

A matter of principal

Husband and wife guided in their common work by faith, love of children

By **GRETCHEN R. CROWE**
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As soon as you meet them, it's clear that Austin and Liz Poole, married 18 years with three children, still like each other.

She laughs at his jokes; he finishes her sentences. They speak as glowingly as their British natures allow of their offspring, Rebecca, Daniel and Sarah. They visit their native England regularly, enjoying quality travel time as a familial unit.

But their family isn't the only thing this couple, parishioners at St. John the Evangelist Parish in Warrenton, have in common. Husband and wife share the career of diocesan school principal — Austin in his 10th year at Our Lady of Good Counsel in Vienna and Liz in her first at Linton Hall in Bristow. And both say the best things about their professions are the children they guide.

Across the pond

The Pooles' journey to the Arlington Diocese began almost 28 years ago when Liz, in the summer following her freshman year at the University of Kent in England, traveled to the Benedictine Monastery in Bristow.

"The big thing for British college students to do is come over here and work in summer camps," she said. So that's what she did.

Liz taught swimming and traveled — frequently to New York City to see her dad, who worked for the United Nations.

The following summer Austin, whom Liz had met in college, joined her in Bristow to teach soccer. The Benedictine sisters became like family to them, and encouraged both Austin and Liz to work at the adjacent school, Linton Hall, following their graduation. With that invitation in mind, the couple came to the United States full time in 1984 and achieved the status of "permanent resident aliens," one which they still hold.

In the then all-boys military school, Austin taught physical education and math for grades six, seven and eight, and Liz taught math and science for grades four and five. Each also was in charge of a dormitory full of boys.

They were so attached to the school, that it was on the



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Austin and Liz Poole each hold the title of diocesan school principal. Austin proposed to Liz on the steps of Linton Hall School, where she is now administrator.

steep steps leading up to the front doors of Linton Hall where Austin proposed to Liz.

Called to educate

In 1989, a year after Austin accepted the position of admissions director at Linton Hall, he and Liz married.

Their first daughter, Rebecca, was born in 1991, and just two years later, the couple welcomed twins Daniel and Sarah.

Having "three children under three" prompted Austin to relocate from St. Ann School in Arlington, where he had taken a job as principal, to Highland School, closer to their Warrenton home.

"I didn't want to ever look back and say I wish I'd spent more time with the kids," he said.

Professionally, both felt the call to work with children.

"I think both of us have the ability to relate to children at a wide age range," Austin said. "We try to treat children with respect. We were never into baby talk."

After receiving a master's in elementary counseling from

George Mason University, Liz counseled in both Fauquier County public schools and, through the Benedictine Counseling Center, in All Saints School in Manassas and St. John School in Warrenton.

In 1998, Austin accepted his current job as principal at Our Lady of Good Counsel School. Though he's been in that position for 10 years, Austin said he still misses the constant one-on-one interaction that teachers have with the students. He sometimes just sits in a chair in the hallways of the school waiting for kids to come by to talk.

"You can have a bad day and you can have an encounter with a student (and think) 'that's why we're here,'" he said.

He loves their spontaneity and the impression that he, as principal, can have on the children.

"It's amazing the impact you can have," he said.

In her first year as principal at Linton Hall, after eight years as assistant principal at St. John, Liz has relied on professional advice and encouragement from her husband.

"If I have a concern, he's the first one on the phone," she said, and admitted to some

apprehension of following in his footsteps.

"Seeing Austin as a principal, I didn't know how I'd be," Liz said. "You hope 'I hope I'm as good as he is.' So far I've been comfortable doing what I have to."

Austin didn't miss a beat.

"People are raving about her," he said with a laugh.

A family first

Austin and Liz readily point out the many similarities between being parents and being principals.

"It's intertwined," Austin said.

As much as parenting is a vocation, so are their positions as principals.

"It's more than a job. I feel a connection, a passion almost," said Liz, who added that she had come "full circle" at Linton Hall. "I'm here because I want to be here."

In addition, Austin and Liz aren't only Catholic school principals — they're Catholic school parents. Rebecca is a junior at Paul VI Catholic High School in Fairfax and the twins are in eighth grade at Linton Hall.

Having children in Catholic school "allows us to better connect with parents who are doing the same thing," Austin said.

The couple said they try to be a balanced mom and dad. They ask their children to put in their maximum amount of effort in all that they do, and almost always are together for dinner.

At the same time, "I try not to hold the kids to a higher level than I hold myself," Liz said.

The family goes to England — and occasionally beyond — every summer, where all of their family remains except for Liz's dad.

"You learn a lot about people when you travel together," Austin said. "It reconnects us with our kids on a different level."

The family, as a whole, also remains connected through its faith. Austin, who converted to Catholicism from the Church of England in the mid-1980s, said that a common faith is crucial for a family, especially during times of difficulty.

"We wanted to share that," Liz said.

As principals, Austin and Liz share their faith not only with their children, but with those in their schools, and the couple would have it no other way.

The goal is to "affect children's lives," Austin said. "We want that for our kids, but also for all kids."

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MASS: 11:00 AM

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