



Shaping theFuture

Summer 2010

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Witness Parent

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."

ROMANS 1:16

The parent-teacher conference usually begins with a prayer. That is certainly appropriate, but is that the only spiritual aspect of the conference? Is there a quick turn to the academics? If our school exists to share the Gospel, then why not make this the first part of the conference? If we wait until the end, the time will be gone. That 15-minute conference goes so quickly! At Immanuel Lutheran School, Memphis, Tennessee, we challenged ourselves to make the faith talk a priority.

The teachers at Immanuel are no different from many educators across the country. We love the Lord and we love children. We are also just as nervous about asking someone directly about their faith life. What do I say? Am I sounding too preachy? How will the parent react? What if I don't know an answer to their question? In a training exercise, we practiced dealing with a variety of parent responses.

In order to do anything well, one must practice.

The teachers role-played with one another, with one person being the "teacher" and the other playing the role of the "parent." The "teachers" knew their part: To ask the parent about their faith. The teachers were able to phrase that question however they chose. It could be as simple as, "Tell me about your family's faith." Or, "How can I partner with you in growing your family's faith?" or "Tell me about your family's church and what it means to you." The parent-teacher conference takes place about six weeks into the school year. By this point in the school year, teachers know if the family attends a church somewhere, and a relationship has been building between the parent and teacher.

The Challenge

The challenge of the activity came in the form of how to handle the parent responses. The "parents" were given roles to play:

Change the subject: "Yea, I know. How is my son doing in math?" (Keep changing the topic.)

Surprised: "My kids have been going to school here for four years. This is the first time a teacher has asked us about this." (Act annoyed.)

Un-churched: "My parents never took me to church." (Act like it's not your fault.)

Silent: Parent doesn't say anything, just stares at the teacher.

Faith-without-works response: "I believe in Jesus, we just don't go to church anywhere. Isn't it enough to just believe?" (Keep answering questions with a question.)

Laugh it off, tell a joke: The parent uses humor as an aversion technique. "Being a new pastor to an aging congregation, he told them he would be serving them prune juice in Holy Communion. When asked why he would dare entertain such a thought, he said, 'If the Holy Spirit won't move you, the prune juice will.'" (Keep it awkward and laugh a lot.)

Tired parent: "I know it's important. We are trying. It's just tough with the kids and my spouse's work. Sunday is the one morning we have together." (Look miserable.)

It's the school's job: "I send my child to your school for religious training. They learn about Jesus five days a week. I don't see why we need to do something on Sunday too." (Act defensive.)

Anti-Religion: "I have a hard time with all that churchy stuff. It's just not me."

Lost parent: "We have not connected anywhere. We just moved to town."

Overwhelmed parent: "My spouse and I are separated and about to get a divorce. I am barely keeping it together."



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Review, Reflect, Resolve

How much of your parent teacher conference time is allotted for faith issues?

What is your major obstacle to discussing faith matters?

Is there another format for witnessing or discussing faith issues?

Links & Resources

[Witnessing in Your Classroom](#)

[LEA Monograph](#) *The Educator as Minister*

He/she lost his/her job this past summer.” (Cry a little.)

Interested parent: “Thanks for asking me about this. I am having a hard time understanding this whole Jesus and faith thing. What do you believe?”

What we found during our exercise was that even though we were with colleagues, there was still nervousness. We laughed it off a bit, but there was definitely some anxiety. After the activity, we shared as a group what worked well and highlighted the teachers who did a great job.

One never knows what is going to happen when that question of faith is laid out there. Each of the parent responses above provides an opportunity for the teacher to share. The message from the teacher simply has to come from the heart. It does not have to be perfect, and it’s OK to struggle a little. “Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” **MATTHEW 10:19B-20**

It’s still a challenge for many, but it’s worth every bit of nervousness and fear. The eternal salvation of the student and the family rests with their faith in Jesus Christ. Nothing is more important than a relationship with Jesus Christ.

We learned several things from the activity:

The approach must be sincere and come across out of love not law.

The interaction is probably going to be short. Depending on how the conversation goes, it could be anywhere from 30 seconds to 3 minutes or more.

This one interaction at the parent-teacher conference is not going to be a “cure-all.” Rather, it is a single opportunity to plant seeds. Many more interactions will have to occur.

It is a huge blessing to have an active church with many opportunities for a family seeking a church home.

The Results

At Immanuel, our teachers play an important role in the growth of the kingdom. Over the past two school years, the Holy Spirit has worked through us to reach families that attend our school. Not counting transfers from another church, we have had five adult baptisms, five adult confirmations, six child baptisms, and three school parents are currently enrolled in our new member class. To God be the Glory!

We praise him that he uses imperfect humans to spread the news of a perfect plan of salvation. In 1 Corinthians 3:5b-6, Paul gave credit where it was due when it came to the faith of the people, “Only servants through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but only God made it grow.”

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