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**TEACHERS:
OVERCOMING A SENSE OF
IRRESPONSIBILITY FOR EACH OTHER**

Cardinal Cushing liked to tell of his predecessor going out to a small parish near Boston during the depths of the depression and asking the local priest how it was going. The old priest replied, "Terrible, your Eminence, terrible, but thank God it's even worse with the Protestants" (1). Most people will probably agree that ecumenical thinking has put to rest such provincial attitudes in the half century since the statement was made. And maybe on the broad scale they would be correct.

But today do not our schools sometimes share in this attitude of irresponsibility for others schools? The principal, for example, who has made elaborate preparations for an impressive graduation ceremony, finds the ritual destroyed by bursts of firecrackers exploding just before the recessional. Someone immediately calls his/her attention to the graduation ceremony at a neighboring school where things were much worse. The intent is to brighten the day for the administrator. We might call this our "Chernobyl effect". If it is really bad someplace else then our "Three Mile Islands" do not appear so bad.

And how about the Catholic school and its perception of the public schools where the comparison puts public education in an unfavorable light. Really an attack on education anywhere has the force to lower the esteem for the profession of teacher everywhere. Catholic schools have their own reasons for existence and should not be defended at the expense of the public schools.

We need not, however, look to outside organizations to find a sense of irresponsibility for one another. This can happen in every school. Schools are loosely coupled organizations. Unlike some other professions such as the dentist who works so closely with the dental hygienist; the nurse anticipating the needs of the doctor during an operation; or a trapeze team who perform with practiced split-second timing; or even two adjacent workers on an assembly line, teachers do not usually need to work closely with one another.

The teaching profession, on the other hand, can produce insular thinking and independent work habits. Teachers can perform in their insulated classrooms, stake out their own turf as to space and equipment, and are generally left alone to direct their own programs. Many teachers claim, in fact, that they have not been visited by a school administrator or other teacher in years. These structures under which teachers work do not naturally lend themselves to sharing with one another in the support of each other's work. Sometimes the only way that one hears that a teacher is good or poor is through the student or parent grapevine. And, incidentally, this delivery system is also too often the only way that a particular teacher receives recognition for his/her accomplishments.

We need the challenge of "departmental crossfire" in our schools. Certainly the history teacher has something to say to the Religion teacher; the English teacher to the French teacher; the Religion teacher to the science teacher; and the music

teacher to the math teacher, remembering that arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music were all linked together in the Renaissance interpretation of the liberal arts.

The lives of the students would be enriched if their art teacher visited their Religion class to speak of religion; if the physical education teacher spoke to the psychology class; if the health teacher spoke to other classes on the holistic approach to sound living. Teacher talking to teachers, teachers visiting other classes to challenge the students and to be challenged by the students, will make for an exciting school. The insights of all the faculty should be at the service of one another. The benefits that each teacher has received from his/her discipline can be shared and enjoyed by the entire school community. Really, isn't this what a school is meant to be?

How can all of this be started in a school? The answer is that if everyone waits for the opening, it will never come. In this respect I am using the Talmudic story of Moses at the Red Sea. In the Talmud version when Moses struck the Red Sea with his staff nothing happened (unlike the Chris-

tian version). The Red Sea opened only when the first person plunged into the water (2). Some of us in each school must take the plunge, call the meeting, talk to others about all the possibilities, or just ask other teachers to exchange classes to get the program started.

Good schools cannot harbor irresponsibility for one another among faculty, staff, or students. The strong academic community needs the exposure of each person's skills, ideas, and enthusiasm. The school as a human organization hungers for such bonding, understanding, an appreciation of talent. The school as a Christian community is by definition a place of concern, recognition, and support.

One of the tasks of the Lasallian schools is to assess its school climate along the lines of this presentation. The result just might be a giant step in overcoming any sense of irresponsibility for each other that may at present exist in the school community.

Bro Terence McLaughlin.

(1) Steere, Douglas. *Together in Solitude*. The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, NY, p. 18.

(2) *Ibid.*, p. 23.