Introduction:

We conducted our regular interview with Martha as well as one reference call. Clearly, she is passionate about St. Mary’s and its future. We have reviewed the issue of her not being Catholic and the need for the next President to be Catholic given current circumstances.
July 7, 2016

Dear Search Consultants and Committee,

In the spirit of Loretto, I am compelled to submit my qualifications to serve as the next head of school at St. Mary’s Academy. I am an educator who is guided and inspired by the Loretto Community’s dedication to working for justice and acting for peace because the Gospel urges us. I am an educator who is spiritually grounded. I am a challenger and innovator while respecting and honoring tradition.

If I did not recognize the current challenges that St. Mary’s Academy faces with the Diocese, you might think me naïve. I am aware of the pressures facing St. Mary’s Academy and more recently the Loretto Community. Living the Gospel values is historically accompanied by the distrust of institutional authority. St. Mary’s Academy is Catholic and always will be Catholic no matter the challenges.

Some of us at SMA are experiencing considerable emotional disbelief and pain during this process of Diocesan review, yet the silver lining, the opportunity for reflection on SMA’s identity, mission, Loretto tradition and future cannot be ignored. By submitting my name for consideration as the next head of school, someone who is a committed catholic educator, though not a confirmed Roman Catholic, and someone who is grounded in the spirit of Loretto, I hope to serve as a catalyst to deepen reflection and increase dialogue among the Board of Trustees, Loretto and the school community at this critical time.

St. Mary’s Academy is a vibrant educational institution. It is unique among schools in the Denver area. The questions I offer to answer with action are, “Why don’t we have wait pools for every grade level? How can we reach the many families who belong at SMA but do not understand who SMA is? Why have we only raised half of the capital campaign’s 10 million? Why are we often not seen as innovative as we really are?”

I’m passionate about St. Mary’s Academy – its history, its Loretto spirit, its Catholic tradition, its Gospel grounding, its academic, artistic and athletic excellence. I’m passionate about the good work we do with students, and eager to represent the school in the role of president. I offer to serve as a catalyst for deep and broad discussions of St. Mary’s Academy’s past, present and future.

Thank you for your consideration,

Martha S. Ashley
During my first visit to the Motherhouse, I had the privilege of meeting Helen Sanders, a mythic figure who became one of my role models. Her life is a story of a strong woman of intellect and action, exceptional within an exceptional community of sisters. Helen Sanders is described as being wise, quietly bold, humorous and innovative, someone who prioritized persons over institutions.

We visited Helen in her room. She was sitting in a chair near her bed. I vaguely remember that there were two or three other people present in addition to Helen Sanders and me. I was introduced as the new Middle School principal and then the talk moved on to other topics.

Helen wasn’t able to speak yet she was alert and very present. Throughout the twenty minutes or so, when her gaze would fix on me, I felt a kindred connection. Here was a committed challenger, a woman of action who was quoted as saying that the best service is to help people to be themselves. Thomas Merton called that becoming your True Self. I felt blessed in her gaze that day.

I carry that blessing with me today. That I have and will continue to lead in the tradition of the Sisters of Loretto is contained in that blessing. Helping students to discover and be their True Selves through faith, service, and working for justice and acting for peace is my personal and professional mission, one that I share daily with colleagues, parents and students.

I am an innovator, pioneer and challenger, I live the Gospel values, I advocate for the underdog and I am grounded in spirituality and humility. This is Loretto.
OBJECTIVE: To serve as a head of school in an independent school that seeks an innovative and experienced leader to carry the institution forward programmatically and financially – a leader with a keen capacity for strengthening community ties and fidelity to mission and values – a leader with experience in developing programs that recognize and value global complexity and diverse perspectives.

ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

Head of Middle School (Principal) – 2004 to present
St. Mary’s Academy, Englewood, Colorado – A coeducational JK-8 and all-girls high school with an enrollment of 600-700 students. The Middle School division is comprised of 210 students in grades 6-8. Primary responsibilities as Middle School head are:

1. To serve, lead and manage the Middle School faculty and program design and implementation;
2. To collaborate on an all-academy administrative team and with the board of trustees in support of the institution’s mission, enrollment, financial stability and advancement.

In support of innovative and vital programming, accomplishments include:

- Maintained consistently robust enrollment;
- Established a consistent, growth-supporting professional evaluation process;
- Diversified faculty – gender, race, cultural background
- Nurtured a gender and race diverse faculty;
- Created an enduring relationship-based community service program with local, regional and international components;
- Established on-site collaborative partnerships with communities in the Cochiti Pueblo of New Mexico and Peru through the World Leadership School that are supported by multi-disciplinary classroom studies;
- Developed an experiential outdoor education program with emphases in cultural and environmental studies and with activities that promote social-emotional growth;
- Ensured that all students have daily experiences and expanded offerings in music, art, design and engineering;
- Expanded and restructured the second-language acquisition program adding an option to study French or Spanish and creating skill-based rather than grade-based student placement;
• Established a consistent and inspiring religious studies curriculum;
• Restructured sequence and content of science and social studies curricula;
• Implemented gender-sensitive, brain-researched pedagogy and curricula;
• Formalized high school application and admission counseling;
• Supported differentiated learning with two positions – one, a middle school learning plan liaison and two, an instructional media technologist.

Additional participation in the MS program include teaching the student leadership and global leadership classes, coaching cross-country running and teaching mathematics.

**Assistant Head of Middle School – 2000 to 2004**
*The Episcopal School of Dallas*, Dallas, TX
– A coed PK-12 college preparatory school of approximately 1050 students. Accomplishments include:
  • Chaired the PK-12 articulation of program;
  • Restructured student disciplinary board for Middle and Upper School.
  • Developed:
    • A middle school student leadership council;
    • Membership in the National Junior Honor Society;
    • A regularly published student newspaper and parent newsletter;
    • A math club and team;
    • An after-school program.

**TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

**Middle School Math Teacher – 1993 to 2000**
*The Hockaday School*, Dallas, TX
– A PK-12 college preparatory school for girls with approximately 1100 students. Accomplishments include:
  • Developed courses for gifted middle school math students;
  • Proposed, organized and coached a competitive math team;
  • Raised standards and reputation of Hockaday as a place for girls to thrive in math.

**Math Teacher for Precocious Math Students – 1989 to 1993**
*The Saint Michael and All Saints School*
– A PK-6 coed Episcopal elementary school that merged with The Episcopal School of Dallas in 1995. Accomplishments include:
  • Developed a multi-level, comprehensive math curriculum for application in grades three through six;
  • Created a resource of hands-on lab experiences and coached application in grades three and four.
Private Tutor (elementary and advanced math) – Gained experience with learning styles and alternative methods of presentation of concepts and skills.

Irving High School, Irving Texas
– A large and diverse public high school. Highlights include:
  • Gained valuable experience with planning and pedagogy;
  • Learned effective classroom management to enhance learning in highly populated classrooms;
  • Sponsored National Honor Society and the Mu Alpha Theta Math Club

EDUCATION

Southern Methodist University – Dallas, TX
  Masters of Liberal Arts; Recognition for High Achievement

University of Texas – Arlington, TX
  Certification: Texas-Secondary Math (grades 6-12) & Physical Science (6-9)

University of Dallas – Irving, TX
  Graduate Business Courses - 16 credit hours (3.63 GPA)

Texas A&M University – College Station, TX
  BS in Engineering Technology; President's Scholar; Magna Cum Laude; Southwest Conference Cross-Country Champion (1979); 4-year letter in Track & Field

PREVIOUS PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Contel Corporation – Dallas, TX
  Systems and Planning Engineer

PRESENTATIONS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

St. Mary’s Academy Board-Administration-Day Presentations
  • Compelling and Not Just Distinctive (January 2016)
  • Global Partnerships (January 2015)

National Association of Independent Schools
  • Presenter 2015 – Global Learning Strategies

Independent Schools Association of the Southwest
  • Presenter 2004 – Bullying - Research & Reality
  • Presenter – 1993 Math Midway and Other Cooperative Projects

Association of Colorado Independent Schools
• ACIS Accreditation Team Member at three member schools

Significant Professional Experiences
• GlobalMindEd Conference, Denver, CO (June 8-10, 2016)
• Serve on Lower School Initiative Team (Jan. 2015 to present) in collaboration to redesign Lower School program and develop teacher leadership
• TEDxDenverTeachers Presentation (March 2013) – Environment, Justice, and Empathy – An Inspiring Example of 21st Century Education
• Cuernavaca Language School (2009 Mexico)
• Understanding By Design – Curriculum Design (2006 New York)
• Independent School Management – Wilmington Delaware
  • Institute for Leadership (Summer 2003)
  • Institute for Deans (Summer 2000)
• Seminar with the Education Group – Moving Up (October 2002)
• ERB Conference in New York (October 1997)
• Faculty grant for study in Italy – Renaissance Art and Architecture (Summer 1995)
• Reviewer/peer editor for Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School (1994-2004)

PERSONAL INFORMATION
I’m an avid outdoor enthusiast who enjoys hiking, running, bird watching, plant identification, stargazing, biking, camping, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. I’m a dedicated student of the Hispanic culture and an advanced Spanish-language speaker, reader and writer. I’m a closet poet. I have the privilege of serving as a mentor for a Hispanic scholarship student who is in her junior year of high school. I have served on the board of the Challenge Foundation.
References for Martha S. Ashley

Deirdre V. Cryor
Former Head of School at St. Mary’s Academy
Current Head of School at Country Day School of the Sacred Heart
303-641-3185
dcryor@msn.com

Linda Deits
Current Lower School Teacher at St. Mary’s Academy
720-341-1432
ldeits@smanet.org

Mike Duncan
Former St. Mary’s Academy Board Member and Chair
303-759-3303
mduncan@duncanoil.com

Don McFall
Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Challenge Foundation
720-203-8888
admcfall@comcast.net

Ross Wehner
Founder of The World Leadership School and TabLab
303-679-3412
ross@worldleadershipschool.com
July 6, 2016

Dear Search Consultants:

I am happy to write this letter of recommendation for Martha Ashley.

I am founder and Board president of the Challenge Foundation, Inc. Our organization currently has thirty seven scholarship students at St. Mary’s Academy. We select children who are academically high achieving but come from poverty level families. It is a very difficult social transition when they enter SMA in sixth grade; however, Martha has greeted these children with open arms and has provided a very warm and welcome environment. In addition, she has been very supportive in personally working with our staff and young students.

Over the course of years, I have witnessed Martha handle “middle school” incidents in a very professional manner. She is a wonderful public speaker and has spoken in English and Spanish at our Challenge events. Also, Martha has an outgoing and warm personality and I feel would be an effective communicator and fundraiser with potential donors and board members.

Lastly, I would like to point out that she exemplifies the Loreto vision of justice. All the children in the Challenge Foundation have a mentor which is no small undertaking. It is an eleven year commitment from sixth grade through college. She assumed this role with our most financially needy family and, as expected, has been a wonderful role model and advocate. I feel Martha will take on every challenge or new venture in the same spirit and will be a wonderful asset to the organization she joins.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 720 203 8888 or admcfall@comcast.net.

Sincerely,

Don McFall
July 18, 2016

To whom it may concern:

This letter is to give my highest possible recommendation for Martha Ashley as a dynamic, innovative and heartfelt school leader.

As Founder of World Leadership School, I have had the privilege of working with Martha Ashley for the last five years on a variety of projects. Our mission at World Leadership School is to help “empower young leaders to find innovative solutions to the world’s pressing problems.” We do this by working with approximately 40 independent schools around the nation on a variety of school change initiatives, including strategic planning, teacher training, and global travel programs. In this role, I work intimately with school heads and division directors around the nation. Martha stands out as as a remarkable school leader for the following reasons:

**Signature Presence.** I have gone into Martha’s office many times for meetings, and she always stands up from her computer, smiles, and sits down to face me with her full attention. She listens thoughtfully, and responds thoughtfully. In my experience working in leadership development with school leaders, but also corporate leaders, this type of active listening and heartfelt speaking is something that few leaders do well. When you are with Martha, she surrounds you with her presence – and she inspires in you an equal level of engagement. This is what I call Martha’s “signature presence.”

**Meaningful Environment.** Martha’s biggest contribution as a leader at St. Mary’s has been to create a meaningful environment for everyone. I have worked with Martha for a full week of camping with her entire 8th grade teaching team and student class during an immersion program in Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico. I have also been to St. Mary’s for countless classroom visits and assemblies over the last few years. I always see the same thing: teachers happily engaged in their craft of teaching, always trying to teach material in more creative ways; students absorbed in learning or in conversation with one another; and the parents are absolutely thrilled. They offer the best perspective on Martha’s leadership.
Any visitor to St. Mary’s Middle School feels the happy, warm, and inclusive energy in the building. It’s the result of a leader who creates a balanced ecosystem: high expectations combined with love and support. In these circumstances, children and teachers come alive, stepping into who they really are and can be.

Fierce Resolve. Martha has a soft-spoken and humble appearance, but she pursues her goals in a passionate and purposeful way. She begins by setting very high standards around what the educational experience at St. Mary’s should look like, and teachers have to step up their focus and energy under Martha’s leadership. St. Mary’s, like many private schools, does a great job of covering academic material and always has. One of Martha’s main priorities is creating an educational experience that also shapes the heart and soul, where students cultivate empathy and the ability to communicate, collaborate and solve problems in cross cultural environments.

Martha has gone to her board and parents, time and time again, to ask permission to do a number of groundbreaking projects. Of all the schools we work with at World Leadership School, St. Mary’s was the first to pursue all-class travel immersion programs. Under Martha’s leadership, rising 7th graders can travel to Ollantaytambo, Peru and all rising 8th graders travel to Cochiti Pueblo, New Mexico. She has also worked with her faculty to build scaffolding curriculum so that classroom learning connects meaningfully with the cultural immersion experience. In this way, traveling students do not “feel the seam” in their learning as they travel off campus. So Martha has built long-term institutional partnerships for St. Mary’s in Peru and New Mexico, but she has also anchored these partnerships in the learning curriculum. Very few of our school leaders have been able to develop such deep and integrated partnerships. These partnerships no longer depend on Martha’s presence – were she to leave the school, the partnerships would carry on.

Lifelong Learner. Martha is constantly learning and growing herself, and most recently she has disciplined herself to learn Spanish. I have seen her time and time again speaking Spanish, finding the right words, improving each year, and modeling what it looks like to learn something new.
In the same way, Martha has pushed herself to learn and grow as Principal at St. Mary’s Middle School. She has accomplished what she wanted to at St. Mary’s and is now ready to take on new challenges and develop new skills.

The school community that is able to recruit Martha Ashley will benefit from her dynamic, heartfelt leadership. Martha has certainly transformed the learning environment at St. Mary’s Middle School for students, teachers and parents. Under Martha’s leadership, St. Mary’s has also dramatically boosted its enrollment and increased its waiting list. Under Martha’s leadership, St. Mary’s now has the most sought-after middle school experience in all of Denver.

Regards,

Ross Wehner
Founder, World Leadership School
July 25, 2016

5193 South Cody Court
Littleton, CO 80123

Educational Directions Incorporated
PO Box 768
Portsmouth, RI 02871

Attention: Dr. Mathew Heersche
Ms. Risa Oganesoff Heersche

Dear Dr. Heersche and Ms. Heersche,

This letter is written in support of Martha Ashley’s application to be considered for the position of President of St. Mary’s Academy. Martha Ashley is extraordinarily qualified to lead St. Mary’s Academy as we look to the continuing successes, opportunities, and challenges facing our school.

Martha’s love of the Loretto values and traditions make her an ideal candidate. Her spirituality lends itself beautifully to understanding the Catholic faith; she will be an exceptional asset in building and maintaining a collegial bond within the external Catholic community while being committed to the charism and traditions of Loretto.

I had the pleasure of working with Martha on the Lower School Initiatives Leadership Committee during the 2014-2015 academic year. Her confidence to look at the overarching issues in the Lower School was evident in all our discussions. Martha clearly gasped the concerns of each constituent group and played a critical role in guiding our work to ensure success. Martha continues to see our Academy as an entire institution, while also understanding strengths and goals important to each division.

Martha was also a dedicated member of the Lower School Math Initiative Committee. As the chair of that committee, I relied on her program expertise to help optimize our goal of connecting the Lower School math program to that in the Middle and High Schools. Martha’s insight was invaluable in the detailed review of various mathematics curricula. She continues to be involved in our evolving instruction of mathematics in the Lower School as we grow in our quest for academic rigor. This sort of collaboration is well supported and inspired by Martha.

As a parent, I can attest to Martha’s care and love for all students in the Middle School. My son and daughter are Middle School alumni, class of 2006 and 2008, respectively. Offering a program that provides inclusivity for boys is one of the key successes of the Middle School. I believe that Martha will bring this same kind of inclusivity to the Lower School helping us to recruit and retain a greater population of boys. I trusted Martha unconditionally with the academic rigor, social/emotional wellbeing, and physical safety of
my own children. When questions or concerns arose, I was greeted with empathy, compassion, and most importantly, respect for my point of view. I could not have asked for more.

Educated in the Loretto tradition and being an alumna of the SMA high school class of 1975, I continue to live my personal and professional life in accord with the Loretto values I learned and experienced in the High School. As a Lower School faculty member, I am honored to be a Loretto educator, helping young children understand how we incorporate the Loretto School Values in all aspects of our life.

I ask that you please carefully consider the application of Martha Ashley for the position of President of St. Mary’s Academy. Martha is a woman of integrity, respect, and compassion; she is an enthusiastic leader who will thoughtfully guide our future at St. Mary’s Academy. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Linda Hughes Deits
Class of 1975, former parent, and Lower School faculty member