

Catholic schools graduate strives for work-life balance

By Elizabeth Lowe

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Even when Lisa Ruth's work takes her 7,200 miles from her home parish of St. Clement Mary Hofbauer in Rosedale, the aquatic biologist makes time for worship. Ruth, an aquatic biologist for the U.S. Army Public Health Command Water Resources Program at Aberdeen Proving Ground, typically spends two to three weeks every few months on a remote island in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, about halfway between Hawaii and Australia.

Mass there is celebrated in an open air church, holy water is in a clam shell and songs are sung in different languages.

"It (Mass) is like bringing part of home with me overseas," Ruth said.

Like many working moms, Ruth, 36, has strived to achieve a balance between her career, her family, her husband, her Catholic faith and staying healthy.

Patrolling the warm waters of the Pacific to spear fish in an attempt to determine their health risk to local fishermen is important work to Ruth, but can keep the wife and mother of two school-aged children away from her family at times.

She credits her supportive family - including parents and in-laws - as well as asking for help as vital to a successful work-life balance.

"It is OK to ask for help and admit that you can't do everything," said Ruth, a graduate of St. Clement Mary Hofbauer School, The Catholic High School of Baltimore and Notre Dame of Maryland University in Baltimore. "We all have the same problems - we all have children who need us, who get sick, and husbands who want to spend special time with us."

Ruth, who earned her Ph.D. from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, prepares some meals for her family before heading overseas but said her husband (a graduate of Archbishop Curley High School in Baltimore) picks up the slack.

"I couldn't have a job like this if I didn't have the family support at home," said Ruth, who is passionate about both her family and her profession.

A self-proclaimed fitness fanatic, Ruth makes time to exercise before or after work. Her fitness regimen typically includes running and strength training. While she has run a half-marathon, her road races are typically a 5K or 10K.

Staying in shape is paramount, particularly because one aspect of her job requires

scuba diving.

When she's abroad, Ruth and her family stay in touch via email, Skype and phone calls to her husband in the middle of the night.

"I think I'm doing a pretty good job this year (of juggling it all) because I have such a supportive family," Ruth said. "I'm not too proud to ask for help."

From an early age Ruth knew what she wanted to do, which included trying to make a difference by cleaning up the environment.

"We see some beautiful aquatic life - lots of fish and coral and dolphins and sharks and turtles," said Ruth, who is focused on the task at hand when she is diving. "The goal is to get there and get the mission done as quickly as we can. The most rewarding part of my job is knowing when I am away from my family that I am making a difference. That motivates me."