

# Teachers' day off: A North Bay retreat

Every year, the St. Joan of Arc School faculty and staff members participate in our annual faculty retreat. It's a break from our typical school day to spend quality time together. It's also an opportunity for us to reflect upon who we are as people of faith, as educators and as individuals. We always look forward to this chance bond with our co-workers because our classrooms tend to be our own islands, populated by boisterous young people and with very limited contact with adults.

In the past, we have made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches at Our Daily Bread, toured the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, and spent time in prayerful reflection at the Shrine of St. Anthony. This year, our principal, Mrs. Virginia Bahr, decided to take us outdoors to connect to our 2017-2018 schoolwide theme "God: Creator of the Universe." We journeyed east to North Bay, a nature park in North East, Maryland. We began the day with a conversation about the book of Genesis with our wonderful deacon, Ray Van Pelt. We all agreed that everything that God created is good and that He will never stop creating. It was a great preface to the events which followed, all on a pleasant October day.

A fiery canopy lined the banks of a placid river before us. On the orange sand before us was an equally orange clump of dense plastic 2-person kayaks and a little over two dozen 2-sided black paddles. Some of us (myself included) were exhilarated and some of us were apprehensive. Our group leader, Kathy, had us line up in partners and pantomime the kayaking experience. I had the great fortune of being paired with our young and energetic Operation Teach 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, Mr. Michael Adamowski, who grew up kayaking on Lake Erie. I've only been kayaking once, on the Colorado River in Austin, so I let him be the captain while I took the front seat and played first mate on our worthy vessel.

The water was a glassy and placid pathway which led us parallel to the shore past Canada geese and the occasional monarch butterfly. Our troubles floated away on their wings as they headed for Mexico. We, on the other hand, were headed to a

small clearing which led to a hiking trail through the woods. Kathy asked us to walk in silence up a gentle slope. It was a challenge for us teachers, who tend to be on the chatty side, but it was the experience, and not the words that brought us together.

After a lunch of lively literary discussion with my language arts and social studies teacher friends, it was time for the thing I dreaded most. The zipline. I couldn't bring myself to want to do it. And no matter how hard I tried to convince myself that dropping several hundred feet down a wire while suspended from a carabineer would be fun, I decided that it would be better to be a spectator than have a panic attack while dangling in the harness. And so I watched in awe as my brave colleagues fly over our heads at alarmingly high rates of speed. I was especially impressed to see Collin's 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teachers prove their indomitable grit and deep commitment to fun as they soared through the air like Peter Pan.

I went home feeling both relaxed and rejuvenated at the same time. I think a healthy dose of the outdoors does that to you and hold tight to my beliefs that God created our environment as a natural treatment of man-made stress. Even more so, I benefited from spending an extended amount of time with the people I wave to in the halls and send a quick "we're almost done" smile to during meetings. It takes a special person to choose to teach in a Catholic school. Many of us are optimists and I think we share the "good vibes" like our kids share germs. I'll admit, I'm a little disappointed at myself for not partaking in the zipline experience, but, guess what...I'm headed back to North Bay with my sixth-graders in the spring. Stay tuned to see if I take the plunge!