

TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

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This an excerpt of a talk given during Catholic Schools Week.

I recently connected with family members that I don't see every day. "It's so good to see you so happy," they said. "What's your secret?" My secret is I'm a Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools teacher.

I wasn't always this happy. I was caught in a deep valley of life professionally for quite some time. But when the pandemic was at its peak, God was carrying me out of that valley. Sitting at my computer downstate – frustrated, defeated, and in despair – I thought:

"Maybe it's time to leave my comfort zone. Where is one of the best places to live in Michigan? What's the name of that place where everyone goes for the cherries every summer."

I conducted a search for "Traverse City Catholic Schools," saw my current job posted, applied, and the rest is history.

It turns out that my decision to take the job had nothing to do with cherries, but it certainly helped to sweeten the deal.

Interacting with the GTACS interview team had a family feel from the start. The more that I learned about GTACS and the more I heard from the team of administrators and teachers, the more I saw Jesus. In August of 2020, a moving truck physically brought me to Traverse City to start a new teaching position, but it was divine intervention that really brought me to this place. Grand Traverse Area Catholic Schools – a place where I have been welcomed with authentic love and kindness; a place where students, their parents, and my colleagues feel like family; a place where I am supported and respected; a place where my faith is nurtured and embedded into so many new facets of my life; and a place that saved a gifted teacher like me from leaving the profession.

As the product of a Catholic school education, I've heard my parents promote their choice for years. They wanted the values that they were teaching me at home to align with the values of my school. They didn't want the seeds that they were planting at home to stop growing when I went off to school each day, and they certainly didn't want the seeds to be uprooted. As many of you know, Catholic schools are an extension of the domestic Church and reinforce the values taught in Catholic families.

Catholic schools form "the whole child" in faith, knowledge, and character. Christ is the center of our Catholic schools; from Him flows the truth, beauty and goodness that foster the caring and nurturing environment for which GTACS is known. In a Catholic school, students look up to Christ—the ultimate role model.

Since GTACS' founding more than 125 years ago, our mission hasn't changed: We exist to assist parents in fully forming children's hearts, minds and souls to bring glory to God. Every family desiring to pass on the Catholic faith to their children in a Catholic school can do so in GTACS, regardless of finances. Our three schools are thriving, and it is such a blessing to report that GTACS enrollment is growing.

One of our most recent points of pride is the return of the Dominican Sisters to our school. We have four Nashville Dominican Sisters teaching our beloved students – two at Immaculate Conception and two at St. Francis. Out of hundreds of schools clamoring to have religious sisters as teachers, the ONLY new mission begun in the US this year was ours, in Traverse City. In choosing Traverse City, the Sisters lauded GTACS for our ability to make a lasting impact

through the integration of faith with skills and subjects. In our schools, we meet our students where they are and challenge each student to grow based on their unique potential.

The ultimate fruit of our labor is creating future generations of faith-filled families, successful citizens, and witnesses to our faith, who give back to their communities and make their indelible marks on this world. People who pray without ceasing in the valleys of life and people who pray on the peaks of the mountains of life. People like me, who received the gift of a Catholic education and are blessed to be giving that gift back to my students today. Giving that gift brings me so much joy and happiness.

Life isn't always a bowl full of cherries—even in Traverse City, Michigan. Some moments and experiences can only be described as, "the pits." But if we choose to be a little more like Jesus each and every day, the rewards of eternal life in heaven will be so very sweet.



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