

## Faith formation priority for new superintendent

*During her doctoral studies, Sister Elizabeth Youngs wrote a paper describing the significant impact the late Sister Mary Baptista Ward had on the history of Catholic schools and SCLs schools in particular. From 1939 to 1965, this legendary SCL school supervisor mentored many Sisters in the classroom and provided direction for teachers and principals.*

While Sister Elizabeth didn't have the direct benefit of Sister Mary Baptista as supervisor, her legacy and influence made an impression. Throughout her ministry and now in her most recent role as superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Jefferson City, Mo., Sister Elizabeth says, "I'm using all that I've learned and brought forward in the SCL tradition of education. I'm standing on the shoulders of giants."

### A 'good fit'

Sister Elizabeth began working in the Jefferson City Diocese in July 2015. She considers the role a good fit for her at this point in her profession and because of the team with whom she works. Sister Elizabeth shares responsibilities of the office with Sister Julie Brandt, SSND.

Because of her experience, Sister Elizabeth is in the senior role and bears the title "superintendent," but she says that the job is not hierarchical. "It's all about being available to support the work that principals and pastors do in the schools, provide policy guidance and assist in legal situations that arise," she explains.

A priority for both educators and the diocese is formation of principals and teachers around Catholic identity. With so many of these individuals educated in public schools and universities, Sister Elizabeth considers modeling Catholic identity and providing faith formation as job #1 for her and Sister Julie. They are incorporating this into meetings with the goal that principals return to their schools and share formation with teachers and advisory councils.

The two Sisters visit the schools to understand needs and how better to serve the largely rural population. Very little is routine in the superintendent's office. They focus on evaluation, planning and analysis; curriculum committees; school accreditation visits; and needs as they arise.

Sister Elizabeth credits Bishop John R. Gaydos with being very pastoral and supportive of Catholic schools in the diocese. Likewise, she values the support of Sister Kathleen Wegman, SSND, chancellor, and Rev. Joseph Corel, vicar general. These two administrative staff had shared an interim role to fill the superintendent's job and have been tremendous resources to Sister Elizabeth.

Likewise, the dedication and commitment of diocesan parishes to Catholic schools and education impress Sister Elizabeth. Schools – many of which are small – don't charge tuition; parishes consider it their stewardship role to keep the schools open.

### Ready for superintendent role

Throughout her vocation and career and as a participant in some important "firsts," Sister Elizabeth was on a trajectory toward becoming a superintendent.

She always wanted to be a teacher and became one before she joined the SCLs. Sister Elizabeth, who grew up in the Denver area, was the fifth generation in her family to attend St. Mary of the Woods

College, Terre Haute, Ind., where she received her bachelor's in education. Her first job was at an SCL school in Grand Junction, Colo. Sister Elizabeth worked with mentors and friends Sisters Janet Cashman, Katherine Franchett and Ruth Ann Hehn. After "fighting" her vocation for a while, Sister Elizabeth joined the SCLs in 1974.

Her early mission assignments included schools in Rock Springs, Wyo., and Kansas City, Mo. Sister Elizabeth was in the first cohort of the Boston College Catholic School Leadership Program through which she earned her master's in education administration. She completed the program in summers, and she began to transition into roles as principal of Catholic schools in Leavenworth; Lawrence, Kan.; and Billings, Mont, where she was also director of schools.

In 2001, Sister Elizabeth moved to Denver to become an associate superintendent of archdiocesan schools in the office that coordinated the largest non-public school district in the state of Colorado. In her role over 14 years, Sister Elizabeth oversaw revisions of all curriculum guidelines, assessment and training for new principals. She's pleased that she can bring some of the good tools that she helped create and design to her current position.

While in Denver, Sister Elizabeth joined another "first" – a doctoral program co-sponsored by The Catholic University and the National Catholic Educational Association. Whereas priests had historically held school superintendent positions, this program targeted lay persons employed by the Church as educators. Sister Elizabeth completed the program in 2013. Participation in this doctoral program opened the door to valuable connections and resources for her.

#### **Link with SCLs important**

Another great fit in the Jefferson City Diocese has been Sister Elizabeth's interactions with other women religious. She's found similarities among values shared by the SCLs, the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSNDs) and the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word (CCVIs) with whom she works and lives.

Still, a key factor for Sister Elizabeth as she considered the superintendent's job was proximity to the SCL Mother House in Leavenworth. She's made a personal commitment to be at the Mother House as often as she can for special occasions and to stay connected with her SCL friends.

Sister Elizabeth is very happy to be serving as superintendent in the Jefferson City Diocese. And it's very likely that Sister Mary Baptista would be proud of where Sister Elizabeth is and what she's doing!