It’s All About Right Relationships!

Virtue-Based Restorative Discipline (VBRD) and the Catholic Education Mission

Most Catholic School mission statements declare that Christ is the reason for the school and that religious teaching is integrated into every area of the school’s curriculum. Our Catholic Parish Religious Education programs’ mission statements have similar premises. If the words in mission statements are to become reality, then gospel values need to be a part of every action and policy in the school, including the discipline. Like schools and parish programs everywhere, teachers encounter discipline problems. As an elementary school principal, I heard parents whose children were the target of deliberate, malicious, cruel, and injurious actions say, "This should not happen in a Catholic School." I could not have agreed more. It should not happen in any school or parish program, but because of sin it does happen. The response of Catholic educators to misbehavior can be uniquely Catholic. With the gospel and the teachings of the Church, we have the tools to overcome evil with virtue. "Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good." (Romans 12:21). Like Jesus, the Catholic educator condemns sin and loves the sinner. Like Jesus, teachers and administrators need to demonstrate mercy and redemption. When harmful conduct occurs, Catholic educators need to minister to both the one who has been harmed and the one who has caused the harm. When the intentional practice of virtue is the foundation of disciplinary practices, relationships are restored, kindness
is cultivated, and all parties grow in the knowledge that they have been created for love by a loving God.

Several years ago, the teachers of Trinity Academy in Shenandoah formed a summer educational book club using the book, *Virtue-Based Restorative Discipline* by Lynne M. Lang. (Our Sunday Visitor, 2013). The ideas in the book resonated in my IHM heart in a way that other professional reading had never done before. Virtue-based discipline is about restoration rather than punishment. The teaching of virtue has always been a central part of the Redemptorist/IHM tradition. Restorative practices are redemptive in nature. Lynne Lang’s approach to restorative discipline changed my attitude in a permanent and profound way. I began to look at discipline as an opportunity to evangelize and teach virtue literacy. In the VBRD™ model, children are taught to restore relationships and return to good behavior. There are consequences for those who do harm. However, the consequences are restorative rather than punitive. Trinity Academy began to incorporate the ideas in *Virtue-Based Restorative Discipline* into the life of the school. The process included prayerful discernment by both adults and children. Children were encouraged to examine their behavior in light of Christ’s teaching. When improper conduct occurred, all involved prayed for the Holy Spirit to be present and direct thoughts, words and actions. In reviewing what happened, children asked themselves what virtue needed to be cultivated in order to correct the situation. The child identified the harm that has been done and suggested ways to repair the damage. (see *Revised Primer for Implementing Virtue-Based Restorative Discipline.™ A Catholic Response to Bullying and Discipline*, Lynne Lang, 2017, p. 16) The VBRD™ approach to discipline leads to real change, and growth in virtue. It is redemptive in nature.
Schools and Religious Education programs that adopt VBRD™ commit to four guiding principles. They are:

1. We will dedicate ourselves to living virtue.
2. We will support others in living virtue.
3. We will commit to constructive thoughts, words, and deeds.
4. When faced with challenges and conflict, we will find solutions that cultivate virtue for ourselves and for one another.

(Lynne M. Lang, *Virtue-Based Restorative Discipline*, Our Sunday Visitor, 2013)

Just imagine the difference commitment to those principles could make in your personal life. Imagine the effect on school climate if every individual embraced those guiding principles. VBRD™ has the potential to make our schools and parish religious education programs more Catholic and help us to be who we say we are.

For more information visit: [https://www.restorationmatters.org/](https://www.restorationmatters.org/)


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![Virtue-Based Restorative Discipline](image-url)