

Teaching Lessons for Life with Love



Sister Frances Salemi, Principal of Sacred Heart School in Jersey City, watches proudly as members of the school chorus sing their favorite song, “Welcome to the Family.” Her head nods ever so slightly to the beat and her eyes sparkle as she surveys the choir. The children sing about love, about being strong, and about leading on. When the song concludes, she thanks the children and says that the song really sums up Sacred Heart School. “We are a family.”

Sister Frances has been leading and loving children at Sacred Heart School for almost forty years. She entered the Sisters of Charity in 1960, after being introduced to the Sisters of Charity while working after school at St. Mary’s Hospital in Passaic. Sister Frances earned a degree in elementary education from the College of Saint Elizabeth. Her first ministry in teaching was at Saint Mary’s School in Dumont. After four years at Saint Mary’s, she went on to teach at Saint Patrick School in Jersey City. Sister Frances came to Sacred Heart School in 1974, serving first as a teacher and then Vice Principal. She has been Principal since 1998.

Sacred Heart School is now in its 99th year as an oasis of Catholic education in Jersey City. Dominican Fathers initiated plans to establish the school in 1913, but were unable to provide proper housing for the Dominican Sisters who were intended to serve as the school’s teachers. The Sisters of Charity came to the rescue to assume the reigns of the school, and “the rest is history!”

Sisters of Charity, with unfailing caring, dedication, and hard work, have provided the gift of Catholic education to generations of Sacred Heart families and children. The Jersey City community has changed over the years, welcoming immigrants from places such as Haiti, Nigeria, and the Philippines. Many families struggle and sacrifice to give their children the opportunity to attend Sacred Heart. Sister Frances is grateful for the generous support from donors and friends that has helped the school to continue for so many years and that has allowed the school to provide tuition assistance to families in need.

Under Sister Frances’s guidance, as well as the leadership of the Sisters of Charity who preceded her, Sacred Heart students thrive. A visit to the school evidences the pride, discipline, and commitment to excellence that is instilled in each student. Even the youngest students appreciate that Sacred Heart is a special place and they are thankful for the loving guidance of the Sisters of Charity. When asked what is special about the Sisters of Charity, students replied, “They give us love.” “They give us a wonderful education.” “They protect us.” “I feel safe here.” The students give much of the credit directly to Sister Frances. “She teaches us to be disciplined.” “She cares about us.”

One boy candidly observed, “In other schools, kids get into fights all the time and students distract the teachers so you can’t learn. Here, if there is a fight, you know that Sister Frances will do something about it. She makes sure that you can learn.”

Sister Frances is quick to admit that serving as Principal at Sacred Heart School takes a lot of hard work, but she loves what she does and she loves her students. She deeply values her dedicated staff and is especially grateful for the three Sisters of Charity, Sister Beverly Bligh, Sister Ann Fay, and Sister Audrey Moloughney, who are full time volunteers at the school.

Every day, Sister Frances lives out the school’s theme, “Building the City of God – One Child at a Time.” As a Sister of Charity, she is committed to the mission to proclaim and live the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Sister Frances has taught every student at Sacred Heart School to stand and greet visitors by name with both “Good Morning” (or “Good Afternoon”) and “God Bless You.” God has surely blessed these students of Sacred Heart School through the love and commitment of Sister Frances Salemi.