



CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Four ACE teachers join educators at three diocesan schools

STORY AND PHOTOS BY MICHAEL SUSO

There's no shortage of job opportunities for graduates of top universities, especially when they've earned degrees in economics, environmental science, neuroscience and psychology. So, what would prompt recent college graduates to consider a two-year program in which they serve as full-time teachers in Catholic schools?

That's what four teachers in the Cleveland Diocese chose to do after their college graduations in May 2024.

Established in 1993, the University of Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education Teaching Fellows program is a two-year, service through teaching program that places recent college graduates as full-time teachers in K-12 Catholic schools. Each year, the ACE program places 180 young professionals in more than 140 Catholic schools throughout the United States.

During the program, ACE teachers fulfill requirements for master of education degrees from the University of Notre Dame.

"An ACE teacher's experience is founded on the three pillars of the program — teaching, community and spirituality. ... Through the three pillars, ACE seeks to provide its participants the preparation and formation to become professional educators, build loving communities, and live active, faith-filled lives," according to the ACE website.

The four ACE teachers serving in the diocese are Clayton Glasgow, Marcello Nanni, Kristen O'Sullivan and Ashley Utnage. They arrived in early August 2024.

Clayton teaches science at Cleveland Central Catholic High School in Cleveland. Marcello is a fourth-grade teacher at St. Benedict School in Garfield Heights, while Kristen and Ashley teach third and fifth grades, respectively, at St. Thomas Aquinas School in Cleveland.

When asked why they chose to be Catholic school educators, each offered a unique, though similar response. They had an impactful encounter with a faith-filled teacher and felt called to serve according to his/her example.

When considering his career after college, Marcello wanted to do something challenging and impactful. "In addition to having a great coach in college who encouraged me to consider teaching, I worked at a summer camp for at-risk children and was drawn to pursue an experience that allowed me to make an impact in the lives of kids. Each day, I want to communicate to all my students that they are valued and believed in," he said.

Ashley said she took her inspiration from her mother, a lifelong teacher. She was drawn to a career where she could foster the educational needs of children and support equitable access to high-quality schools. "I always wanted a meaningful career, something that allowed me to make a difference in the lives of others. My mom was a teacher, and I found myself inspired to follow her example of caring for the needs and success of children," she said.

As graduation neared, Clayton narrowed his choices to the Peace Corps and ACE. Ultimately, thinking about the teachers in his own life drew him to choose ACE. "I was blessed to have teachers and coaches in my life that pushed me in and out of the classroom, but most importantly, they cared for me as a person. That's the type of person and teacher I want to be," he said.

As for Kristen, she always knew she wanted to be a teacher. "I felt called to a life of service through Christ's love. In the past, I worked as a camp counselor for preschoolers and volunteered in an elementary special education classroom. I love watching kids grow into their best selves," she said. ACE allowed her to earn her professional teaching license and, at the same time, help her students come to know, love and serve God, she said.

All said they appreciate the ACE program's structure, the professional teacher development, the opportunity to live in a supportive community with fellow ACE teachers, to grow in their faith and to be Christ the teacher for their students.

"The highlight of our experience so far is seeing the look on our students' faces when they grasp a concept, develop a new skill, or come to love something they previously struggled with. It makes the late nights of lesson planning all worth it," Ashley added. †



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Visit ace.nd.edu for more information about the ACE program.