

THE CALL TO TEACH: Saint Joseph Regional School

By Christine D'Alessandro

Education is often cyclical. It starts with one special teacher whose influence isn't truly seen until years later: a student with a talent for puzzles turns engineer; the constant doodler explores graphic design—all thanks to the encouragement of a teacher.

Those teachers also inspire future educators, as is the case with Saint Joseph Regional School principal Dr. Janice Fipp, who recently celebrated 50 years in education.

"I grew up in Margate and attended the Granville Avenue and Tighe schools," Dr. Fipp recalls. "In fourth grade, my teacher was Claire Solomon, who was a gift to every student in Margate."

Years later, Dr. Fipp found herself in a full-circle moment, teaching fourth grade at Linwood's Seaview School. Reflecting on her decision to pursue a career in education, Dr. Fipp acknowledges that her direction was inspired by many great teachers, and also the sense something greater was guiding her, eventually calling her to Saint Joseph Regional School (SJRS) in Somers Point after an established career that included superintendent of Northfield schools, a training and development manager at two casinos, and an adjunct professor at ACCC and Rutgers University.



Father Santa Teresa is a beloved presence in the halls of SJRS. He is seen here giving a high five to Susan Seabrook's daughter

"I can't tell you how often someone will walk through our doors at SJRS ready to contribute or solve a problem, and we just glance over at that picture and smile." The picture Dr. Fipp points to is a familiar one for the Catholic faithful, a portrait of Jesus framed by a bright light. She's also not the only one to hear the calling.

"My husband and I converted to Catholicism after my oldest daughter was diagnosed with cancer," 2nd grade SJRS teacher Shannon Crawford shares. "I attended Holy Spirit High School and always felt drawn to the Catholic religion. We also wanted to raise our children Catholic and, after visiting

Saint Joseph School, we made the decision to enroll them. When my youngest daughter went to PreK, Sister Grave, the principal at the time, offered me a job teaching. It was divine intervention. Working at Saint Joseph School with my three daughters attending as students was one of my greatest blessings. My girls are long gone from elementary school, yet I continue to be blessed with a job where I teach and share God's love every day with a whole new group of students year after year."

Saint Joseph Regional is the only Catholic school on the Mainland, and it offers pre-kindergarten (for ages three and four) through eighth grade. The school is staffed by the Sisters of Saint

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Joseph and experienced lay teachers, all of whom heard the call to teach and found themselves in Somers Point. This includes PreK4 teacher, Angela Cavallo, who found SJRS after relocating to Ocean City. She had 20 years teaching experience, but found something new at the Somers Point school.

“From the moment I walked through the doors of Saint Joseph, I felt God in those halls. I could see the Catholic School values in the principal, the other teachers, and especially the children I met as I toured the building,” Angela reflects. “I knew this was where God wanted me and where I could give of my talents.”

Saint Joseph’s offers all you’d come to expect from the many high-performing public schools in our area, including an engaging curriculum, new technology, and innovative teachers. According to Dr. Fipp, what sets the school apart is what she

describes as the “intangibles.”

“Parents and students tell us that they feel a particular kind of energy when they walk through our doors: an openness and warmth that reflects our Catholic values and culture,” Dr. Fipp explains. “That culture is reflected in everything we do, from clubs and activities to hallway interactions and community gatherings.”



Students from Mrs. Angela Cavallo’s PreK4 class enjoy a visit from first responders.

“Each morning, I confidently send my three children off to Saint Joseph Regional School,” parent Susan Seabrook explains. “I know they are safe; I know they are loved; and I know they are pushed both academically and spirituality to be their best selves. Our “why” is easy. Our why is a feeling. SJRS feels like home.”

As history has shown, the overreaching influences of education, faith formation, and teachers and staff at SJRS are yet to be fully realized, but the cycle of education is well and working in the Somers Point school where there is surely more than one student helping another, on their way to becoming the next generation of those called to teach.

Saint Joseph’s Regional School will host its annual gala on Saturday, March 18th, at the Flanders Hotel in Ocean City. This year’s honoree is the Klemic family, and the event will include gourmet cuisine, music, plenty of cheer, raffles, and a silent auction. For ticket information: <https://sjrs.ejoinme.org/sjrs gala23>.

To learn more about the school, visit sjrs.org. ♣



Saint Joseph Regional School teacher Shannon Crawford instructs students in her second grade class.

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