

## What Makes a School Catholic?

Catholic schools are not places where everyone quotes Bible verses, or where real life challenges are non-existent. Catholic schools exist in neighborhoods where students do not have enough to eat, as well as a place where vacationing in Europe is an ordinary occurrence. Catholic schools educate students with disabilities, as well as honor students. Catholic schools educate children of divorce, single parent homes, and children whose parents abuse alcohol and drugs. Catholic schools educate children whose parents make sacrifices so their children can go to school in a safe place and really learn about their faith. Catholic schools educate students whose parents also attended Catholic schools, often the same one they send their children to. Catholic schools don't stand out because they educate children who are different; they stand out because they educate the same children who attend other local secular schools. It is in the additional area of faith formation that makes Catholic schools, and Catholic students, really stand out.

The past 100 years have proven that Catholic schools are an integral part of their communities. St. Paul Catholic School has existed for 82 of these 100 years. Catholic schools are like a strong rope, each made of individual strands that contribute to the raw strength of the total. Modern Catholic schools have moved beyond the "neighborhood" school to be examples in their communities of academic excellence, healthy athletic rivalries, and expert use of technology. Catholic High School students have more than a 95 % graduation rate, far higher than their secular counterparts, while Catholic elementary schools are the grounding point for these same students.

St. Paul Catholic School and all Catholic schools plant the seeds in children that open them up to the faith that began with Jesus and His disciples. Each year, students build on the foundation that God loves us, plain and simple. That love encompasses our families, homes, friends, communities, strangers, and the earth. The Old Testament, the stories and proverbs, as well as stories of the lives of the Saints, speak to children of examples where ordinary people like us can choose to "do the right thing" and follow God. Here at St. Paul Catholic School, we are even more blessed to have the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany living and working with us to help us to better understand and share Franciscan hospitality, justice, peace, non-violence, and Conversion. Catholic schools are safe places where the teachers are expected to express their Catholic values in their teaching as well as in the example of their personal lives. Catholic school teachers are called to lead a higher ethical and moral life.

Fundamentally, a Catholic school is a place where the people that embody it seek to continually know and love God through their actions with each other. We see God in every child and every parent who enters our buildings. To be sure, those of us who are lucky enough to come to work every day in a Catholic school, know that there are certainly situations and conditions that make it difficult to look that deeply, but we strive daily to do just that. Those difficult home and family situations are exactly why we need to be the "rock", the "stability", the "voice of reason" for these parents and children. They too are seeking God, and maybe, to them, we can help them on their road to a closer relationship with each other, and ultimately, our Lord. St. Paul Catholic School, with its' 82 year history of educating and bringing children and families closer to the Catholic faith, is a rich example of this.

The daily life of students and teachers in St. Paul Catholic School is filled with the richness of our Liturgical year. The weekly celebration of Mass as a school community is a highlight of the week. We are immersed in the true meaning of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter as well as delving into the Gospels during the “Regular” year. Educating our second graders on the Sacrament of Reconciliation and First Holy Communion is both a rite of passage and a joyous memory for parents and students alike. Catholic schools are a place where the issues and challenges of everyday secular life are merged with the faith and promise of our Catholic faith.

As we begin to celebrate Catholic Schools Week, I want to thank you for trusting us to educate your children and invite you to join us in as many of our school events as possible.

Blessings,  
Mrs. Smoot