



Lasallian Reflections

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Seeing Them As God Sees Them Student-Teacher Relationships

by Karen Sweet

English Teacher and Mentor for New Teachers/Totino-Grace High School/Minneapolis, Minnesota



“And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love tenderly, to walk humbly with your God”

(Micah 6:8).

The Hebrew prophet Micah may not have known it at the time, but he spoke powerfully about the mission of the teacher. Many years later, St. John Baptist de La Salle echoed the challenge and the invitation of Micah, giving shape and meaning to those words in his own life, work and writings. He instructed his Brothers to touch the hearts of their students:

“You are engaged in a ministry wherein you are obliged to touch hearts. You cannot possibly do this without the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Beseech God to confer on you today the same grace as he gave to the Apostles so that

after filling you with his Spirit for your own sanctification, he may confer it on you for the salvation of others also”

(Meditation 43.3).

One of the principal ways for a teacher to act justly and love tenderly is to make an intentional effort to see individual students as God sees them.

That perception and insight is often required in order to achieve good and effective student-teacher relationships. Not all students present themselves as naturally lovable.

Seeing students as real and potential gifts to the world, and not as problems that need to be solved or tolerated, can be the beginning of real growth for student and teacher. Students may not see their own strengths until good teachers help them discover that potential.

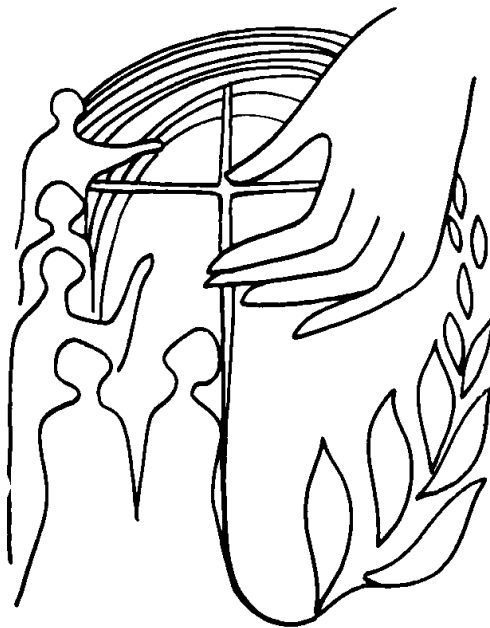
Young people are capable of participating at high levels in moral, ethical and social circumstances.

They often show good judgment when required and common sense when necessary. More students than most people know about, have made tough, unpopular moral choices in situations involving cheating, sexual activity, chemical use, shoplifting, and mistreatment of parents or other family members.

Over the years I have been inspired by the healthy ability of young people to act justly and to make the right choices. As teachers, we have the opportunity to reinforce this behavior by instilling positive trust in our students. Students are capable, willing and longing for the trust of a caring teacher. They know if we expect them to do the right thing. They also know if we do not trust them.

In *A Separate Peace*, author John Knowles chronicles the journey of a high school student, Gene Forrester, as he struggles with rivalry, jealousy, competition, and hatred in his relationship with his best friend Phineas. At one point Gene acknowledges, "Sarcasm is the protest of the weak." As a veteran of thirty-four years experience, I can attest to the withering effects on students when they are victims of a teacher's sarcasm. Teachers who use it as a tool to exert power and control often cause silent and personal pain.

Because sarcasm is so prevalent in our society as a form of humor, the good teacher needs to be sensi-



tive enough to see it as the form of belittling and disrespect it is and avoid its use.

Not a day goes by that we should not thank God for gifting us with the knowledge, experience and skills necessary to be teachers.

Students may disappoint us when they plagiarize a paper or utter a rude comment to a classmate. They may sadden us when they fail to use their potential. They may hurt us when they disregard the opportunity for spiritual growth through prayer and meditation. However, the eternal optimism in us

must love them unconditionally, fiercely, and reverently.

As you face your students tomorrow, pray for the grace "to walk humbly with God." Ask for the help to see them as God does. This new perception may give you insight and vision that you may have missed otherwise.

Nothing, including many advanced educational degrees, is as powerful and effective in developing good student-teacher relationships.

"Sarcasm is the protest of the weak"

For Your Reflection:

Think about your students and single out one now whom you consider to be a problem or one whose behavior puts people off. Ask God for the grace to "see" beyond behavior and appearances and to give you a hint about what that student needs most from you. What does God love in him or her?

Be conscious of the kind of humor used in your classroom. Having a good sense of humor is a gift that has lifelong benefits and there is usually plenty of humor in a good learning environment. Make sure that it is humor that builds people up rather than the kind that tears down or belittles. Teach your students to be aware of destructive kinds of humor, especially sarcasm. Television "sitcoms" provide lots of examples.

Do you trust your students to do the right thing? What are some of the practical ways you convey that to them?