

WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL RELIG TEACHER?

By Jack Murphy

PERSON

GENUINE CONCERN FOR EACH STUDENT

A.. KNOW THEM QUICKLY -- name, temperament, habits; crowd they hang out with; activities and interests; where their head is at; ability to respond on emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual levels; why they come to RELIG; family environment.

WAYS: Be extremely perceptive and observant; check back RELIG files-teachers-Director; KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT THEM, IF POSSIBLE, BEFORE YOU MEET THEM; strike up short conversations with them outside center, on stairs, before class, questions and discussion in class, hand around a bit after class. FIRST THING: ASSOCIATE THEIR NAMES AND FACES AS SOON AS POSSIBLE; study their registration and personal view forms.

B. LET THEM KNOW YOU -- from the very beginning, reach out to them -- let them know a little about You: tell them why you are here; give them your address and phone number--your time is theirs; you are there for them--anytime they want to talk or if they ever need help in any way; always take a REAL interest in them--never pass one student by or put them off, if possible. THEY ARE YOUR TOP PRIORITY; be natural; talk person to person; psychology of touching; go out of your way for them; remember things they have said and done.

C. GET THEM INVOLVED-- remember their birthday, Christmas, Easter, End of the year (try to send cards); call them from time to time; drop them notes--talk up Relig activities in class, and in speaking individually--be involved in the total program of RELIG yourself and you may well bring them along; feel for them, always try your best to understand, and try not to lose your "cool"; be happy and enthusiastic when you see them; keep them in your thoughts outside the class; reach the TOTAL PERSON--realize yourself that we must reach and develop the whole person; it at all possible, drop by where they work or where they hang around, or when they play sports, are involved in some special activity such as a play or concert, etc.; find out what they're doing week to week--tell them what you are doing; be with them as much as possible; offer them a challenge--always welcome them to be part of the RELIG community (family) in a closer way; share yourself with them and especially your thoughts about them, your hopes for them.

CLASS

START OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT

1. Know your mission to them: what you hope to accomplish--set reasonable goals.
2. Know your students--what will work; what they need. The better you know them and relate to them, the more you can reach them,

give them the willingness to listen and learn from you and each other, and the less discipline problems and interruptions you will encounter.

3. Work hard at preparing your lessons-- make them interesting, relevant and alive. No one wants to sit through a boring class-- not even you. It is generally better to be over-prepared, but don't get flustered if you don't use everything. Each lesson should be practical and understandable with a positive application to the lives of the students. You might use the idea of the mini-lesson. Use a variety of means to get the same central theme or message across; films, filmstrips, posters, busy work, song, question and answer, discussion, physical activity, short presentation, or one of the many, many other motivational devices available. Always use tonight's lesson to reinforce last week's & to set-up or preview (introduce) next week's. Continuity is an important key to presenting the student the Christian message which he can understand, reflect upon, and hopefully respond to in a positive manner. Know your curriculum; know the audio-visual aids available; plan ahead of time; consult with your colleagues, with the Director and other Master Teachers.

"Can I get a drink of water?"

"Can I go to the bathroom?"

NO!! (Unless it is a matter of dire necessity). Inform students that they are to use washrooms before or after class, if necessary. You don't need any undue interruptions and neither does any other class!

4. Set the tone at the beginning--introduce yourself and others; explain our purpose here; give them some idea (outline) of what to expect during the course of the year; stress the idea of having respect for each other--in talking, fooling around, coming to all classes, being on time, etc.; help them to feel free to open up in class--need to be honest, to help each other, to understand, to teach and to learn from each other--need for what is said and shared in group in confidence to remain there (this is building a community within a community based on trust and mutual respect); handle any disciplinary problems at the moment (it is generally a mistake to "put off" anything that can lead to a serious problem) in a calm, loving but firm manner. Be aware of what is going on throughout the class; know when to overlook a comment or remark, but do not permit continual or frequent chatter or disruptions to continue by anyone. Don't get so upset that you lose your place--continue with the class--Don't blow things out of proportion; make it a smooth transition from your remark or comments back to the class again.

BEE SURE you don't bring your own upsets, disappointments, problems into the class--YOUR MIND AND HEART MUST BE ON YOUR STUDENTS!

5. Try not to embarrass any student in front of the others; In short, be kindly yet firm, in letting them know that you are the teacher and that each must respect the rights of the others. Be fair and do not show favoritism. Above all, respect each student and let him know that he is a unique and beautiful person. We must begin a process of building people up, not tearing them down.

Difficult disciplinary cases should be handled privately with students, and if they continue consult with the Director. Often getting to know the parents will help should any problems later arise.

6. Atmosphere--must be set-up conducive to learning. Set chairs in a small circle so the group is united and closer together. Do not allow any student or group to sit outside the circle.

CLASS IS AT LEAST 1 HOUR--if they come late, keep them late. Impress upon them the importance of coming on time. Time Boundaries (minimum) must be maintained closely.

Make sure the room is well-lighted and comfortable. OPEN WINDOWS--fresh air can often work wonders. Handle attendance register YOURSELF--always read announcements or assign someone to read the announcements at the beginning of class.

MAKE HASTE--YOUR HOUR IS GOING FAST!!

7. Be thoroughly familiar with your lesson preparation, and be confident in yourself as you present it. Things should move quickly--if you see interest waning, change your approach (possibilities for this occurrence should be considered ahead of time during preparation).

DON'T PREACH TOO MUCH-- realize there is a time and place for this. A good class is one which goes by quickly; when time drags on, your class is probably not interesting and you can expect disinterest and diversion.

BE FLEXIBLE -- don't worry too much about the work you feel you must cover. Do not become the over-worried clock watcher who insists on meeting his own schedule demands. If legitimate questions or concerns arise from the students, it is often better to treat them honestly and seriously at the time. You can cover your planned material next week. Realize also if students just pop questions, manufacturing them to "get you off the track", This does not happen very often but it is possible. If such an incident occurs be patient, explain that such matters can be discussed after class if interest still remains, and then continue with your regularly planned lesson. Also be flexible in your approaches to a topic week by week. Too much of one good thing can get boring too--there are many other good techniques around. ALWAYS REMEMBER: You are the greatest

motivational device you can use. Be enthusiastic and full of life; don't seem apathetic, listless or bored. The students will follow your lead in either case.

Be careful not to ramble on yourself or allow any student to monopolize the class. This can be a "bummer" and the others will lose interest quickly. Don't get into an argument or discussion with just one student--always speak to each member of the group, but the WHOLE GROUP. Try not to "cut-off" a student when he is speaking unless he is extremely long-winded or is rambling on from one point to another.

Be aware of body language and eye contact--they are important. Also, that what one member of the group says or does may well be indicative or expressive of other members within the group. Do not stand or sit in one position for too long a period of time. You will learn when and how to move, using your own body movement, gestures and facial expressions and tone of voice to stress or dramatize a point which you want to make. Use the blackboard--that's why it's there. Remember when you were their age and be patient with wandering bodies and minds. Just bring them back gently. The student's attention span often is very short which necessitates a lively and fast moving class filled with activity, change of mood or technique and down to earth object lessons. Do not expect fully mature people--you are dealing with teenagers who can one moment be sophisticated and very wise, and the next giddy and playful. When you speak, use gestures naturally and share eye contact with students. This is the way to speak to each individually while you speak to the whole group.

Keep developing your own sense of humor, and use humor effectively in presenting your lesson (evoke a healthy laugh from the students -- it is often the key to a successful lesson because you capture their interest, making them more receptive to the learning process.

BE ESPECIALLY CAREFUL that your vocabulary is not too high or flowery--it is easy to speak over their heads--speak in simple and direct language. Do not be concerned with technical theological terminology. This is relatively unimportant. Your job is to get across the Christian message, not the correct terms to describe it. Know your students and be careful to remember that when you speak of deep or abstract concepts, you must speak simply and always use graphic and concrete examples.

Make use of good question and answer techniques, especially if you have shy, disinterested or slow learners; make sure you pose important key (pivotal) questions. Pose simple questions and direct them to individual students. General or vague questions thrown out to the whole group often receive no response until the students are coaxed. Never let a question go unanswered--direct it to an individual. Make them think. Be patient and wait for an answer (sometimes hints are important).

At times, when you have waited too long a time, you might do well to rephrase the question so it is more intelligible to the group.

Be sure to encourage student participation and always thank students when they have contributed, even if in reality their contribution was slight or vague. A pat on the back often goes a long way. Make them feel important, because they are and you know that. Often they fail to realize their own worth as persons, so we must give them a boost. Always, we must be a source of encouragement. Our job is to help them to realize their own goodness, and elicit a response from them in the form of Christian living. They have been called by God to do great things for others--to love in a unique and special way, to share in God's very life. We are the instrument and messenger by which they may learn and accept these truths of their lives.

MAKE A MENTAL NOTE AS YOU ENTER THE
CLASSROOM, AND LEAVE IT IN THE SAME
CONDITION WHEN YOU LEAVE -- there is no
need for hassles with the school

8. Be in your classroom early -- set up equipment you will need and be ready so you can talk with the students informally before class. (many times, arriving at the center early gives you an opportunity to talk with students outside).

After class, remain--be there, available for anyone who wishes to talk with you. When your students do leave, lock up class and roam around outside the center or in the gym for a few minutes. The walk will do you good and you may strike up one or two conversations with the students. Be like a campaigning politician--meet and greet kids who hang around; learn their names, friends, and what RELIG class they are in--often, by getting to know other kids outside your class, your students will hear about you from them and might be tempted to move closer to you and get to know you better.

9. After classes, drop into the Faculty Lounge for a beverage and some good conversation with your colleagues. If we are to be teachers of the Christian message it is imperative that we, ourselves, live the spirit of Jesus and become an integral part of His RELIG community in New Rochelle. Often the coffee hour or two (if you can make time), or even the coffee half hour is an important step for us to get to know each other better, to instill greater confidence and faith in our great work, and to begin the community building process which is so essential to being a Christian. Whichever your outlook (Ecclesial vs. Congregational), where Christ is there is the community OR where the community is, there is Christ!

10. Check absences in your class with your Center Secretary. You should know why students did not show this evening. After two or three absences, call the student yourself and check out the problem. Always keep in close touch with the kids. Good weekly attendance is not in itself so important; but often it

PAGE SIX

can be indicative of something positive happening in the class.

11. NEVER dismiss your class early unless there is an emergency or you have pre-planned and consulted administrative personnel. Other classes may be disturbed at their peak moment.

ABOVE ALL, BE JOYOUS AND HAPPY,
YOU ARE A MIRACLE OF THE LORD'S
CREATION AND EVERY DAY SHOULD BE
YOUR HAPPY BIRTHDAY, FOR EACH DAY
WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE
RE-BORN TO NEW AND GREATER LIFE
IN THE LOVE OF JESUS.