



CATHOLIC
MEMORIAL
magazine

Richard Chisholm

He's What CM's All About

...And, Why Mentoring Matters



Richard Chisholm

More Than Just a Principal, Chisholm Has Been 'What CM's All About'



Written by Steve Holt

It's 7:15 a.m. on St. Patrick's Day. Rain falls softly on what is one of the warmer mornings of a truly horrendous winter, weather-wise. Young men, some wearing a touch of green in honor of the day, spill out of cars and yellow buses and into the rain. There to greet each arriving student, as he has since 2000, is Principal Richard Chisholm, today clad in a green button-down shirt and holding a large black umbrella.

"Mawnin'," Chisholm, a son of Roslindale, directs toward each of the boys as they pass. His face is as serious as always,

rarely cracking a smile, but some students say his mere presence sets them at ease and starts their school day off right.

"He has more respect than anyone else in the school," says senior Pat O'Leary, who's known Chisholm since he enrolled in seventh grade. "He shows what CM's all about. When you see him at the front of the door, you're like, 'It's going to be a good day.'"

After almost four decades at Catholic Memorial – including 15 years as

principal – Chisholm, 65, will retire at the end of this school year. Even though he never attended Catholic Memorial as a student (each of his three sons did, however), Chisholm has become synonymous with the school, having served in a host of roles over 37 years. Because of this, many staff and students say they cannot imagine not seeing Chisholm standing sentry in the mornings, walking the halls throughout the day, popping into their practices and rehearsals.

"He runs so much, and he's at so much, that if he's not there, there's always going to be that presence that's kind of lost," O'Leary laments.

THE ROAD TO THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

Born and raised in Roslindale, "Richie" Chisholm is a product of Catholic education in his early years, attending Sacred Heart in Roslindale for elementary school and St. Mary's in Brookline for High School. He attended Boston State College for his bachelor's degree, and later earned a master's degree in education from the same school.

Out of college, Chisholm taught eighth grade for a year at St. Mary's, before taking a teaching and coaching position at Don Bosco, where he stayed for five years.

The young teacher's introduction to Catholic Memorial may not have happened were it not for the help of a friend, Dan Burke, who worked in the building. Chisholm, then 28, was hired in 1978 to teach physical education and history. After five years, at just 33, Bro. James Timoney asked Chisholm to serve as co-Dean of Students – a role he shared first with Bro. Bob Siccone and then Alex Campea.

"It was both a surprise and an honor that I was offered," Chisholm remembers. "It actually was an honor to be approached to do it. It definitely was a challenge, but I was open to the challenge."

While the title changed in 1989 to Vice Principal, Chisholm's duties did not, and he would hold that position, enforcing student behavior and attendance, for 17 years – a period he considers his most enjoyable at Catholic Memorial. Even then, he'd start each day standing outside his office, keeping careful watch over his students, greeting them by name.

In 2000, Chisholm's love for the boys of Catholic Memorial led him to apply for the school's highest staff position, principal. As Chisholm tells it, the previous few years had seen several

principals come and go, he "felt that maybe a little stability would help the job."

"It's not fair to anybody in the school to keep changing leadership," he continues. "It doesn't set a good tone in the overall building. Not that I intended to stay 15 years."

LEADING WITH CHARACTER, FAIRNESS AND CONSISTENCY

His reasons for staying were simple: he enjoys what he does, and loves his co-workers.

And the students.

"In my mind, they're a great breed of kids," Chisholm reflects. "Like any kid, they make mistakes, they serve their punishments, but when the chips are down you can always count on the kids in the school."

The respect is mutual. O'Leary remembers coming to Chisholm prepared to drop his Latin class. Chisholm sat O'Leary down, heard him out, discussed the student's options, and gently put forth his opinion.

"He led me in the right direction," O'Leary says. "I was actually going to leave Latin, but I stuck with it, and it was one of my best decisions since I was here."

Chisholm's support extends beyond the classroom as well. As son of veteran teacher and coach, senior Denis Tobin has known Richard Chisholm his whole life. Whether Tobin was serving as waterboy or playing, he'd see Chisholm in the stands at every basketball game. Seeing Chisholm almost every day of his 18 years, Tobin says he's "been pretty much the same guy" as long as he's known him. But for Tobin, it was the time in middle school when Chisholm picked him up on a cold, snowy day walking from the school to his grandparents' house that demonstrates most clearly that the principal "is all for his students."

Between the bells, Tobin says Chisholm's tact was no-nonsense, able to convey



"Quiet leader, gentle presence, compassionate heart, steadfast commitment, Christ-like gentleman, consummate professional, are just a few of the expressions that describe the high character and leadership profile of Richie Chisholm. He has done an outstanding job in witnessing to the gospel message and in embodying the Essential Elements of an Edmund Rice Christian Brother Education."

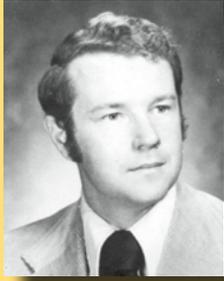
–Brother Kevin Griffin, Deputy Province Leader, upon presenting the Edmund Rice Lifetime achievement award to Richard Chisholm.

disappointment with a mere look. But treating every student with fairness, regardless of their "standing in the building," has been Chisholm's single guiding value as he leads.

"In most cases, any kid who makes a mistake should be given the opportunity

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Chisholm's Legacy



1978

Hired to teach history and gym at Catholic Memorial High School.



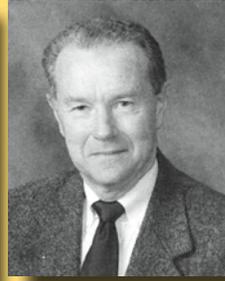
1984

Became Assistant Headmaster of Student Affairs – Dean of Physical Education and Student Affairs.



1989

Named Vice Principal of Catholic Memorial High School.



2000

Appointed Principal of Catholic Memorial High School.



1978-2015

Throughout his CM career, Mr. Chisholm coached football and baseball, mentored and supported countless athletes and teams.

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to get a second chance," he says. "In life, everybody makes a mistake and should be forgiven."

He adds that "typical days" in the life of an administrator are nonexistent, as he rarely knows what issues he'll have to tackle. Challenges involving students and families are ongoing, but this winter's historically snowy weather — "the worst I've ever seen it in over 40 years of working in a school," Chisholm says — added on a glut of early morning snow day decisions.

A LASTING LEGACY

As Catholic schools elsewhere have shrunk or closed their doors, Catholic Memorial School, under Chisholm's leadership, has significantly increased its academic offerings, expanded its co-curricular and campus ministry programs, excelled athletically, and successfully fostered the mission of the Edmund Rice Christian Brothers among its diverse and vibrant student population.

Ever self-effacing, Chisholm is constantly doling out credit for the school's success to the many teachers, coaches and administrators he's served alongside. But make no mistake: Chisholm oversaw a period of great growth, in the process commanding the respect of students and faculty. Thinking back over his career, of what is he proudest?

"We've carried on the tradition of CM — poise, tradition and class," he says. "I have to say that I hope the reputation of the school has grown. A lot of people say we're a hidden gem. I just wish more people would understand we are a gem, but we don't have to be hidden." 🍷

The Richard F. Chisholm scholarship

www.CatholicMemorial.org

