More Than a School: Finding a Place to Belong at St. Augustine



When you have moved around the world, attended different kinds of schools, and helped your children start over in new communities, you learn to recognize when a place feels different.

For the Fette family, that feeling came during their first visit to St. Augustine Catholic High School. After years as a military family, raising four children and experiencing homeschool, public, charter, and private education, Mr. and Mrs. Fette knew what they wanted for their children. They wanted strong academics, a foundation in faith, and a community where their kids could find their place.

They found all three at St. Augustine.

The family first considered Arizona in part because the state's education scholarship opportunities could make Catholic education accessible for their children. They also had an established faith community at St. Pius X Parish and hoped to put down roots in Tucson. Although they knew St. Augustine was nearby, they did not know much about the school until they scheduled a tour.

For Mrs. Fette, the moment was almost immediate.

"Just driving up to the campus, being off the main road, but it was really when we walked into the courtyard. It just felt special here."

Mr. Fette remembers another detail from that first visit. As they walked through campus, they noticed a classroom door with a sign explaining that class would be held outside that day and directing students to meet beneath a tree.

"That was the education I wanted my kids to have," he recalled. The experience gave him a glimpse of a school where learning could feel personal, engaging, and connected to the world around students.

But what truly convinced the Fettes was not the campus or the classrooms. It was the students.

"I've never been around a group of young people at this age that are as mature and faith-filled and in sync as a school," Mr. Fette said.

Over the years, that first impression has become one of the things they value most about St. Augustine. As a military family, the Fettes understand how difficult it can be for teenagers to enter an established community, especially after another move. They wanted their children to find more than a place to attend school. They wanted them to feel that they belonged.

One memory has stayed with Mrs. Fette. During their daughter Annabelle's freshman year, she watched as Annabelle finished a swim race and stood off to the side while a group of older students gathered for a photo. When they noticed her, they called her over and pulled her into the middle of the group.

"I cried like a baby," Mrs. Fette remembered.

It was a small moment, but it represented something much bigger. Her daughter was new, yet her teammates made sure she was included. That spirit of welcome has continued to shape the family's experience.

"Everybody's welcome, everybody belongs," Mrs. Fette said. "The kids that you would maybe normally think in other schools would not have a place, it's not like that here."

Discovering What They Can Do

At St. Augustine, the Fette children have found room to explore interests, discover talents, and take on challenges they might never have imagined for themselves.

Annabelle, a member of the Class of 2023, discovered a love of writing and theater. Although she had not participated in theater before high school, teachers encouraged her to try new things and take her ideas seriously. After conversations with a teacher about the plays she was reading, Annabelle suggested writing one herself. The response was simple: if she wrote it, the school would put it on. And she did.

For Mr. Fette, that experience captured the power of a school where adults recognize a student's potential and give them the confidence to pursue it. Annabelle also explored track, swimming, cheer, and tennis, developing interests and abilities along the way. Today, she is studying communications at Seton Hall in New Jersey, where she arrived with more than a year of college credits already completed through Dual Enrollment and Advancement Placement classes at St. Augustine.

Her younger sister, Adeline, has embraced that same spirit of possibility. A senior, she is involved in athletics, serves as a student ambassador and Kairos leader, and recently completed her Eagle Scout project by organizing the renovation of the Stations of the Cross on campus.

Adeline led the planning, fundraising, and organization of the project, coordinating the people and resources needed to bring her vision to life. Her parents provided support when needed, but the work and leadership were hers.

"She can have me help only if she orders me what to do," Mr. Fette joked. "All I really did was provide dumb manual labor."

Beneath the humor is a point he feels strongly about: students grow when they are trusted with real responsibility. At St. Augustine, his children have had opportunities not only to participate, but also to lead.

Their youngest student at St. Augustine, Benjamin, is already discovering that trying something new can lead to unexpected rewards. He arrived hoping to swim, but when the team could not get enough participants, he reluctantly joined cross country instead. He ended up loving it.

For the Fettes, that is part of the value of a smaller school. Students have the chance to try different sports, join activities, and explore new interests without having to decide too early who they are supposed to be. They can discover what they enjoy, learn to manage their time, and experience both leadership and teamwork.

As Mr. Fette explained, “You’re not going to, hopefully, be captain of everything that you do.” Learning when to lead and when to follow is just as important as learning how to succeed.

A Faith That Goes With Them

Faith was central to the Fettes’ decision, and it remains central to their experience. Through theology classes, Mass, retreats, and prayer woven into everyday school life, their children have grown in their understanding of Catholicism and their confidence in practicing their faith.

Mr. Fette, who grew up Catholic, has even found himself learning from his own children. They bring home new insights from theology class and experiences that prompt conversations about faith at home.

Mrs. Fette has noticed another change: prayer has become a natural part of her children’s daily lives. They pray before classes and athletic events, and they see their peers doing the same. She remembers watching the girls’ cross country team gather before a race, putting their arms around one another and praying together without anyone prompting them.

“It was just seeing the girls do that with each other,” she recalled. “That was a really cool moment.”

For the Fettes, those moments matter because they show that faith is not simply something students study. It is something they live, share, and carry into their relationships with others.

A Foundation for What Comes Next

The Fettes believe St. Augustine has prepared their children for more than college. Annabelle’s academic preparation gave her a strong start at the University of Arizona, while the opportunities she and her siblings have had to participate in different activities have helped them build confidence, time-management skills, and the ability to find their place in new groups.

For a family that has moved so often, that sense of grounding is especially meaningful.

“One of the things we tried to do when we came to Arizona was to throw down roots for our kids,” Mr. Fette explained. He wanted them to have a firm sense of who they were, where they came from, and the faith that would guide them as they eventually stepped into adulthood.

He believes St. Augustine has helped provide that foundation.

As their time with students at St. Augustine eventually comes to an end, the Fettes know they will miss more than games, activities, and familiar faces. They will miss the people who have

become part of their lives. They describe a community where parents know one another, students encourage one another, and families become invested in the school together.

“I feel like it’s a family here,” Mrs. Fette said. “I walk into a basketball game, and I know people, and we’re talking.”

For the Fettes, that is what makes St. Augustine special. It is a school where students are encouraged to explore, trusted to lead, grounded in faith, and welcomed into a community that makes room for them.

And sometimes, all it takes to see that is a first visit, a walk through the courtyard, or an older student reaching out to make sure a new student knows she belongs.