

IN THEIR OWN WORDS—ALUMNI TEACHERS

NED WILSON, Class of 1958

Ned Wilson (a.k.a. "Sir") has taught Science to thousands of Saintsmen since 1965.

On what keeps him going: "I teach energetically, I jump around, I'm wired, and I want them to be that way around me. I'm blessed because science, particularly the way I do it, is pretty thrilling, and I get a lot of students excited about it. It's also the talented staff, faculty and students that we have had for years. These are the blessings that keep me going."

On what has been difficult: "It took me 35 or 40 years to understand the mark I make on many students. They don't stand up and tell me what I did that impressed them, but I can finally see it. They may not have caught on to science or to the value in being a good person right away, but in the sophomore or junior year, the light goes on, and I can see that fire in their eyes that tells me they're getting it."

On life's surprises: "My goal was to be a researcher. In college I would never have guessed that I'd build an entire career teaching science to young men, and reveling in it."

On academics: "At one time, people had the impression that Catholic schools were sub-par, but we'll never go back. We'll always be at our current, high level based on the people we have and everything that we've put in place."

On faith in action: "Look at the real-world aspects of being a Catholic school: sophomores working at St. Vincent de Paul every week, students raising money for the Hogar Infantil Orphanage in Tijuana, the hours of Christian service that every boy needs to put in. It's the whole idea of giving back. It's not just a catechism or religion book. Our young men learn how to make a difference in the world."

On his trademark "Fire Up": "I'm fired up all day, and I had the idea for something catchy that would work everywhere, a rallying point. A few years ago, I stood before the senior class at the end of Mass and said, 'Fire Up is not just words. I want you to think about Fire Up when you're off and away somewhere, when it may help you over a bad spot and bring you back to what you got from your high school education.' I want to instill in the boys the idea of being fired up and ready to go on. It may be on the field or on the court, but more importantly, it's going to be in life. Fire Up is nothing profound or serious, but I intend it to be more than just yelling at a football game."

On "Sir": "I address students as 'Sir,' so they started calling me 'Sir.' That's how that came about. It used to be 'Doctor,' then 'Brother,' now 'Sir.' These things take on a life of their own..."



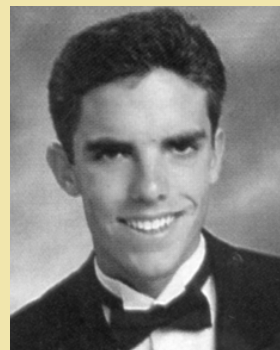
1958 Yearbook Photo

BRENDAN JOHNSTON, Class of 1994

Now in his tenth year of teaching English and Latin, Brendan Johnston also chairs the Foreign Language Department and coaches soccer.



On parental involvement: “I’ve been impressed that parents are so excited and willing to be part of their sons’ education, and that they invest themselves far beyond the tuition they pay. It’s a huge advantage for Saints and for us teachers. A few years ago, the wildfires came near our condo in Dehesa, and I happened to mention it in passing at soccer practice one day. I guess a few players took that home, because out of nowhere, three of their families offered to put us up if we needed a place to stay.”



1994 Yearbook Photo

On education: “I talk to my students about the crisis in boys’ education and the way that girls outperform boys at different levels of schooling. These boys can’t look to anybody else to do things except to their classmates, so their peer role models are all male. If something needs to be done, they can’t say, ‘That’s a girl’s job.’ It’s just work that needs to be done, and they do it.”

On students and stress: “College requirements are higher than they’ve ever been, and some students wear the stress of impending college choice around school with them. It’s part of my job to keep an eye on that and tell these boys, ‘It’s all going to be fine because you’re working hard and you’re a good kid.’”

On life’s lessons: “I didn’t get into my first-choice college, but my soccer coach pointed me to Marquette and it turned out to be the best thing that’s ever happened to me. Students want to hear stories like that.”

On faith in life: “They’re teenagers and they have a lot of uncertainty in their lives, so part of their maturation process is trying to figure out the role of faith in their lives. ‘What am I going to do in times of crisis? How can I turn to my faith and lean on it? What does that really mean?’ Your faith doesn’t explain why things happen, but it will help you pull something out of them.”

On values-based vs. testing-based: “We have a kid who walks out of here who might have been a C-student. But with a values-based education, he’s still got transferable characteristics and values. I taught three full sections of AP (advanced placement) English last year because these boys rise to the challenge of college-level material that we present. If all we valued were high test scores, we’d do a class of 20 students, a 100% pass-rate and we would look splendid. The values of the school drive the choices we make, even in curriculum.”