

Catechetical Partners: Working with the Parish School

An important part of being community is building community. If you are in a parish that includes a school, it will be important to create opportunities for both catechetical groups to connect.

Some Ideas to Foster a Sense of Unity

- Develop a positive relationship with the school principal and faculty. Meet with the principal to talk about how you can work together. Drop into the teacher's lounge before school and at lunch to get to know the teachers better. Elicit their ideas for building community between their students and the children in the parish religious education program.
- Encourage your catechists to meet their counterparts on the school faculty. Working with the school principal, arrange a "Get Acquainted" social on a weekday afternoon or evening before classes begin. Have the two groups talk about common goals and how they can best work together.
- Invite your catechists to write notes introducing themselves to the teachers whose room they will be sharing this year. The note might ask if the teacher has any special requests about using the classroom space. For example, a teacher might ask that a certain portion of the chalkboard not be erased or that if desks are moved, they are returned to their original place. Encourage the school faculty to supply classroom floor plans and seating charts for the catechists.
- Have both groups exchange phone numbers or e-mail addresses so that they can easily contact one another throughout the year.
- Foster community by suggesting that teachers and catechists have their students create a card or poster to greet one another during the first week of classes. The card can include a prayer asking God to help both groups grow in faith throughout the year. Have all the students sign the card or poster and display it prominently in the classroom.
- Encourage school and parish catechists to develop a bulletin board in the classroom that can be devoted to the unit themes that both groups are studying. If both the parish religious education program and school are using the same religion series, school and parish catechists can alternate responsibility for decorating the board with their students' work.
- Arrange it so that the prayer area in the classroom can be a shared space with both groups taking turns decorating it seasonally. The students can also write prayer petitions and place them on the prayer table for communal prayer between both groups.
- Deal with problems that arise over shared classroom space as they occur. As the two groups get to know one another, problems will diminish because of better communication and cooperation. Remind them that both groups are catechists and participate together in the Church's catechetical ministry.



and get acquainted with one another. Depending on the theme of your gathering, you may want to provide entertainment. Consider showing a video, having a sing-along, hiring a magician or clown, or having one or more classes from both programs perform a skit that they have prepared in advance.

Vacation Bible School

Scheduling a week of summer learning and fun activities built around Bible themes is a wonderful way to build community. You can use a VBS kit from a publisher or create your own weeklong program. Conclude the week with a family celebration and have the children share with their parents the projects they have created, the songs they have learned, and the Bible stories they have studied.



FOR REFLECTION

- *What are the best things I have done to build a good relationship with the parish school?*
- *What is one initiative I could take this year to increase cooperation?*

Other Possible Activities

Prayer Partners

Pair the students in the school with parish religious education students who share the classroom. Encourage the students to pray for one another on a weekly basis. The students can also communicate with one another by writing prayers or notes to their partners and dropping these messages off at the religious education center or the classroom.

Community Events

Work with a committee of parents from both the school and parish religious education programs to plan community events throughout the year. Consider a pasta night, a pot luck dessert night, or a Lenten soup supper. Begin your gathering with a simple prayer service in which students from different grades take an active role. Supply name tags for everyone to wear. Plan an icebreaker to help people mix