

Profile of a Fifth-Grade Child

Characteristics

Fifth-graders, though no longer little children, are not yet adolescents. They are at a period in life commonly called pre-adolescence. During this stage, physical changes often drain their energy. Great spurts of activity are often followed by periods of "laziness," which may have a physical basis in fatigue.

They have a great desire to know the world around them. They are open to experimentation and investigation. They want to know more.

Pre-adolescents have a wide range of interests and urges: to talk, to look, to read, and to listen more than they want to work. They are amenable, cooperative, sincere, poised, and easy-going; they enjoy life.

Socially, ten-year-olds are open to close family companionship. They like to help in forming family plans, to be "in on things." They may make friends easily and cooperate in group activities to which they are increasingly able to make worthwhile contributions. Peer acceptance becomes stronger.

Fifth-graders enjoy being of service to others, whether helping younger children, sharing in the ministry of the Church, or taking the initiative in noticing the needs of others.

Faith Development Needs

Pre-adolescents need the security that comes from being accepted by a group of their peers. From them, they develop cooperation, a sense of personal worth, consideration for others, the ability to make and carry out plans without adult help, and a feeling of "finding oneself" through the group.

Ten-year-olds need the help of adults to understand themselves as changing and capable of developing the gifts God has given them. Related to this growth is the need to recognize their responsibility for self-development as cooperation with God in creation.

Symbols, codes, signs, and rituals have a natural place in life at this developmental age. Because children can be led to appreciate the symbolic and the poetic, this is an appropriate time in which to explore the chief symbols and celebration of Catholic life and worship, especially in the Sacraments.

Their orientation toward group activities makes group preparation for celebrations important. School games and other special events can all be brought to prayer and religious celebrations with ease and profit.

Implications

In accepting pre-adolescent restlessness and awkwardness, the catechist helps students to experience God's love for them as individuals. The message of self-worth should be repeated again and again.

Inasmuch as peer pressure is a reality and pre-adolescents fear peer rejection, liturgical experience rooted in the group is appealing because community is an inviting concept. They begin to grasp their dignity and that of others as being united in the Body of Christ. The following are some of the ways students can participate fully as a group: preparing the materials and the place for celebrations, playing musical instruments, reading the Scripture, dramatizing the gospel story, presenting the gifts of bread and wine, making decorations, and delivering commentaries.

To ten-year-olds, God becomes a partner, someone they can talk to, someone who affects them personally, someone with whom they can enjoy periods of silence and reflection. At this point, the catechist can establish a positive attitude toward prayer and its purposes. Among the suggestions for praying are the following: traditional prayers, silent prayer, spontaneous prayers and petitions, meditative prayer, para-liturgies and prayer services, and faith sharing.

As the child matures, he/she begins to understand that the end of life is not death but eternal life with God. The pre-teen needs to realize that sacramental life opens eternal life.

The catechist is responsible for educating students in attitudes and behaviors of peace and justice. Three perennial areas of concern are world peace, world hunger, and the rights of the oppressed, especially the right to life. Inasmuch as fifth-graders are service-oriented, they can be encouraged to become involved in these issues.