

Family and School Association Newsletter

Volume XXVI –

Sue Bordenaro – 312-534-5304, sbordenaro@archchicago.org

Newsletter Items

This newsletter, responding to the readers' requests, covers organizational assistance, educational assistance for children, parenting issues and family faith formation. This issues will address all of the above.

Parent Ambassadors

In order to keep Catholic schools healthy, it is vital to work on recruitment and retention year after year. While a variety of marketing strategies are effective in different parts of the city and suburbs, the only strategy that works across all Archdiocesan schools is parent engagement. Giving parents a voice, keeping them engaged, and validating their decision to choose Catholic education helps retain them and makes them more likely to recommend their school to friends and family. The best way for a school to create this level of engagement is to create a Parent Ambassador Program.

This program educates parents on how to communicate to current families and prospective families about the school and share the reasons they choose Catholic schools. The program encourages current parents to canvass the community, communicating wonderful things happening at the school. Word of mouth is key. Current families and prospective families want to hear from the parents why they chose this school.

The Parent Ambassador Program focuses on retention, recruitment and enrollment in each of our schools. It is typically a group of five to twenty current parents who are dedicated to telling the story of our Catholic Schools. The principal, assistant principal, and marketing director personally ask parents if they would like to be part of the Parent Ambassador group. The best Parent Ambassadors are those that are genuinely satisfied with their school and are eager to invite prospective families to consider joining their school community. While other parent organizations serve other school volunteer and fundraising efforts, Parent Ambassadors are dedicated to promoting the school and focused on recruitment and retention efforts. Successful Parent Ambassador Programs typically have one to two Lead Parents who coordinate meetings, schedules, and marketing opportunities with the principal or marketing director. Groups usually meet once a month for an hour to discuss different ways to market the school. They are also available upon request to participate in school marketing efforts. Parent Ambassadors typically pick three to five high priority marketing strategies to focus their efforts, often including:

- Promoting the school at your own parish masses and others without schools
- Presenting to religious education families
- Encouraging current parents to invite personal contacts to tour the school
- Canvassing the community where parents and children frequent with information about the school
- Offering office support as it relates to admissions and enrollment management
- Building relationships with local officials and realtors and inviting them to the school
- Creating and leading Mom and Tot programs which help promote the school to families with infants and toddlers
- Mentoring and helping to orient to new families
- Volunteering at admission events, giving tours and follow up with prospective families

“The Parent Ambassador Program educates you on how to market your Catholic school to current and prospective families,” shared one parent “It allows you to be involved in the retention and recruitment process and to be more knowledgeable about your child’s school. All Catholic schools should highly consider adapting this program into their school,” If you or someone you know are interested in learning more about this program, please contact Noreen Walton Valle (nwalton@archchicago.org), Enrollment Marketing Manager at the Office of Catholic Schools.

Raising Your Child to Think Clearly

Thinking clearly is a necessary skill both for school and for life. You can help your child to gain that extremely important skill in the following ways:

- Teach your child to think for his or her self. Help your child to weigh what he or she hears and avoid believing and repeating everything a peer or even a teacher says without thinking the issue through from his or her experience and perspective.
- Teach your child to take time to think before acting.
- Teach your child to think hopefully even in tough situations.
- Teach your child to avoid prejudice and think charitably and without bias about others

A friend’s said her husband always told his children to “Engage brain; then engage mouth”. Sounds like good advice!

Two Major Times of Preparation and Thanksgiving

Both Thanksgiving and Advent are just a matter of days away. Thanksgiving is November 24th and Advent begins the next Sunday, November 27th. Both are days for family celebration, one to give thanks to the Lord for our blessings and the other to begin our preparation for the coming of the Lord.

The following prayer was shared by our Superintendent, Dr. Jim Rigg, with our principals. It is a wonderful prayer to share with your family as fall unfolds around us and Thanksgiving approaches:

Harvest Prayer

God we thank you for your harvest which feeds us so many times each day.

We are nourished with your forgiveness and hope.

We are sustained with your strength and patience.

We are filled with your grace and compassion.

God we thank you for feeding us with a harvest of plenty.

We are restored through your generosity and healing .

We are replenished with your abundance and joy.

We are reminded of your selfless abandon.

God we thank you for feeding us with the bread of heaven.

Your gift of Christ sustains our lives.

His presence restores the promise of your love.

His life fills our hearts with your everlasting light.

God we thank you too for filling us with the water of life.

May we drink deeply that our thirst may be quenched,

May your river continue to flow,

Over us, in us, through us,

And out into the world you love.

Amen

Advent is a time to spiritually prepare our family for the birth of the Christ Child. It is important to emphasize the faith dimension of this time, not just the physical, secular dimensions - shopping, decorating, card writing, etc. To keep Jesus at the center of these upcoming days an Advent wreath is a helpful item. An Advent wreath is simply a small wreath with four candles, three purple and one pink. These candles are lit one at a time on the four Sundays of Advent as a reminder of the coming big event. Another Advent custom is the bringing of small amounts of straw each Sunday to an empty crib until the crib is ready for the baby on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, depending on your family's tradition of celebration.

A blessed holiday season to each of you and to your family!