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My Life After Alpha School

23 years ago, if someone would have asked my teachers and classmates which member of the Class of 1987 would one day become a priest, I venture to guess that I would have been the very last choice on everybody's list! That is because I was one of those students who is known somewhat euphemistically as "the class clown" or "not working up to his full potential" or even "penitentiary bound!" And while I never won any awards for academic excellence at Alpha School, I certainly learned a lot of things in the classroom. And a lot of what I learned at Alpha School I still use today.

It is true that I never really applied myself as well as I could have during my years at Alpha School. But the funny thing is: I did in fact learn many things that served me extremely well through high school, college, graduate school, and eventually seminary. When I graduated from Alpha School and went to public high school, (and started applying myself to my school work), I found myself way ahead of the other students in terms of academic growth, and I essentially sailed through my classes. And throughout my years in college and graduate school, I never struggled academically in any way, and I honestly feel that is because of the sound education I received at the Alpha School. All of the stuff that my teachers tried to drill into my head actually got there!

And if I learned nothing else at Alpha School, I learned the valuable lesson of never giving up on someone. I remember my teachers and principals never giving up on me. As a former educator myself, I know that it is very easy to write off the trouble student, the class clown, the student who would rather goof around than apply himself. But my teachers and principals never wrote me off. They certainly disciplined me (I probably still hold the 7<sup>th</sup> grade detention record!), and I do remember getting in a lot of trouble, but they always told me that I could do better. They always told me that I had it in me to succeed if only I would try. They always loved me out of Christian love- and they never gave up on me. And once I started to try after I graduated from Alpha School, I certainly did succeed: I graduated with highest honors in high school, summa cum laude from college, and went to graduate school to study education on a full scholarship.

As a priest, I use a lot of what I learned at Alpha School. A large part of my ministry is communicating with people, and the skills I learned so long ago, especially in language arts, certainly assist me each and every day. The lessons I learned about God and the Catholic faith as a child at Alpha School certainly laid a strong foundation in my spiritual life, and now I pass on those lessons to the children and adults in my parish. And the most important lesson- the lesson of never giving up on anyone-is one that I utilize all the time. In my ministry I encounter many difficult people, people who are lost in one way or another, people whom the world has written off. But I know that God never writes anyone off. So I as a priest never write anyone off. They never gave up on me. They never stopped encouraging me. Today I am an extremely blessed person, and I received many blessings from the Alpha School.