

Ms. Elizabeth (Liz) Larson has made a huge daily impact on the students, parents, and teachers of St. Peter in Chains School. In her classroom, Ms. Larson creates a safe and engaging learning environment. Students work collaboratively in small group settings in which each student is valued and has a role. Incorporating rigorous problem-solving scenarios in Science, such as STEM Engineering Design Challenges, she helps students to think at higher levels drawing from various concepts they have learned across the curriculum. By holding students responsible for due dates without frequent reminders, and allowing them to revise work for better grades, Ms. Larson seeks to cultivate a sense of accountability, which is very much needed for middle-schoolers. All students are empowered and encouraged to seek leadership roles. Using methods such as Socratic Seminars empowers students to speak their minds without fear of judgement. Ms. Larson sets the bar high as she assigns students the task of researching a current topic or event and defending their opinion with facts.

Students are very excited to be part of Ms. Larson's Social Studies, Science, or Religion classes. One favorite lesson in Social Studies includes creating a Speakeasy from the "Roaring 20's". Each student does research and assumes the identity of a historical person who lived in that era. In Science, students participate in the "Sharktank Competition" using the STEM process to create a new product or service, develop an idea, and present it to a board. Other innovative lessons in Science include teaching the ecosystem through the popular film, "Shrek"; or the adaptation tournament in which students research different adaptations of animals which live in the deep ocean and play Pokeman with them, being able to know and defend their chosen adaptation. The Lives of the Saints in Religion class includes stations with a dramatic reenactment of the heroes of our Catholic faith.

Not only is Ms. Larson busy providing engaging lesson plans during the school day, but she goes above and beyond the call of duty. A teaching colleague states, “As the music teacher at St Peter in Chains, I applaud Ms. Larson’s organizational skills and quick thinking, along with her willingness to help in any capacity, which makes her the best volunteer back-stage manager I’ve ever had for music and drama productions. Quick to assess a situation, remain calm, and provide solutions, she directs and motivates the children in her care to give their best, all with a smile...” As our parish Junior High Youth Minister, Ms. Larson meets with school students and other young parishioners twice a month for youth group, does service in the community as much as possible, and takes youth on fun outings. Working with Student Council, along with other teachers and groups, Ms. Larson has assisted students in meeting the needs of others through Hope’s Closet (clothing/toys for children in foster care), Magnified Giving (philanthropy program), and Cookies for First Responders. She has coached volleyball with great success since she joined the staff three years ago. Ms. Larson worked with two other teachers last year, to organize the first Washington DC trip for our school. Working with the other teachers, she served as liason with the travel agency, helped organize student fundraisers, and then helped to chaperone the week-long trip. The trip was a great success and set the stage for trips to occur every two years.

Ms. Larson contributes as a leader with our school community. She is responsible for assisting in our monthly Virtues in Practice program, in which our school focuses on a virtue of the month—students are recognized for demonstrating virtue. As a spin-off to the virtues program, Ms. Larson started the Teacher Shout-Out program, with teachers recognizing teachers for their contributions to the community. As the 8th grade homeroom teacher, she works to develop our 8th graders as student leaders of our school. They work with 1st graders, and lead

school assemblies and prayer services. Ms. Larson has also presented at staff meetings and PTO meetings, utilizing technology to lead parents through a student experience of Google classroom. As one parent writes, “Ms. Larson is an outstanding teacher. She is challenging our children in such a positive way...From stirring current-topic debates that bring our Christian faith's role into real-time issues, to units on women's suffrage and how history builds us, she is opening minds and introducing students to very important and mature concepts and critical thinking. Teaching, especially at parochial school, is not an easy or well-paid job. We are so thankful that Ms. Larson has chosen it, and SPS, as her home. On a personal level, my daughters both adore her and look up to her. We are so grateful for her hard work and inspiration.” The students, staff, and parents at St. Peter in Chains School agree that we are very grateful for Ms. Larson!