

# Along the track

## Another Year of School

Once again our schools will welcome students to another year of learning, of discovery. For some it will be easy, for others this year will present challenges. Some will return reluctantly, some full of excitement, others with apprehension. And parents and caregivers and teachers will do their best to guide them through this adventure, the highs and the lows, the successes and the failures.

Watching the little ones step out of home for the first time in this new stage of life brings many emotions. Some come with enthusiasm, others are wary and others are, to say the least, reluctant. They cling on to what they know.

The late Barry Dwyer was an educationalist and author of note. Not many students seeking tertiary recognition for essays or papers would not quote Barry to support their ideas or conclusions. He had a profound understanding of the nature of education. In one of his books, he suggested that all students come with a set of questions that they try to answer over the years

Who am I?

Am I worthwhile? Am I competent?

What is of value, important?

Is the world to be trusted?

Can I make a difference?

Why am I here? Where am I going?

Why did this happen to me?

What should I celebrate?

Is there a God?

How could God love me?

They are good questions and some of them can take a long time to answer. For those teachers, parents and caregivers who accompany children and young people on their journey, it is worth taking some time to think about how you would answer them yourself and how you found out the answers. For example, little children know the answer to 'Who am I' in relation to their family but when they step out into the wider world of school that question requires a greater understanding. Who am I now in this group, in this place? What am I good at? Sometimes young people are told that you can do anything you want, you can be whatever you want and then they discover that isn't true. So how do we help them discover what is worthwhile and how each of them can make a difference. Is the world to be trusted is a much more complex question than it was when I went to school. How do we as parents or caregivers or teachers address that question now? And how we

help our children to understand that they can make a difference.

How do our children come to answer the God questions? Just because we tell them that God exists is not enough. Awareness of God's existence begins with an experience of awe and wonder, that there is something (someone) greater than just me and my awareness. In the words of Rabbi Abraham Herschel; *The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder. Awareness of the divine begins with awe and wonder.*

How do we nurture that? Celebrating is such an important part of education, not just the successes and the highs but rejoicing in life itself. Jesus was a great teacher, not simply because he told good stories but because he connected with people, he listened deeply to them, he came to appreciate their deepest longings – he had a special ear for the marginalised, the outcaste, those who received no hearing from others. He taught them, how could God NOT love someone like you!

He was a good teacher because he was hospitable, in other words he encouraged people to come, to talk, to explore. They did not feel condemned or stupid or outcasts – they felt safe in his presence.

One of my first principals asked great questions! As an example, every six weeks or so we began our staff meeting with a ten-minute silent reflection. She asked the same question each time: How in the last six weeks did your students know that you loved them? It was an important and challenging question.

This isn't meant to be another guilt trip, more pressure on parents and caregivers and teachers but rather a reminder that what we do, how we care for our children, how we encourage and support them, how we help them to discover new ways and new ideas, how we help them to appreciate each other is building a better world, a better future, helping to bring about the vision of God. And in doing so, may we always remember that we are all precious in God's sight.

Regards  
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