

Hello. My name is Mikki Dunkley, and I am the principal of St. Vincent Ferrer School. My husband, Mark, and I have been parishioners for 31 years, and our four children attended St. Vincent Ferrer School. In honor of Catholic Schools Week, I would like to take a moment and thank the entire St. Vincent Ferrer parish for your support of our parish school. On behalf of our school staff, we wish to express our sincere gratitude for the support that we receive that allows us to carry on the important ministry of Catholic education here at St. Vincent Ferrer.

There is much to be excited about at our small, but mighty school. As our school principal, one of my favorite things is to see our school through the eyes of others. Over and over again, I have heard the words, "There is just such a special feeling about this place," from first-time visitors, long-time volunteers, parents, and staff. The warmth and sense of community is something that is palpable, and it is a joy and a blessing to be a part of it. Recently, some students and staff members were featured as a part of a bulletin board to be displayed for our Spaghetti Dinner. The title was, "Why I love SVF." Our youngest students shared replies, such as "I like to play with my friends," "I love that I can play on the playground with everyone," and "I love art class." But I think it the replies from our older students, such as, "I feel the support from the entire community, from my friends to my teachers," and "Every teacher has my back, and helps me every day achieve my goals" that really give a sense of the warmth of our SVF family. Two staff members used the phrase, "second home" to describe our school. Much of that comes from our dedicated teachers, who work tirelessly to serve our students and their families. We are blessed to have a staff that is committed to student success and social and emotional well-being. It also comes from school and parish volunteers who repeatedly give the gift of themselves, in volunteerism and financial support to ensure that our school is a community in which our students thrive and are prepared for the next level.

In recent years, we have seen an increase in the number of alumni that have returned to St. Vincent Ferrer School to enroll their own children, the next generation of SVF Students. This year, 19 of our students are 2nd or even 3rd generation Hornets. With those students, come their parents and grandparents who are ready to serve as volunteers to make a difference in their school community. It is lovely to hear the stories of parents who have chosen SVF school and share their reasons for enrolling their own children. There is a common theme: I loved my time here at SVF, and I want that for my own children.

Additionally, we have a group of young adults who do not yet have children, that choose to volunteer at our school as coaches and at special events. We also have teachers that have retired from our school and continue to volunteer to make a difference for our students. This sense of "coming back to give back" is a beautiful way to build on our strong

tradition of excellence and look toward a future that searches for innovative ways to continue to achieve excellence, reinforce values, and provide stability, and calm, in an ever-changing world.

As principal, one of my favorite responsibilities is meeting with prospective families to provide tours of our school. One of the first questions I ask is, “what are you looking for in a school, and why are you considering SVF?” The top response is that they are looking for a school that provides a faith-based environment that aligns with their Christian values. SVF provides this every day, not just with our curriculum, but with a school culture that is Christ-centered and holds tightly to a strong Catholic identity. I also hear that our prospective parents are purposefully looking for a small community in which their child is known, loved, and cared for like family. With our small class sizes and lower student to staff ratio, no one is going unnoticed, and in fact, our small setting truly gives our students the opportunity to shine. This allows our students to develop strong leadership skills as they move on, positioned for success in their future high schools. Additionally, prospective families tell us that they are looking for diverse environment, in which their child is valued for their unique gifts given to them by God, and they then have the opportunities to witness those values in others. This year, our students come to us from 26 different zip codes, 15 different school districts, and a wide array of cultural backgrounds that create what we like to see as a true representation of God’s world. In our school, our students learn that they are wonderfully and beautifully made by God, and they are called to value the beautiful diversity of others in the world around them.

As parishioners, I am asking for your continued support of our school. Help us spread the word about our school. Tell your family members and your neighbors about our small but mighty school community. Registration for next year is now open, and classes are filling quickly, especially at our youngest grade levels. I am available for private tours with prospective families in addition, St. Vincent Ferrer School has group information sessions that are adult only events to learn more about our school. Be sure to follow our school on Facebook “St. Vincent Ferrer School Cincinnati” to see regular updates of the wonderful things that are happening each day, and then you can share with others and help us spread the good news about what is happening at the school. Of course, donations to our Scholarship Granting Organization through the state of Ohio, donations to our STAR Tuition Assistance Fund, and donations for special projects are always greatly appreciated, and truly make a difference for our whole community. Our school is growing and thriving, and we know that the support we receive from our church is a huge part of that success.

Once again, thank you for your time and your support of St. Vincent Ferrer School.