

## LEADERSHIP

# The Best in Each of Us Elevates All of Us

One Sunday at church, Johnetta Johnson's pastor preached about the importance of moving out of comfort zones. It was a message Johnson didn't necessarily want to hear.

Johnson, Purcell Marian Class of 1994 and veteran educator, had been in conversation with Purcell Marian's leadership team about the possibility of becoming Dean of Students.

"I didn't want to leave my classroom," says Johnson, who had been teaching American Sign Language (ASL) to students on the bottom floor at the Castle. "I didn't even want to go upstairs," she laughs.

Her pastor's sermon cracked open the possibility for Johnson. Soon after, she accepted the role with one exception - that she could still teach in the classroom, at least some of the time.

### Communication, Accountability, and a Little Love

Johnson's parents sent her to Purcell Marian because they liked the discipline, structure, and foundation Catholic education provided. For one year of her education, Johnson's parents sent her to public school, but she returned to Catholic school the next year.

"I wasn't a 'bad' kid," Johnson says. "But if I could get away with something, well then I'd try to get away with it." That's pretty much true for her

students today, she says, as she begins her fourth year as Dean of Students and her 22nd year of teaching at Purcell Marian.

Johnson's approach to discipline is conversation and accountability. The first thing she does when a student is facing a problem is have a conversation with him or her. Oftentimes there is another party involved. "Eighty-five to 90 percent of the time, the issue is miscommunication," says Johnson.

The second thing Johnson does is hold students accountable. "Even if the problem came from miscommunication or misunderstanding, there has to be accountability," says Johnson. "We are each accountable for our actions, and I teach students that."

"I also tell my students that I love them," says Johnson. "They sometimes don't want to hear it, but I tell them anyway because I mean it, and they need to hear it."

### "My Kingdom Assignment"

Johnson believes in living and learning honestly with each other. "Going to games, talking to parents, walking with students, and relying on my leadership team are all part of what I consider my job," Johnson says. "I can't do my job without learning from other people."

This is perhaps why Johnson is respected - if not beloved - at Purcell Marian. "My work is my ministry - my kingdom assignment," Johnson says, joyfully.

When Johnson was a full-time American Sign Language (ASL) teacher at Purcell Marian, she only knew the names of her students. "At graduation, I wouldn't know many of the graduates crossing the stage," she says. Now, she knows each student by name, and she still keeps in touch with dozens of students long after they graduate.

"Knowing each student is my favorite part of my job," Johnson says. "I love touching every single kid's life. Plus, they keep me young."

**SHE WILL KNOW YOU BY NAME (& SHE WILL REMEMBER YOU, TOO)**



American Sign Language (ASL) is a beautiful language, says Johnson. "It is also a very direct language, in that you get right to the heart of the matter when you are communicating." As Dean of Students, Johnson prides herself on getting straight to the matter. "I'm to the point - I want to know what we did, what we are doing, and what we are going to do about it."