



The Development and Implementation of Characteristic Five

Characteristic Five of the Evangelizing Catholic School process states: *An evangelizing Catholic school reaches out to students and families with various backgrounds and needs in order to bring God's love into their lives* focuses on supporting, respecting and strengthening the family.

As a school we see the family as the foundational religious and social institution upon which the Church and society depends. The entire faith community of an evangelizing Catholic school is sensitive to the challenges that others face, respectful of differences and sees all people as made in the image and likeness of God.

The Fifth Characteristic urges administrators and teachers in the Catholic school to reach out to its families in a compassionate and sensitive manner and respond by developing and/or making known those processes that will address the needs of those students and families.

In a real sense Characteristic Five encourages you to reach out to the families in your school that are suffering and hurting in an emotional, material or physical way. This particular characteristic goes a step further by inviting administrators and teachers to reach out to the total person, the total family unit, in an effort to make the love of Jesus Christ more evident to those who need assistance by supporting, respecting and strengthening the family.

Hopefully this follow-up will help you be a better witness to the Person of Jesus Christ as you develop new ways to assist your families in experiencing the love of Christ in their families.

INTRODUCTION

“There is no doubt that students are growing in their relationship with the Lord, so evangelization is taking place. However, the challenge for administrators and teachers in our Catholic schools, who minister in a culture growing more and more secular and relativistic, is to be much more conscious of how they evangelize and realize that everyone needs to be evangelized.”

We live in a culture that is growing more and more secular and therefore pushes God, religion and morality to its outer limits. Our secular culture claims to have all the answers that one would need in securing a better life for its people. It has no need for God!

Throughout the course of history we have seen a weakening and dismantling of the family unit. Many families have replaced prayer before meals with driving through the lines of fast food restaurants; replaced Sunday worship and keeping holy the Sabbath with sports practices; replaced meaningful conversation with post-it notes and text messaging; and, quality family time with dad taking one or two of the kids to this place and mom taking the others in a different direction. The family has truly become “like two ships passing in the night.”

We can't be all things to all people and many of the wounds that families need healed are so specialized that we just aren't qualified to address them and, even if we were qualified, cannot find the time in our days to address them. So what are we to do?

The families who send their children to our schools are as diverse as the children who sit in our classrooms. Their needs abound! We are aware of some of those needs and seek to address them with various programs and processes. But other needs are more hidden. They come to light only when tragedy strikes or by happenstance.

This fifth characteristic is ***“an evangelizing Catholic school reaches out to students and families with various backgrounds and needs in order to bring God's love into their lives.”***

The following format is designed to be more of a resource manual for you. It not only asks you to look at the way you respond to needs in your faith community, but it also contains the names of various organizations serving a variety of needs that may manifest themselves in the students and families in your school faith community. When these needs become evident, you can use this resource to address those needs by referring those families to a resource that has the qualifications to handle the particular problem in a loving, sensitive and qualified manner.

To many of our families you are the only face of the Church that they come into contact with, and to many you are the only face of Jesus that they see. How you respond to those families may bring them closer to the person of Jesus Christ or push them further away.

SIMPLE – YET PROFOUND – THINGS YOU MIGHT DO

MEETINGS:

So many of our families are pulled in so many different directions that it is sometimes difficult if not impossible to fit one more thing into their schedules. It's not that the desire is not there to keep up to date on their child's/children's progress, it's just that there is not one more thing they can fit into their schedules...at least not according to the schedules we set for them.

- When we plan our calendars do we look for alternatives to the way we've done it for years or do we use the same format and the same time frames that we've always used because it fits into our schedule?
 - Is it possible to schedule the meeting more than once to give families some flexibility in their schedule? This may require some adjustments on our part but would it be possible to schedule one meeting on a Tuesday at 7:00 PM and the same meeting at, say, 5:30 PM on Thursday?
 - If our families are unable to make the meeting, do we send them a note that says: "You missed the meeting on Thursday evening. Enclosed is the agenda?" Or do we type up a summary of the meeting including what was discussed and any decisions that were made and include a note that says: "We missed you but understand that schedules are tight. I've included a summary of what was discussed / decided. If you have any questions or would like to speak further about something, please call me?"
 - In the notification about an upcoming meeting, do we enclose a postcard that says: "If you need someone to watch your children so that both of you can attend the meeting, please let us know. We'll have adults and some of our seventh and eighth graders here to help out."
 - Do we vary the style of our meetings, especially if these meetings are held every year on the same topic: (i.e., sacramental meetings, opening meeting for the year, parent-teacher meetings)? In many instances, parents feel that they've heard it all before so why jump through the hoops when nothing new is going to be presented.
 - Do we allow for the exception? If someone doesn't fit into our schedule and there is no way to make their schedule to fit ours, do we ask them to set the schedule (especially if it's a truly important meeting) and alter our schedule to fit theirs?

PARENTS AS THE PRIMARY RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS OF THEIR CHILDREN:

Parents often feel inadequate in teaching their children about the Church and her teachings, especially since many of them aren't sure if they themselves understand exactly what the Church teaches. For many of them, their last formal instruction was some 15-20 years ago and this, too, adds to their reluctance to be titled "primary religious educators."

- Do we truly promote “parents as the primary religious educators” of their children or is that just a phrase we put into print that abdicates our responsibility as a support to parents if a student fails religion or is uncharitable to others?
- What are some of the ways we reinforce this concept with our parents and their children?
 - In our handbooks, do we list the expectations we have of parents in regard to their child’s / children’s religious education? Or do we just figure that saying it is enough?
 - Do we have parents sign the “Witness statement for those whose children attend Catholic education programs”?
 - Does our beginning of the year meeting focus on this concept and does our presentation center on religious education and the part parents play in this responsibility? Or does our meeting focus on tardiness and absenteeism, discipline, and homework?
 - Do we have a plan for encouraging parents to become actively involved in the religious education process? Do we give parents hints and suggestions of what to do and give them ideas on how they might begin discussions with their children on the topics being taught and Gospel values?
 - Does our weekly or monthly newsletter focus on more than what’s going on in various classes or the various service activities being sponsored? Does the newsletter highlight something “religious” each time it’s printed: such as, information on the latest encyclical or Church teaching; a spiritual event in the school; a featured Saint of the Church; or an informational piece that will help the parents learn more about the Church and what’s being taught to enhance their child’s / children’s faith formation?
- How do we bring parents into the educational process of forming their child / children in religious education?
 - Does the faculty keep parents informed each week or month regarding the content of what’s being taught in religion and what concepts can be reinforced in the home by parents?
 - Does the faculty send home handouts so that parents can work with their children in understanding their faith? Do they have a place for a signature and a comment section so that parents can indicate that they have discussed this with their child / children or comment to the teacher that they did not understand something or need a question answered?
 - Do we vary our teaching techniques by inviting parents into the classroom occasionally to give parents a first-hand glimpse about what’s happening in our classrooms in religious education?
- How do we help parents understand what it means to be Servant Church?
 - Do we specifically ask parents to cultivate in their children a sense of stewardship? Or do we wait until Confirmation preparation and then inform parents that their child / children are required to perform so many hours of service in order to be confirmed?
 - Do we begin at the lowest grade level and continue teaching throughout all grades that we are all called to a life of service: service to the world, to the community, to our families, etc?

- When we speak of service to our families and our faculties is it geared toward service by the students or do we focus on service by everyone as a response to our baptismal call?

SPECIAL CELEBRATIONS:

Family needs manifest themselves in different ways at different times. What affects some families directly only affects others indirectly and in not so obvious ways. But we are a community of faith! We not only need to be sensitive to the needs of others in the community but we also need to share in their sorrows and joys. As a faith community we have a unique opportunity to divide a family's sorrow and double their joy by participating in activities and functions that enable those who feel separated and distant from the community.

As a school community of faith we have multiple opportunities to bring others who feel disenfranchised and marginalized into the faith community without necessarily singling them out - and making them feel uncomfortable. At the same time, however, we can exercise sensitivity and still respond to their needs by creating situations where the entire community gathers in prayer.

And while the creation of these situations may not be the total responsibility of the school faith community, we can be instrumental in bringing the parish family together to pray for the needs of school and parish families.

- As we gather to celebrate Eucharist, do we reach out to all members of the faith community to come together to celebrate this central mystery of our faith? Or are we content with the attendance of the parents whose children in a particular class are responsible for planning the Mass?
- Do we take every opportunity to celebrate the feast days of Saints who would have a special significance to members of the faith community; especially to those members of the school / parish family who might be in the minority? Or do we advertise for and seek out these members and invite them not only to attend but also to participate in the liturgy?
- Do we "invent" celebrations such as an International Day or a Christmas-around-the-world Day to help our students and their families to come to understand different cultures and practices and then end with a prayer service where we celebrate diversity and acceptance of all peoples as children of God?
- Do we celebrate rites of passage for families? Within the family structure there are multiple rites of passage that can help ease the pain or uncertainty facing our families: obtaining a driver's license; going away to college or graduating from grade school; becoming grandparents for the first time; loss of a loved one through death or divorce; getting a scholarship; being on the honor roll for the first time after months or years of struggling, etc. Many of these rites are celebrated in one way or another but being conscious of the many things happening within the family structure can make us more sensitive to celebrating those passages with our families.

DIVERSITY GATHERINGS:

Our schools are filled with diversity and rightly so! We are Catholic, reaching out to peoples of all cultures and from all walks of life. The school calendar provides us with various opportunities to celebrate that diversity. We schedule a liturgy for Our Lady of Guadalupe and we celebrate the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during January. But our diversity extends well beyond those two holidays. We have students whose ancestry is German, French, Spanish, Polish, English and a host of other cultures.. How do we celebrate that diversity?

- Maybe we could schedule a day during the year devoted to all the diversity represented in our schools. Or maybe we could focus on one cultural group each month or twice a year until we've adequately represented all the various groups in our faith community.
- Naturally, we'll want to make certain that we don't leave anyone out, so this will take some planning on our part. But having a day or a series of days to celebrate the diversity in our schools could be an exciting way to bring peoples of all colors and races into the faith community in an educational setting.
- Parents and grandparents as well could become involved in the planning of this event especially since many of our students are unaware of their cultural heritage. Parents and grandparents would be able to add realism and integrity to our gathering.
- Classes could center around the diversity featured for this or that particular day.
 - In religion, we could focus on the Saints who represent that culture;
 - In English, we could read stories or poems by authors from that culture;
 - In History or Social Studies, we could trace that culture's immigration to the new world;
 - In Math, we could feature someone from the culture and discuss his or her contribution to the world or design a crossword puzzle or game;
- We could have a World Fair Day with various cultures making food specifically associated with their culture. Naturally you would have to follow the guidelines as outlined in the Health Section of the Administrator's Manual.
- You could even use "scrip" representing the various monetary methods used in the particular cultures.
- You could use grandparents and great-grandparents as storytellers helping the children understand what it was like in the "olden" days.
- You could end with a prayer service that stressed the unity of all peoples, respecting the diversity of everyone.
- This could be an educational experience for all.

RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR RESPONDING TO NEEDS

With the economy being what it is, some of your school families may be suffering from unemployment and the accompanying financial pains, especially in regard to keeping up with mortgage payments, school tuition, and utility payments. They may have little or no money for food. One will only have to be sensitive to their surroundings to see that a need exists.

While some of these needs can be met at the local level, still others may require the expertise of outside agencies and resources to address the problem.

UNEMPLOYMENT:

The list below provides various agencies within the greater Saint Louis area that can assist those who have lost their jobs or are searching for employment in order to maintain or regain their dignity and self-respect.

- **Missouri Connections: An Education and Career Planning System** (Career Centers that provide free-of-charge services to job seekers. All centers provide help with finding a job. Some may also help find and pay for additional training) <http://www.missouriconnections.org>
- **United Way of Greater Saint Louis** (Free tax preparation for low income households in St. Louis City and County for families with incomes of \$40,000. or less) <http://www.stl.unitedway.org>
- **Jobs for Life** (Provides toolkits and ongoing training and support to equip churches and faith based organizations with the strategy and tools needed to help individuals find, obtain, and retain employment and build healthy lives.) <http://www.jobsforlife.com>
- **Employment Connection** (Offers several programs to assist persons with limited opportunities to self-sufficiency through employment) <http://stlcin.missouri.org>
- **St. Louis Employment Links** (Provides links to job openings available through local businesses' websites) <http://www.stlouisemploymentlinks.com>
- **Missouri Department of Social Services Division of Family Services Employment & Training** (Helps those recipients receiving food stamps ready themselves for employment which would lead to self-sufficiency and help avoid long term dependence) <http://www.dss.mo.gov>
- **Missouri WORKS** (Available at no cost to assist citizens of Missouri in their employment, job development and training search) <http://www.works.mo.gov>

CARE FOR THE ELDERLY:

The various agencies or church-sponsored organizations listed below are intended to give you resources to help your families who are struggling with being caregivers for their elderly or infirmed parents. This is by no means an exhaustive listing of skilled care facilities but is meant to be a starting point for referrals to your school families.

- **Alexian Brothers Community Services** (All inclusive care for the elderly) <http://www.alexianhealthsystem.org/facilities/missouri/abcs.html>
- **Anna House** (Home Skilled Nursing) 314.209.7979
- **Cardinal Ritter Senior Services** (A complete continuum of care for senior adults) 314.961.8000
- **Cardinal Ritter Adult Day Program** 314.918.2295
- **DuBourg House** (Cardinal Ritter Senior Services – Assisted Living) 314.752.1901
- **Faithful Friends Program** (Cardinal Ritter Senior Services) 314.383.0800
- **Nazareth Living Center** (Skilled care and residential services) 314.487.3950
- **Pope John Paul II Apartments, Inc** (Cardinal Ritter Senior Services – Senior Housing) 314.653.0400
- **Queen of Peace C – Star Center** (Homes for Adults with Special Needs) 314.531.0511
- **St. Elizabeth Adult Day Care** (Day Care Centers for Adults in areas across the Archdiocese) 314.772.5107

SERVICES FOR AT-RISK YOUTH / SPECIAL NEEDS:

Sometimes parents are at the end of their rope. They have a child who needs special services which they are no longer able to provide for or need help assessing those needs. The following agencies or organizations may be able to help them in those instances.

- **Boys Hope/Girls Hope of St. Louis** (Provides long-term care for at-risk youth who are academically capable) 314.692.7477
- **Catholic Guidance Center** (Psycho-educational assessment including personal interview, testing for cognitive/academic functioning, visual-motor development, screening of personality, social and other psychological factors. The Center services elementary age children and adolescents) 314.533.3454
- **Child Center – Marygrove** (Emotionally disturbed children and youth, ages 6-19 and providing overnight emergency care) 314.837.1702
- **Learning Center Classes in parish schools** (Classes for children with specific learning disabilities. The children are included with regular curriculum classes as needed but receive services of specially trained teachers who address the children's specific difficulties)
- **Special Education Religious Ministry** (Religious instruction for children with special needs who would not be able to learn at the same pace as other in catechetical programs) 314.439.5865 or 314.792.7374
- **Department of Special Education** (Provides psychological testing, counseling, educational and vocational services to infants and young adults, ages 6 weeks -22 years, who have major learning difficulties) 314.792.7321

AGENCIES / ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE:

The listing of agencies and organizations that follows addresses a number of needs that your school families might have as they cope with the day to day situations of their lives. Again this listing is not meant to be all-inclusive but serves as a starting point for you to resource your parents and families who might need assistance.

- **Catholic Charities** (Consists of more than 66 agencies and programs providing services to people in need without regard to religion, race or national origin) 314.367.5500
- **Catholic Family Services** (Provides professional counseling services to all people within the Archdiocese of St. Louis regardless of race, religion, or national origin. Operates outreach centers throughout the Archdiocese that help people with basic needs) 314.544.3800
- **Franciscan Connection** (Provides emergency financial assistance, e.g., utilities and minor home repairs to low income families in South St. Louis City) 314.773.8485
- **Housing Resource Center** (Enabling low/moderate income families to become first-time home buyers. Also offers mortgage assistance, rental assistance, relocation, and home repairs) 314.241.5600
- **Housing Association, Intercommunity** (Provides directly or in conjunction with other organizations, housing and related facilities/services for families in need.) 314.664.6811
- **Refugee Services** (Welcomes and resettles refugees from all over the world, providing assistance with housing, employment and basic needs) 314.771.2570
- **Society of St. Vincent de Paul of St. Louis** (Volunteer program that offers emergency assistance in a personal manner to people in need throughout the Archdiocese.) 314.531.2183

MISCELLANEOUS AGENCIES FOR A VARIETY OF SPECIFIC NEEDS:

The listing below contains various organizations and agencies that offer assistance of one type or another that may be affecting some of the families in your school. This listing is very specific in the type of assistance offered but may be of help to you as you seek to minister to the families in your faith community.

- **Catholic AIDS Outreach** (A referral line for HIV/AIDS education, support groups, pastoral support and assistance providers.) 314.533.0304, extension 404
- **Project Rachel** (Free, professional, confidential counseling for anyone who has been wounded by an abortion experience) 314.792.7565
- **Catholic Legal Assistance** (Provides free legal services to low income clients in civil matters, including evictions, bankruptcies, abuse orders of protection, welfare and food stamp benefits.) 314.977.3993
- **Courage** (A Catholic Church Apostolate which ministers to those with same-sex attractions and their loved ones.) 314.633.2336
- **Laity and Family Life** (An Apostolate of the Archdiocese that offers programs and services to help lay Catholics connect faith and life at home, at work and in the parish: including *Bereavement / Grief Ministry*(314.792.7179); *Inactive Catholic Outreach* (314.792.7181); *Separated, Divorced and Widowed ministry*.(314.792.7183) among others)

- **Prison Ministry** (St. Vincent de Paul Society outreach to inmates and their families and to crime families) 314.652.8062
- **St. Martha's Hall** (Conducted by Catholic Charities and reaches out and provides assistance to battered wives and their children) 314.533.1313

PROGRAMS FROM THE CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE:

Listed below are programs and processes already in place within the structure of the Catholic Education Office. These programs are intended to help schools help children.

- **Tuition Assistance to Elementary Schools** (For parents needing assistance in meeting tuition costs at the elementary and secondary levels. Parents should contact their pastors for information.) 314.792.7305
- **Parent Education Program** (Sessions focusing on assisting parents in key transition points in the student's academic career.) 314.792.7300
- **Anti-Bullying Program** (Virtue Based Restorative Discipline (VBRD) and others). 314.792.7346
- **Health Programs and Services** (The Health Advisory Committee, in cooperation with SSM Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical Center and the Catholic Education Office provides a variety of health programs and services to schools throughout the Archdiocese. These programs and services, some of which are listed below, are provided at no cost to schools and are available to a variety of members of the educational community) 314.268.2752
 - **Training for Emergency Response Team Members** (Information on universal precautions, modes of transmission of blood borne pathogens, appropriate methods of recognizing potential exposures, etc.)
 - **CPR Training** (Class for school personnel covering adult, infant and child cardio-pulmonary resuscitation and choking.)
 - **Nutrition and Physical Activity** (Outlines the nutritional requirements of students that will provide the energy needed for normal growth, development and maintenance of a healthy lifestyle.)