

School and Parish: Catechetical Partners

An important part of being community is building community. By working with the director or coordinator in charge of parish religious education and the catechists in the parish, you will find many opportunities for both the school and parish programs to connect and see themselves as one catechetical community.

Some Ideas to Foster a Sense of Unity

- Develop a positive relationship with the person in charge of parish religious education. Meet with them to talk about how you can work together.
- Call the faculty together and ask the teachers to suggest strategies for working with the parish staff. Elicit their ideas for building community between their students and the children in the parish religious education program.
- Encourage your teachers to meet the parish catechists with whom they will be sharing a classroom this year. Work together to arrange a “Get Acquainted” social on a weekday afternoon or evening before parish sessions begin. Have the two groups talk about common goals and how they can best work together.
- Invite your teachers to write notes introducing themselves to the parish catechists they will be sharing a classroom with this year. The note can include any special requests the teacher has about using the classroom. For example, the 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 space. Encourage the school faculty to supply classroom floor plans and seating charts for the parish catechists. The note can also invite the parish catechists to express any needs they might have.
- Have both groups exchange phone numbers or e-mail addresses so they can easily contact one another throughout the year.
- Foster community by suggesting that teachers and parish 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 school and the parish religious education program are using the same religion series, teachers and parish catechists can alternate responsibility for decorating the board with their students’ work.
- Arrange it so 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.

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 office 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 potluck 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 ice-breaker to help people mix 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 religious education program?*
- *What is one initiative I could take this year to increase cooperation?*