

# CATHOLIC EDUCATION

*Written by Josette Surratt, TCHS Faith Formation Director*

Growing up in the '60's was, to paraphrase Charles Dickens, "the best of times and the worst of times". The innocence of the '50's was still evident, but the violent deaths of John Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King overshadowed the decade. In my small hometown however, I still felt safe and optimistic about the future. My education at our Catholic school formed so much of my identity that, at one point, I considered becoming a nun. The priests and nuns who taught us planted the seeds of my faith life, but I took it all for granted at the time. As I entered college during the Vietnam War era, I was still hopeful good days were just around the corner. I continued to practice my faith and joined the retreat team at Our Lady of Wisdom, but school and social activities took up most of my time.

The first real test of my faith occurred the first year of my marriage, when my husband was sent to Vietnam; that's when my faith started to deepen. I attended Mass more frequently and formed a personal relationship with Jesus. Little did I know how important that period of my life would be. Fast forward and many sleepless nights later, I realized I would have to divorce my alcoholic husband. Because he was unemployed, I had to take on three extra jobs, in addition to my full time teaching job. I again turned to my faith for the courage and strength to provide for my three girls. The faith foundation that began in grade school then became my stability, and I truly appreciated the people God sent into our lives during that time. I was also very fortunate to be teaching all those years in a Catholic school, so I was surrounded by people who uplifted me and shared my belief that God would take care of us. The environment of a Catholic school truly defined who I was and provided me with the resources I needed to raise my girls as a single parent and persevere when times were difficult. That strong faith presence continues to impact my life each and every day.

From my early years as a Catholic school student to having been a Catholic school educator for 45 plus years, I am confident the foundation of faith I received carried me to this point in my life. I am so grateful I am a product of a Catholic school – both then and now!