

Howard County TIMES

EDUCATION

Trinity principal marks 40 years at school

Faced challenge of leading school in difficult period

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Sometimes, life comes full circle. This week, Sister Catherine Phelps celebrated her 40th year as principal of Trinity School, a private co-educational Catholic school in Ellicott City. When she became principal in 1970, Phelps was returning to a familiar land-

'Children remain children in so many ways... they need direction.'

Sr. Catherine Phelps,
Trinity School principal



STAFF PHOTO BY SARAH PASTRANA

Sister Catherine Phelps, principal of Trinity School, is honored by students and staff for her 40-year service at the school. She became principal in 1970, at a school that formerly housed the convent of the Congregation of Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, the order she entered right out of secondary school at 17.

didn't exist," she said.

"(But now), it's great to have interaction with parents," she said. "In the times in which we live, in a Catholic school, it's critical to have the support of parents and involvement in your school."

Still, some things never change.

"Children remain children in so many ways," Phelps said. "There are still areas teachers get involved with because there are so many challenges children face. They need direction ... and help with education in life skills."

She cites making difficult decisions, "usually related to finance and the operation of the school," as the most challenging part of her job. However, she

said she is inspired by seeing children on a daily basis, "literally growing and blooming before your very eyes, coming back and sharing what Trinity meant to them, and then bringing their own children back."

Phelps was honored at a school ceremony Sept. 7, where County Executive Kenneth Ulman issued a county proclamation celebrating her service to the school.

'Energizer bunny'

Trinity admissions director Joan Voshell, whose three daughters attended Trinity and who has known Phelps since 1989, said Phelps always tries to make an effort to visit students even

after they've graduated. She recalled a time when Phelps couldn't make it to a student's high school graduation party, but arranged to visit her before she left for college.

"Once you're part of the Trinity family, you're always a part of the Trinity family," Voshell said. "It's more than just a slogan."

Additionally, Voshell said Phelps believes each person has a specific purpose in life and she helps both the children and staff discover that purpose.

Voshell said the school has nicknamed Phelps "the Energizer bunny because she's all over campus, and wherever you look, there she is."

Phelps sees both of her roles — as a

scape: the Trinity property used to house a convent, which Phelps entered following graduation from Maryvale Preparatory School, in Brooklandville, at the age of 17. The convent was affiliated with the Congregation of Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, the same order that taught her as a student at Maryvale, and founded and continues to sponsor Trinity today.

After 2 1/2 years of training and a series of missions working as a teacher and principal at various schools in the area, Phelps was asked to be Trinity's principal, a role she has held ever since.

Reflecting on her 40 years, Phelps, who is in her 70s, said the scope of the job has expanded significantly.

"We used to deal only with teachers and students, we didn't have much interaction with parents. Life was simple, we had few meetings and weren't involved in committees and boards because they



STAFF PHOTO BY SARAH PASTRANA

Howard County Executive Kenneth Ulman congratulates Sister Catherine Phelps at the event honoring her 40-year service as principal of Trinity School. Ulman issued a county proclamation celebrating her service.

member of the religious community and a school administrator — as complementary.

“In any profession, you’re a professional person in your field; being religious is just part of who I am. I don’t see them in conflict. Hopefully, being religious is just making me a better principal,” she said.

She said the position requires “a very positive person [who] enjoys working, meeting and talking with people” and “hav[ing] the skills that will enable you to run a school that’s organized,” Phelps said. Trinity School has 384 students this year in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade.

And Phelps seems to have done just that.

“I wouldn’t change a thing if I had to do it all over again,” she said. “I’ve always tried to do what I think is best, relied on God’s help, and maybe if what I did wasn’t the best in the long run, I know that my intentions were good, and I tried to do the best thing or make the right decision. I don’t have any regrets.”