

## All are Welcome

**An excerpt taken from a letter written by a first year teacher to her college roommate, August 16, 2006:** *"It seems like centuries ago since we graduated. We were so proud to hold our diplomas and our teaching certificates. I was so excited to see some of my fifth graders from student teaching at the graduation. It made the whole idea of getting into my own classroom so imminent. But now, I have to admit, I'm a little scared. I'm going into school tomorrow for the first time since I signed my contract. I will be putting up my bulletin boards and delving into lesson plans. That I know how to do...but I'm wondering (actually, worrying) about so many things...How will the veteran teachers accept me? Will my students like me? Will the parents be cooperative..."*

**An excerpt from the diary of a sixth grader, dated September 5, 2006:** *"Dear Diary, Well, tomorrow is the first day of school. Moving to this new town was hard for me. Our new house is really nice and I've met some of the kids that will be in my class, but I have to admit, I really do miss my old friends and old school. I wonder what it will be like to be the "new girl". Will the boys think I'm cute? Will the girls think I'm fun? Will my teacher like me?..."*

**Overheard while grocery shopping, a woman on a cell phone, September 19, 2006:** *"Hi! I'm so glad you called. I'm just picking up a few things for dinner tonight. It is going to be a quickie. Why?...Oh, I forgot to tell you that there is a "Back-to-School Night" at the kids' school. I was so active in our other school. Since the move, though, I haven't really had the time to get to know too many of the parents. I'm eager to meet some tonight, but you know me, I'm a little reluctant to jump right in with both feet even though you know how I like to be involved...Think of me tonight, okay?"*

In countless homes across the country this fall, these and similar scenes will be replayed. How can we as parents in the Catholic school allay the fears and concerns expressed by this new teacher, this new student, and this parent new to our schools? Making each of these individuals feel welcome, incorporating them into the life of the school is an integral part of how we "do" Catholic school! In the landmark document of the US Catholic bishops, *To Teach As Jesus Did*, we read that "In this [Christian] community, one person's problem is everyone's problem and one person's victory is everyone's victory. Never before and never since the coming of Jesus Christ has anyone proposed such a community....Community is at the heart of Christian education not simply as a concept to be taught but as a reality to be lived." (#22-23)

Let's start with the young teacher. Remembering that each of us began our own career with little or no experience is probably a good frame of reference. This new teacher has been well-educated and well-prepared to teach your child. He or she is eager to use his or her expertise in the classroom. You, as parent, can be such a support. All of us have made mistakes in our personal and professional lives. No one needs to feel as if he or she is being watched to see "I gotcha!" Letting the new teacher know that you will be of support is such a life-giving gesture.

And the new student in the class. Most children are sensitive to the new student and want to be his or her friend. However, sometimes peer pressure becomes so great that the new student is suddenly the most popular student in the class or is just as suddenly ostracized from the group. As parents, you will often hear your child speaking about other students in the class. Without sounding "trite," try to remind your child: "*What would Jesus do? How would Jesus welcome the new student?*"

And finally, the new parent. If you have been in the school "forever," you may very well have forgotten what the first parent meeting was like. Rewind the mental tape and picture yourself on that first night. Was anyone especially welcoming and accepting of you? How did it make you feel? Can you do the same for this new parent?

There is a lovely hymn which is sung in many churches called: "*All are Welcome*" by Marty Haugen. The last verse, especially speaks to the environment we strive to create in our Catholic schools.

*Let us build a house where all are named,  
Their song and visions heard  
And loved and treasured, taught and claimed  
As words within the Word.  
Built of tears and cries and laughter,  
Prayers of faith and songs of grace,  
Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:  
All are welcome, all are welcome,  
All are welcome in this place.*

All of us working together, all of us working to insure that each feels welcome, creates that true community that is at the "heart of Christian education."



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