

KATE KELLEHER JUNK
SPECIAL TO THE CATHOLIC HERALD

What is it you appreciate most about Catholic education?

My husband and I joke that Catholic schools are our family business. We love Catholic schools because we value how, in a Catholic school, we can explicitly form the spiritual life of our students in addition to the intellectual and physical dimensions. From being able to talk about God to praying in all forms and at all times, Catholic schools provide a well-rounded education steeped in faith and rooted in the Gospels.

What opportunities are you looking most forward to in your new role as Executive Director of St. Eugene and St. Monica schools?

I am eager to form a strong leadership team with the principals of St. Eugene and St. Monica. Together, we will create a vision for our schools that will ensure our vitality and Catholic identity for the future. I look forward to mentoring, creating strong professional development opportunities and working on curriculum initiatives.

Your daughter followed in your footsteps to attend Dominican High School. What is special about that community?

I had an amazing experience at Dominican and I think Rose's experience was even better. I just wish more people would consider sending their children there and understand what a great high school it is and all it has to offer. Rose got involved with campus ministry and continued to feed her spiritual life. I think that has really put her on solid ground now that she's in college. You always worry as a parent. Are your children going to continue to feed their faith when they're in college? Rose goes to church every Sunday. She's gotten her roommates who aren't

MY FAITH MINI-PROFILE

Rebecca Jones Executive Director, St. Eugene and St. Monica schools

- Jones has served 27 years as principal in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, including 24 on the North Shore. She attended St. Monica School and served as the principal of Holy Family School and St. Eugene School.
- She holds a master's degree in educational leadership from Marquette University.
- Jones is a 2018 recipient of the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation Leadership Award.
- Jones was named Distinguished Alumni of the Year by her alma mater, Dominican High



- School, Whitefish Bay, for her outstanding contributions to Catholic education.
- She and her husband, Eamonn O'Keeffe, the high school principal of St. Mary's Springs Academy in Fond du Lac, are the proud parents of Rose, who is in her sophomore year at DePaul University, Chicago.



▲ Rebecca Jones (center) is married to St. Mary's Springs Academy high school Principal Eamonn O'Keeffe. Their daughter, Rose, attends DePaul University. (Submitted photo)

Catholic to come to church with her on occasion, and she's not afraid to express her faith. I really think she got that foundation both at St. Eugene and at Dominican, and we're just so grateful for that.

You stepped away from your work as an educator for a bit; how did you get pulled back in?

I stayed home after the birth of our daughter. When she was entering first grade at St. Eugene, our principal, Michael Taylor, took another position, leaving St. Eugene in need of a principal two weeks before the start of school. Our pastor, Fr. Jerry Herda, knew my background and asked if I would step in to be an interim principal. I had no intentions of returning to school leadership. I thought I would return to the classroom. However, I needed to give this strong consideration. How could I say no to my pastor? And I was invested in my daughter's school. So I said, "yes." I thought it would be for a year. As the year unfolded, I fell back in love with Catholic school leadership. The strong faculty and supportive families drew me back in. I was invited to apply for the position permanently. I was offered the position, which led to 13 wonderful years serving as St. Eugene's principal.

It sounds like you had a similar experience of answering a call when it comes to your new position. Is that right?

Yes. In various conversations it kind of evolved. Fr. Mark (Payne) had this idea (for a new position – director of St. Eugene and St. Monica schools), and then I thought I could see how this could work. Fr. Mark said, "Well, if we do this, I would really like you to be in that position." Which of course was very humbling and exciting. I'm so grateful, to both Fr. Jerry and to Fr. Mark, that they have trusted me with these positions.