

Be A Competent Christian Teacher Stephenie Hovland

Teachers in parochial schools face a tough task. They often get paid thousands less than their public counterparts, work more hours, are expected to be available 24 hours a day, be perfect, and turn little children into equally perfect, sinless saints. So, how do you measure up?

If you're laughing, you have either felt the pain of the above demands, or you think it isn't true. I am a parochial school teacher who laughs, knowing just how true it is. I have some suggestions for new parochial teachers and for those who have been through years of not measuring up.

- **Pray and stay in the Word.** There is nothing more important to your teaching career and your personal faith than to stay connected to God. When angry parents call, you have a source of peace. When report cards are due and you still have a stack of workbooks to correct, you have a source of energy. When you finish directing your first musical, you have a source that rejoices with you. Stay connected. God will keep you grounded in the good and bad times.
- **Don't compare yourself to the "other" teachers.** You may develop the grass-is-always-greener complex. Be aware that all teachers have battles to fight. Even though your neighbor may get paid thousands more than you, she probably envies something about your job. You may have an unrealistic view about the other teachers' jobs. Even if you know that they get paid more, get more prep periods, and have a classroom aide, it won't help you enjoy your job, will it? Can you really serve the Lord at your school, if you spend your day being envious and coveting another's job?
- **Always strive to learn more.** Some parochial schools are lax about their teachers' continuing education or don't have the funds to support it. Other schools try to encourage outside learning, but the teachers are so worn out, they don't do it. Make time. Take time to continue to develop as a teacher. Going to workshops and taking classes help keep you in the educational "loop" and re-energize your teaching.
- **Re-evaluate your teaching methods regularly.** Don't get in a rut. Look through student evaluations, watch students' responsiveness in class, and ask parents for feedback. Can you objectively judge yourself? If you do it regularly, you will find that your teaching gets better every year.
- **Share your faith.** This is one of the biggest benefits of teaching in a parochial school. Not only can you share faith, you should! The more you witness to your class, the more they will see God in you. Remember that you model God to them as well. So, model forgiveness and patience, even when it's difficult. God loves us, though we can be his most difficult children.
- **Stay positive.** There will always be challenges. On some days it will seem as though the challenges are too much for one person. They can be! That's why God is there. He is there to support us in every way. Every day.

With God's help, you can be a wonderful Christian teacher who shares faith with students for years to come.