



June 30, 2021

Rita Stasi, Principal of St. Joseph School and Champion of Catholic Education, Retires After 14 Years

“A true leader has the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. She does not set out to be a leader but becomes one by the equality of her actions and the integrity of her intent.” This quote, paraphrased from Douglas MacArthur, embodies the characteristics that describe Rita Stasi during her tenure as principal of St. Joseph School.

After 14 years of service, leadership and dedication, Rita Stasi retired as principal of St. Joseph School in Downers Grove, Illinois. “There are many ways, big and small, in which her life has been an example of Christ. She has been the cornerstone of the SJS family, an example of God’s love to our children and to all of us in this community,” a St. Joseph School parent said about Rita. St. Joseph School has been blessed to have Rita Stasi guiding and serving the school community by offering care for everyone around her with the same love and compassion they are shown by God while expressing justice, kindness, and mercy.

“With her many gifts for teaching and leading a Catholic school as Principal, Rita Stasi has blessed us all in her tireless efforts to lead St. Joseph School to always faithfully carry out its mission of Catholic education,” said Father Albert Heidecke, Pastor of St. Joseph Parish. “I am thankful, along with the whole church and school community, for the dedication, wisdom, and perseverance of Mrs. Rita Stasi as the Principal here for fourteen years. She is a champion of Catholic education, understanding that its purpose and mission finds expression in all subjects taken up, for they all have the same Author.”

A product of Catholic schools from grade school at Blessed Agnes through her master’s degree at DePaul University, Rita had one dream – to become a teacher. She began her career in education as a teacher and an Administrator in Chicago Public Schools. Starting out, she worked as an Upper Grades English Teacher and then was a Special Education Teacher and Coordinator of Special Education Services. After becoming Principal of her school in Chicago, they received the Rising Star Award for highest academic improvement three years in a row.

Passionate about education, Rita felt a lack of mission or challenge after retiring from CPS. God had a plan for her and knew that her work in education was not complete. In the fall of 2007, she accepted the call to become the Principal of St. Joseph School where she became aware that the mission of Catholic schools is greater than just maintaining high standards in Catholic education, but also to form students to be Disciples of Christ.



When Rita joined St. Joseph School, she was proud to work at the same Catholic school her two sons had attended. She worked to have students not only receive a great academic education but also want to become better Christians with the faith-based education woven into all studies. Mrs. Stasi was awarded The Bishop Kaffer Outstanding Principal Award in 2015 for her outstanding dedication to the education profession, Catholic ideals, and school leadership.

Educational improvement has always been important for Rita. Under her leadership, the school thrived. Since 2007, Rita established the St. Joseph Preschool program, implemented full-day Kindergarten, developed a Spanish language program for all grades, and increased the length of the

school day to provide extended instructional time. She hired a Reading Specialist for K-5 classes to assist students in becoming strategic readers, and a School Counselor to support the needs of students and families. In addition, she instituted the first all-day Preschool program.

Over the years Rita has also been a proponent of enhancing the school's facilities. The Art classroom was updated, the library was converted into a Learning Resource Center, and a Computer Lab was added. She assisted in the development of a needs survey and a Master Plan for the campus. After two years of construction and renovations, she successfully opened the school in 2019 with four new classrooms, additional restrooms, an elevator, handicap accessible ramps, and relocated the preschool classrooms from the church to the school. Additionally, she helped promote energy efficiency through education and monitoring of energy usage after installation of solar panels on the school's new addition through a grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation.



To ensure the school remained competitive in the community, Rita was an advocate for continuous upgrades to the technology program and introduced daily STEM lessons. She encouraged open lines of communication between parents, faculty, and administration by implementing surveys and launching an online gradebook. She also expanded the afterschool enrichment program to accommodate different student interests. The steady stream of improvements has helped to promote St. Joseph School to prospective families and retain students. As a result, the school has seen increased enrollment since 2007.

Academically, St. Joseph's has maintained strong performance, scoring in the top quartile nationally on standardized tests, winning local scholastic bowls and math contests, and earning alumni honors and scholarships at local high schools. At St. Joseph School, Catholic values are as important as academic excellence. Choosing service over self-interest is a trademark of Rita Stasi, her staff and school families. St. Joseph students live their faith by serving others in their community in such ways as donating clothing and supplies to people in need, collecting food for the hungry, and raising funds to help cover medical expenses for a Downers Grove resident or participating in the annual St. Baldrick's shave event to raise funds and awareness for childhood cancer.

Through Rita's tireless efforts and guidance from a team of healthcare professionals and with the support of teachers, staff, students, and parents, SJS remained open for full-day, five days a week instruction along with livestreaming for its remote learners from start to finish of the 2021 school year. "Mrs. Stasi was unflinching in her commitment to keeping our school open for in-person learning," said Father Al Heidecke. "During these very trying times, Mrs. Stasi reminded us of our Catholic faith and the gifts we have from it."



Many give powerful testimony to Rita's extraordinary leadership. When asked to describe her, the responses include "Mrs. Stasi always puts others before herself" and "Mrs. Stasi is the definition of 'above and beyond'" "She is an extension of every family that belongs to our school" and "She sets the tone for compassionate and respectful interaction."

A St. Joseph School parent affirmed, "My children have received a wonderful, faith-based education at St. Joe's in large part due to Mrs. Stasi's efforts. She shows remarkable focus on her students and a commitment to our faith in everything she does. She exemplifies what it means to be a caring, supportive Catholic school principal." A

Downers Grove Village Commissioner and neighbor said, "Mrs. Stasi has kept St. Joseph's on the leading edge. Simply put, St. Joseph School is a staple of the Downers Grove community, and Rita Stasi is its engine."

A humble, hard-working leader, with a positive, “can-do” approach, Rita feels blessed to work in a community committed to the teachings of the Catholic faith. “It is truly a team effort,” Rita stated. “The St. Joseph School community is formed of teachers and staff, parents and students who care about academics, each other, and our long-term well-being. Together, we’ve worked to achieve great things.”

During retirement, Rita looks forward to continuing involvement in religious education in some manner. She is grateful for the opportunity to have worked with dedicated teachers and families who joined together to make the school a special place to learn and develop Catholic teachings, and for the opportunity to help children grow in their Catholic faith.



The St. Joseph School community expresses sincere gratitude to Rita Stasi for her hard work, dedication, leadership, wisdom, and love. We pray that her retirement is filled with God’s grace and blessings.