

Family Runs Deep for New Tosa Catholic Principal

CALLIE GAY
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Lori Suarez, Wauwatosa Catholic School's new principal, has been in Catholic education since she attended St. Jerome's in Oconomowoc when she was a child.

"It's in my heart," she said, as she spoke of her many happy memories at St. Jerome and later at Catholic Memorial High School. "I had such a great experience growing up being taught through my faith, it was an easy decision to go back to it when I decided to pursue education as a career."

Her mother was a teacher, too, and worked as a nursing instructor at Marquette for many years, her father was the chief of police in Oconomowoc, and the couple instilled in their four daughters the importance of education and of their faith. Suarez remembers the pew her and her three sisters sat in next to their parents every week at the 7:15 Mass from the time she was a baby until she left for UW-La Crosse after high school.

"Unless it was a holiday and we were at our grandparents' church, we were in that pew," she said. "It felt like it was assigned to us."

On Sunday evenings, the family of six would gather with cousins and aunts and uncles at their grandparents' house for dinner. As they grew up and the girls got married and started their own families, Suarez's mother moved the dinners to her house, and they still meet there almost every week to share stories and talk about their lives together.

At 83, Suarez's mother is just credits shy of her doctorate.

"It was very uncommon for the time," Suarez said, "I think now that she reflects back on it, she wishes she would have achieved it, but her children came first, so she didn't."

Following her mother's example and her mother's passion for education that became her own, Suarez entered into her master's program at Marquette when her children Hannah and Trevor were 7 and 9.

"I'm not sure how I did it," she said of the three years she juggled being a mom, a teacher and a student. She knew, though, that for her own fulfillment it was something she had to do. She remembers how excited her children were for her and how they cheered at her graduation, thrilled that their mom had accomplished her masters degree.



▲ Lori Suarez (Submitted photo)

Principal Lori Suarez comes to Wauwatosa Catholic as an educator and an experienced administrator within the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Her teaching career began at St. Leo Catholic Urban Academy in Milwaukee, where she taught K4. In 2004, she returned to her hometown of Oconomowoc and became the K5 teacher at St. Bruno Parish School in Dousman. Before joining Wauwatosa Catholic, Suarez was the associate principal at Waukesha Catholic for the last six years.

Suarez attended St. Jerome Parish School and then graduated from Catholic Memorial High School. She received her undergraduate degree from the University Wisconsin-La Crosse in elementary education with an early childhood minor. In 2010, Suarez earned her masters degree from Marquette University in educational leadership. She also obtained a certification as a director of instruction.

Suarez views a collaborative school environment as the key to creating successful teachers and students. She believes a partnership with parents and community members is essential to enriching the experience at Wauwatosa Catholic.

Suarez is married and has two children in college. She enjoys traveling, biking and running. Lori is training for her 19th marathon but competing in the Boston Marathon in 2013 was the most memorable.

"I couldn't have done it without my husband, my in-laws, or my parents. They were there helping me at every step of the way," she said.

Early in their marriage, Suarez and her husband, Christopher, juggled first- and third-shift jobs but because for most of their married life they've lived next door to her parents or his, they never had to worry that someone wouldn't be there for their children. She credits the people that Trevor and Hannah have become to the loving influence of their grandparents.

"Family is most important to me," she said, "and I am so glad I've been able to instill that in my children."

Suarez dreams of getting her doctorate and laughed when she remembered her children asking what came next after she'd gotten her masters. They jumped around and called her "Dr. Suarez" when she told them that her next goal was her doctorate, "someday," she said. "I'd like to go back, but my own children come first, and my husband and I are doing our best to help them get through financially."

Both are now away at college, but Suarez and her husband look forward to their visits home whenever they can get them; they gather at their table for a tradition that's fading as dinners together are fewer and farther between.

"When they were growing up, it was a must," she said. "We always felt that it was very important that we all broke bread and concluded our days together."

Because their schedules grow harder to align, sometimes dinners happen at 4 p.m., and sometimes not until much later in the night, but whenever their kids are home, they happen, and Suarez says as long as they can, they'll keep happening.

"We all have our ambitions and dreams but I don't want my children to forget what comes first," she said.

What drew Suarez to Wauwatosa Catholic School most were the families she saw there and the deep connections and strong values she witnessed being passed from parents and teachers to the children.

"They're always caring about one another and praying with each other, it's the kind of community I've been hoping I would find for a long time, and I'm so blessed that the Lord has led me here and given me two wonderful families."