

About Teaching and Being an Aide for REACH

She was tired. Or it could just as easily have been: He was tired. There was work to do at home and at the job. She -- or he -- was needed by family, parents, neighbors, friends, children. There was the job, there were meetings to attend, friends to visit, children to care for, encourage, and support. There was yard work, house repairs, carpooling, laundry, cooking, the children's soccer games and music practice to get them to, and a million other things.

It was Sunday. Children were coming to St. Jerome's who had questions, who needed attention, who wanted to learn. The teacher had done the planning and preparation well for the religious education class, but sometimes...sometimes the question lingered, "Is it all worth it?"

She was tired. The REACH religious education class had been full and active. On the way home she hardly heard her son's words as he chattered beside her. Then suddenly he caught her attention. "What did you say?" she asked. Her son repeated, "God did not come to class today, so He sent my REACH teacher."

True story. Also true is that we need more teachers and aides for our REACH religious education program covering grades K through 8. Classes start in only a few weeks. Teachers conduct the classes and teacher's aides help out in the classroom and are crucial to the success of the program. Each class section is small and manageable, only 10 to 12 students, not the 20 to 25 that many public school classrooms have.

You may be thinking, "Well, teaching kids, teaching them religion, is not for me", or you're thinking, "Gee, I' like to help, but I don't have any children in the program." Well, maybe it is for you, maybe the Lord is calling you. And we need you even if you don't have young children in the program this year.

How might your first year of teaching go? What if it's the first time that you'll be teaching in a classroom? You'll live. You'll do it! The children are good. You'll have fun. The children will have fun. They'll learn. You'll learn. You'll do lessons. You'll do arts and crafts. You'll make Jesse Tree ornaments for Christmas, might act out the Good Samaritan story in a Gospel Reaction at the children's Mass, you'll decorate a turkey box for the Thanksgiving food collection.

As a REACH teacher you can get back more than you put in. You get a glow of satisfaction that comes from giving of yourself. You get notes from students thanking you for being their teacher. You get to work with our children and the future of our faith. You'll be teaching our children what Jesus' stories and parables are all about.

And you get to be there for the fun. As when Father Mike asked what a leper was and the eager first grader shot up his arm and said proudly, "I know! I know! A leper is like a tiger." Or the time the children were asked during was a lesson on Christ as the grapevine and we as the branches, "Where do grapes come from?" and a young girl confidently answered, "Grapes come from Stew Leonard's." Then there was the fourth grader who refused to go to the Lenten REACH

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Reconciliation service because, as he put it, "I just went to confession last week and I'm out of sins."

If you've never taught before, don't worry. There's plenty of help from Fathers Dave, Joe, and Mike, and from your grade's experienced team leader who will guide you through each week's lesson. There's also the textbook which for grades 2 through 6 lays out for you in an oversized teacher's edition step-by-step directions, suggestions, and activities for each lesson.

If you're thinking to yourself that you don't have the time, you have the job, the kids, the whatever – Here's the commitment: the class time is one hour and the REACH liturgy is an hour and you go to Mass anyway on Sunday. The preparation time is about another hour – unless you get hooked on REACH and then you'll want to give it more time and come up with classroom ideas of your own.

Maybe you're thinking you can't get up in front of a bunch of 8 year-olds or 13 year-olds? We guarantee you can do it. Would the Lord call you to teach if He wasn't going to give you the grace to get the job done? (Besides, you're bigger than the kids and smarter.) You'll have your teacher's edition textbook, your team leader, and a host of support people. And the children are good! They're our parish children and they need you. After all, what do we want for our children? To follow Jesus, to care for each other, to love God and their neighbors. And it all starts here in childhood, in family life, in parish life, in religious education.

Now if you're thinking someone else will do it – well, if everyone thinks that, we'll have no one. If you're beginning to think you should answer this call but aren't sure, that's a good sign Christ is definitely calling you personally. That slight tug, that slight inclination to *maybe* volunteer to teach, that's a sure sign you're getting a real call from the Lord.

We have a REACH program for our children that's powerful and effective, and we need your help to keep it going as well as it has been going for over 30 years at St. Jerome's. Even if you don't have young children in the parish religious education program, we need you this year. We need you in the classroom to do Ten Commandments projects with your students, to make those Jesse Tree ornaments at Christmas, to do Gospel Reactions at Mass with your class, to teach the lessons of our faith. Please answer the Lord's call.

To volunteer or to receive grade-level information, please call the REACH office at 846-2111 and leave your name and number. Director of Religious Education Kathy Coyne will get back to you, or call her cell phone at 856-4273.

Detailed information about the scope of our REACH religious education program can be found on the parish website at http://www.stjeromenorwalk.org/html/religious_ed.html, specifically for Grades K-6 at http://www.stjeromenorwalk.org/html/reach_k-6.html, and for Grades 7-8 at http://www.stjeromenorwalk.org/html/grades_7-8.html.