

Lynsie Reavis 'at home' as new principal at St. Mary's School of Piscataway

By Mark Zimmermann
Catholic Standard

After graduating from the University of Maryland in 2009 with a degree in elementary education, Lynsie Reavis remembers that "I desperately wanted to be a middle school teacher."

She got her first job at St. Mary's School of Piscataway in Clinton, Maryland, but as a first grade teacher.

"At first, I was terrified... (but) once we started rolling, I loved it," she said.

CALLED TO THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

Part four of a series on
Catholic school principals

After a decade as a teacher and administrator at St. Mary's, Reavis was named as the new principal there for the 2019-20 school year, and she noted that she still sometimes returns to the first grade classroom where she began her teaching career.

"Even now, I'll go in and do story time," she said. "The good thing about first grade is they've already been in school, in kindergarten, and they're becoming self-sufficient. They know how to learn, and they want to learn. That's the best thing about the little guys."

In an interview, Reavis reflected on her years growing up attending local Catholic schools, and on what serving as a teacher and as an administrator at St. Mary's School of Piscataway has meant to her. In a letter on the school's website, she noted that, "from the first moment I arrived at St. Mary's, I knew I was home."

When she first applied for the teaching job there, "I didn't know this school was here," she said, adding that over the years as she has gotten to know all the children and families there, it has become "like my second family."

Reavis was baptized at Holy Comforter-St. Cyprian Parish in Washington, D.C., where her family has deep Catholic roots, and she attended St. Ambrose School in Cheverly, Maryland, from kindergarten



Lynsie Reavis, in her first year as principal of St. Mary's School of Piscataway in Clinton, Maryland, after serving as interim principal there last year and working as a teacher there for a decade, visits with kindergarten students. Her own background attending St. Ambrose School in Cheverly and Elizabeth Seton High School in Bladensburg continues to shape her life and work, she said. See story, page 10. (CS photos/Andrew Biraj)

through the eighth grade, where she said she appreciated the school's family atmosphere. Her principal there, Vincent Spadoni, later served as principal at St. Elizabeth School in Rockville and now serves as president of the Archdiocese of Washington's Consortium of Catholic Academies.

At St. Ambrose School, she volunteered as an altar server. "I learned how important it is to serve others, to go out of your way to help others, that it's not always about me," she said, adding, "I was big into helping the little guys, I would volunteer with helping younger classes, which led nicely into teaching."

Father Timothy Baer, St. Mary's pastor, also has a connection to St. Ambrose School.

"It meant a great deal to me to have the opportunity to hire Lynsie as our new principal at St. Mary's of Piscataway," the priest said, adding, "I had been one of her religion teachers as the parochial vicar at St. Ambrose Church and School in Cheverly – when she was in fifth grade! I was pleasantly

surprised when I found out she was one of the teachers here when I came to St. Mary's in 2011."

The priest added, "From my perspective, her transition to principal this year was an easy call, blessedly seamless... Under her leadership, there is stability in the present and hope for the future."

After graduating from St. Ambrose School, Reavis then attended Elizabeth Seton High School in Bladensburg, Maryland, graduating from Seton in the class of 2005. Her years at Seton really shaped her, she said.

"I got to learn so much about my faith from the sisters (the Daughters of Charity) and from people from other faiths who wanted to learn more about Catholicism," she said.

At Elizabeth Seton, Reavis played the clarinet and trumpet in the band, sang in the gospel choir, helped stage school plays, was a member of the math club, wrote for

Continued from page 1

the school newspaper, *The Roadrunner Review*, was on the crew team and served as secretary on the student council.

"There was always something for me to do," she said.

As a graduating senior there, Reavis earned the Elizabeth Seton Service Award for outstanding service to the school community. During her years there, she also visited the elderly at a nursing home and helped tutor children at a neighborhood school.

Later as a senior at the University of Maryland, she interned at a public school.

"I loved the school, but something was missing," Reavis said. "It was a great school, they had great kids, (but) to be able to talk about God was missing for me."

Ultimately, Reavis decided to look for a job at a Catholic school. "To be able to make that connection (about faith) with my students was really important to me," she said.

At St. Mary's School of Piscataway, Reavis taught the first grade for six years, from 2009-15, and then she taught third graders and algebra for two years. Then in 2017, she attained her dream of teaching middle school, when over the next two school years she taught math to that age group.

"Middle school was my place, being able to make a connection with kids (there)," Reavis said, noting that she enjoyed making math fun, playing math games with students, and sometimes even wearing shirts and skirts with mathematical formulas on them. During those years, she especially enjoyed celebrating Pi Day with students on March 14, the day on the calendar that has the first three digits of the ratio of a circle's



Lysnie Reavis began teaching at St. Mary's School of Piscataway in 2009 and was named as the school's principal this past fall.



During her visit to the third grade classroom at St. Mary's of Piscataway School, Lysnie Reavis, the new principal there, works with student Brelynn Johnson. At left is third grader Noel Matome. (CS photos/Andrew Biraj)

circumference to its diameter.

After serving as an assistant and then interim principal at St. Mary's, Reavis was named as the school's principal this past fall.

"At first I was a little afraid to leave the classroom," she said, adding, "When I started into it more, I could see that I could impact all the children here."

As St. Mary's principal, she regularly visits all the classrooms at the school, which has nearly 140 students in prekindergarten through the eighth grade. And she continues to teach algebra to the seventh and eighth graders there.

A highlight of the current school year there came in January, when Washington Archbishop Wilton Gregory celebrated a Mass for St. Mary's students and blessed the school's new media center, its remodeled school library that now features state-of-the-art technology, including virtual reality goggles, and an expanded selection of books.

During that ceremony, Reavis said, "It's so important to foster a love of reading for all the children and to give them an opportunity to grow in the digital world we live in." Later she added, "I'm a big proponent of having a book in hand and using technology."

Reavis, who earned a master's degree in educational administration from Trinity Washington University during her years at St. Mary's, said her own Catholic education shapes her work as a principal there.

"I get to take everything I learned and that was instilled in me from kindergarten, and now I get to share that with the children

here. I get to show them it's not always about what you know, it's about how you exercise your faith," she said.

In a statement for the *Catholic Standard's* "Back to School" edition in 2019, Reavis reflected on her role as a new Catholic school principal.

"The Church has been a driving force in my life since I was born. As an adult, I know how important it is for me to give back that love and compassion to others," she wrote. "Being the principal of St. Mary's gives me an opportunity to lead with love. I became a teacher to spread God's love with my students. As principal, I can extend God's love to the whole school community. Every decision that I make is rooted in Christ and serving the community."

Later in an interview, Reavis spoke about how important it is "that I stay true to my faith." And when asked what impact that she hopes to have on her students, she added, "I want them to be two things – lifelong learners and good people."

For Reavis, life has come full circle, from being a student in Catholic school to teaching and serving as a principal at a Catholic school. And at St. Mary's, she taught math to eighth graders who had been first graders in her classroom when she began teaching there.

"It all just hit me at once, I saw them young, (and then) seeing them as young men and women at graduation, just to be a small part of that hit me," Reavis said. "Lots of tears were shed that day."