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WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW: SAINTS & HEROES (All Saints' Day)

Part of the religious education background of many of us used to be reading the lives of the saints. Gradually, libraries began their great thin-out of such biographies. Many of them were poorly written and not sound theologically. Too often they were simply sweet presentations of holiness that made the saints look less human, not more human. That was the tricky part: in an attempt to make a saint look holy, she/he was described as less human. By being less human, he or she came to become a model of full humanity.

The saints came to be known as the finest of our human race; yet some of their actions were not ones that we could identify with at all. Sitting on a pole praying or fasting for three months on water just did not seem to us a way to build humanity. The spectacular came to be the special mark of those saints with whom we lost contact. Those like us with human weakness and features stayed with us. Their model of holiness seemed solidly built on an understanding of grace that was relational with other men. Grace did not abstract a man out of the human order; it refined man's ability to love.

Saints are not church oddities. The early church called all its people "saints." We know how we can identify with saints who are human *and* holy. We know that we use deeply felt statements like "My mother was a saint" and really mean it despite the fact that such lives were not extraordinary. We have seen or read works such as Erik Erikson's books on Gandhi and Martin Luther. They show us clearly how it is often the natural weaknesses in men's personalities that eventually lead to their most striking service to mankind. The world would be poorer if Gandhi's natural weakness, identification with his mother, did not lead him to "mother" the starving millions in India. We know now for sure that saints have the same nature as we have and



problem is really a two-fold one—not only recruiting new teachers but keeping the ones you already have.

Dealing with the problems of recruiting and keeping teachers takes some evaluating of both the recruiting techniques used and the parish church-school program itself. Many times the techniques and the program may have some aspects that contribute to the problem rather than to the solution. For example, when some people being recruited to teach protest that they don't know enough to teach, they are often told: "Don't worry. You'll learn as you go along." Before using this technique, recruiters need to ask themselves in what ways the church-school program is constructed to help teachers learn as they go along. If learning as they go along simply means that teachers can read their manuals and teachers' guides and learn enough to get through each lesson, perhaps the program can be expanded to include a little more help—a qualified person to be in charge and to whom teachers can turn for specific problems, monthly teacher-training meetings, funds for teachers to attend teacher-training conferences outside the parish or for inter-parish workshops, a good resource library where teachers can find answers to their questions and books for self-study. These support systems can help raise the quality of religious education while giving recruiters specific points for selling teaching to those who protest they don't know enough to teach. If these support systems operate, they also tend to cut down on turnover by decreasing teachers' feelings of being alone with no one to turn to for help and guidance.

Recruiters also tend to recruit people to teach by saying, "Teaching won't take much of your time." But teaching **does** take time, and fostering the idea that teaching shouldn't take time only undermines the church school program. It also leads to teacher frustration when teachers discover that teaching takes more time than they were led to believe, and frustration can lead to dropouts. It is much fairer to the teacher and to the church-school program to give prospective teachers an honest and accurate description of the job and the time it takes to teach. This can be done by borrowing an idea from business—the job description. A job description for church-school teachers can include a general description of the job, the specific responsibilities, the abilities needed, any training necessary and how it can be secured, the person to whom the teacher is responsible, the term of service, and the time requirements for the job. Writing a job description helps the parish church-school program because the recruiter can give prospective teachers a realistic picture of church-school teaching. In preparing the job description, however, those involved should be thorough. For example, specific responsibilities might include not only teaching a weekly class but also planning the lesson, attending teachers' meetings, taking part in the liturgical and sacramental life of the church, etc. Time requirements would, then, be tied to these responsibilities, for example, one hour teaching weekly, two hours preparing lessons, an hour and a half weekly attending Liturgy, three hours monthly attending teachers' meetings, etc.

If prospective teachers keep saying "no" to the recruiter, the recruiter often resorts to saying, "But nobody else wants to teach; *somebody* has to do it." Now this well may appeal to someone's sense of obligation, and the recruiter just

might make the person feel guilty enough to accept. But the first part of the statement isn't a very good advertisement for church-school teaching, and the second part isn't exactly an enthusiastic vote of confidence in the person being recruited. Recruiters need to be a little more positive than that. It may be that nobody wants to teach, but that's not the prospective teacher's problem—that's the recruiter's problem. Sometimes recruiters are so aware of what teachers have to give—time, effort, study—that they don't focus enough on what they can get from teaching. Any teacher will tell you that you learn a lot when you teach—about the Orthodox Faith, about people. You also become more involved in the church community because you get a new group of students each year to share with and because somehow the kids become "your" kids because you have shared. And teaching can be fun; it's not all drudgery.

There are times when there is closeness, sharing, joy—and learning. But most important, teaching is more than a task; it's a ministry to which people are called. And this call is to follow in the steps of Christ and teach the faith that leads to salvation.

Teaching is not an easy job always. It takes commitment; it takes time; it takes an openness to learning and experimentation. We can't fool people about these requirements. But the parish can clarify its hopes and expectations, and ask teachers to share them. The parish can provide help so teachers can meet these expectations. The recruiter's dream may be to find 20 extraordinarily qualified church-school teachers in the parish standing in line to teach, but the reality is that we must find the few committed people whom we can teach and shape and help reach their potential—if we give them the necessary facilities, training and moral support.

NOVEMBER CALENDAR

Saturday, November 4

All Saints Day

Saturday, November 11

Archangels Gabriel and Michael

Saturday, November 18

Apostles Philip and Andrew

Thursday, November 23

Thanksgiving

Sunday, November 26

First Sunday of Advent

DRE BULLETIN

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