



The influence of a Catholic school education

To say that Ed Burjek is a product of Catholic school education is an understatement.

Except for two years during high school, all his years of schooling were done at Catholic schools, including his undergraduate and graduate years at DePaul University.

He grew up in a family where faith

was important. His parents were born in Slovenia, which he described as a devout Catholic country. One of the ways his mom and dad passed on the importance of the faith was by sending him and his four siblings to Catholic schools.

One of the biggest impacts of his education, he said, was developing a relationship with Jesus, fostered by going to Mass every school day with his classmates.

Another way his education shaped him in life, he said, is that he is extremely involved in his community.

"I'm sure that a big part of it is owed

to my Catholic upbringing and going to Catholic schools and knowing how critical service is to our brothers and sisters in the community," Burjek said.

Getting a broader understanding of others, especially the community at large, is one of the benefits of receiving a Catholic education, said Karen Ristau, president of the National Catholic Educational Association. In fact, service is the theme for this year's Catholic schools week, which Catholic schools throughout the country typically celebrate at the end of January.

"Civic engagement is a hallmark of Catholic education," Ristau said. "The majority of elementary and secondary schools participate in service projects, ranging from collecting canned goods for the homeless to rebuilding schools in the hurricane-torn Gulf, so it was natural that we choose service as a major theme."

Burjek knows all about service. After he got married, he and his wife were youth ministers for several years at their parish, Our Lady of Peace, in Darien. That was before they had children. But after their three kids were born, he continued to volunteer.

Over the years, he has coached basketball, football, roller hockey, soccer, volleyball, baseball and softball. He has also served on the following boards: Our Lady of Peace School; the Darien Youth Club; the Benet Academy Fathers' Club; the Darien Swim and Racquet Club. He has been a member of the Illinois Right-to-Life Golf Outing Committee, the membership committee for Legatus and the Darien Lions' Club, where he served as the Fourth of July parade chairman in 2007. He's also part of the Joliet Cursillo men's leadership team. Cursillo is a movement of the church that helps to deepen one's relationship with Christ.

"It just came naturally for me," he said, when asked why he is so involved in the community. "If asked to be part of something of value, I do my best to try to assist in any way that I can. I have tried to follow this philosophy throughout my adult life."

Part of that mentality stems from being a product of the Catholic schools system, he added.

"I don't say that it was strictly due to

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my Catholic school upbringing, but I'm sure it is the primary reason why I do this," he said. "I know what a Catholic community is like. I know that it's all about relationships and people helping people and having seen that growing up was a great example. The sisters who taught us at St. Stephen's were a great example of what dedication in the Catholic community meant and that made a very deep impression on me."

That kind of commitment has trickled down to his children. They also have been active volunteers. They have volunteered at Vanderbilt Children's Hospital; Shade Tree Family Clinic, a free health clinic for the uninsured and underinsured in Nashville; the Peer Jury Board for Downers Grove Township; the American Cancer Society Relay for Life and the Midwest Heart Foundation's Young Hearts for Life.

He said the public schools in Downers Grove are very good, and the family could have saved a lot of money by not sending the children to Catholic schools. But Burjek's wife, Gloria, said it was really important that they receive a strong faith-based and academic education.

"I thought that it was a real blessing that the school and the church could be the center of their life," she said. "The idea that there were Catholic symbols around them all the time was so appealing to me. The church was there, in the background, as they played during recess and that, to me, was a very comforting thought." ☺



Ed Burjek and his wife, Gloria, pose during a recent Fourth of July parade, which he participated in as parade chairman for the Lions Club.



Burjek relaxes during lunch at a recent Cursillo retreat weekend for which he was part of the leadership team.