

Catholic Financial Life Honors Milwaukee-Area Teachers

KAREN MAHONEY
SPECIAL TO THE CATHOLIC HERALD

To celebrate Catholic Schools Week, Catholic Financial Life held its fifth annual Give Back Contest and out of 62 teachers nominated throughout the country, two of the three winners were from the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

The winners are Karin Peterson, a fourth-grade teacher from St. Joseph Catholic School in Big Bend, and Kathryn DeLapp, a middle school ELA, forensics coach and faculty technology coordinator at St. Robert School in Shorewood.

According to Vicki Vlach, Catholic Financial Life's manager of corporate communications and events, both Peterson and DeLapp received many votes, as well as inspiring comments that spoke to how they make a difference in the lives of their students.

Presenting the awards, which include a \$500 monetary award for the teacher and a \$4,000 award for the school, is important to CFL, a longtime proponent of Catholic education.

"Teachers spend countless hours going above and beyond to ensure students succeed inside and outside the classroom," said Vlach. "Their everyday acts can often go unnoticed, but it's our goal to shine a light on these unsung heroes through our annual Give Back Contest."

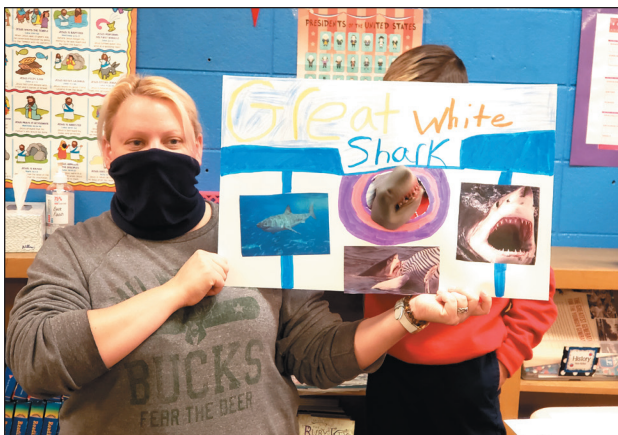
Peterson was nominated by the family of one of her students.

"The family was new to the school this year and were very impressed with our school environment," she said. "I feel truly honored by the nomination. I'm very thankful for all the support from the community, especially the parents and school community. Winning the award puts who I am as a teacher into perspective. In the end, I feel like it shows what I'm teaching the kids in the classroom is making a difference in their lives."

In her 15 years as an educator, Peterson said she has worked hard to create a safe, welcoming environment in which students can learn and grow in their education.

Peterson said she tries to approach learning from the students' point of view when she creates lesson plans that she hopes they will appreciate and understand.

Choosing to teach at a Catholic school is important to Peterson, who said it's important for her to pass on the Deposit of Faith, share Bible stories, pray and prepare her students for lifelong learning.



Karin Peterson (above) of St. Joseph in Big Bend and Kathryn DeLapp (below) from St. Robert in Shorewood were announced as winners in Catholic Financial Life's Give Back Contest. (Submitted photos)



Peterson's principal, Jeff Van Rixel, said he couldn't be happier for Peterson.

"This money will really help our school," he said. "We are one of the smallest Catholic schools in the nation, but we have some of the biggest hearts. Our final goal is heaven, but we are so proud of what we accomplish each day."

DeLapp didn't realize that she was nominated for the award until the voting was underway. Somehow, the school missed the notification.

"A faculty member came across the competition by chance and saw that I'd been nominated," she said. "There was an entire week of voting, and we found out on the last day voting was open and that I'd been nominated. The community rallied together and flooded the votes that Friday, praying that somehow, we could make up for those lost days. CFL then determined winners based on number of votes, the original nomination story and comments that voters left."

With all the COVID restrictions, DeLapp, who has taught at the school for seven years, said the teachers were bombarded with new challenges, but through it all, the community continually supported the teachers and demonstrated their gratitude.

One of the keys to DeLapp's success in the classroom is through setting high expectations, structuring those expectations and challenging students to accept and work through the struggles.

DeLapp always felt called to teach at Catholic schools and helping her students learn to be servants of God.

Last year, when the school went virtual, the middle school teaching team chose to start each day with students in prayer.

"Around 100 people joined a live Google Meet, where eighth-graders took turns sharing prayers and daily reflections," DeLapp said. "This gave us an opportunity to connect spirituality and emotionally with our students during a time that was quite frankly, pretty scary and overwhelming. To me, this is where I see Catholicism shine. We turn to our faith constantly as a source of guidance, love, and steadfastness. In and out of the classroom, we provide opportunities for kids to grow in faith."

St. Robert Principal Lauren Beckmann said DeLapp is a passionate subject-area specialist and inspiring English teacher.

"She's served on the Archdiocesan English Language Arts Committee and Standards-based Learning Task Force," she said. "She's a well-respected forensics coach in the State Middle Level Forensics Program, where she has consistently taken our team to first or second place. She serves on our Learning Support Faculty Leadership Team and is our school technology coordinator and Google domain administrator."

DeLapp devotes her summers to missionary service and serves the poor alongside St. Mother Teresa's Little Sisters of the Poor in 2019.

According to John Borgen, president of CFL, the organization understands a good education is key to a successful future. In 2019, CFL awarded \$290,000 in grade school, high school and college scholarships.

"Education is a central value and charitable priority of CFL," he said. "In 2019, Catholic Financial Life raised, matched and donated nearly \$1.9 million for churches, schools, local organizations and individuals in need."