Vatican

Francis, the comic strip



Pope Francis greets the crowd during his general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sept. 5. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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Vatican City — September 7, 2018

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Without respectfully collaborating with teachers and schools, parents will risk being on their own when it comes to educating their children and be at a greater disadvantage for facing the challenges emerging from today's culture, mass media and technology, Pope Francis said.

Speaking to hundreds of parents, the pope told them that "teachers are like you -- dedicated each day in the educational service of your children."

His comments came to some 1,400 members and guests of the Italian Parents' Association during an audience at the Vatican's Paul VI hall Sept. 7.

Praising the group's efforts promoting the family and education as guided by Christian principles, the pope invited them to always foster and build trust with teachers and schools.

If it is all right to "complain about limitations" or defects when it comes to schools and teachers, it is also "imperative to treasure them as the most invaluable allies in the task of education, which you together carry forward," said the pope, who taught high school students as a young Jesuit in Argentina.

Today, "families no longer appreciate like before the job teachers have and (teachers) -- who are often badly paid -- feel the parents' presence in the school as being an uncomfortable intrusion," which all ends in a situation, he said, where the parents are kept at bay or considered "adversaries."

"To change this situation, someone has to take the first step, overcoming any fear of the other and generously holding out one's hand," he said.

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"That is why I invite you to always cultivate and foster trust toward schools and teachers; without them, you risk remaining on your own in your educational efforts and being increasingly unable to confront new educational challenges that emerge from today's culture, society, mass media and new technologies," the pope said.

Everyone has their role to play and no one entity can substitute the other, he added, which is why education demands collaboration, frequent communication and mutual trust.

"Dear parents, your children are the most precious gift you have received. Remember how to take care of it with commitment and generosity, giving children the freedom necessary to grow and mature into people who will one day be able to be open to the gift of life," he said.

However, he told them, do not let their "vigilance over the dangers that threaten the lives" of children prevent them from being able to look at the world with confidence or from showing kids the best ways to grow as people, citizens and Christians.