Supporting and Reaching Families: Some First Steps

Making the school religion program one that reflects the importance of families starts with family sensitive school leadership.

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Making the school religion program one that reflects the importance of families starts with family sensitive school leadership. Is the school staff a collaborative team? Do we help one another? Are our roles flexible enough to allow for working together? A silo mentality can undermine a family sensitive environment, both philosophically and practically speaking. For example, collaboration between the religion teachers and other school faculty can help to make other aspects of school life, such as school liturgies and service projects, and events, more inclusive of the family, but failure to collaborate in this way can sometimes limit participation by families in school life.

The changing family brings a new moment in religious education that requires a fresh and creative approach. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, this approach should follow the example of God who, rather than waiting for us to find Him, reaches out to us, meeting us where we are. We must look for the evangelizing moments we have with families, and capitalize on these moments to the greatest extent possible.

Where are the evangelizing moments? They are the times when families are naturally more open to the Church and what she can give. In the usual family life cycle, these moments may include developmental milestones of family life, such as a wedding, the birth of a new child, a child’s entry into school, the death of a family member, and other important times. Evangelizing moments might also be spiritual or religious milestones in the life of a family, such as baptism, first celebration of Eucharist, or Confirmation. Special circumstances that could be evangelizing moments might also arise the life of a family. These include a severe illness or unexpected death of a family member, a separation or divorce, a time of financial need, or another family crisis. When pastoral ministers welcome families warmly and reach out to families in need, they can make the most of these evangelizing moments to let the family know that they are part of a larger Christian community that seeks their presence.