

An educator today, Lynn Scheffler credits St. Mary Nativity with instilling that lifelong passion

By Pat Morrison

Along with her six brothers and sisters (she's right in the middle), Lynne Scheffler remembers the daily hike of several blocks to St. Mary Nativity School from her home on Marble Street.

The proximity to the school had pros and cons. It was hard to play hookey (if one were so inclined!) "because you could practically see our house from the school or convent." But in nice weather there were definite perks: The Scheffler kids had time to take a quick dip in the backyard inflatable pool at home on their lunch break, a fact which made students who didn't have the "luxury" of living so close to school a bit envious.



Lynne Scheffler (SMN'81)

Photo courtesy of St. Joseph School

The 1981 graduate of St. Mary Nativity School attended kindergarten through eighth grade at her alma mater, and credits her parents, Alice and Jerry Scheffler, for demonstrating the importance of Catholic education for their children. "They made sure we all had a Catholic education, and that we appreciated it. What the teachers said was law, and homework came first," Lynne recalls.

She also credits her education at St. Mary Nativity with not only giving her great formation in Catholic faith and values, but instilling her own love for education.

Today, Miss Scheffler is beginning her ninth year as principal of St. Joseph School in Lockport. There she and her 18-person faculty and staff serve 282 students. It's been a time of growth and innovation: In her second year at the school she opened a full-day kindergarten program, and in year five began a pre-school program for 3 and 4-year olds. Currently the school is building a science lab and band room.

Lynne started in the classroom, as a teacher – her dream vocation – and began working on her master's degree to be a principal while teaching at St. Andrew the Apostle School in Romeoville. At the time, she said, the diocese was making a real effort to train teachers for principal roles, believing in the importance of having principals who came up from "the ranks" and knew the students. That program allowed teachers to work on their master's degree specialization for principalship while still teaching, "a real plus," she says.

"I knew since third grade that I wanted to be a teacher," she says. She notes with pride that her class counts nurses, lawyers, accountants and a pharmacist. "But I'm the only principal."

"I truly believe I'm the person I am today because of my Catholic education, and having that education during my most formative years," she said.

“It wasn’t just academic, but learning Catholic faith and values at every level, absorbed with every subject. That’s something you can’t duplicate.”

The school and parish environment at St. Mary Nativity, Scheffler says, “created a real community of believers.”

Being with the Lemont Franciscan Sisters and lay teachers, and especially spending nine years with her classmates “made us very close. You spent a good portion of your life with these people, and it was very special.

“It was wonderful. You really became a community, and you knew that these people cared about you,” Lynne recalls fondly. “That’s not a small thing for a child.”

In her decision to become a teacher, Scheffler says, she wanted to create and model that kind of environment for other children – “and it’s probably needed more today than ever, with all the things children have to contend with that many of us didn’t.”

Lynne Scheffler loved being a teacher but even as a principal she says she’s “hands on” and “I’m in the classrooms all the time.” When a teacher needs to be off, “I don’t call a substitute; I’m in there [the classroom] in a heartbeat! I love being around the children, and my job gives me so many opportunities to do that, it’s great.”

After she became a teacher herself, Lynne said she thought of her first-grade teacher at St. Mary Nativity, Miss Mary Ann Tomac. “I knew why she stayed.”

Lynne has warm memories of St. Mary Nativity that were formative for her: the Court of Mary, daily Mass (with Fr. Al Sinsky as pastor), making and selling donuts as fundraisers, sports – “especially when we beat our rival, St. Pat’s”—for the CYO championship.

“We really were a family, and those events were all ‘family’ memories, warm and fun times we shared,” Lynne says.

Does this St. Mary Nativity alum have any words of wisdom for today’s parents, for parishioners in general?

“Catholic education comes with great sacrifice,” she noted, “if not money, then commitment. But I can’t think of a more worthy goal for both money and commitment than instilling the values of the Catholic faith in our children.

“You simply can’t underestimate the value of Catholic education. It’s worth it. The faith and moral values you pass on to children in that daily setting, year after year, are irreplaceable.

“As an adult, there’s nothing I rely on more than my faith.

I look back at my St. Mary Nativity days with such fondness—and gratitude,” Lynne Scheffler says. “The values I learned there permeated my life for the long term.”

And that’s something she hopes parents will cherish and pass on to their own children with the gift of a Catholic education.