

# Classroom passion runs deep in Westminster



A combined 65 years in the classroom. An endless supply of esteem for, and expertise in, Catholic schools.

That's what Antoinette "Toni" LaFlame and Barbara Ott bring to the 255 students at St. John School in Westminster.

A parishioner of St. Isaac Jogues in Carney, LaFlame commutes 60 miles every school day to St. John, where she fronts the seventh grade homeroom and teaches science to middle-schoolers.

Ott is in her 18th year at St. John, where she guides the second grade and serves the first three grades as a reading specialist. A parishioner, she moved from her native Pittsburgh to Westminster nearly two decades ago because she "was ready for a change, and it was close to the beach."

Both have Catholic education in their blood.

LaFlame grew up at St. Ursula in Parkville, attended its parish school and graduated from The Catholic High School of Baltimore, along with at least 20 relatives, including her mother, Evelyn Cuneo Loetz; daughter, Ashley; and an aunt, Franciscan Sister Anthony Leo Cuneo.

Both her husband, Mike, and son, Michael Jr., are graduates of Archbishop Curley High School.

“I love being able to teach the faith to students who are so eager to learn,” LaFlame said. “It’s more of a mission than a job. It’s a calling.”

Independently, Ott said, “I feel that my teaching in a Catholic school is not a job but my true vocation in my life.”

Her third-grade teacher at St. Sylvester School in Brentwood, Pa., was her grandmother, Catherine Dixon.

“I have always attended Catholic schools,” said Ott, who has multiple degrees from Duquesne University, “and always knew I wanted to teach in a Catholic school.

“One of the neat things about teaching at this level is getting the children ready for the sacraments, first Communion and reconciliation, and how that affirms their lives.”

Both describe a family atmosphere at St. John School, the only Catholic school in Carroll County, where Jo Marie Tolj is the principal and Father Mark Bialek the pastor.

“It’s not only the excellence of Catholic education, but the formation that’s being offered,” Father Bialek said. “Every classroom, every teacher, is a place where we find joy.”