

A Message from Sr. Shirley Anne...



Missing the Mark When Close Just Doesn't Do It



A recent **School Administrator** magazine title caught my attention. It was titled "Missing the Mark". Although the article content was testing and assessment, I had just finished reading the September issue of **Educational Leadership**. Every article, written for public educators, was about respect.

Many laudable ideas are expressed in this issue. Teachers are encouraged to ask students about their relationships while building a democratic classroom and school climate. Teachers are reminded that bullying is also a problem of values but must rely on a humanistic approach that offends no one. Programs are encouraged to promote win-win strategies rather than a win-lose one. It even tackles the issue of lack of respect among adults saying that teachers who are stressed, unhappy, and feel unsupported, are more likely to treat their students with disrespect. One article even takes the "religion" step by saying that if our schools are going to dispel the stereotypes and build relationships, then we need to go beyond modest increases in teaching about religious traditions.

Laudable ideas indeed but missing the mark! When my sister bought her first home, my father went with her to several viewings and she received a lesson that pretty doesn't count if the foundation is crumbling. So to, Jesus warns us about a house (program) built on sand and encourages us to a strong foundation. Respect is part of our foundation in Jesus Christ and all our building of relationships flows from this. In our schools and religious education programs, we need to be clear about this foundation. From Genesis to the end of the New Testament, we are told and reminded that we are made in the image and likeness of God. We are told in the Great Commandment of Love to love our neighbor as our self. In the Gospel of John, we are told to love one another as God has loved us. Throughout Scripture we are admonished, encouraged and given models of what loving and respecting looks like. We come to know about solid virtues and not today's generic version of character traits or values.

This respect flowing from being made in God's image and likeness is shared with many other religions. A practice that has become well known in our day from the Indian culture is the greeting of one another with **Nameste**. This practice of bowing to one another is done at the beginning and ending of a class in India. It is a sign of deep respect and it acknowledges the soul (God) in one another.

In our culture and in our time there is a definite need to address the issues of disrespect, bullying and lack of appreciation for life in all its forms. We have the unique opportunity in our Catholic Schools and Religious Education programs to address it at its roots. There are many programs out there that we can buy but generally their effect is like placing a cover over the cracking foundation. When all is said and done, the cracks are still there. Let us build relationships and teach our children to do so based on honoring the image and likeness of our God within one another. We are fast approaching the Advent/Christmas season when our God took the ultimate step of love to come to earth and model that love and respect first hand.

