



WASHINGTON
EPISCOPAL SCHOOL

Washington Episcopal School
Bethesda, Maryland

Why I Teach at an Episcopal School
Ms. Dawn Harding, Nursery Teacher

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I initially visited Washington Episcopal School (WES) with a friend who was applying there to teach. At that time, I had no intention of leaving the friendly little co-op Nursery school where I'd been for the previous four years. Yet, the spirit of both the place and the people was infectious, and during that initial visit I found myself applying for a position in their expanding Early Childhood program. I couldn't put my finger on it, but there was something different about this school that resonated with my soul. Now, almost twenty years later I can see a little more clearly what it is that draws me to teach here.

My family has always shared a strong sense of faith both in our home and church community. However, growing up I always felt I had to leave that spiritual facet of myself behind when I entered my public-school world. How liberating it was, as a teacher, to discover an Episcopal school where I could freely act on my belief that we are all God's creations and know that the school shares the philosophy that, "each of us is a child of God with gifts to offer to the others." My spirituality is a large part of who I am and teaching without it would be like trying to do my job with one arm tied behind my back. I love being encouraged to teach the **whole child** (physical, emotional, social, and spiritual).

Integrating faith traditions during our school day helps our students to explore this aspect of themselves. I love the fact that even our youngest students, my class of three- and four-year-olds, are included in a weekly chapel service where we share song, scripture, lessons, and prayer. Our

chaplain even asks for student input as we pray together for specific people or causes. One of my little guys asked the chaplain to, “Bless everyone who doesn’t have raisins to eat.” I love the fact that this type of true prayer from the heart is encouraged and respected.

We also incorporate a variety of types of prayer in our classroom, inviting students to share their family prayer traditions with each other. As an example, one of our Muslim students ends his prayer over food with the word “Bismillah” which means “in the name of God” before digging into his snack. The rest of the class has decided to join him in this, and my heart sings when I hear 16 other little voices chiming in together with his “Bismillah”. Hopefully, children with this type of love and acceptance for each other’s differences will have a positive impact on the world.

When describing what makes a school Episcopal, *the National Association of Episcopal Schools* has written, “Episcopal schools have been established as ecumenical and diverse ministries of educational and human formation for people of all faiths and backgrounds.” I am a Mormon—a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. And although I don’t share the Episcopal faith, I share the **values** of that faith. I have felt like my own diversity is more than just accepted, I have felt **embraced** for who I am. In speaking with other faculty members from a variety of faiths and backgrounds, I have found that many of us feel that same inclusiveness. I think Fred Rogers said it best in his commencement address at Middlebury College, “I believe that appreciation is a holy thing, that when we look for what’s best in the person we happen to be with at the moment, we’re doing what God does; so in appreciating our neighbor, we’re participating in something truly sacred.” And in appreciating our students, faculty members, and entire school community for all their differences, we are truly living our school motto of BE KIND! And I can’t think of any kind of environment in which I would rather pursue my passion for teaching.