

## Catholic Schools: Communities of Respect

Catholic schools across the country have always been recognized and known for their academic excellence, character development, safety and faith formation when compared to other schools. Thus far in this parent series, we have talked about Catholic schools as communities of academic excellence and of faith. This month we take a look at the aspects of character development and school safety. In other words, Catholic schools as communities of respect.

Catholic schools emphasize scholarly achievement and responsible behavior, while at the same time, celebrate and instill the faith. Catholic schools have traditionally been successful because they understand that these are not mutually exclusive but complimentary to one another. This is why families, regardless of their faith, invest in Catholic schools. They see the value and embrace the understanding that they want more than just an academic education for their children. Families want their children to grow as individuals with a deep-rooted sense of respect for other people. They want their children to display good character when engaging with others. This is what makes a Catholic education different.

Another element that helps develop good character, and is also complimentary, is that Catholic schools emphasize a component of service to others. By offering opportunities for students to choose a volunteer service as part of their education, Catholic schools provide a rich advantage to them. Investing students in the process, by allowing them to make decisions for themselves that are grounded in the faith and make a difference in the lives of others, they are more independent and feel confident making respectful decisions about faith, life and relationships with others.

Parents who gift their children with a Catholic education are laying the foundation that will inspire and guide them through their lifetime. They know that their children will be nurtured in the Gospel message and challenged to see themselves as able to make a difference in the world. Another important value learned in a Catholic school community is that of inclusion. Helping each child understand the importance of respecting all, allows them to recognize that they are called to be responsible global citizens. This formation of recognizing the presence of

Christ in themselves and others, which is begun at home, is not only fostered but is celebrated in Catholic schools.

Not only do Catholic schools teach the value of respect for others, they also teach the importance of respect for various religions of the world. Teaching global awareness of other faiths and social justice issues encourages students to be responsible, responsive, compassionate and empathetic to the beliefs, feelings and needs of others. By teaching morality in accordance with Gospel values, all members in a Catholic school community show self-discipline and respect for everyone.

In 2015, the Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Kathleen A. Cepelka, Ph.D., encouraged her Catholic schools to consider what their communities can do to ensure the continued safety of their schools and that those within them are treated with nothing but respect. Reprinted with her permission, she offered them the following pledge:

**R**eceive each person who comes into our lives – student, parent, teacher, staff member, community or parish partner – as our brother or sister in Christ.

**E**ngage completely and regularly, without deliberate distraction, in face-to-face communication with those in our care.

**S**olve problems through open dialog, not silence or verbal violence.

**P**ray for those who have hurt us and for those whom we have hurt.

**E**xamine our hearts for prejudices, biases and judgements that drive us toward the darkness rather than the light.

**C**hoose to use words as blessings, not weapons, in a manner that heals, not harms.

**T**hink of no one as less than ourselves.

As Catholics, we believe that all people are created in the image and likeness of God and, therefore, everyone is entitled to be treated with love, dignity and respect. This is what students experience on a daily basis in Catholic schools. ✚