

Bonds with Catholic schools

INSPIRE CONVERSION

God's grace touches those seeking full communion with the Church



▲ Amanda Valine at Our Lady of Grace School in West Sacramento.

Catholic schools have long attracted Catholics and non-Catholics alike to their educational environments which focus on high quality, Gospel-based education. The Church regards Catholic schools as important in assisting families to educate their children, but also instrumental in sharing the light of Christ with all people. The National Catholic Educational Association reports that more than 20 percent of students enrolled in Catholic schools are non-Catholic.

“We have an opportunity to bring faith into the homes of families who are both active and maybe not so active parishioners,” says Casey Valine, principal for Our Lady of Grace School in West Sacramento. He adds that outreach to families “who are not affiliated with the Catholic Church” also naturally occurs by virtue of a loving community.

With nearly 20 years in Catholic school teaching and administration, Casey sees Catholic schools as providing “chances to learn about God and strengthening relationships with him” which ultimately inspire a more active family faith, possibly leading to conversion. This he knows firsthand. Casey’s wife, Amanda Valine, is preparing to enter the Church this Easter.

At St. James School in Davis, third-grade student Ricky Treseder, age 8, can also attest to the Holy Spirit at work. Amid pandemic school shuffles he happily found himself in a Catholic school. He fell in love and wanted to be baptized.

Amanda, parent and math teacher, moved to conversion

“I have been wanting to become Catholic for quite some time,” says Amanda, recognizing how her marriage to Casey in 2009 kindled her interest. When both her sons were baptized in the Church and began attending school at Our Lady of Grace School (OLG), she knew in her heart that God was calling her.

“I just saw the love that the school and church have for my children and my husband and I knew I wanted to be a part of that,” she confides.

Years ago, when Amanda and Casey thought about their future family, they discussed where they would send their children to school.

“I attended all public schools,” Amanda says, sharing her point of reference compared to Casey who “attended all Catholic schools.”

“He was very passionate about wanting to send our children to Catholic school, and I am glad he was able to convince me on the matter,” Amanda says, reflecting on the subtle ways God was drawing her closer.

“I have found it to be one of the best decisions we have made to raise our children in this faith-filled environment,” she offers, describing her children as “the kindest, most loving and respectful kids” and attributing these qualities in large part to the OLG community.

She also sees their choice for Catholic education as having “contributed to my desire to join the Catholic faith.” Formerly an eighth-grade public school math teacher, she easily distinguishes what sets Catholic education apart.

“Catholic education is more than just academics,” she asserts, describing how “it’s more about teaching the whole child... mind, body and spirit.”

This whole-child approach that merges academic and spiritual growth compelled Amanda interiorly to pursue teaching in a Catholic school.

“When I was hired at Christian Brothers High School (CBHS), I knew that God was telling me that it was time to stop putting off converting,” Amanda discloses, also conveying how her lengthy “professional struggle” resolved. “I think God was sending me signs that I just needed to have faith in him, and he would open new doors for me,” she adds, noting her childhood Christian baptism but the absence of a strong connection.

Amanda began taking classes immediately in the late spring of 2022, consulting with several priests and embarking on the next part of her faith journey. Immersed in OLG school and parish and thriving in the CBHS community, she received approval for an intensive online study program that meshed well with her family and teaching schedule.

“I attend Mass with my family as well as in St. Joseph Chapel at Christian Brothers High School,” Amanda says, stressing that teaching at CBHS has “definitely helped me to grow spiritually and to not be afraid to share and live my faith.”

Amanda says she is overwhelmed but “in a good way” as she discovers Church history, liturgy, the Eucharist, Mary and the saints. “All of it just makes sense to me and I can’t wait to fully embrace the Church after my first Eucharist and confirmation this Easter,” she says.

Casey, too, acknowledges being overwhelmed, but “with joy.” He describes his “heart being filled with God’s grace” as he recalls his hope to have never “come off as pressuring” Amanda into conversion. “This decision had to be her choice when she was ready,” he says, unquestionably thrilled that she is now ready.



▲ Casey and Amanda Valine and their sons, Nolan, 7 and Owen, 11.



▲ Ricky Treseder speaks with his parents, Chelsea and Evan, and Heather Church, principal of St. James School in Davis.

Ricky, third grader, finds faith and inspiration in Mass

Third-grader Maverick “Ricky” Treseder does not contain his love for the Church. Attending St. James School in Davis, he radiates enthusiasm for God and the Church in an infectious, joyful way evident by his brimming smile and jubilant nature.

“I just love the way the religion and the Church do stuff,” he exclaims, revealing his youthful innocence but also a maturity beyond his years. He launches into a list of all that he loves.

“I love Mass, I just love the songs, it is beautiful, the music is beautiful,” Ricky says, suggesting an otherworldliness that grips him.

Parents Chelsea and Evan Treseder watch their son’s spiritual transformation with wonder and respect. Both have Christian backgrounds but grant the lack of a regular faith practice until recently. The family came to St. James School after a wild post-pandemic search to find a school.

“Ricky went to preschool and then kindergarten at our neighborhood public school,” Chelsea says, unfolding the beginnings of their journey to St. James. Since COVID-19 closed his school and started online Zoom instruction, Chelsea opted to homeschool Ricky.

“I had a toddler and an infant and was going to be at home,” Chelsea recalls, sharing adamantly that six hours on Zoom was not likely to work well for her son. As time hurried on, the Treseders moved to re-enroll Ricky for second grade in the neighborhood school only to find it was full. The “overflow” of students was directed to a different school in town.

“We had applied to St. James School but decided against it due to money,” Chelsea admits, thinking of their original choice. But in the turmoil of feeling school-less Chelsea says, “I just had a God-moment and I wanted to send him to St. James so badly.”

Met with a waiting list, their hearts sank. They waited. And then, three days later they received the fateful call. They were going to make room for Ricky.

“I just started crying,” Chelsea conveys, convinced it was all “meant to be.”

“I can’t believe we were going to let the money stand in the way,” she says now in hindsight, as Ricky continues at St. James, midway through third grade.

“It’s about making finances work, you know,” Chelsea posits, expressing “you sacrifice other things. What’s more important than your child’s education and spiritual life?”

“Within the first couple of months he wanted to be baptized,” Chelsea says,

recounting that January day in 2022. He also prepared for his first Communion and first reconciliation with classmates.

Still on fire with his faith, Ricky says “it gets better and better,” setting his sights already on receiving the sacrament of confirmation in a few years.

“Watching your child be awakened spiritually, at any age, is pretty magical and amazing,” Chelsea upholds, sharing that “seeing how much Ricky lights up has been inspirational and great for our family dynamic.”

Chelsea and Evan are inspired by the community and Catholic values stating, “not until St. James did we feel such a sense of community around our family and kids.” Chelsea adds “from day one there were people who cared.”

“I’m really glad that I came to this school,” Ricky interjects, knowing he “may not have learned about God” and the Catholic faith elsewhere.

For their part, Chelsea and Evan remain encouraging and open-minded, committed to learning and understanding all that they can, and recognizing they may “very well end up with three Catholic kids.” They plan to have their daughter start kindergarten at St. James School next year. “Without question,” Chelsea insists, “there is no way we would do anything else.” †



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