

January 31, 2010

This week we celebrate Catholic Schools' Week in our diocese. Our 21 Catholic grade schools and three Catholic high schools are a great gift from God to all of us. We thank God for our priests and parishioners who support our schools, our administrators and teachers who permeate our schools with the spirit and message of Jesus, our parents and grandparents who sacrifice to make Catholic education possible for their youngsters, the people of our diocese who are so supportive of our Catholic schools through their generous Catholic Services Appeal contributions, and the boys and girls who benefit from our schools.

Our Catholic schools are concerned with the holistic formation of our students, intellectually, humanly, physically, and spiritually. The entire educational and formational effort is centered in Christ who is, for all of us, the Way, the Truth, the Light, and the Life.

Our Catholic schools form a community which is animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity. They are illumined by faith. We look at our world, at human life, at ourselves and others with the eyes of faith. Jesus is our teacher par excellence and His Gospel spirit permeates, not only what is taught in religion classes, but the entire atmosphere of the classroom, cafeteria, and recreation areas.

Our schools are intended to assist parents in fulfilling their responsibilities as the first teachers of their children in the ways of Jesus and His Gospel. While Baptism is received only once, it takes a lifetime to learn to live Jesus' Gospel way of life.

Our Catholic schools have as their purpose to help parents prepare their children to succeed in the workforce, to be good citizens, to respond to God's call to marriage or a special vocation, to be contributing members in the Church and society. Ultimately, our goal is on the finish line, preparing our children for their God-given destiny, heaven.

Consider how today's society has distanced itself from God compared to 40 years ago. Does society's marginalizing of God not have some correlation to the increase in domestic and street violence, to the diminished respect for other persons and their property, to the increase of children born out of wedlock, to increased abortions, divorces, and cohabitation?

Our Catholic schools are counter-cultural. They teach that God is love and sent His eternally begotten Son to teach us the truth about God, ourselves, other people, and our destiny. With teachings rooted in the Gospel, our schools teach that Jesus' way leads to peace, joy, and happiness even in this life. They teach the meaning and value of responsible freedom and self-giving love.

There is nothing better for reinforcing the values of faithful Catholic parents than studying in a Gospel-permeated atmosphere five days a week with teachers and peers who treasure and strive to live by those same values.

It is fitting that the largest segment of the annual diocesan budget goes to support Catholic schools. Each year \$500,000 from CSA is designated to assist Catholic families who would otherwise not be able to send their children to Catholic schools. This tuition assistance is often supplanted by further tuition assistance opportunities in our high schools and grade schools. The diocese subsidizes the operational budget of our three high schools just as parishes subsidize the operational budget of each of our grade schools. Tuition never

covers the full costs. Additionally, significant amounts of diocesan funds are used each year for capital projects in our high schools.

Diocesan and parish support for Catholic schools are augmented by the sacrifices parents and grandparents make to provide their youngsters the advantage of a school illumined by faith. Our administrators and teachers consider their responsibilities, not simply as jobs, but as ministries and work for a remuneration much less than what they would receive in the public schools.

It is fitting that we take this week to celebrate the gift of our Catholic schools and all who sacrifice so much to make them possible.