



Church ^{of the} Redeemer

PARISH DAY SCHOOL

Good evening and welcome! I am Mary Knott, and I am honored to be the head of Redeemer Parish Day School. I have spent the past 21 years here as a parent, teacher, or administrator. Redeemer is not just my place of employment; it is also a wonderful community that feels like family. The faculty and I are excited to welcome all of you to the upcoming program year. We are passionate about education and grateful for what we do. We feel honored to work with such incredible students and families. Tonight, I want to start with a story.

Once upon a time there was a little girl who dreamed she could be anything. She wanted to be an astronaut, a news anchor, a politician, or the first female NFL player. Throughout her childhood, everyone told her she should be a teacher, and truth be told, it drove her a little crazy. She had different ideas. After college, the little girl who was now a young woman with a degree in communications, began working in Washington DC for her senator from Nebraska and in the office of a political consultant. With all due respect to any politicians in the audience, this was all the young woman needed to discover that everyone else had been right all along. A year later she found herself enrolling in graduate school to pursue a career in education.

At the end of her program, the young woman and her classmates were required to attend a two-hour seminar on something called, "the internet." They were told that as educators it would be essential to their future careers. They gathered with their professor, a boxy looking device that was almost the size of the desk, and a dial-up modem to access the internet. At the end of the seminar, the students left clueless, as confused as when they arrived, and certain that they probably didn't really need to know too much about the internet after all. It was just another thing in school that seemed pointless to real life. A recent article in Time magazine tells us that, "The internet we know today spans nearly every country, 40,000 networks, millions of applications, over a hundred million servers, almost a billion websites, and tens of billions of devices." Long ago my fellow graduate students and I were absolutely wrong!

Fast forward to a couple of weeks ago when that issue of Time Magazine landed on my desk. After reading the title, "INTO THE METAVERSE: THE NEXT DIGITAL ERA WILL CHANGE EVERYTHING," my heart skipped a beat as I immediately recalled the internet seminar that I attended nearly 30 years ago. As an educator I figured I better get ahead of things this time and get a handle on the metaverse. Based on the headline, it will be essential to the future of our students. I started to flip through the magazine, and there were many things I could easily comprehend – Rome's colosseum is worth \$79 billion, Musk and Twitter are still going at it, and unfortunately, Klondike is discontinuing the Choco Taco. But after reading about the metaverse, which is described, "as a parallel virtual plane that spans all digital technologies, or somewhat of a 3-D internet where the Magic School Bus can become reality." I was still a little confused.

I suspect that as Time Magazine tells us, though, the Metaverse may change everything. While I am not sure what the future holds, what I do know, as educators it is our job to ensure our children are equipped. At Redeemer, we believe the first school experience is the most important, and research tells us this is true. We know that the learning that occurs in the early years will have a substantial impact on our students' futures. Ninety percent of brain development happens in the earliest years. It is a time of explosive growth and a practice field for navigating life. With the gift of a high-quality early learning experience, not only will our students discover a passion for knowledge, questioning and exploration, but I also suspect they will have no problem tackling the metaverse.

As we expand through third grade to provide a full early childhood experience, we are also deepening our relationship with our Govans neighbors and adding additional programming to better serve our families. As we grow in a multitude of ways, we are determined to strengthen our school, church, and Baltimore, benefitting not just our students but our entire community. This past summer we began working with a group of architects to plan for a new building and changes to our campus to enhance our growing program. We have work ahead of us, but we are confident that with the support of our community, we will create a unique program in Baltimore that will leave its mark on generations of students and families. It is an extremely exciting time in our school's history.

Some of you may have heard this story before, but as we establish our unique learning model, it's worth repeating as it illustrates the reasoning behind our expansion. The first year I began teaching at Redeemer my youngest son Cole was in pre-k. At the end of one school day, we headed to pick his two older brothers up from their school. My middle son Brendan, a third grader at the time, got in the car and started spouting forth statistics about how little kids' brains were so much better at thinking and that the older you get the less creative you become. He explained, in the wisdom of a third grader, Ken Robinson's Theory of Divergent Thinking. Some of you may be familiar with his studies but for those of you who are not, in a nutshell, Robinson explains divergent thinking as "the ability to interpret a question in many different ways and the ability to see many different answers to a question." According to Robinson, "our capacity for divergent thinking deteriorates with age. A longitudinal study of kindergarten children measured 98% of them at genius level in divergent thinking. Five years later, when they were aged 8 to 10 years, those at genius level had dropped to 50%. After another five years, the number of divergent thinking geniuses had fallen further still." Robinson blames this decline on educational institutions and an emphasis in our world on linear thinking.

My son Brendan went on to explain to us that if you give preschoolers paper clips, they will produce hundreds of more ways to use them than any other age group. He ended the conversation when he put his hand on his four-year-old brother's shoulder, looked him straight in the eyes and said rather solemnly, "I'm really, really sorry but you are getting closer and closer to not knowing what to do with a paperclip."

At Redeemer we don't let that happen, because here there is rarely only one right way. We know that true learning comes from wonder, curiosity, and the freedom to take time to discover. It is messy, noisy, joyful, full of mistakes, and fun. The way we teach and learn in early childhood environments is how all people learn best. At Redeemer, we consider it not just our job but our mission to ensure that we set our students on a path where they will never drop out of the 98% genius level in divergent thinking.

Our greatest leaders, inventors, thinkers, and heroes got to be where they are because they love learning. It matters that our children have the opportunity to think divergently, imagine that anything is possible, engage in experiential explorations, and foster the passion that already exists within. Those who make the greatest impact in our world got to where they are because they never stopped expressing creativity. They never lost the ability to think divergently, and they continued to wonder, imagine, and allow their passions and interests to drive their future. In other words, they never stopped thinking and learning like preschoolers. Extending our teaching approach and learning model through third grade is a gift that will last a lifetime!