

## Archive for April, 2013

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### **When Compassion hurts your school**

There is a lot of irony when you exercise Christian compassion and it damages your ability to minister. Compassion should be a blessed hallmark of a Christian ministry and yet, at times, compassion will hurt your effectiveness to minister. The challenge for Christian idealists is to know the limits of compassion; to know when it is time to "give up" and move on. The problem is that we don't like to give up and we feel that if we can't, in Christ's name, minister to needy children what is the value of our ministry.

There are two vital points to remember about compassion. First, are we equipped to deal with the needs before us? Our challenge as Christian Montessorians is that we feel our environment should be a holistic and healing place for all children, even more so than traditional environments but even so there are limits to the miracles that we can accomplish.

Here are three examples to illustrate the challenge of knowing when to call it quits, (even though I have not been able to master it.) We once had a junior high student who was emotionally disturbed. The constant outbursts and negative actions were completely detrimental to the peace and harmony of the environment. But when you base your decisions on "hope" you are always hoping that you will be able to turn the corner on behavior. We kept this student for five years and saw literally no improvement. By the time we made the decision not to re-enroll the student the misplaced compassion had already created chaos and negatively affected the viability of the upper school program. When we finally communicated our decision to the parents, they did not express any appreciation for the five years of hell that we endured.

A second example involved a toddler who was tremendously adept at using his teeth on his classmates. When he had exercised his teeth seventy eight times, we finally came to the decision to dis-enroll the child. Explaining the decision to the mother we expressed that we had done all we could. Her answer was, "I

don't think you have." She eventually quit her job and stayed home with her child.

A third example, was a child that had been with us for over two years but had not seemed to develop even a modicum of self-discipline or self-control. The child could not walk across the room without disturbing, hitting or bothering other students. You keep hoping that your Christian environment, your prayers, your interventions will help the child develop that internal gyroscope of self-control. Your positive view that maybe tomorrow will be the day that self-discipline enters. In the mean time days stretch into weeks and weeks into months and you never see the breakthrough, you never turn the corner and you have never drawn a line in the sand that says by this time or by this day if the change does not happen you will need to make a decision about enrollment. But how do you give up? That is the challenge of compassion. This is why at some point before compassion becomes a problem you need to have a line, that when crossed, will trigger your decision. The line needs to be established long before there is a crisis, long before any emotion enters into the decision. It seems cold and calculating and it is calculating but not cold. Compassionate people hang on too long. (I wish I could learn these lessons but I am passing them on to you for you to know that you have "permission" to do the unthinkable – and that is give up on situations that you are not equipped to handle.) This is where you have to trust God that He will provide for the child. We are so used to seeing miraculous turn arounds that we might think that we have something to do with it (and we occasionally do) but ultimately, we are not God and some things are beyond us and not in our control.

As they instruct you on the airplane if the cabin loses pressure oxygen masks will drop. Put your mask on before putting on someone else's. This is a hard lesson for compassionate people to learn and apply but the ultimate effectiveness of your ministry is that it continues and not wreck itself on the rocks of misplaced compassion.