



### **My St. Bonaventure University Story**

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*2018 New York State Teacher of the Year*

My St. Bonaventure University story began in 1986, as a freshman at Fairport High School. My grandmother, a devout Catholic, was dying of heart disease and she asked me to become a Catholic. I was not raised Catholic; my parents had strong morals, but were not church goers. Yet, it was important to my grandmother that I learn about the Eucharist and be confirmed as a Catholic. Without really understanding the significance of this decision, and seeking only to please my grandmother, I was confirmed in the Catholic Church at the age of 15. I didn't know it then, but this decision would gain true meaning for the first time four years later, at St. Bonaventure University.

As a senior in high school, after my plan to attend the United States Air Force Academy fell through when a visit revealed this institution wasn't a good fit for me, there was no back-up plan. As a first generation American citizen, my father had always been clear that he wanted me to attend college. I worked with a girl at Wegmans at that time who attended St. Bonaventure and spoke highly of her school. Without visiting, I applied to Bona's, and in the fall of 1990, I packed my bags, and headed off to St. Bonaventure University.

That was over 27 years ago, but as I look back at that fall now, I liken it to a stone being thrown into a calm pond; the ripples from that stone are seen for a long time, and that is the affect that St. Bonaventure has had on me.

I received a solid education at St. Bonaventure, but I also received something much more important – exceptional preparation for life experiences inside and outside of the classroom. The Franciscan value of Discovery, in which a St. Bonaventure education is grounded, incited a love for learning within me, and molded me into a lifelong, self-directed learner. The best part about being a teacher that embraces lifelong learning is that it becomes contagious in a classroom: igniting passion, interest, and joy within my students.

Campus ministry was also a big part of my life at Bona's. I was a Student for the Mountain at Mt. Irenaeus, where I learned service and charity, encountered mentors, and made friendships that continue to influence me to this day. The Franciscan spirit that permeated St. Bonaventure University made it the ideal location to learn how to find joy in the simple things, discover, and develop a path forward in life. These are the lessons I continue to weave into the education of my fourth-grade students.

Nearly three decades have passed since I was a student at St. Bonaventure University. Today, I am a fourth-grade public school teacher in Brockport, New York, now in my 23rd year of teaching. But I have carried the lessons and experiences learned at St. Bonaventure University with me throughout my life and every day in my classroom.

On Sept. 12, 2017, I was recognized as the 2018 New York State Teacher of the Year, and though the achievement of being recognized may seem to be a career highlight, I credit the Franciscan values learned at Bona's with helping me keep it all in perspective. Though my name is attached to this honor, I'm reminded of the many people who have had an impact on my life and brought me to this moment — especially those individuals I encountered at St. Bonaventure University and the Franciscan values I learned there that have continued to influence my life and my career as an educator.

I am grateful for the role St. Bonaventure University played in directing my career path, and the Franciscan lessons that continue to have an impact on my personal life and my life as a teacher.