

A Speech Given by Dorothy Veracka at the 2007 Banquet

Last summer, I was sitting in my living room entertaining two small children, one of whom was not yet 2, the other just 3 months old, when I happened, on one rare occasion, to answer the telephone...It was Tim Bleecker, the beloved headmaster of Caritas Academy. He wanted to know if I would be interested in teaching math, specifically Precalculus, at Caritas this year. It didn't bother him that he had asked me in the past, and had been rejected...or maybe he had forgotten. He asked again. And I said "Well...if you could help me figure out what to do with my children, then I think I would." Not 24 hours later, he called back. He had called my bluff – and as it turns out, he had worked out childcare for me, and I was left in shock, staring at my children thinking, "How on earth am I going to make this happen?"

Well, I have been making this happen, and other than the job of raising my children, which is still my most important job, I have never loved a job more. As it turns out, I love to teach – I guess this is unsurprising considering that I love both math and high school students. But even more than that, I have grown to love Caritas. I'd like to explain what it is that I love most about this place, and why I am so certain that I'd like to send my children here when they are old enough. My explanation has just two parts: the extraordinary education it offers, and the Christ-centered community in which this education takes place.

Even though I am a new teacher, without the years of experience and wisdom that many of my colleagues possess, I am absolutely certain that the classical education provided at Caritas is exceptional. A classical education makes use of the pattern of learning known as the Trivium, named for the three stages of education: Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric. We assume, at the high school level, that students have mastered the grammar stage of learning, in which they absorb facts, learn rules; we emphasize the logic and rhetoric stages of the Trivium. In the Logic stage, students learn how to think, how to reason, and how to assemble coherent arguments. In the Rhetoric stage, the student learns to express himself persuasively. For example, the logic of mathematics involves taking the rules that have been learned and using them to solve problems. In the rhetoric stage of mathematics, a student might be encouraged to construct an original proof. When a student graduates from Caritas, he will have learned to absorb information, to ask critical questions about its content, to draw his own conclusions on the subject, and then to express these conclusions in beautiful, elegant language.

An exceptional education is not merely a checklist of subjects learned; students cannot master subjects if they have not mastered the tools of learning. As Dorothy Sayers has written, "The sole true end of education is simply this: to teach men how to learn for themselves, and whatever instruction fails to do this is effort spent in vain." At Caritas, I can assure you that we are all committed to teaching our students to learn and to think for themselves.

But this is not a complete picture...How can students learn to think if they aren't given subjects worthy of their thoughts? It is not enough to teach with appropriate methods, we must teach the truth. Our students must be able to discern what is true, what is good, and what is beautiful. I want my children to learn English from a teacher who loves words

because God has created us with the ability to think and to express ourselves, to communicate with Him and with each other. I want my children to learn History from a teacher who will encourage them to see God's hand in its unfolding and to understand how men, both sinful and godly, have affected its course as well. I want my children to take science here at Caritas, so that they will not only learn the intricate systems in the human body, but will also understand that these systems speak persuasively of intelligent design (rather than specious Darwinian Evolution). I want my children to learn the laws, postulates, and theorems of mathematics. But I also want them to understand that these laws did not have their origin in human minds; instead they were attempts at explaining what was observable in a universe governed by such laws long before any had been put into writing. A well-trained mind should certainly be the end product of education, but it is not enough. At Caritas, we encourage students to use their minds and their unique gifts to appreciate the wonder of God's creation. And we seek to do so in a community that demonstrates his unfathomable love for his own creation, especially for His children who are made in His own image.

I know that we are accomplishing this at Caritas. Spend a day here at school, and you will know it too. In addition to the rigorous academics, you would observe teachers loving these students, and students caring for each other. You would see how clearly Dr. Bleecker delights in their work and play...I know no headmaster who loves students as much as he does. You might see Mrs. Beers, discussing *The Hiding Place* in class, and telling wide-eyed 8th grade boys that true love means a man being willing to die for his wife. You might overhear teachers, at a faculty meeting, praying for their students individually. Perhaps you would see a student being given a Roland award for outstanding effort in every subject. And you would be sure to see students enjoying each other. Occasionally, you would see them helping out with chores around the school, sometimes without being asked (I'm sure this happens at home too...) Maybe you would see a thoughtful student jump up to lend me a hand when they see me tripping down the hallway, dragging my kids by their hoods, with my schoolbag bumping along the ground. I am so proud to be a part of this school.

All of us are here tonight because we value education, and we value students. Our goal here at Caritas is to teach our students how to learn for themselves, that they may understand the truth, goodness, and beauty in God's creation. I can assure you with enthusiasm that we are meeting this goal and it is worth everything that we are investing in it as students, parents, teachers, and supporters.