

Dear Our Lady of the Snows Parishioners and School Families,

My husband and I recently moved back to this area, and I rejoined the parish. We lived in Mary's Home, and I taught at Our Lady of the Snows School from 1977-1982. As we welcome a new pastor and bid farewell to Fr. Callistus Okoroji, I feel called to share *what a true treasure and blessing this parish, school, and community are!*

Bo and I have been married for 47 years. We have lived on the island of Guam and in the states of North Carolina and Missouri, have lived in ten different communities, and have moved 22 times. During that time, I taught for 44 years in grades two through eight, and have also served as assistant principal, principal, director of an early childhood center, and adjunct professor in education at Northwest Missouri State University.

With that perspective in mind, we have seen and have been part of many parishes and communities over these 47 years. So again, I just feel that I need to share with you *what a special place you have here in this parish, school, and town!*

In this era when so many small towns are fading away, Mary's Home is a thriving community with a new Knights of Columbus Hall and upgraded ball fields, a new fire station, a new credit union building as well as it also has an active bank, funeral home, auto repair business, Corner Market, and several other small businesses. The homes along its main streets are well-maintained and welcoming. The community sponsors volleyball, bowling, ball teams, and other social activities on a regular basis.

In the center of this community is its heart and soul, Our Lady of Snows Church! It is here where the bonds of faith and community have been formed, are valued, and continue to be reinforced. It is a vibrant and vital parish with devoted parishioners, committed families, and hard-working volunteers who are continually engaged in supporting their parish through its faith opportunities, annual parish picnic, neighborhood quilts, fundraisers, social functions, and numerous other activities. It is so rewarding and renewing to go to Mass with generations of all ages who are actively involved in the service. Recently forty-four teenagers received the sacrament of Confirmation. Even the Parish Cemetery is part of the circle of life at Mary's Home! It is such a beautiful and peaceful final resting place for those who continue to be a valued part of this community.

You are to be congratulated, too, for working so hard to keep your Catholic school alive and well. The presence of a flourishing school is an incredible asset for any community, but especially one which is based on teaching faith and stewardship to the next generation. As a fellow educator, it is exciting to see two new buildings on campus, an energetic and enthusiastic young principal who has found grants and funding sources for new technology and physical facility improvements, and experienced and dedicated staff members, including alumni Marianna Kliethermes Werdehausen, Rosie Schwaller Beck, Carla Adrian Morris, and Darryl Love. Next school year yet another alumna, Tricia Berendzen Belshe, will be joining the teaching staff. Personally, I know that I became a better teacher and person because of the many faith and life lessons I learned from the staff, students, and families at Our Lady of the Snows School!

In closing, thank you for welcoming this little Mary back to Mary's Home. Our Lady of the Snows is such a warm and welcoming family of faith and friendship! As I said earlier, it is a true treasure and blessing!

With sincere regard,

Mrs. Mary Burgess

Cc: Bishop Shawn McKnight and Dr. Erin Vader, Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese of Jefferson City