

The Boxes We Create

by Mary Jo Weiss

I remember attending a Catholic conference at our church a number of years ago. We had our five children there, and I was sitting with one of them on my lap.

At the break, a woman approached me and asked, “Do you homeschool your children?”

I replied, “No, they go to the parish school here.”

“Oh,” she replied, “You were so loving with your children, I thought that surely you were a homeschooling mother.” And she walked away, apparently with little left to talk about.

It was not the first time that I experienced a divide between those who choose to educate their children at home, and those whose children attend Catholic or public school, nor the first time that I got the “message” that if I *really* loved my children, I would educate them myself.

I realize this is a sensitive subject, and I want to state up front that I have a great respect for those who

choose to educate their children in the home. What I have a problem with at times is the attitude that there is a “best” choice. This attitude tends to polarize, label or “box” people out, and negates the unique action of grace in each family.

Over the years, I have been in and out of many homes in my work as an occupational therapist, and it has made me realize that each family situation is unique. The commonly shared value is that loving families sacrifice for their children. That sacrifice may take different shapes or forms, and in many instances it is difficult or even heroic.

Let’s recognize that all parents need support, encouragement, and fellowship in raising and educating their children. When parishes offer opportunities for families to interact and get to know one another, stronger communities can form. At this time, when the Catholic family is so under attack, let’s focus on how we can be of help to one another, rather than focus on that which divides us.

The Year of Mercy, as declared by Pope Francis last year, inspired us to contemplate the deeper meaning and demands of mercy. Perhaps we can look within to find and overcome those areas of our lives where we have safely, neatly, and impersonally “boxed” others out. And when we find them, let’s ask God to open those boxes and let his grace enter.

Dennis and Mary Jo Weiss write from their home in Hamburg, New York. Over 30 years ago, as a couple of starry-eyed kids just out of college, they made a promise to love and honor each other “all the days of their lives.” With the blessings of five children and now grandchildren, their journey continues.

