

WHO AM I?

Introduction

Welcome to the beginning of the year and the first RE staff meeting. The beginning of the year is a very busy time and very often we are so caught up in the 'busyness' we can easily forget to take time for reflection. This material will allow you and the staff to reflect on various aspects of who they are as leaders and teachers. Much of this may seem very basic but it is very important to regularly focus on this, especially as you begin a new school year.

You will need:

- A4 paper (for personal reflections)
- A3 photocopy of Finola Cunnane's quote
- A3 copy of 'You are the leader ..."
- Photocopy for each person of pages
 - Knowing who I am - Personal Reflection
 - Notes for 1 Corinthians 12:12-30
 - Nurturing your relationship with God
 - Suggestions outlined by Teresa Cleary
 - Opening/Closing Prayer
- Bible for each person
- Large piece of paper with the outline of a body drawn on it (if you have a big group for this meeting you might need a couple of these)

Opening Prayer (see attached)

"I teach who I am - I can't teach who I am not."

Finola Cunnane

- What do you think this statement means?
- In small groups or as a whole group respond to this question.
- Share responses with the whole group.

Knowing who I am

Personal Reflection - explain to the teachers that they will not be asked to share this.

Knowing who I am - Personal Reflection

(you will not be asked to share this)

ONE - My life journey

- Draw a time-line from birth until present - identify significant moments (sad, happy, successes, milestones, turning points...).
- As you look at your time-line consider: what/who has influenced your understanding of who you are? What/who has influenced your understanding of life and living? What/who has influenced your understanding of God?

TWO:

- Underneath your time-line jot down your response to the following:
- What gifts, skills and qualities do you bring to the role of teaching?
- How can you use these gifts, skills, qualities this year both in your own classroom and within the wider school community?
- What goals, hopes, dreams, aspirations do you have for this year (particularly relating to teaching, but you may also like to include others, those not necessarily related to teaching).
- What might hinder you in achieving these goals? Can these limitations be overcome - if so how?
- What place does God have in your plans and your dreams?

One body, many parts

Paul used the image of the body to explain the interdependence of the members of the Christian communities which he founded. All the members relied upon each other, no matter how weak or strong they were. The idea that different people have different gifts was emphasized as well as the fact that, for Paul, all are part of the body of Jesus Christ.

Depending on the size of your group you can either do this as a whole staff or divide into smaller groups.

- Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-30.
- Discuss the unique and complementary nature of parts of the body (see notes below; these are from the bible commentary and should help you lead this part of the discussion or you might like to give a copy to the group after they have spent some time discussing it, so they can compare what they have come up with and what the bible commentary has said).
- On a large piece of paper, with the outline of a body drawn on it, invite the group to stand where they feel they have a gift that corresponds to a body part/function as described in the scripture passage.

For example, I am an ear because I'm a good listener. I am a hand because I like to do things for others. I am a leg muscle because I'm active and strong. I am part of the backbone because I can help to support others. I am the eye because I look out for people in need.

- Discuss - What implications does this scripture passage have for us as a staff?
(Focus on you as a staff rather than the whole school community).

I.e.....

We are all part of the body i.e. the staff of _____ (school name) Catholic School, and although each of us is different and we might have a different role to play within the body/staff, without all the other parts to make up the whole body, we become less effective.

Notes for 1 Corinthians 12:12-30

(from the Life Application Study Bible, New International Version)

12:12

Paul compares the body of Christ to the human body. Each part has a specific function that is necessary to the body as a whole. The parts are different for a purpose, and in their differences they must work together. Christians must avoid two things:

- (1) being too proud of their abilities or
- (2) thinking they have nothing to give to the body of believers.

Instead of comparing ourselves to one another, we should use our different gifts, together, to spread the Good News of salvation.

12:13

The church is composed of many types of people from a variety of backgrounds with a multitude of gifts and abilities. It is easy for these differences to divide people, as was the case in Corinth. But despite the differences, all believers have one thing in common - faith in Christ. On this essential truth the church finds unity. All believers are baptized by one Holy Spirit into one body of believers, the church. We don't lose our individual identities but we have an overriding oneness in Christ. When a person becomes a Christian, the Holy Spirit takes up residence and he or she is born into God's family. "We were all given the one Spirit to drink" means that the same Holy Spirit completely fills our innermost beings. As members of God's family, we may have different interests and gifts but we have a common goal.

12:14-24

Using the analogy of the body, Paul emphasizes the importance of each church member. If a seemingly insignificant part is taken away, the whole body becomes less effective. Thinking that your gift is more important than someone else's is an expression of spiritual pride. We should not look down on those who seem unimportant, as we should not be jealous of others who have impressive gifts. Instead we should use the gifts we have been given and encourage others to use theirs. If we don't the body of believers will be less effective.

12:25, 26

What is your response when a fellow Christian is honoured? How do you respond when someone is suffering? We are called to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15). Too often, unfortunately, we are jealous of those who rejoice and apathetic toward those who weep. Believers are in the world together - there is no such thing as private or individualistic Christianity. We shouldn't stop with enjoying only our own relationship with God; we need to get involved in the lives of others.

12:31

The greater gifts are those that are more beneficial to the body of Christ. Paul has already made it clear that one gift is not superior to another, but he urges the believers to discover how they can serve Christ's body with the gifts God has given them. Your spiritual gifts are not for your own self-advancement. They were given to you for serving God and enhancing the spiritual growth of the body of believers.

Are you a leader worth following?

This material is based on an article by Teresa Cleary, in Religion Teachers' Journal, September 2003.

- Brainstorm in small groups or as one group the answers/ideas relating to 2 questions below.
- Share responses as a whole group.

You are the leader in your class. As the teacher your students hear your every word and watch your every move and whether you like it or not, your students will pattern themselves after your example. After all, what you say and do - and how well those two things match up - show the values you hold and want others to embrace. You have to live your life with the kind of integrity that allows your students to follow your words and actions.

- So what is integrity?
- How do you model it to your students - how can you match your walk with your talk?

Notes

Webster's dictionary defines integrity as "uprightness, honesty, sincerity". Other synonyms include fairness, goodness, honour, trustworthiness.

Obviously the group would have come up with various ideas as to how you model integrity i.e. matching your walk with your talk.

The following are some suggestions outlined by Teresa Cleary:

Suggestions outlined by Teresa Cleary, a Devotional writer:

Nurture your relationship with God

- This is the most basic, yet the most essential ingredient of leadership.
- You need to allow God to fill you before you can give yourself away to others.
- Reading the bible - the bible clearly details God's expectations for all areas of your life. Knowing what God's word has to say helps you set uncrossable boundaries for your own behaviour.
- Connecting with God through your own prayer on a regular basis will deepen your faith and will help to bring actions closer to your words.

Weigh your words

- Every time you open your mouth you have a choice. What you say to those you lead can either help them or harm them.
- Compliments, praise, and encouragement are all positive ways of building up your class.
- From the way you greet your children at the door to the response you give to a "silly" question, your words impact on your children.
- Think before you speak - your children are listening carefully to - and often mimicking - what you say and the way you say it.
- Set an example with Godly speech.

Show God's Love

- As a leader, you become "Jesus with skin on" to the children you teach.
- If you tell them they are important, show your concern for them.
- Ask them questions that let them know you care about what goes on in their lives.
- Smile from the heart.
- Share special days with them.

Avoid hypocrisy

- Make sure that your actions match up with what you say you believe.
- Make sure you live a life that's consistent with what you say you believe.

Admit when you're inconsistent

- There will be times when you slip up and your words and actions won't match up - your children will see your more human side. When that happens, admit what you've done wrong and ask forgiveness if it's needed.
- When your children mess up, encourage them to do the same.
- Don't claim that you are perfect or expect perfection from them - the only perfect person was Jesus.

Lenore Danesco, in Religious Teacher's Journal, September 2005 adds to this by highlighting the importance of following Jesus.

Follow Jesus

- Christ is the model for every teacher.
- Studying his example as he teaches through word gestures and actions as he feeds the hungry, cares for those who are sick and prays, provides a pattern for us to follow
- Your students do not expect you to be a saint, but they accept leadership best from someone who is also working hard to be a sincere witness to Jesus.

To end the meeting

- Take some time now to reflect on the meeting.
- What will you take away from this meeting?

Closing Prayer (see attached)

Opening Prayer

God, the source of our being,
the energy of our world.

We thank you for gathering us here together,
for the space to listen to each other,
for the time to think, to feel, to reflect.

Be with us today and edge us forward in the confidence of
your spirit and the hope of Christ.

Closing Prayer

God who created us and made us who we are,
we come to you at the beginning of another year.
We ask you to bless us, to continue to walk with us,
to lead us and teach us your will and your ways.

Guide us and strengthen us for the days that lie ahead.
Keep us faithful to the good things we've planned,
and if through weakness we should go astray
bring us back and heal us - don't let us turn away.

We ask this of you God our creator
and maker of all that is good.

Amen

You are the leader in your class. As the teacher your students hear your every word and watch your every move and whether you like it or not, your students will pattern themselves after your example. After all, what you say and do - and how well those two things match up - show the values you hold and want others to embrace. You have to live your life with the kind of integrity that allows your students to follow your words and actions.

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Finola Cunnane