

Meet the next generation of Catholic school leaders

By Paul McMullen

pmcmullen@CatholicReview.org

Twitter: @ReviewMcMullen

They are young, athletic and burning with the desire to share their love of learning and sense of service with students and staff.

The new face of schools' leadership in the Archdiocese of Baltimore includes three 30-something principals of vibrant elementary schools. Their profiles follow.



Monsignor Slade Catholic School principal Casey Buckstaff is far from her Chicagoland roots, but her parents "recognize that my ministry is here" in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Casey Buckstaff

School: Monsignor Slade Catholic School, Glen Burnie

Age: 33

Hometown: Mount Prospect, Ill.

Home parish: St. John the Evangelist, Severna Park

Education: University of Notre Dame, B.A. in history with concentration in peace studies; Notre Dame of Maryland University, M.A. in art of teaching.

Background: Buckstaff is exactly 751 miles from her parents (who are in a Chicago suburb), but said, "They recognize that my ministry is here."

She never envisioned that in 2003 when she left Notre Dame, where she had captained the varsity rowing team and interviewed Father Theodore Hesburgh, the college's legendary leader, for her senior paper on social justice. She only tried the classroom because she "wanted to get outside her bubble" before entering law school.

Buckstaff had enjoyed rowing on the Severn River in Annapolis and the Potomac in Washington, D.C., and thus applied for the Operation Teach program at Notre Dame of Maryland University. She taught at Our Lady of Mount Carmel School in Essex, spent six months in a troubled part of the Philippines as a volunteer with Catholic Relief Services and passed the LSATs - only to return to the archdiocese. She was an

assistant principal at Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. John the Evangelist School before coming in 2013 to Monsignor Slade, which has 629 students.

Pursuits: Playing off her athletic background, Buckstaff led Slade to participate in the 2014 Dragon Boat races, a biennial event of Catholic Charities of Baltimore. She leads the Children's Liturgy of the Word at her home parish.

Quotable: "My faith fills me. I want to dance and tell people about it. ... Part of my responsibility as a leader is to pound the pavement for Monsignor Slade. That's where singing and dancing comes in."



Just 31 years old, Baltimore native and Loyola Blakefield product Zachary Coyle is the principal of Sacred Heart School in Glyndon, where he and his growing young family are also parishioners. (Paul McMullen | CR Staff)

Zachary Coyle

School: Sacred Heart School, Glyndon

Age: 31

Hometown: Baltimore

Home parish: Sacred Heart, Glyndon

Education: St. Joseph School, Cockeysville; Loyola Blakefield; St. Joseph's University, Philadelphia, B.S. in economics; Towson University, M.A. in secondary education.

Background: Coyle's peers at Maryvale Preparatory School the previous seven years included his mother, Betty, who had taught in the Baltimore County system for 34 years. Coyle said he had a "good" faith when he entered Loyola Blakefield and that "he crazy loved the Jesuits," but says that faith exploded through the Kairos retreat program, which he led as a senior. A college internship for a tobacco company paid well but left him unsatisfied, and he entered the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, which sent him to Kolbe Cathedral High School in Bridgeport, Conn. He had no training as a teacher, but immediately felt as if he had found his calling. Coyle took his talents to Maryvale, where he led a service trip to the Dominican Republic and taught his students to create businesses, the proceeds of which have funded micro-loans in Africa, South America and the Philippines. In his first year at Sacred Heart, Coyle is highly accessible to his 541 students and community, writing weekly for the parish bulletin.

Pursuits: Coyle played golf for Loyola Blakefield and got his handicap as low as 4, but doesn't get on the course much since he has a 5-month-old son, Samuel Ignatius. Coyle met his wife, Kelly Niezer Coyle, when she joined the Maryvale Prep faculty. She is the youth minister for Ascension (Halethorpe) and St. Augustine (Elkridge)

parishes.

Quotable: “You have to have a love for kids, and the faith that every kid wants to learn. If you don’t come with that, you’re done.”



When Jeff Dudley became principal of Our Lady of Grace School in Parkton in 2013, he brought experience in public schools, a Catholic girls’ high school, and a private boys’ high school. (Paul McMullen | CR Staff))

Jeffrey Dudley

School: Our Lady of Grace, Parkton

Age: 39

Hometown: Cape May, N.J.

Home parish: Immaculate Conception, Towson

Education: Fairleigh Dickinson University, B.S. in marine biology and chemistry; Cornell University, M.A. in teaching; Notre Dame of Maryland University, administrative certification.

Background: Dudley entered the corporate world out of college, working in a lab, where he found that he “loved science, but not what I was doing. There was little interaction with people, and that was not for me. In what other realm could I enjoy science? Teaching seemed a natural fit.”

He spent a decade in New Jersey public schools, beginning in science but one year adding emergency certification in special education to fill a staffing hole. “Bouncing around” the U.S. in the summer of 2006, he visited a friend in Baltimore, became intrigued by the area, and moved here even before he was hired to teach science and direct the athletic program at the Institute of Notre Dame.

He shifted from a Catholic girls’ school to a private boys’ school, spending three years as a dean at St. Paul’s School, and in 2013 became principal of Our Lady of Grace, which has 150 students. It was named a National Blue Ribbon school last October.

Pursuits: Growing up in a resort town on the Atlantic, Dudley was a member of the swim team in college and still loves the beach. He is also an avid skier and runner, racing as far as a half-marathon.

Quotable: “We’re making a difference in the lives of kids, but at the same time we have to have a positive impact on the people we work with and our (school) families. It reaches wider than the kids.”

Also see:

Catholic school students salute personal ‘champions of courage’

Catholic High revels in renovated gymnasium