

LEADERSHIP CHANGE COMING TO OLPR
THIS UPCOMING SCHOOL YEAR

Passing the torch

By Melissa Komar
STAR EDITOR

Sister Mary Ripp has served as a principal for 42 of her more than a half-century career in teaching.

This upcoming school year, she'll step into a new role when she walks through the doors of Our Lady of Port Richmond Regional Catholic School.

Effective July 1, Sister Mary will now serve as Director of Mission and Ministry.

Assistant principal Aubree King will take over as principal.

Sister Mary has been principal at the Port Richmond school the entirety of its 14-year existence.

Prior to that, she filled the role for 21 years down the street at the now-shuttered Our Lady Help of Christians.

And, before her time in education in Philly, she was principal at St. Joseph's School in New Jersey for six years, and as a teacher for nine years prior at the same school.

She also served as principal for one year at the former St. Boniface School in Wilkes-Barre.

Sister Mary actually served as principal and fourth-grade teacher for a school year prior to transitioning to the role full time.

"Starting my 10th year of teaching, the community asked me if I would be the principal and be the principal and the fourth-grade teacher," she said. "I said yes reluctantly because teaching is my first love, and I really didn't want to leave the classroom. However, I did it out of holy

obedience because that's what we do as nuns. And, I have to say every day went well since. "But every day I was principal and not teaching, every time I walked by the classroom, I had a tear in my eye. I really, really missed the classroom," she said. "However, where I am now at this stage in my life, I have loved being a principal because I did still get to work with the children. I got to know their parents, the teachers. I'm a people person. I love people, so that part has really been wonderful."

As difficult as the transition may have been years ago, it's been a decision that's allowed Sister Mary a career that's been nothing short of amazing.

"It's something that came out of holy obedience to something I absolutely love and cherish," she said.

King has been assistant principal at OLPR for the last two school years.

Prior to taking on the role of assistant principal, the Port Richmond native and Nativity BVM alumna was the pre-k 3 teacher at OLPR.

"Going into the 2020-2021 school year, Sister Mary and the administrative team developed a COVID taskforce so we could bring the students back into the building safely," she said. "At that time, Sister asked me to be the coordinator of the COVID task force team at Our Lady of Port Richmond."

The team met every week to put plans into place prior to school starting.

In July before that school year start-



PHOTO: RENEE ROZMATOSK

Sister Mary Ripp and Aubree King will take on new roles at OLPR effective July 1.

TORCH

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ed, Sister Mary popped the question that would put the recent announcement into motion.

"Sister Mary asked me if I was ever interested in administration and I responded, 'Well, yeah, I could see myself doing administration,'" King said. "And, then another week went by and then Sister Mary called me into her office and I was offered the assistant principal position, which was fantastic. I just love being at the school."

King went through a similar experience to Sister Mary, transitioning from teaching in the classroom to leading the school.

"I did miss my pre-k students," King shared. "Similar to Sister, when it was the beginning of the school year and the pre-k 3 kids were coming in, I did have a hard time. And, it took awhile."

Although leaving the classroom was

tough, her new role more than prepared her to take on the reins when school resumes.

"I've worked alongside Sister Mary and she has mentored me and she has basically walked me through her every day routine and we'd help each other out," King said. "I'm grateful she has been such a great mentor the past two years because with this new position, I wouldn't be able to do it without her."

Sister Mary is quick to point out that King was the perfect pupil.

"She's a quick learner, she's an organizational guru, her administrative skills are outstanding," she said. "She knows the people and the culture of Port Richmond. She loves the children, she's so service oriented. From the very beginning, we worked as a team."

About three weeks ago at a school administrative meeting, Sister Mary decided it was time for King to lead that team.

"I went into that meeting not plan-

ning to pass on the torch. I was sitting across the table from her and I found myself saying, 'I think you're ready. I know you're ready. You couldn't be more ready.' And, she smiled back and said, 'Really,'" recalled Sister Mary, laughing.

The team then inquired what Sister Mary would do.

"Well, I'm not yet ready to retire even though I'm 77," she said. "And, knowing and working with our administrative team, it's second to none. Seeing the work we do together, I wanted to be able to continue that mission of a quality Catholic education."

As King takes over as principal, Sister Mary will remain involved in a leadership role at the school.

The newly created position will include working with the team to open an engineering lab in September, expanding the prayer group initiative, fundraising, grant writing, maintaining a deep sense of Catholic identity within the school and

expanding programs such as honors math, to name a few.

"It's that whole idea of continuing the mission and strategic planning and working with the team," Sister Mary said. "I'm looking forward to continuing to work in a school where the team and the faculty work so closely together for the good of the children, constantly envisioning new programs. It's just so invigorating. I'm so happy I can continue to be a part of that."

For King, keeping the continuity of the team and curriculum is key amid the transition.

"I'm very positive and looking forward to next year," King said. "I don't really see it being that difficult. There's always going to be challenges. One of the biggest things is to continue to have our school run the way it has been running. To be able to continue that in the community I grew up in is really a blessing."