

# Teacher marries beau with second-graders in the front row

BY NICHOLE GOLDEN

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ATLANTA—Beth Anne Ross and William Dempsey III were united in the sacrament of marriage Friday, April 1, at the morning Mass of St. Jude the Apostle School.

Dempsey and Ross, longtime friends and running and hiking partners, became husband and wife at the first wedding in the school community's history.

A second-grade teacher at St. Jude, the bride provided white carnations for her students to pin to their school uniforms. Her class, who had prime seats at the front of St. Jude Church, bobbed up and down for a glimpse of their teacher as she walked down the aisle in a tea-length wedding gown.

The bride, carrying a bouquet of assorted white flowers, entered on the arm of her father, Lawrence Ross, to the processional song, "Morning Has Broken."

Msgr. Joe Corbett, pastor, celebrated the Mass, which was attended by the entire student body, as well as the couple's friends and family members.

"Class, today we're going to talk about marriage," said Msgr. Corbett.

"We are delighted to be able to share in their happiness today," he said.

The pastor told the couple, "The day you met for the first time

marked a new beginning in your life." The wedding itself is a "new life in Christ."

"Your wedding lasts only for the next two hours, but your marriage is for the rest of your life," he said.

"For better or worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, all the days of your life," are not just words, said Msgr. Corbett, reflecting on the approaching promises. "It's a solemn vow in the presence of God and these people."

The celebrant asked the guests to do something for the couple.

"During their ceremony they would like for you to say a little prayer, asking God to bless them this day and all the days of their married life."

During the presentation of the gifts, the St. Jude Middle School Choir sang "Ave Maria."

In a light moment, he asked the second-graders who is boss of the classroom. They shouted "Ms. Ross" in unison. After the wedding, who will be the boss at her house, he queried. "Mrs. Dempsey," they said.

## 708 cupcakes for the reception

The wedding Mass was a school-wide effort. Principal Patty Childs, who led the prayer of the faithful, had made the off-hand suggestion that the couple marry at a school Mass. The bride-to-be thought about it and decided it was actually a great idea.

"We're all about the sacraments," said Childs.

Most of the bride's students have been preparing to receive first Communion and first reconciliation this spring, and she didn't want to be left out of the special sacramental year. The school practice is for "Spiritual Life" mothers to come and teach the children about the sacraments.

Prior to the wedding, matrimony was the students' focus and they had a surprise bridal shower in the Stapleton Center for their teacher. The mothers put together a beautiful scrapbook of all the happenings.

"It was such a joyful time," she said.

The bride and groom ordered 708 cupcakes, topped with white frosting, for the children to enjoy after the wedding Mass. Fellow teachers spent two months embossing 1,200 napkins for the cupcake party. Each child was also given a keepsake program.

The second-grade students posed for official wedding photos in the sanctuary with the newlyweds.

The groom's best man was his brother, Thomas. Groomsmen were Bradley Shinstock and Wilson Hester. The bride's sisters, Kathryn Brown and Lisa Morgan, were the matrons of honor.

Some wedding guests traveled all the way from South Carolina to attend. Susan Heim, Carol Ruff and Mary Smock came to know Beth Ross when she taught at St. Peter School in Beaufort, South Carolina. She taught their children and they remain close. "We love her," the ladies said.

"April first didn't surprise us either," said Smock about the bride's unique sense of humor.

## "It hit me that Beth was my best friend"

Ross and Dempsey, who goes by Will, had known each other for



PHOTO BY KATY COWAN

**Newlyweds Will and Beth Dempsey stand before the statue of St. Jude the Apostle following their nuptial Mass. It was the idea of St. Jude principal Patty Childs to hold the wedding during a weekday Mass, giving students a firsthand lesson about the sacrament of marriage.**

several years, meeting through mutual friends and often attending the same retreats, service days and social events.

They developed a friendship, meeting each Wednesday to go running and share life's happenings. They began spending more time hiking with Ross' dog, Gus,

and dining together. He became a fixture at the school and its events.

After many months, they both realized that a deepening friendship was love.

"Suddenly it hit me that Beth was my best friend and, from that, something else developed," wrote the groom in recalling their story.

During one holiday season, it began to occur to Ross that her friend was a lovely man and deserved someone special in his life. "Pretty soon after that thought, I remember thinking that I would like that someone to be me," she remembered.

After Dempsey's proposal, Ross shared the occasion with her students with a video.

"He did it in a creative way," said student Caroline Callahan approvingly.

Ross created special invitations for the children with lots of



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PHOTO BY KATY COWAN

Mr. and Mrs. William Dempsey celebrate their April 1 wedding at St. Jude the Apostle Church in Atlanta with her spirited second-grade students. The new Mrs. Dempsey has been a teacher at the school for nine years, and the wedding was the first celebrated at a school day Mass. The couple gave each student a carnation to wear.

PHOTO BY KATY COWAN

Lawrence Ross escorts his daughter, Beth Anne, down the aisle for her April 1 wedding at St. Jude the Apostle Church, Atlanta. The entire student body of the school, many of whom had previously had Ross as a teacher, attended the ceremony.

“bling.”  
 “We were really excited. Everyone thought it was a joke,” said student Joseph Iannucci about the April Fools’ Day date.  
 Msgr. Corbett recommended marriage preparation by a couple married for 28 years. “It’s been remarkable,” said Mrs. Dempsey of the marriage preparation.  
 Their wedding trip took place over spring break, and she was back in the classroom April 11.

Her husband, who works in jewelry sales, shared his experience of deciding what to have engraved inside their wedding rings.  
 The bride’s family hails from Scituate, Massachusetts, where a lighthouse, Minot’s Ledge, blinks the numbers “1-4-3.” The numbers are translated to mean “I Love You.”

The morning he was to have the rings engraved, Dempsey looked at his Facebook page and saw a photograph from a race one year earlier. It was the first road race

the couple ever ran together at St. Jude, and he was randomly assigned the number 143.

Dempsey recalled a Bible passage a friend had found extremely meaningful about God having prepared a place for him.

“Thinking back on my friend’s experience, it occurred to me that it was a perfect sentiment for our rings,” he said.

Dempsey felt God was prepar-

ing a place for them, both in the physical sense of a new home and in the spiritual sense as a covenant relationship.

“I Googled the phrase on a Bible website and it came right up,” Dempsey. “As I began to write down what I wanted on the engraving form, it hit me like a ton of bricks.”

The verse was John 14:3. It says, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

“Marriage really is a school of love,” said Msgr. Corbett in his homily. It is the sacramental way to love each other more deeply.

Flannery Hipp, 8, one of the bride’s beloved students knows that to be true.

“When you’re married, you love each other more than before,” said Flannery.

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