), Outstanding Acting Performance by a Male-identifying Performer (Joe Lizzi/ Officer Lockstock), and Outstanding Achievement in Direction (Katie Collins). IHA ("Mamma Mia!") won Outstanding Achievement in Lighting Design (Nikki Belenski).

Many of the same students and staff were also nominated for the 2024 Paper Mill Rising Star Awards (full list of nominations at the bottom), which recognizes the accomplishments of high school theater productions in New Jersey. AHA took home three awards: Outstanding Overall Production, Outstanding Featured Ensemble Group, and Outstanding Direction under Katie Collins.

The seven high schools nominated for Outstanding Overall Production, including AHA and St. Joseph, performed musical numbers from their respective shows throughout the ceremony. Between performances, hosts and Broadway stars JJ Niemann and Amber Ardolino gave out awards in 36 categories over the three-hour, sold-out ceremony. Fahey and IHA's Madeline Heinimann who played Donna Sheridan in "Mamma Mia!", both nominated for Outstanding Performance in Leading Male/Female-identified Role, also performed in medleys with their respective nominees.



*(From left to right) Don Bosco students Anthony Proia (nominee), Zachary Emerson, and Salvatore Noble (nominee) in their production of "Guys and Dolls." (Brooke Walters)*

## recent border immersion trip

Maria Margiotta January 22, 2025

Father Joseph D'Amico, pastor of Saint Anastasia Church in Teaneck, recently experienced a transformative Advent journey related to the ongoing immigration crisis.

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## Hoopfest raises \$111K for SFIC while showcasing student athletes

Sean Quinn January 21, 2025

More than 530 spectators enjoyed three fast-paced games featuring some of New Jersey's most talented high school basketball players.

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## MLK challenges all to 'live out' solidarity, human dignity

OSV News January 20, 2025

The words of slain civil rights leader Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. continue to challenge all "to live out the principle of solidarity

*A scene from AHA's production of "Urinetown." (AHA)*

"I am so thankful for the honor of being nominated for a Metro award!" said Heinemann.

"Without the incredible support from my family, friends, and school community, I would have never been able to receive this recognition."

Toward the end of the show, AHA's Katie Collins, the performing arts department chair, gave a tearful speech, as "Urinetown" was her last production as director. "This is an amazing way to say goodbye," said Collins.

One of Collins' students, Eva Zazzali, said to Collins, "I really hope we make you proud," while accepting her award.

Of all the productions, St. Joseph received the most nominations at 13. AHA received nine nominations, and IHA received six. Don Bosco didn't go home with any awards from their five nominations but being part of the production for "Guys and Dolls" meant a lot to the students and staff.

Brooke Walters, the theater program director at Don Bosco, admired how close the students are in her program. "I am always blown away by how supportive and giving my students are, and now we celebrate that, which is awesome," said Walters.

"Being part of a greater whole is something that's very fulfilling," said Salvatore Noble, nominated for Outstanding Performance in a Featured Role as Nicely-Nicely for Don Bosco. "Theater, by nature, is not an individual thing. 'Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat' would not be what it is without other people."

Elizabeth Scully, the coordinator for performing arts at IHA, said she "knows how much the students care for each other, and being up on that stage, they have their bonds with friends that became family."

Asselta said he and his students from the theater program would support those who performed at other schools within the Archdiocese and at theater camps. This support was evident when St. Joseph's Lizzi accepted his award. Lizzi said of his fellow nominee, Jack Laux, "I look up to you every day."

and human dignity," said the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic bishops.

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**From the archives:  
Martin Luther King  
Jr. Day**

Archdiocese of Newark

Archives January 20, 2025

The Black Coordinating Council of the Archdiocese of Newark presented the 1986 Dr. Martin Luther King Awards to the 10 Black bishops of the United States during a Mass honoring Dr. King.

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**Week of Prayer for  
Christian Unity to  
focus on Creed**

OSV News January 17,  
2025

As Christian churches prepare to mark the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity will focus on affirming the Nicene Creed and its expression of the faith Christians share.

*Immaculate Heart Academy (IHA) earned one for "Mamma Mia!" (IHA)*

St Joseph's Derek Bedell spoke to the production team while accepting his award. "Your talent, hard work, and unwavering support have been the driving force of our production's success."

Many nominees recently graduated and are about to start their next adventure. Whether Asselta's students pursue theater, he is confident his students will carry everything they've learned from running these productions.

"Theater skills are skills for life. Some will do this professionally, but the majority of our people don't go to Broadway. But we are able to develop more articulate doctors, more convincing lawyers, and more successful salespeople," said Asselta.

St. Joseph's Jack Laux, nominated for Outstanding Performance in a Supporting Male-identified Role as Caldwell B. Cladwell will be pursuing mechanical engineering at the University of Florida, hoping to become a Disney Imagineer. But he knows his involvement in creative entertainment will help him succeed. "It helped me be in an environment where I had to work collaboratively toward a common goal. I was never involved with something like that before, so it helped my teamwork skills," said Laux.

Walters believes that rehearsing and performing as characters helps the students understand themselves. "Empathy is part of our honor code, and empathizing with characters helps them learn about themselves. They walk away with a better sense of who they are and are proud," said Walters.

Scully said, "Whether they decide to continue on with theater, they know how to build relationships and develop a project together. The stage is their home, and they'll always have that, even after they leave IHA."

Spring theater productions are over at these Archdiocese schools, but the memories the students have made will last their lifetimes.

"People may forget what award you won, but they won't forget how that show made them feel and how it inspired them," said Walters.

*Featured image: St. Joseph performs a rendition of "One Day More" at the 2024 Metros. (R.J. Buscher)*

## **2024 Metro Award Nominations**

### **Overall Production of a Musical**

Academy of the Holy Angels – Urinetown

St. Joseph Regional High School – Les Misérables: School Edition

### **Outstanding Performance in Leading Female-Identified Role**

Immaculate Heart Academy – Madeline Heinimann (Donna Sheridan / Mamma Mia!)

### **Outstanding Performance in a Leading Male-Identified Role**

St. Joseph Regional High School – Liam Fahey (Jean Valjean / Les Misérables: School Edition)

### **Outstanding Performance in a Supporting Female-Identified Role**

Academy of the Holy Angels – Eva Zazzali (Little Sally / Urinetown)

St. Joseph Regional High School – Emily Kenny (Fantine / Les Misérables: School Edition)

**Outstanding Performance in a Supporting Male-Identified Role**

Academy of the Holy Angels – Jack Laux (Caldwell B. Cladwell / Urinetown)

St. Joseph Regional High School – Derek Bedell (Marius / Les Misérables: School Edition)

**Outstanding Performance in a Featured Role**

Academy of the Holy Angels – James Coleman (Hot Blades Harry / Urinetown)

Don Bosco Prep – Salvatore Noble (Nicely-Nicely Johnson / Guys and Dolls)

**Outstanding Performance by a Chorus**

Academy of the Holy Angels – Urinetown

St. Joseph Regional High School – Les Misérables: School Edition

**Outstanding Achievement in Direction**

Academy of the Holy Angels – Katie Collins (Urinetown)

St. Joseph Regional High School – Marc David Wright (Les Misérables: School Edition)

**Outstanding Achievement in Music Direction**

Academy of the Holy Angels – George Croom (Urinetown)

St. Joseph Regional High School – Ed Ginter (Les Misérables: School Edition)

**Outstanding Achievement in Scenic Design**

Don Bosco Prep – Darren Rosen (Guys and Dolls)

Immaculate Heart Academy – Vincent Gunn (Mamma Mia!)

St. Joseph Regional High School – Vincent Gunn (Les Misérables: School Edition)

**Outstanding Achievement in Lighting Design**

Immaculate Heart Academy – Nikki Belenski (Mamma Mia!)

St. Joseph Regional High School – Asa Lipton (Les Misérables: School Edition)

**Outstanding Achievement in Hair and Makeup Design**

Immaculate Heart Academy – Derek Alfano (Mamma Mia!)

St. Joseph Regional High School – Derek Alfano and Chelsey Cavalcante (Les Misérables: School Edition)

**Outstanding Performance by a Stage Crew**

Don Bosco Prep – Guys and Dolls

**Outstanding Achievement in Lobby Display**

Don Bosco Prep – Sheri Dennehy (Guys and Dolls)

St. Joseph Regional High School – Kim Buscher (Les Misérables: School Edition)

**Outstanding Performance of a Duet**

Immaculate Heart Academy – Maeve Murray as “Rosie Mulligan” and RJ Buscher as “Bill Austin”

(“Take a Chance on Me” / Mamma Mia!)

**Outstanding Vocal Performance by a Female-Identifying Performer**

Immaculate Heart Academy – Katherine Ryan (Tanya Cresham-Leigh / Mamma Mia!)

St. Joseph Regional High School – Lily Yezdanian (Cosette / Les Misérables: School Edition)

**Outstanding Acting Performance by a Female-Identifying Performer**

Academy of the Holy Angels – Lilianna Garber (Hope Cladwell / Urinetown)

**Outstanding Acting Performance by a Male-Identifying Performer**

Academy of the Holy Angels – Joe Lizzi (Officer Lockstock / Urinetown)

Don Bosco Prep – Anthony Proia (Nathan Detroit / Guys and Dolls)

**Outstanding Performance by a Child Performer**

St. Joseph Regional High School – Alexander Suarez-Inclan (Gavroche / Les Misérables: School Edition)

**2024 Paper Mill Rising Star Awards**

OUTSTANDING OVERALL PRODUCTION OF A MUSICAL

Academy of the Holy Angels—URINETOWN

St. Joseph Reg. HS—LES MISÉRABLES: SCHOOL EDITION

OUTSTANDING PERFORMER IN A FEMALE-IDENTIFIED LEADING ROLE

St. Peter’s Prep—HOW TO SUCCEED—Gabby Beredo as “Rosemary Pilkington”

OUTSTANDING PERFORMER IN A MALE-IDENTIFIED LEADING ROLE

St. Joseph Reg. HS—LES MISÉRABLES: SCHOOL ED—Jack Laux as “Javert” and Liam Fahey as “Jean Valjean”

Honorable Mention: Mt. St. Dominic Academy—ANASTASIA—Bridget Castano as “Dmitry”

OUTSTANDING PERFORMER IN A FEMALE-IDENTIFIED SUPPORTING ROLE

St. Joseph Reg. HS—LES MISÉRABLES: SCHOOL ED—Kate Ryan as “Cosette” and Maddie Heiniman as “Fantine”

Honorable Mentions: Academy of the Holy Angels—URINETOWN—Ellie Finnegan as “Penelope Pennywise”; St. Joseph Reg. HS —LES MISÉRABLES: SCHOOL ED—Marlie J. McKenzie as “Eponine”

OUTSTANDING PERFORMER IN A MALE-IDENTIFIED SUPPORTING ROLE

St. Joseph Reg. HS—LES MISÉRABLES: SCHOOL ED—Derek Bedell as “Marius”

OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE IN A FEATURED ROLE

Academy of the Holy Angels—URINETOWN—James Coleman as “Hot Blades Harry” and Valentina Gonzalez as “Becky Two Shoes”

OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE BY A FEATURED ENSEMBLE GROUP

Academy of the Holy Angels—URINETOWN—“The Rebel Poor”

OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCE BY A CHORUS

Academy of the Holy Angels—URINETOWN

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT BY A TEACHER OR OUTSIDE DIRECTOR

Academy of the Holy Angels—URINETOWN—Katie Collins

OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN MUSIC DIRECTION

Academy of the Holy Angels—URINETOWN—George Croom

Immaculate Heart Academy—MAMMA MIA!—Edward Ginter

OUTSTANDING SCENIC ACHIEVEMENT

St. Joseph Reg. HS—LES MISÉRABLES: SCHOOL ED—Vincent Gunn

OUTSTANDING LIGHTING ACHIEVEMENT

Immaculate Heart Academy—MAMMA MIA—Nikki Belenski

St. Joseph Reg. HS—LES MISÉRABLES: SCHOOL ED—Asa Lipton, Michael Yesenosky

OUTSTANDING COSTUMING ACHIEVEMENT

Academy of the Holy Angels—URINETOWN—Axcel Portillo

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## Faithful stand together to support victims and survivors of abuse (Child Abuse Prevention Month) - Jersey Catholic

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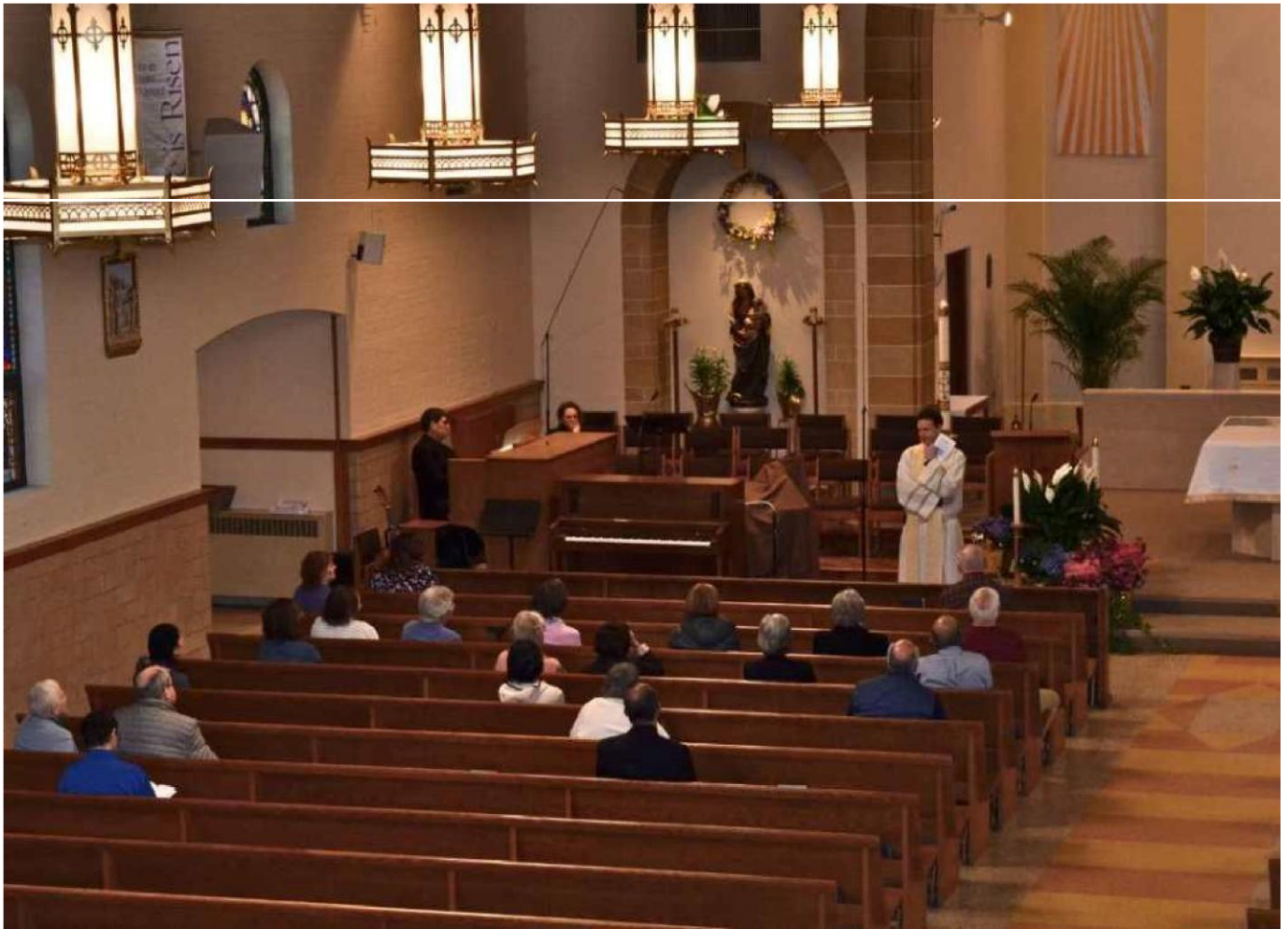
Churchgoers from near and far gathered to pray for victims and survivors of abuse at the Hope and Healing Prayer Service at St. Joseph's Church in Oradell on April 27. Hosted by parish administrator Father Christian Scalo, in conjunction with the Legion of Mary and the Department for the Protection of the Faithful, the service furthered the Archdiocese of Newark's pledge to support and protect vulnerable children and adults.

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Following an opening hymn and a Scripture reading by Deacon George Montalvo, Director of Religious Education at St. Joseph's, Father Scalo reflected on how his experience with childhood bullying is only one type of abuse, and with the support of God and the community we are never alone.

*"Healing is possible,"* Father Scalo said.





*The faithful joined a service for hope and healing on Saturday, April 27.  
(Jenny Hubert)*

The faithful then recited the Prayer of St. Francis and participated in a decade of the rosary. In between each prayer to Mary, members of the Legion of Mary cited Scripture, meditating on verses such as “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

Karen Clark, Director of the Department for the Protection of the Faithful, led the Litany for Healing. Kassie Pierinelli, Principal of St. Joseph’s School, then recited the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Prayer for Healing Victims of Abuse. The event concluded with remarks from Gina Criscuolo, LCSW, the Coordinator Officer for the Office of Accompaniment, about the Archdiocese’s consistent efforts to prevent abuse and provide resources for victims and survivors.

“I accompany survivors in any way that’s most helpful,” Criscuolo said, describing her role as a licensed clinical social worker and an employee of the archdiocese, “whether it’s to connect them with therapy or with a priest for spiritual advice.”

The Hope and Healing Prayer Service comes at the end of Child Abuse Prevention Month, a nationally recognized effort to stop abuse and increase the support of survivors. But Clark and Criscuolo both agree that services like these are not just for April. The archdiocese will continue to support pinwheel gardens across Catholic school campuses and offer online resources like the virtual rosary for healing, according to Clark and Criscuolo.



*Attendees took home information and the blue pinwheels, which is the symbol of Child Abuse Prevention Month. (Jenny Hubert)*

Supporting the archdiocese's commitment to transparency and healing, Auxiliary Bishop Michael A. Saporito, DD, prayed with attendants during the service and said that attending events like these is a strong starting point for healing. "Hearing the stories of people is absolutely paramount," Bishop Saporito said. "We can't undo what has been done, and we have to stand with those who have suffered."

At the reception following the service, participants expressed their support for those who have suffered abuse and were eager to stay involved in the community. "There are a lot of unknown wounds that can be healed in a service like this," said Cindy Hyland, a member of the Legion of Mary.

"I was happy to hear they were doing this at our church," said a parishioner of St. Joseph's who wished to remain anonymous. "We shouldn't ignore abuse. It's present in every shape and form, and we must support each other and receive the healing touch of our Lord."

Not everyone is ready for healing, Criscuolo recognizes, but she wants these services to be available when those hurt people are ready. "My role is to not have the person retraumatized. I give them the space and time that is good for them. I ask, 'How can I be most helpful to you?'" Criscuolo said.

"Remember, the Lord is working; He is our Savior. He takes the ashes and lets us grow from a beautiful place," Father Scalo said.

Parishioner Fred Fakharzadeh was encouraging of those who feel all is lost after suffering abuse.

"Remember that there is always hope when despair seems insurmountable. God is always there to pick us up," he said.

Healing services like these are hopefully the beginning of many throughout the archdiocese, said Criscuolo. She and her team at the Department for the Protection of the Faithful are striving to host a service in each of the archdiocese's four counties — Union, Bergen, Hudson and Essex — by the end of 2025.

The Department for the Protection of the Faithful is looking for more parishes to host healing services. Interested parishes can contact Karen Clark or Gina Criscuolo [here](#).

To report abuse, please visit [the website](#) of the Archdiocese of Newark.



*Attendees gathered for fellowship following the service. (Jenny Hubert)*

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