

Why I Teach at an Episcopal School?



St. Margaret's School

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When Mother Anita, our school chaplain, first asked me to write this article for MAESA, I began to think about why I chose to teach in an Episcopal school, what brought me to St. Margaret's in the first place, and why I have stayed so long (45 years). However, as I reflected on my own experiences at St. Margaret's, I thought of several of my colleagues who have been on this journey with me a good part of the way and who would, if asked, share some of the same reasons why they chose to teach in a church school, especially an Episcopal one.

There are seven of us in all; if you add up our numbers, as of 2017, we have taught at St. Margaret's a total of over 200 years. It is no coincidence that we are all Episcopalians, actively involved in our churches through Altar Guild, Flower Guild, Sunday School, and Vestry; two are Eucharistic ministers, and one of us is the spouse of an Episcopal priest. We all feel called to teach in a church school, and where we are at our best is blending in with the ecumenical aspect of our school community.

Our teachers and staff members at various times have included those of the Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Unitarian, and Jewish faiths. Our students are, and have been in the past, representative of these faiths also. Through our strong International program, we have welcomed Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims throughout the years.

As teachers in an Episcopal church school, we live our faith each day in our classrooms, on the sports fields, and in the residence halls. What appeals to us about an Episcopal school? I think the way of life of a church school and the values it teaches. At St. Margaret's, two days a week we begin with chapel; the other two days we start the day with Announcements which end with the school prayer. At seated lunch two days a week with our advisees, we pause for the blessing, led by the student who is Head of Chapel. All our weekly faculty meetings begin with prayer. Our Honor Book signing is part of a chapel service, as is the Installation of our student leaders. Our school ring, like the school seal, contains three religious symbols, the cross, a Bible, and a chalice.

We follow the church calendar and its seasons, taking part in all-school Eucharists on All Saints Day, at the beginning of Epiphany, on Ash Wednesday, and at Easter. We open the school year with a Eucharist and end the year with an Evening Prayer service at Baccalaureate. Our Commencement begins and ends with hymns and prayer. On such a foundation we teach

honor, build character, and encourage students to put others first in various aspects of their lives.

In what ways does this foundation reflect our values as a church school? Through our Community Service program and service clubs, we reach out to those less fortunate in our small town. Whether it include taking girls to work in soup kitchens feeding the homeless, or having them tutor children in the local elementary school's after-school program, or raising money to support our local food bank, our students are taught not only to be aware of, but also to care about and become involved in helping those in need. As part of our Minimester term in February, we take service trips to places like the Dominican Republic where our students help children learn English. Last year one of our teachers took a group to Kenya to work with Baptist missionaries at the school they started.

Part of our mission statement reads: "In a Christian environment, founded on the Episcopal tradition, both honor and character are developed. St. Margaret's seeks to inspire each student to make the best of herself, and in so doing, make a better world." Recently, a chapel service led by our student leaders closed with this prayer attributed to St. Teresa of Ávila, which I think best sums up why my colleagues and I teach in an Episcopal school.

"Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion is to look out to the world; yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good; yours are the hands with which God is to bless people now."