

David DeSalvo, of St. Andrew's School

Upon his retirement, The Reverend David DeSalvo, of St. Andrew's School in Middletown, Delaware, reflects upon his many years in Episcopal schools:

Looking back, I don't know that I "chose" this way of life as much as I felt "called" to it. I guess this is as good a place as any to begin.

As a young person struggling to find a purpose for my life, I was embraced by good people in my hometown Episcopal church, older and wiser folks who lived out their own sense of purpose to love and serve young people. When I went off to an Episcopal university, the chaplain there suggested that I could finance college room and board by living at the Episcopal boarding school affiliated with my university. Since that fall of 1978, I have never lived anywhere but at an Episcopal boarding school, a total of 40 years.

As I write this reflection, I am proud to be a teacher in an Episcopal school. One of the greatest strengths of our schools is their history of being schools of the not-already-made-up mind. Times change, paradigms change, perspectives change. For any school to resolve that its mind is made up on any issue or curriculum is to deny its mission to be open and welcoming as it strives to teach justice, to have respect for the liberal arts, and to lead young people in making the world a better place through love and service to others.

The three Episcopal schools where I have been privileged to serve are not perfect, but they are resolved to always remaining open and welcoming, celebrating and rejoicing in the gifts of all. I continue to teach in an Episcopal school because the school evaluates and reevaluates its importance as a voice for faith and reason in an ever changing culture, and it does so while striving to be really honest about its core values as articulated in the mission of the school.

The mission of our school, as articulated in 1929 by its founder, A. Felix duPont, is "to provide secondary education of a definitely Christian character at a minimum cost consistent with modern equipment and highest standards." Our reflection on that mission into the 21st century leads us to *"continue to cultivate in our students a deep and lasting desire for learning, a willingness to ask questions and pursue skeptical, independent inquiry and an appreciation of the liberal arts as a source of wisdom, perspective and hope. We encourage our students to do the work of scholars, artists and scientists and to develop those expressive and analytical skills necessary for effective communication, judicious consideration of multiple points of view and for meaningful lives as engaged citizens. We seek to help our students develop a passion for intellectual pursuits such that each student feels inspired to develop and pursue his/her individual talents."*

If a school is centered on its mission and philosophy and has its core values intact, then it is in a good position to handle obstacles and challenges in positive and optimistic ways. This includes encouraging and welcoming feedback from students, teachers, staff, and parents; such feedback is viewed as an opportunity to reevaluate and address situations in which the school's decisions and actions might contradict its core values.

I have continued to live and teach in an Episcopal school for 39 years because these schools are inclusive. We are grounded in and upheld by our Episcopal identity, welcoming persons regardless of religious backgrounds. Episcopal schools help students explore their spirituality and faith while nurturing their understanding and appreciation of all world religions.

We are also committed to service, urging students to be actively involved in community service, with the understanding that all members of the community share responsibility for improving the world in which we live. Episcopal schools seek to inspire in their students a commitment to justice, peace and respect for every human being. Students are taught to take seriously the Book of Common Prayer, especially when praying about stewardship of "this fragile earth, our island home." Our schools honor this commitment by what we teach and by how we live in community and harmony with the natural world.

The four heads of school I have served have all been committed to professional development of teachers. Whenever I have consulted with a school leader about my strengths and how I envisioned my professional development going forward, they have been helpful in pressing me to look inward and to listen to that still small voice that comes in times of quietness and prayer. In my case, I found that counseling, coaching, advising, and chaplaincy were uniquely fitted to my calling as a teacher. I joined the counseling staff at my school and then the chaplaincy staff, serving as a lay chaplain for several years until I took a sabbatical to attend seminary and become an ordained Episcopal priest in the Diocese of Delaware.

There are so many good reasons to teach in an Episcopal school. In my case, I found my calling to be a teacher and priest in an Episcopal boarding school. My wife and life-long partner also taught alongside me for six years when we were first married, taught in an independent school for a number of years, and then returned to a nearby Pre-K through 8 Episcopal day school for her final 14 years as a professional teacher. We raised two sons who both attended Episcopal schools, and our youngest graduated from an Episcopal university. Needless to say, we are deeply grateful for the lessons and values of the Episcopal Church and its excellent schools.