

## Keeping the Spirit of Brooklyn Prep

# ALIVE



*Brooklyn Prep, a Jesuit high school for boys, was founded in 1908 and formally closed in 1972. Yet its spirit has never died.*

By Peter Feuerherd

Last October, the school's Alumni Association celebrated its centennial, gathering to remember old times and making donations so that students elsewhere today can also experience a Jesuit education.

The school may have closed, but its spirit "never did go away. It didn't die," says Ralph P. Mascia of Queens, NY, former president of the Alumni Association, which boasts nearly 4,500 members. "The

school made an indelible mark on those who attended," says Mascia, a member of the class of 1971.

Brooklyn Prep's roster of famous alumni includes Bob Bennett, prominent Washington attorney, whose clients have included President Bill Clinton and U.S. Senator John McCain. In his autobiography, *In the Ring*, Bennett described the Jesuits who taught at Brooklyn Prep as famous for their "tough love" who "didn't let kids fall through the

*Members of the Brooklyn Prep Alumni Association with Fr. Jack Alexander, SJ (center.)*

cracks." Other famous alumni include football coach Joe Paterno, former Cabinet official and advisor to presidents Joseph Califano, and William Peter Blatty, author of *The Exorcist*.

Mascia says Brooklyn Prep was a special experience. It provided Jesuit education to immigrants and the sons of



*Mr. Ralph Macia, former president of the Alumni Association (top), and Fr. Daniel Fitzpatrick, SJ, who took over the reins from Fr. Alexander.*

immigrants. "It transformed pubescent males into young men. It gave you a chance to express yourself and grow up." The Jesuits at Brooklyn Prep, "turned people into self-starters."

That tie continues today. Overcoming the disappointment when the school was closed for financial reasons, alumni continue to give to the cause of Jesuit education. Brooklyn Prep alumni have served on the board of Brooklyn Jesuit Prep, a middle-school in Crown Heights that opened five years ago. The Alumni Association also contributes some \$180,000 each year to six Jesuit high schools in the New York Province and Brooklyn Jesuit Prep – money used for

scholarships. "It makes available the same kind of education we received," said Mascia.

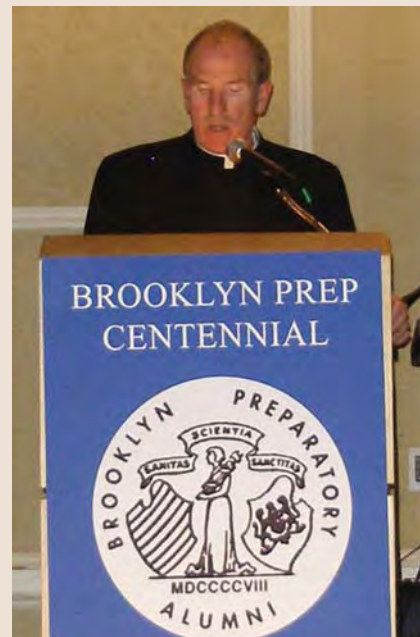
Father John Alexander, SJ, long-time moderator of the Alumni Association, was the final Headmaster of Brooklyn Prep, and was charged with the difficult task of closing the school. "It was the worst news I had since my parents' death," Fr. Alexander said of the personal heartbreak he felt at the time. But he worked to keep the spirit of Brooklyn Prep alive by coordinating the activities of the Alumni Association. He is proud that the organization has contributed more than \$1.5 million in total scholarships to Jesuit schools

and that an endowment has been established for that purpose. Fr. Alexander, 84, last year handed over the reins of the association to Father Daniel Fitzpatrick, SJ, an alumnus and former teacher at Brooklyn Prep.

Mascia noted that the organization will continue to support Jesuit education for the rest of its existence and beyond. Many of its members have died as the years have passed. Because of its endowment, however, the Brooklyn Prep alumni fund will continue to be a testament to the impact the institution still holds nearly 40 years after its doors were shuttered.

## The Christian Paradox

Father Joseph McShane, SJ, is a graduate of Regis High School and serves now as the President of Fordham University. On October 11, 2008, he was the keynote speaker at the Brooklyn Prep Alumni Centennial Dinner. Here is the conclusion of his address: Of all the qualities that marked Brooklyn Prep and its graduates, the most extraordinary was and remains your fierce embrace of paradox, and especially of the Christian paradox that stood and continues to stand at the center of your lives as sons of the Prep. Thirty-six years after the Prep closed its doors, you continue to live—not only as individuals, but as a family. You faced the death of a much-loved school and you wrested more than a half-life of memory from that death. Rather, you have given yourselves over to the work of keeping the Prep alive in the lives and school careers of young men and women from Brooklyn. In the process, you have done what Brooklyn Prep students and graduates have always done: you have lived up to the charge laid before the first students who gathered on Carroll Street in 1908 by Fr. JFX O'Connor, SJ, the first Rector-President of what was then called Brooklyn College: "When the great Napoleon and his conquering army were assembled before the pyramids of Egypt, Bonaparte in addressing his soldiers said, 'Twenty centuries look down upon you.' And I say to you young men today, you the pioneers of Brooklyn College, that twenty centuries, ay! more than twenty cen-



*Fr. McShane, SJ, at the Centennial Dinner*

turies of Catholic education are looking now upon you. For the Church of the past and of the future has its gaze fixed upon you young men, students of the first Jesuit college in the Borough of Brooklyn. Much, then, is expected of you. Your aim is to be the broadest possible culture, together with accuracy in scholarship. To attain this end hard study is required and will be expected of you." If only Fr. O'Connor could see you now, he would be filled with pride—as well he should be.