Spirituality



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It's a strange thing, putting your kid on a big yellow bus on that very first day of kindergarten.

You gather at some arbitrary corner with a bunch of other bleary-eyed parents and their offspring, checking your watch between sips of coffee, as you count down the minutes to that oddly specific turn of the clock. When the bus suddenly barrels up the hill, the kids practically fall over each other to be first in line.

Except yours. Yours is a little apprehensive. And, well, they should be on the first day in a new place, on a new vehicle, with new people. But what can be done? A kiss and a hug and a "Good luck!" and off they go into the world, surrounded by strangers that have not yet become friends, in the hands of a stranger who you simply trust to navigate a huge bus through those narrow streets, nary a seatbelt to be seen. You hope — you pray — that they return at or around the designated time, but there's painfully little in your power to ensure that happens.

And so, you spend the day wringing your hands and checking your phone and barely getting any work done until that fateful hour when you return to that corner to see how the whole adventure turned out.

That big yellow school bus, you can see it in your mind — even if you never rode one, even if your days of shepherding kids to the bus stop are long gone, even if that first climb up those foreboding stairs into the chasmic mouth of that rumbling yellow monster is but a whiff of a memory, you can still see it.

It's a near-perfect image with which to pray as we begin this back-to-school season.

Why? Because the school bus requires a tremendous amount of spiritual freedom. We have to let go. Growth does not occur when our hands are clenched, even when they're clenched around the hands of our children. The world is a scary place, and schools are not the bastions of safety they once were. Still, we must let our children go into the world; they can not make it a better place if they never step into it.

A disposition that clings, stunts. That's more obvious in parenting, but it's no less true in our own spiritual lives. What are we clinging to? Perhaps old ways of living, a broken status quo, an unhelpful relationship or dangerous habits.

Allow that proverbial bus to carry you to the place in which you might learn a new way of being.

We have to lean on others. Community matters, and it's built on trust. We don't only trust that the resolute bus driver will perform his or her task, we also trust the many hands that will ferry our children to their final destination. Those of us gathered at the bus stop lean on each other, too. Who among us hasn't run late and needed a helping hand and watchful eye?

It's foolish to go at it alone in life. We need each other to build a world that is worthy of one another, to build the world God still dreams of. A school bus is a collision of lives, of families, of hopes and struggles, all contained in one metallic box. Who are we called to look after?

We must wait and trust. God's unfolding plan is alive within us and our world, even when all appears desolate. Still, we stumble out to the bus stop and collect our kids. Still, we stumble through the ordinary tasks of our day, hoping that some good will come of them.

As the school year begins and you spot those yellow buses traversing the roads around your neighborhood, consider the lessons they offer. Let go of what keeps you stuck and lean on others as you journey ahead.

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