

Mike Kish Marks 40 Years As Principal Of Immaculate Conception Catholic Grade School

By Bethany Prange
THE INDEPENDENT

In the whirlwind of activity and chatter that follows 294 kids, it's noteworthy that the principal is the person most excited for each school day.

But even after four decades as principal of Immaculate Conception School in Columbia, Mike Kish still looks forward to each day as though it is his first day as a teacher.

"I can't wait to get to school every day - I'm the most excited kid here," Kish says with a grin. "The kids are really full of fun in so many ways."

Kish, 65, has been walking the halls of ICS in one way or another for most of his life - a total of 52 years so far.

A native of Columbia, he attended ICS for eight years as a student. He attended St. Henry's Preparatory Seminary in Belleville and St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Lockport, Ill.

At the seminaries, he met students from across the country; an opportunity he says allowed him to broaden his views of the world.

"I always felt that I didn't have the narrow mind," Kish

said. "My goal has always been to lead kids out and help them become more than they are, that's our job in education."

Kish earned a bachelor's degree in history and a master's degree in education administration from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville.

In 1971, he took his first teaching job back at his hometown elementary school - ICS. He became principal four years later and has been there ever since.

For some, spending an entire career at one school might have hampered professional aspirations, but Kish said he never really felt the need to go elsewhere.

"I feel very appreciated here, and the cooperation from the parents, the parish and the community is just stellar," Kish said. "I always tell the faculty they have no reason not to be the best faculty in the world because basically anything they can dream up we can do."

Kish became principal at 25, and admits there's been a certain freedom that comes from being big chief on a small mountain. At the same time, it also comes with a lot



ICS Principal Mike Kish gets ready to welcome the students to another day of learning.

of responsibility.

"I believe in telling everybody, everything," Kish said. "I put out a weekly letter, so parents always know what's going on. It gives parents a sense of confidence in the system. I'm okay with loyal opposition - people who come to you and are opposed to what you're doing, but they're on

our side. Sometimes we get our best ideas from loyal opposition."

Kish manages by walking around and even sitting in on classes.

"Sometimes I just want to jump in and ask questions," Kish said.

Kish also believes in opening the lines of communication when it comes to the students themselves - he wants them to take an active role in pursuing their education.

"The goal is to get them to own their education, and once they do that it's limitless - it's limited only by their dreams," Kish said. "I want kids questioning. I want kids happy. I want them to be respectful. I don't want a quiet school. I want teachers to know they can learn from their students."

Kish credits his faculty and the parents, but also the Columbia community at large for the success of ICS. Advantages like culture, safety and community participation are valuable assets to any child's education, he says.

"You wish every kid in America could have what we have here," Kish said.

Students, faculty and community members expressed their gratitude for Kish's 40 years of service at their annual dinner in February. The students made cards and celebrated the principal during Catholic Schools Week.

The art teacher helped the students make large ICS letters with photos and "Kishisms," sayings Kish is known to repeat, such as "work like you're going to live forever, pray like you're going to die tomorrow."

Kish and his wife, Jeanne, have three daughters, Amy Meyer, Andrea Biske and Kristi Stuart, and seven grandchildren.

So far, Kish has had four of his sisters, his three daughters and six of his grandchildren at ICS.

"I'm kind of spoiled," Kish said. "I preach that to the kids - what do you love? Find something you love, gravitate to that. You can live simply and really be very happy."

When asked if he has any thoughts about retiring, Kish says his secretary is in charge of making that call.

"When I get crabby, I'm done," Kish said.



Immaculate Conception Grade School earned nine medals in the Science Olympiad Regional held Feb. 14 at SIU Edwardsville. First place medals were presented to Lexi Hennes and Mary Wessel (Bottle Rocket), Hannah Janson and Trevor Stockard (Elastic Launch Glider) and Lucy Settle and Kaleb Chism (Road Scholar). Second place honors went to Andrew Gibson and Kaleb Chism (Air Trajectory), Lexi Hennes and Mary Whelan (Meteorology) and Andrew Gibson and Kaleb Chism (Robo-Cross). Earning third place were Jane Whelan and Eve Melliore (Anatomy), Andrew Gibson and Lucy Settle (Crime Busters) and Jane Whelan and Eve Melliore (Solar System).