

Love is the answer, discovers Catholic school principal

Dear Friends of Catholic Schools,

"I hate Catholics."

That is what the man on the airplane said to one of our Catholic School principals. The principal and some of the teachers from the same school were boarding a plane to attend the National Catholic Education Association conference. The man was in the seat next to where the principal was sitting. As he buckled his seat belt, he said to the principals, "You are either on a 'girls' weekend' or going to a conference." The principal replied, "We're going to a conference," and told him which conference when he asked. That is when he told her he hated Catholics. Though stunned, the principal kept her engaging smile and without missing a beat said, "Well, I hope you don't regret your choice of seats!"

Throughout the flight, the man told her his story. He had been raised Catholic and attended Catholic schools more than 30 years ago. He told her story after story of how he remembered being mistreated when he was in school. The principal just listened, occasionally commenting, "I am so sorry that happened to you." When the plane landed, the principal told the man her name and school and said, "Whenever you would like to see how we do things today in Catholic schools, please come visit. You are welcome anytime." The man replied, "Thank you, maybe Catholics aren't so bad after all."

I have continued to think about what happened to this principal since she told me the story. There are so many lessons for us in Catholic schools today to learn from the man's experience. As I reflect on these lessons, one word comes to mind - love. Those in our schools must strive every minute of every day to truly see and treat our young people as Jesus would treat them. This does not mean that we abandon high standards and expectations or that there are never any negative consequences for students, but rather that we always make sure students know that we love them, even if we impose such consequences.

As my thoughts return to the man on the plane, I cannot help think that the situation was not just a chance occurrence. I think it was a moment guided by the Holy Spirit, and I believe our principal responded the way any of our Catholic school staff today would respond...with love.

Vaya con Dios!

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