

# PACS leader plans to make Lord 'primary focus' for students, staff

By Debra Stevko Miller  
Correspondent

Her destiny was sealed in the first grade when the teacher made such an impression on the youngster during the first day of school that Anacelis Diaz knew she would pursue education as her life's passion.

"She was everything I wanted to be," says Diaz. "I was in awe of her charisma. There was just something about her that radiated. I knew then, in first grade, that I wanted to be a teacher. All my life there was never a thought of anything else."

To achieve her life's goal at an accelerated pace, she double majored in English and Elementary Education at Felician College, Rutherford, and unexpectedly secured her first job — teaching first grade — during a practice interview for a substitute position at the Wilentz School, Perth Amboy. The irony wasn't lost on her.

"The fact that I would start my journey in first grade was pretty epic," she says. "I love first grade. It's the year when you see the most growth. It's so rewarding. It has a very special place in my heart."

Now, after 10 years in the public elementary school system, she is tran-

sitioning into a parochial school setting ascending into her current role as principal of Perth Amboy Catholic School — her first in an academic leadership position. When she recently found out that her husband, Anthony, and his cousin are alumni, they took her on a private tour recounting some of their favorite memories.

Diaz is well-prepared for this next chapter in her academic career with a background in youth ministry, teaching confirmation students, and seeking spiritual guidance from her aunt, who is a member of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George. Diaz' brother will be ordained a priest in May.

"My parent's/family's love has nourished my life in such a way that I'm living in the abundance of God's providence," she said.

Saying a simple prayer for guidance in making a decision on whether to leave teaching, she said: "Lord, I trust you. When this is meant to happen, I will know and you'll work it out."

"I want to honor the Lord in everything I do," she said about ultimately accepting the job. "I want to make a difference. I felt the call."

For inspiration in her new role as she leaves her last, she looks to Principal Lauren Marrocco at the EJ Patten

School in Perth Amboy who is "warm, loving, and hard-working."

"You felt understood [as a teacher]," she adds about Marrocco's approach as a principal. "I've had great leadership in my experience."

Diaz expects to do the same for her teachers, staff, and students but to add another dimension as "a spiritual leader."

"I believe in education of the whole person: body, mind and soul," she explains. "That's what I see being the difference between the public schools and the Catholic schools. You have an opportunity to speak into [the students]; life through faith. We are building them up and we're equipping them the best way we can for life and for their vocation as a person here in this world."

One of her primary goals as principal is to convert a school classroom back to its former purpose as the chapel. Eventually, she wants daily Mass to be reintroduced to all grades before morning classes begin.

"The Lord has to be the primary focus for all things to fall into place," Diaz says. "I believe that he's going to steer us and lead us in the right direction when it comes to our academic and Catholic identity as a Catholic school."



In getting to this special place in her life, she credits her dad and biological father for their support and strong influence to becoming an accomplished and confident adult.

"They both did a remarkable job," Diaz says of these two important men in her life. "They are both a part of who I am. Everything I've been able to do has been because they were able to give their love."