

# Notre Dame's new headmaster brings fresh vision

By Elizabeth Coe

**Elizabeth "Libbi" Murray took over as the head of Notre Dame Academy in Middleburg in January following the school's controversial decision last fall to move away from Catholicism.**

After the school's split from the Arlington Diocese, Murray said the school lost about six families and needed new direction.

"We want to be respectful to our founders and maintain our faith-based tradition," she said. "But if we are not officially a diocesan school, then what are we? It caused us to have a conversation about what are our core beliefs and what is important to us. In addition to our spirituality, we wanted to explore what that means."

This month, the school's board of trustees adopted a new vision statement that Murray said "continues the school's tradition of ethics, spirituality, generosity and respect for others. It will continue to emphasize learning how to think, rather than what to think."

Murray, who is a practicing Catholic, said the plan is to add courses focusing on the environment, sustainable living, world cultures and history in order to better prepare students for a world beyond Loudoun County and beyond college.

"I am especially excited by the prospect of adding an ecological overlay to our strong programs in the basic sciences -- physics, biology and chemistry," she said. "We'll be adding a richness and more thinking about and learning about the world's environments ... so that our education increases in its intellectual integrity."

Murray previously served as an associate head at Linden Hill School in Northfield, Mass., and at The Brearley School in New York City.

She said she loves working at Notre Dame Academy, especially interacting with the 250 students and faculty members.

"It's wonderful," she said. "It's a school that has a really caring and nurturing environment. The faculty are well educated and have many years of experience. The faculty is equal to any faculty at the best schools in the country, and the students are really engaged in their academic work."

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