

"A close-knit team"

In Abidjan in Ivory Coast, parents and teachers are working together closely to build a school that reinforces the values learned at home.

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Abidjan, with over three million inhabitants, is the largest city in Ivory Coast. Although the civil war is now over, for quite some time it has been receiving a constant flow of immigrants who are escaping the zones in which violence persists and settling in the outskirts of the city,

where living conditions are precarious.

The Etimoé-Makoré Project entails the construction of a new school in an underdeveloped part of Abidjan called Cocody, with the aim of reducing illiteracy and providing a quality education to children of all social conditions, ethnic backgrounds and religions.

We spoke with Cyril and his wife Alvine, who are on the team of project sponsors and whose three sons (Yoel-Axel, Charles Emmanuel and Pierre-Ilan) are studying in Makoré. A daughter, Grace Marie, is in the large kindergarten class at the sister school for girls, Etimoé.

Cyril, you were part of the promotion team for this school. What are your goals?

We are a group of parents with young children concerned about

preparing our sons and daughters to face a future with ever greater challenges. So we decided to create "our school" for our families. A school in which solid instruction is given along with an all-round education, in the fullest sense of the word. We want to try to ensure that our children receive an education in accord with our own values: a setting where the education provided by the school is on the same wave-length as that given by parents at home.

We want a school in which parents team up with teachers, where education is not simply a matter of teaching students to pass certificates and examinations. That is certainly important, but first of all we have to teach them how to live.

Alvine, you were also involved from the beginning in the project.

Of course! Initially the number of students was quite small. Gradually

our friends have seen how our children were maturing, and some have spoken to other parents about it and thus the number of students has grown.

It is very interesting to see how parents are asked to collaborate with teachers in monitoring the progress of each child. There are frequent meetings between teachers and parents to talk about their child.

Cyril, what special traits would you highlight about Makoré?

First of all, the personalized monitoring of each child by teachers and tutors. Each student has a tutor who oversees that child's personal and academic development.

The presence of parents is strongly encouraged. They periodically meet with the tutor of each of their children. Depending on the school situation and personal maturity of

the child, by mutual agreement specific goals are set. In addition, parents are invited to participate in family counseling courses, in which we exchange experiences and improves our grasp of issues involved in raising our children and in our home life.

And also, the strong Christian identity of the school. Makoré gives great importance to helping children grow in human virtues and, for those whose parents wish it, to receive a Catholic doctrinal and spiritual formation.

And Alvine, what would you highlight?

All the parents meet with one of the school directors before enrolling their children. In this interview, all educational aspects of the project are addressed. Including the degree of involvement that the school expects from parents; without this

collaboration, the educational project would not work. Non-Catholic parents completely adhere to the orientation of the school. Very often they also want their children to benefit from the specific Christian training imparted. These classes, like the Mass, held once a week, are not mandatory.

Another wonderful point is the children's strong attachment to the school. They talk about their classmates and their teachers at home. Strong ties of friendship are formed between the children, and also between the parents.

What are some of the virtues the school tries to teach?

Virtues that children are encouraged to live both at home and at school: small points of politeness, being concerned about others, a friendly demeanor. Depending on their age and maturity, the young people are

encouraged to live charity, obedience, sincerity, order...

In addition to this, the chaplain looks after their spiritual formation. Those whose parents wish it receive the necessary preparation for First Communion and Confirmation, with the agreement of the parish priest. At the request of some of the parents, catechism classes are also organized to prepare their children to be baptized.

And the parents themselves?

As we said earlier, parents are encouraged to work side by side with the teachers. Besides the meetings with the tutors of their children, there are meetings of parents of students in the same class and, each semester, a meeting to evaluate the overall running of the school, to which all parents are invited.

Days of recollection are organized monthly for dads and teachers. A temporary chapel has been set up until the definitive one is built. Parents contributed the funds needed for the essential liturgical objects, including a tabernacle and a beautiful statue of our Lady. Moms also meet periodically for Christian formation talks.

Cyril, what are some of the biggest challenges you face?

Each year a new class of students is added. The staff is growing and we need more infrastructure. The architectural project is very ambitious; it will materialize gradually, with the collaboration of all.

The essential thing is that the educational model we set out to implement is now a reality: a school in which parents, teachers and students form a close-knit team.

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