

## ***Super embraces his new Catholic school families – all 42 of them!***

It was September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017. I was in my seventeenth year as a principal in a Catholic school. There was no better way to celebrate my 45<sup>th</sup> birthday than with the 535 students in the school. Just like on my previous sixteen birthdays, my morning was full with classes of students marching to my office and singing to me in their cherub-like way. I received beautiful cards with a variety of artistic renditions of me drawn and colored with care. Even the eighth grade students, perhaps begrudgingly forced by their teachers, came and sang to me. That morning was filled with countless acts of love by my school family.

At 2:30 that afternoon, I received a phone call that would not only change the mood of that day but also my life and the significance of September 28<sup>th</sup> each year thereafter. My brother Joe called me at school and told me his twenty-three year old son, Christopher, died earlier that day. I don't know how to describe the pain I felt, the sorrow I had for my brother and the loneliness that overcame me when I hung up the phone. I didn't know how to process what I had just been told. I instinctively went to some of my coworkers, my school family. Linda, our assistant principal, and Bridget, our administrative assistant, saw the pain on my face and led me back to my office. I wept in their arms. It was all I could do.

In the days, weeks and months that followed, my school family was there for me at every turn. They sat with me in my pain. They prayed for me and with me. They met me where I needed them.

A Catholic school is a family. We trudge through daily life with one another, celebrate the successes of our brothers and sisters and sit with each other through our sufferings and struggles. We endure the craziness and disagreements that family members will often experience. We challenge one another to do our best. We serve one another and we worship together.

As the new Superintendent of Schools, I am excited and blessed to join the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, as well as the forty-two school families spread throughout Northeast Kansas. May God the Father create a spirit of unity in each school community and surround each with abundant graces. May our Lord Jesus Christ help each person, especially our children, to know they have been redeemed and they are loved. May the Holy Spirit guide the words and actions of teachers and parents to work collaboratively so that each student realizes his/her gifts and talents and uses them in service to others.