



ST. ANDREW'S  
EPISCOPAL SCHOOL

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I was honored this year to be asked to reflect on why I teach where I do. I spent this last month thinking about the joys and challenges of teaching at an Episcopal school. As I spent time reflecting, I thought of the importance of my teaching training, our school-based Episcopal tenets, and finally my personal faith on my choice to teach at St. Andrew's Episcopal School.

I trained at a private elementary school that was struggling with its religious identity. First the wreath on the door at Christmas time was green with a red bow. Later in the month the wreath lost its red bow, and later yet, the wreath changed to blue with a silver bow (apparently school colors.) Such a struggle made me realize how faith plays such an important role in my identity, and how the wreath changing upheaval weighed heavily on my soul. It was then that I realized I needed to teach in a school with a strong religious identity.

At St. Andrew's, we practice our faith by honoring five Episcopal habits. We love. We worship. We welcome. We serve. We question.

We love. I teach third grade. So many times, people think that the upper grades are the challenge - that we elementary school teachers have it easy. Not so much. It is my practice to find the good, the joy, the strength in each student I teach. Facetime with an elementary student hovers around five hours a day. It is easy to get in the rut of complaining and blaming the students for our rough days. I often think from that child's perspective, for after all, how many times a day would I like to hear my name called out in a punitive way in class in front of my classmates and friends? There is something redeeming in each emerging soul, and it is my position to find it, nourish it, and develop it. We love.

We worship. I look forward to Chapel each week. It is a time of reflection and practice of my faith by enjoying song and a message. That Chapel moment helps establish my week. But the chapel does not need to be one on Christianity. In an Episcopal school, we honor all traditions, so the message might be about a Jewish holiday, or a living or deceased prophet, or a message delivered by a guest speaker. I love the look on my students' faces when we return to the classroom and his/her tradition has just been honored. We

worship.

We welcome. We welcome different thoughts, diverse religions, genders, and skin color. We talk about differences frequently in class, helping students realize that it is okay to be distinctive. We teach growth mindset and the art of skillful risk-taking. We greet each other each day with a welcoming comment and a warm hello using his/her name. When conflicts arise, we hear each viewpoint, acknowledging that each student needs to feel heard and understood. We welcome.

We serve. In an Episcopal school service is most important. Recognizing the value and beauty in another's voice as we listen is paramount to a rounded education. We take care of our classmates in need and recognize that fair does not look equal. I know we are getting somewhere when students freely share their supplies and one student helps another without being asked. We serve others outside our community, such as our sister school in Haiti and our acquaintances at Samaritan Ministry, as well as our friends at Bokamoso Youth Centre in South Africa. We serve.

We question. One of the best moments in my class is when students start a discussion with, "I'm not sure but..." or "I wonder if..." Then I know we are getting somewhere. The gift of knowing how to challenge your thinking and respectfully challenge the thinking of another is powerful. A questioning mind within an emotionally safe environment is key to growth as a student. We spend time reflecting and jotting thoughts on exit notes describing our thinking and our wonderings, leading to continuing conversations. We question.

I feel blessed teaching at St. Andrew's and look forward to the impact I might make on the minds of our future. My faith carries me through each day, as I know I am actually not alone in the classroom. I know the school Chaplains are available for my and my student's needs. I honor the differences among my students and relish the deep conversations we can have with eight and nine year olds. I feel honored that parents allow their most precious beings to enter the classroom each day in my care. I look forward to the future.