



Reaching Out To Our Hispanic Neighbors

What are the most effective ways to welcome the growing Hispanic population into our Catholic schools and parishes? Our Lady of Mount Carmel School in Meriden creates a warm and welcoming environment for the Hispanic families in their area by using the following initiatives.

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A priority for the school community at Our Lady of Mount Carmel (OLMC) in Meriden is the creation of a culture of inclusion that incorporates, welcomes and celebrates all school members into one family, including those of different cultures, and with physical, social, and learning differences. Creating this culture takes several forms, in particular the Inclusion Committee, chaired by a parent with representation from faculty, parents, and students. The Committee meets regularly to plan cultural events, arrange for special speakers, and develop a list of suggested reading materials. Other efforts include those listed below:

- ❖ Over the summer, Our Lady of Mount Carmel held a joint faculty retreat with their colleagues from St. Francis & St. Rose of Lima School in New Haven entitled, “Building a Brighter Tomorrow.” As part of that retreat, two presentations were given: Fr. Carlos Echavarria, Pastor of St. Francis-St. Rose of Lima, on “What Makes Catholic Schools Different;” and Fr. Eduar Gutierrez-Tovar, Parochial Vicar of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, on the “Infusion of the Latino Culture in Catholic Schools,” sharing how the school could better equip itself to welcome a larger community of Latino learners.
- ❖ In October, OLMC Principal Christa Chodkowski will be attending the Latino Enrollment Institute sponsored by the University of Notre Dame’s Catholic School Advantage Campaign in the Diocese of Providence, Rhode Island to gain new insights on how to celebrate and reach the Latino population in the Meriden area.
- ❖ Mrs. Chodkowski is also seeking a Parent Volunteer Translator who would be willing to earn his/her volunteer hours by serving as the school’s Spanish translator for general conversations and school documents, ensuring that language does not present a barrier for Hispanic families.
- ❖ Other school initiatives include the creation of a Picture Book Library of common books in Spanish for the younger grades to encourage their love of reading and the acquisition of English; the presence of a Buddy Bench, indicating the need for friendship for anyone who sits on it; and the Wingman Program, which teaches students to be supportive ambassadors for one another, including those of other cultures who may be new to the school.

These wonderful OLMC efforts set a great example of how to provide a warm welcome to the growing Hispanic community in our schools and parishes.