

## Methods and Class Management: Setting Environment

### Introduction

Environment is important. If you are comfortable, engaged, and secure, you benefit from the experience. If not, you are distracted, uncomfortable, and eager to escape.

### First Question

What kinds of spaces or environments did you feel most comfortable and uncomfortable in as a child?

### Article: Plan Your Space

Some environments lend themselves more easily to religion classes than others. However, no matter what your space, you can make it work with a little creativity. Look at your space ahead of time, and ask yourself: “How can I best use this space to create a warm, welcoming environment and accomplish the goals of any class session?”

Use the following questions as a guide to ask yourself:

- Where can I establish a prayer space?
- Where will students sit? If there are desks, do I want to keep them, or move them and create a circle?
- Where can small groups do activities?

Usually a classroom for religion is structured so that there is space for students to sit on chairs or the floor for the formal part of a lesson, a gathering space for prayer, and a space that will withstand spills and clean up easily for activities such as arts and crafts projects. It is not necessary to have a lot of space, but it is important to be able to adapt to different activities.

For the prayer space, you will need a small table or desk, tablecloths or pieces of fabric in the liturgical colors: green, white, purple and red. Also, have a Bible, a candle, and a clear bowl of water. Other symbols could be used depending on the lesson, for example, you might use a loaf of bread when you are talking about the Eucharist, or incense when your subject is prayer or the Holy Spirit. The activity space might include a table for art supplies and artwork, with utensils for cleanup.

When you look at your classroom, is it attractive for your students' age group? If not, use pictures, posters, flowers, banners, and plants to make the room visually appealing. Include a bulletin board or a large sheet of card stock to display students' work.

Creating an environment also includes building a spirit of community. You are part of the environment. You teach the "Good News." Ask yourself: "Do I look like Good News? Do my actions and expressions show that I am happy to be here and am enthusiastic about our time together?" Call your students by name. Greet them as they come into the classroom. Celebrate birthdays and baptismal anniversaries. Building community with your class is a process. It takes time but it begins by helping students get to know one another. Encourage students to share their concerns and experiences so they do get to know one another. Encourage them to be kind to each other and to pray for one another's needs.

## Reflection Questions

- What do you think is the most important thing you can do to create an environment for learning and community building?
- What are two things you will do to improve your classroom environment?