



# Episcopal Identity

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School Chaplain



Class of 2026 in chapel

*The Lotus grows out of the mud. Without the mud, there is no Lotus. Suffering is a kind of mud, that we must use in order to grow the flower of Understanding and Love”*  
- Thich Nat Hanh/ Vietnamese Monk

I recently learned an interesting fact about the Lotus flower. This beautiful flower, which is associated with many religions as a sign of divinity, purity, and renewal, grows out of the mud. It thrives and grows in murky and mucky water - how amazing! It got me thinking about this year that we have just been through. There was certainly mud. We went through hard things, we changed the way we lived, we had to isolate, and we lost people we loved. Despite all of this there was so much beauty and growth. We learned and grew despite, and sometimes because of, the mud.

In Episcopal Schools we know, and we cling to the fact, that we are spiritual people. We are always looking to the source of our being and for a connection to something that is outside of ourselves. Learning and existing in a school community is not just about book

knowledge, it is about becoming our authentic selves (children and adults!) These opportunities go beyond the explicit spiritual formation that happens in chapel or religion class. This ‘becoming’ is at the heart of what we do every day. It happens in the small interactions between peers, in tears of frustration being acknowledged and held, and in the constant coming together of our community to grow into something greater than we could accomplish alone.

Goal number three of our strategic plan says that we will embrace and celebrate our identity as an Episcopal school as we nurture the spiritual foundation of every student. One of the big ways that we have made progress towards this goal is by hiring Amanda Rea to be our Primary and Lower School Religion Teacher. The addition of Amanda to the religion team expands our ability to nurture the spiritual growth of our students. Amanda will work closely with me to help our students explore their own spiritual natures and to grow into curious and engaged learners. The expansion of the religion department also enables me to commit deliberate focus and energy toward our service learning program and our diversity and equity goals.

One of the objectives in our third strategic goal is to practice and model a culture of civil conversation around diversity and inclusion. In order to do this we need to know where we currently are as a community, both our strengths and the areas needing growth. In the fall, to help start this important work, we will be conducting a school-wide assessment of the climate of inclusion on our campus using the Assessment of Inclusivity and Multiculturalism (AIM). This broad reaching survey will look at all areas of our common life and give us a starting point for the work of equity and inclusion that we want to do. This will not be easy work, nor is it meant to be. It will require us to look critically at ourselves, to hear and speak hard truths, and to work toward becoming a more inclusive and welcoming community.

There are lots of exciting things on the horizon at St. Mark’s. We are looking forward to another year of growing together, learning more about one another, and searching for God in the everyday moments of community life. There will certainly be moments when we feel like we are stuck in the mud, but like the lotus flower, we will again emerge as a new beautiful creation.