

seamlessly to distance learning. “Most of Christian Brothers’ books were already digital and teachers took one day off to get everyone on board to work from home, and then we jumped right in,” Alison says. “Lauren is glad she is a sophomore, because if she was a junior she would miss her SAT, and if a senior she’d miss graduation activities. St. John the Evangelist made adjustments to the students’ workload and on Fridays they have optional activities. Their teachers ask them all the time how they are doing and handling all this.”

Both Owen and Lauren “enjoy sleeping in a bit and not having to rush to get ready in the morning,” Alison chuckles. The teens keep up with their friends each day on FaceTime, Zoom calls, and online chats. “Lauren is very social and definitely missing her

friends. Owen has been in Little League since kindergarten, so we are missing our time at the baseball diamond.” Instead, they have been enjoying walks in the evening and more family nights. “It’s been nice to linger around the dinner table because the kids are freer in the evenings, with not as much homework or sports,” Alison notes.

Technology has been a blessing. On Sundays, the family chooses one online Mass for worship and they also view priests’ homilies from additional Masses. “This helps a great deal. Owen is a regular altar server at Mass, so he misses being able to serve,” Alison says. Ascension Press has been offering a worldwide rosary every day, and Alison tries to pray that daily, with the kids joining when they aren’t in class.

This period of dealing with COVID-19 “would be much different if my kids didn’t have their faith to rely on,” Alison concludes. “We are so grateful it’s grounded them through all of this. Adam always reiterates that God is in charge, that he’s got this. And even though we don’t know what will happen, God knows how it will all play out. That’s the underlying message we give our kids and they are comforted by and take their strength from this.” †



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— ALISON FARRIS



■ Jenny Oliver with her children, Ava and Graham, on steps of their home.

PRINCIPAL JENNY SAYS

‘LIKE EVERYTHING THAT LIFE PRESENTS,

*We face it together
as a family’*

BY JULIE SLY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVE GERMAN

JENNY OLIVER, PRINCIPAL OF ST. JOSEPH SCHOOL IN AUBURN

for the past five years, was having a “typical” day during the COVID-19 pandemic, taking care of her two children, Ava, 4, and Graham, 2, in her home only a short drive away from the school she loves and leads, with 140 students in grades K-8.

She got up at 5 a.m. while the kids were still sleeping, to run on her treadmill for 30 minutes. Multi-tasking, she was writing her distance learning newsletter for week eight to email out, planning

for next school year, budgeting, making sure of modifications for the return to campus, posting on social media, hosting virtual faculty meetings, problem-solving technology issues, and calling



■ Jenny Oliver plays with Ava and Graham at home on a rainy day.

parents to check in as time allowed. “I don’t know where I would be at this moment without my faith,” she admits.

“I’ve reflected on how important prayer has become to all of us,” says Jenny, who taught sixth and eighth grades for four years at St. Joseph before becoming principal. “Families are listening to our morning assembly prayer together; they are saying prayers of gratitude as their grace before dinner together; or sometimes mom or dad is whispering a quick Hail Mary that they’ll get through the day! And I’ve said to them, ‘Believe me, I can relate!’

“This pandemic is a crisis we could never have imagined. But my family and our community at large support each other by putting into perspective our roles as parents and educators. It’s been such a humbling experience, reminding us that God is in control. So we each do our part to protect and guard the kids in our care.”

Jenny is a graduate of St. Mel School in Fair Oaks, (the former) Loretto High School in Sacramento, and St. Mary’s College in Moraga. She holds a master’s degree in education

from California State University-Sacramento. Her husband Jason is a special agent for the Department of Justice and is away from home a significant amount of time for his job.

Working long hours to keep the school community going “has been challenging, for sure,” she notes. “Like everything that life presents though, we face it together as a family. Our two children come first and they feel very much a part of the process. On Principal’s Day, our community staged a caravan parading by our house with all sorts of posters and banners. We heard lots of shouts of ‘Thank you, Mrs. Oliver!’ and ‘We love you, Mrs. Oliver!’ All of a sudden, Jason and I noticed that our kids, without prompting, were waving to the passing cars and shouting ‘Thank you!’ and ‘We love you!’ That tells me better than anything else that they could understand the concept of community.”

Faculty pivoted without missing a day to distance learning and have worked more hours than they ever have before. “We are in constant communication, adapting curriculum and lesson plans, and sharing best practices.

Like many of our teachers, I have a household to run. I try to keep a routine for my little ones, but I also emphasize that when I’m interrupted, it’s not because they’re not important, but because we all have to work together because every mommy and every daddy is important. My kids know what it means to be a part of our SJCS family.”

Reaching the last day of school this year, in particular, is going to feel like a winning touchdown.

“I’m going to encourage everyone to ‘run into the end zone and spike the ball,’ Jenny says excitedly.

“For our teachers, it will mean getting away from lessons and planning. For our parents and families, it might mean reclaiming the area of their house that became ‘school’ for the last several weeks. For our students, I am going to cheer them on to a summer of outside fun with extended family and friends. My family is certainly going to do all three of those things!”

Jenny hopes the school community will change because of living through COVID-19. “It will be different in the fall, but our values and standards of keeping our students safe and secure will guide us into a ‘new normal.’ I hope the habits of praying and staying connected, and giving God praise and gratitude, stay with us. And I hope that when we have a little time to reflect on how much our faith helped us get through the sacrifice and uncertainty, we will appreciate our Catholic identity more than ever.” †



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