

Lorraine Iafrate Memorial Service/ Tree Blessing and Dedication July 22, 2020

It is an honor for me to be speaking about Lorraine Iafrate this morning and recalling how much she loved God, our Catholic faith, and her family. We remember how she touched the lives of her students, their families, her colleagues, and the priests at Saint Philip Church.

How appropriate and lovely it is that this tree has been planted and dedicated in Lorraine's memory. She who loved participating, teaching, and sharing in the miracle of God's creation. Guiding her students in the care of the seedlings they grew for God's Little Acre. Sharing in the excitement her students experienced as they watched their little plants blossom and produce a harvest. It was the wonder and beauty of God's creation they were celebrating and which then became a gift of food for others. What a lovely way to teach about God's goodness and His greatness.

I first met Lorraine in 2004, when I came to Saint Philip School to serve as its principal. How quickly I learned who Mrs. Iafrate was. She had a big personality, a quick smile, and an enthusiasm that was impossible to miss. She taught math and science to sixth, seventh and eighth grade youngsters. She was the eighth-grade homeroom teacher. Her schedule was more than full; and her enthusiasm matched her schedule.

Lorraine loved God deeply; and her life was centered and committed to her love of God and her Catholic faith. Teaching in a Catholic school is a ministry: one that Lorraine embraced completely. How eager she was to teach her students about the truths of our Catholic faith. How easily and comfortable she was to share her own faith with her students and colleagues.

And then there was the love Lorraine had for her family: her husband, Donald, her sons, her daughters-in-law, and grandchildren. So many times Lorraine came to school and shared the news about the accomplishments her grandchildren had on the athletic field, and of their successes in the classroom.

We heard loving stories which revealed the closeness and goodness of all those in her family. And so many stories about her life with her husband, Donald, the love of her life.

Lorraine loved God. She loved her family dearly. And she loved her students, teaching, and learning.

Mrs. Iafrate was an award-winning teacher. Shortly after I arrived at Saint Philip School, Lorraine was named one of the NCEA Distinguished Teachers of the Year. Assistant Principal, Patt McCormick, and I

traveled to Philadelphia with Lorraine and her family to celebrate her receiving this prestigious award by the National Catholic Education Association.

Lorraine's classroom door was always open and visitors were welcomed and encouraged to join. Her classes and participate in the teaching and learning that was happening.

It was Mrs. Iafrate's strategy to help students learn various skills and concepts in science and math by getting them involved in hands-on projects: like germinating seeds in the greenhouse.

She wanted her 8th grade students to learn about closed and open circuits in science and decided to have them work in teams, research Rhode Island's coastal areas and lighthouses, and create miniature replicas of one of the lighthouses and create working circuits which would allow their lighthouses to be illuminated. Students learned the concepts through their hands-on experiences. They had fun, were engaged in their learning, developed teamwork skills, and utilized math skills at the same time.

Today educators speak about the importance of project-based learning: years ago Lorraine was using this very successful strategy to engage students and make learning meaningful for them.

She was not shy about wanting to learn a new tool. When computers were first created to be used in the school setting, Lorraine and Janet Boswell were thrilled about having them in their classrooms. They embraced the idea, even though it meant hours of additional study and practice during after school hours. She was truly a life-long learner.

Lorraine didn't hesitate to offer her assistance when she learned there was a possibility to begin a Robotics Club after school. Lorraine ran the club with Dr. Blais, who taught robotics at Bryant College; along with Phil Boswell. It became one of the most popular after school programs we initiated.

On top of teaching math and science, Lorraine was the eighth grade homeroom teacher. That meant she was in charge of the eighth grade award banquet, the eighth grade end of the year trip, and the eighth grade graduation.

Did I tell you that aside from all of her other loves, Lorraine loved the New York Yankees? I cannot begin to tell you how many times the eighth grade trip involved taking in a New York Yankees game along with site seeing, a shopping excursion and lunch in New York.

One particular 8th grade trip stands out in my mind. I joined Lorraine, the middle school teachers, the students, and parents on the New York trip. We left the school parking lot before school even began on a Friday morning in June. We traveled to New York for the day of site seeing, visited the 911 memorial, ate at the Hard Rock Café, shopped a little and traveled to Yankee Stadium to watch a Red Sox /Yankees game. We stopped at a McDonalds for an after the game snack and headed home with lifelong memories created and sore feet. The trip ended as we pulled into the Church parking lot and disembarked at 3 AM Saturday morning; it took me the rest of the weekend to recover from that trip!

What a ball of energy Lorraine was; and she enjoyed life. She never wanted to be just a spectator: she wanted to participate! How proud of her students Lorraine was. She encouraged them; tutored them when it was needed; and helped them reached standards beyond what they imagined they could reach. Mrs. Iafrate believed in them; she cared about them; she loved them and they knew it. And during the Grade 8 awards ceremony, Lorraine celebrated her students' accomplishments as much as they did.

During her last years of teaching, Lorraine inspired all of us with the determination, work ethic, and courage that she exemplified.

When her illness caused her to not be able to maintain the rigors of a full-time teaching schedule, she did not want to leave Saint Philip School completely: its students, faculty, staff and parents were there: we were all her other family: her school family and she loved being with them.

So, Lorraine became a part-time teacher and traveled to the Kindergarten through Fifth Grade classes to teach science and health once each week. What fun she had working with the younger students. The questions they asked, presentations they gave, and interactions during her classes often made her go right to Patt Mc Cormick or my office so she could share the experiences she had in the classrooms with us.

She taught part-time and continued her supervision of the robotics club with Dr. Blais and Phil Boswell. And she continued to raise her hand any time help was needed. She was there helping to make ham and cheese sandwiches after school every time Club Sandwich gathered to make lunches for the homeless. Lorraine was selfless in her giving in so many ways.

And she was not going to let a doctor's diagnosis of illness define her. We had Catholic Schools Week and celebrated our wonderful school spirit with a student-faculty beachball volleyball game. Lorraine didn't want to watch and keep score: she played volleyball with the rest of us.

It was after her diagnosis that she decided to learn how to play golf. She, Mary Strniste, Joan Pierpaoli and Linda Audet would return to school sharing the stories of the antics that went on

the golf course as they shared their friendship and laughter over their golf successes and mishaps some of which had to do with their driving of the golf carts!

That was also around the same time that Lorraine decided to take up kick boxing for exercise. She was still campaigning for her seat on the Johnston School Committee: it was an election which she won.

Lorraine was an award-winning teacher who taught her students exceptionally well. Yes, she taught her students exceptionally well; but she taught all of us, too.

There are many people who loved Lorraine and who are not here with us today because of illness, because of Covid 19; and quarantine restrictions. Those colleagues are here in spirit, in love and in friendship. Patt McCormick is one of those people who would be standing here with us to honor Lorraine this morning, along with two of Lorraines' golfing partners Mary Strniste and Linda Audet. And I believe I believe her dear friend, Janet Boswel, who passed away is with us in spirit as well.

Yes, Lorraine taught us much. She taught us to cherish life. She taught us to laugh, to work hard, to serve God and others She taught us not to give up. She taught us that life is worth living even when there are big crosses to carry. She taught us to live with courage, with love and with joy

Lorraine is living now in God's heavenly kingdom. She has touched all of our lives in big and little ways. We were so blessed to have worked with her; and to have had the privilege to call her our friend. She has touched our lives and left a mark on our hearts and those of her students. What a model she was of loving God and loving others. She taught us well. May we all follow Lorraine's loving example.

Darlene Walsh