

# **Home – School – Parish Links**

## **AN INTRODUCTION**

Most people would agree that families today face more challenges and difficulties than ever before. The challenge and difficulty we, as a Church community, face is how to lead and support our families in these changing times.

As a teacher I see the effects on parents and children of these difficulties. It is not unusual to see angry children unable to cope with the word around them. Neither it is unusual to meet desperate parents unable to understand, guide and love their children in the way they need.

As Christians we are asked to love God completely and to show this love by loving others in a Christian way – wanting what is best for them as fellow human beings. By developing our Parish-School-Home links we have the opportunity to do this. The kingdom of God will be present in the partnership we work together to develop.

The purpose of this short paper is to present a number of ideas which have been tried in Inverness where St Joseph's R.C. Primary, over two school years, focused on building up its Home-School-Parish links.

St Joseph's R.C. Primary is a middle sized primary in the heart of the city. It is the only Roman Catholic school in the area. The pupils come from various parishes in and around the city. All of our priests are busy but all are supportive all the school and its pupils. At the start of the project all were keen to see links develop into real partnerships.

Many areas in our Dioceses have no Roman Catholic school. At St Joseph's we recognised how fortunate we were. The ideas we have tried and the lessons we have learned could be taken and developed by catechists in parishes without denominational schools. The ideas are the same.

## **FIND OUT WHERE YOU ARE AT**

It sounds simple but the first thing we found it necessary to do was to find out exactly where we were at with links and partnerships and then decided where we would like to be in three years time. This involved speaking to as many people, from as wide a cross section of our Church community as possible. We spoke to parish priests and deacons, our youth officer, parents, future parents, past parents and members of the general church congregation. We drew up a short report to circulate to others. They helped to clarify for us what we were doing well and what they would like to see. Three messages for us were loud and clear – parents wanted more information on what the children were doing, parents, families and the general congregation wanted to participate and support us in our work and the parishes wanted to see much more of the children.

## **MAKE A START**

Our next step was to draw up an action plan. Any action plan has to be realistic so we set ourselves small, easily achievable targets and we started with the easy things first. Working in this way we all experienced success and we shared our success with the parish and parents.

## **GO SLOWLY**

Some of the obvious and easy things we did were

- **Children reading at Sunday morning Mass –**  
*choose easily heard children, get the text to them early, make sure they practice at home, give them a couple of real tries before the day*
- **Pick a feast day associated with the parish**  
*celebrate the day, we gave a wee piece of home baking, made by the children, with a small tag attached that said a gift from the pupils of St Joseph's to celebrate St Joseph's day*
- **Pick a day like Mother's Day and perform something simple like a song**  
*start learning the song well in advance, add a bit of sparkle – we gave out single daffodils after our song to all the ladies in the audience*
- **Offer to help in routine tasks**  
*if you offer teas after Mass offer the help of the children to clear tables and wash up  
could older children help put the collection plate round  
during the children's liturgy could the children do ten minutes litter picking up as a living example of how to care for the world*

## **THINK ABOUT HOW YOU COMMUNICATE**

Communication is perhaps the most important thing we can do to improve links with home, school or parish. Time spent thinking about communication, planning it, making sure it continues to happen, will be well spent. Without good communication you may find all your other hard work is lost or does not really take off. With good communication you may see parents, families and parishioners take a more active part in what you do. Keep communication easy - photocopied sheets are a lifesaver!

Most parents like to know what their children have been doing. If you want parents to talk to children you have to give them something to discuss. We all have been told by children that they have "forgotten" what they have just done or that they did "nothing". Help your parents and parishioners by making sure communication is good.

- **Get a slot in the parish newsletter**  
*Tell parents what you'll be talking about for each of the next three weeks*

- **Photocopy a small sheet with details and give it to the child to share**  
*try to add something that make's the sheet personal to that child – try these*

### ***St Mary's R.C. Church***

*This week we learned about the people who are special to us.  
And here's who your child drew*

- **Parents like to know how their child has been behaving**  
*something that is simple to fill in is necessary because it takes time – try this- it takes a second to complete. Don't make negative comments. If a child is not behaving you need to speak to a parent, not give out a note.*

### ***St Mary's R.C. Church***

*This week we heard the parable of The Good Samaritan*

*Your child listened*

***Really Well      Well***

- **If you do or make something make sure some go home with the children**  
*if everything you do goes to the altar as an offering the parents never see it and cannot talk about it*

- **Don't throw things away before you have displayed them**  
*displaying things will interest both children and adults*

- **Change displays regularly**  
*aim for something new every three or four weeks. That way you'll let people know your are an exciting, dynamic group*

## **SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION**

Obviously this is a vital time in terms of Home-School-Parish Links. It is a perfect opportunity to create real relationships that have a chance of lasting longer than just the preparation period itself. It is a time when most families are expecting to join in more. You can make the most of it.

- **Have a opening event to begin with**

*try something with a big social element first like a get to know you night, some parents might stay*

- **Consider what information you give parents**

*many parents might be a little unsure themselves of what you are teaching. Try to give them the basic information too. We had one or two adults go back to mass because they stopped being unsure if things had changed*

- **Ask the Parish to get involved**

*you could ask the morning congregation to pray for your group once a week during their preparation*

- **Keep the Parish up to date**

*we went along to morning Mass and one or two pupils gave a little presentation on what they were doing*

- **Give parents an opportunity to update their own knowledge of their faith**

*we offer parents an opportunity to meet with our Parish priest  
you could think about one or two “refresher” classes for parents. These can be described as a way to help the children so that home and parish are saying the same thing*

- **Plan a retreat day or morning**

*this could be for children, home or parish – or even all three*

- **Don't forget to say thank you**

*after the day try to go back to the parish and say thank you. Some young people could read out accounts of the day at morning Mass.  
you could prepare a spiritual bouquet for the Parish to say thank you.*

- **Don't lose touch**

*once you have establish contact with a group of children, try to keep in touch with them over the years. Have social events occasionally, send them Christmas card, put them on a mailing list for events.*

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