

# In Catholic schools, lessons learned beyond the classroom

**Commentary piece by Elizabeth Lowe**

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Some of the most valuable lessons I learned at St. John the Evangelist School in Hydes did not come during a 50-minute class session.

We learned about geography, multiplication and writing in cursive. Unlike our peers in public and many non-Catholic schools, however, our education was enhanced by religion classes.

We learned about the saints and the names of sacred vessels, and were required to memorize the Nicene Creed and other prayers.

We lived our Catholic faith at school, with daily prayer in the classroom, monthly school liturgies and the experience of traditions, such as adorning a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary with flowers during the annual May crowning.

Learning about my Catholic faith at school, as part of my formation, made Sunday liturgies more meaningful. In addition, the faculty members were role models in how to live a Christian life.

Regardless of the subject matter, they used creative ways to teach us concepts that otherwise could have been difficult to grasp.

One day, my fourth-grade teacher, Madeleine Hobik, now the principal of St. Margaret School in Bel Air, asked us to stand during a lesson about the water cycle. She taught us gestures that corresponded with each stage - evaporation, condensation, precipitation and storage - in an effort to help us remember when it came time for the test.

She helped us to think outside the box for ways to absorb new material, which served me well throughout my years of schooling.

As enduring as any lesson, I experienced the power of community support and acts of kindness at the Catholic school in Hydes.

My family, which worshiped at St. John the Evangelist Parish, was on the receiving end of the generosity of others following my dad's diagnosis of non-Hodgkin lymphoma in December 1995.

During indoor recesses that winter, friends and I frequently made get well cards for him.

After his death in April 1996, members of the school and parish communities rallied

around my mom and me. We remember the plethora of home-cooked meals that were prepared and delivered to our home. My fourth-grade classmates attended my dad's funeral. They planted a tree behind the school in his memory, and added a plaque with a touching message.

My experience, of course, isn't unique.

In December I wrote a story about Emily Kolenda, a fourth-grader at Monsignor Slade Catholic School in Glen Burnie who was diagnosed in January 2012 with an autoimmune disorder.

That school community has rallied around Emily, visiting her in the hospital, organizing fundraisers to help defray her medical bills and helping transport her sisters to and from the school.

The support St. John provided my family and the support the Monsignor Slade community is providing Emily and her family shows that today's Catholic school students are learning more than long division and American history.

Students are gaining an understanding of the importance of service and compassion toward others, lessons that can't be taught in a classroom.

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