Supporting Your Religious Educator

the Rev. Makanah Morriss
with assistance from
Judith Frediani, Rev. Patricia Hoertdoerfer, and Rev. Jeannellen Ryan

Relationship, communication, and collaborative support are three key components in creating a healthy and strong professional team.

Nurture a Good Relationship

1. Good relationships require time and effort. Begin with a foundation of trust. What do you need to experience a sense of trust in the relationship? What does your colleague need? If the religious educator is a member of your congregation you will need to talk about the changes in your relationship now that that person is part of the staff. Trust is basic but not mysterious. As you talk openly about trust issues, trust will increase for both of you.

2. You each have talents and skills, likes and dislikes about your professional work. Sharing these with each other can increase appreciation of and respect for each other’s work.

3. Learn from each other and appreciate your different perspectives. You each bring particular viewpoints and vantage points from which to look at issues, concerns, programs in the church. There is a richness to be mined here so make good use of it.

4. Make time for fun amidst the work. Laughter shared, lunch out on occasion, an ice cream break can all help staff relationships grow and strengthen.

Communicate Well With Each Other

1. Meet with your religious educator on a regular basis, weekly if possible. This needs to be a priority for you as well as for her/him. Discuss short and long range worship plans, intergenerational events, calendar considerations.

2. Talk together about the current health of the church. What is working? What is not working? What are the obstacles to accomplishing what you each are wanting to do? How might these obstacles be removed or at least diminished?

3. Talk together about your visions for the church. What are you seeing as possibilities for the
congregation? What do your colleagues envision from their perspectives? How can you work together to help these visions and possibilities happen? Religious education is one important aspect of the total ministry of the church. You both need to take time to look at how all the pieces of ministry are fitting together.

**Offer Collaborative Support**

1. Explore how the two of you can experience yourselves as a professional team. If there are issues on which you disagree, talk together about these in your weekly meetings so that you can present a united front at committee and board meetings.

2. Talk with each other about your collaborative styles. What works for each of you? What does not? Honor these differences and find ways to work together which you both find helpful and enjoyable.

3. Read your church’s religious education prospectus. Know what is being offered so that you can easily respond to basic questions from visitors and newcomers. Your obvious knowledge of the program offers explicit support for the staff and the R. E. Committee.

4. Read one curriculum a year. You may well find a sermon illustration or even some interesting new facts and perspectives. A reference to the ideas being studied by the children and youth will strengthen parents’ desires to promote regular attendance.

5. Attend intergenerational events whenever possible. This will give you a chance to get to know some of the children and youth and will indicate your support of the families in your congregation. Besides, these are times for some fun as well!

6. Offer ideas to each other with respect to possible volunteers. You may be aware of members without children who might make excellent religious education teachers or youth leaders. Your colleague may have ideas of talented folks for a variety of church committees. Share your information and in so doing you will enlarge your talent bank.

7. Work together to support equitable salary and program funding for all of the church staff. Your obvious support of each other will go far to encourage your Board and Finance Committee to move toward excellence in compensation practices.

8. Share compliments you hear about each other. Good news and appreciation always need to be shared. As your sense of collaborative support grows, you will find it easier and easier to remember to share the words of a job well done.

9. **Most of all**, be appreciative of the hard work, commitment and care which each of you is offering for the enhanced health and vitality of your religious community. You are both doing important and transformative work. Congratulate and celebrate each other!