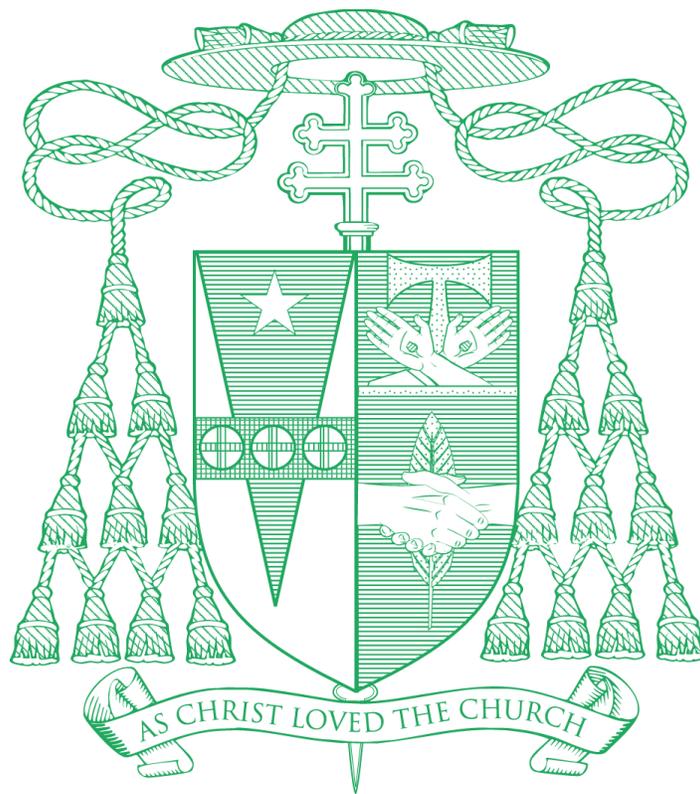


“Equipping Saints”



PASTORAL LETTER ON CATHOLIC EDUCATION AND FAITH FORMATION

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NOVEMBER 1, 2014

Equipping Saints: A Pastoral Letter on Catholic Education and Faith Formation

Catholic schools and faith formation programs are vital to the Catholic teaching mission and the well-being of the whole believing community. As a result, we need to reflect more deeply on what these apostolates do, not just for young people but for the entire local Church.

The goal of our educational mission here in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia is simple: to equip saints for life in this world and the next. Today we continue the great witness begun many decades ago by the fourth bishop of Philadelphia, Saint John Neumann. His energy and vision encouraged parishes to open the first Catholic elementary schools, and his success became a model for Church-sponsored education in our country.

Obviously, much has changed since. Shifting demographics in the U.S. northeast, combined with new challenges to family life and an increasingly secular culture, have led to big changes in the educational needs of students and families. Catholic school structures have adapted in dramatic ways. Here in Philadelphia, the Independence Mission Schools, Faith in the Future Foundation, Business Leaders Organized for Catholic Schools (BLOCS), and Elementary Regional Boards work closely with our Secretariat for Education to ensure a better future for our Catholic schools. But our goal, with God's help and guidance, remains the same: *equipping saints*.

Section One

The Role of Our Teachers, Catechists and Leaders

*Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers,
and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.*

Pope Paul VI, *Address to the Members of the Consilium de Laicis* (2 October 1974)

As secularizing trends in society become more pronounced, we need teachers, catechists and administrators who are not merely professionally skilled – though this is vital – but also deeply committed to Christian virtue and Catholic faith. Lay educators, who now play such a key role in Catholic education, should be

encouraged to *contribute their initiative, their creativity, and their competent, conscious, and enthusiastic labor to this task.*¹

The Greek words *en theos* or “God within,” remind us that the life of God within us, a heartfelt Catholic *enthusiasm* for our mission, is the best proof to our students that we care for them. Witnessing to the life of God in our own hearts inspires those around us to do the same. Thus, we do not ask our teachers to simply “enjoy” what they do but instead to live honestly and visibly as disciples of Jesus Christ. *Being aware that Baptism by itself does not make a Christian -- living and acting in conformity with the Gospel is necessary -- the Catholic school tries to create within its walls a climate in which the pupil's faith will gradually mature and enable him to assume the responsibility placed on him by Baptism.*²

Nothing has a deeper impact on students than the loving Christian relationships we create around them. Knowledge alone is nothing without meaning. Knowledge alone, without the guidance of wisdom, prudence, mercy and justice, can attack human dignity as easily as serve it. Our love for Jesus Christ is the center from which all our decisions must emanate. At the same time, Catholic education should provide a culture that encourages creative thinking and innovation. The student should be formed intellectually with the best available pedagogy, curriculum and educational resources. The genuine academic freedom that we enjoy in our teaching mission – an authentic freedom grounded in truth – commits us to delivering superior academic and moral development to our students in a way consistent with the mission of the Church.

Our teachers and catechists remain the most influential models of Christian living our students encounter outside of the family. As Pope Francis reminded a group of teachers on a recent trip to South Korea, “I would ask you to be concerned in a very special way for the education of children supporting the indispensable mission of not only the universities but of Catholic schools at every level, beginning with elementary schools where young minds and hearts are shaped in love for the Lord and his Church in the good and the true and the beautiful; where children learn to be good Christians and upright citizens.”³

No Catholic teacher can form her students in moral character without a passion herself for the Gospel, a zeal for Jesus Christ, and a confidence in the truth of the

¹ Lay Catholic in Schools: Witnesses to Faith, October 15, 1982 - 10

² Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Declaration on Christian Education*, "Gravissimum Educationis", 8.

³ Meeting with the Bishops of Korea at the headquarters of the Korean Episcopal Conference, August 14, 2014. Pope Francis.

Church and Catholic teaching. No Catholic educator can give to others what he doesn't have himself. If we ourselves don't believe, then we can only share our unbelief. If we're not faithfully Catholic ourselves, then we can only communicate confusion. Who we are and how we live inescapably shape the formation we give to others. This is why the Christian character and Catholic fidelity of our teachers, catechists and educational leaders are so essential to our mission.

Section Two The Parent's Role

Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years. This already happens when family members help one another to grow in faith by the witness of a Christian life in keeping with the Gospel. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith. Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2226

Parents are the primary educators of their children; the Church is their partner in that task. Without the conscious commitment of parents to use the opportunities the Church offers for the education of their children, our schools and our religious education programs cannot flourish.

Social changes in recent decades have complicated the role of parents and now challenge the very fabric of family life. We are keenly aware that the Church's ministry of education must support the work of our parents. Central to any effort that seeks to form young people is the relationship forged between the family and the educational institution. As the Congregation for Catholic Education stated in 2007:

This relationship appears as full participation of the parents in the life of the educational community, not only because of their primary responsibility in the education of their children, but also by virtue of their sharing in the identity and project that characterize the Catholic school and which they must know and share with a readiness that comes from within. It is precisely because of this that the educational community identifies the decisive space for cooperation between school and family in the educational project, to be made known and implemented

*with a spirit of communion, through the contribution of everyone, discerning responsibilities, roles and competences.*⁴

With this in mind, we need to more vigorously encourage the active involvement of our parents and the wider community in our schools and our parishes. Opportunities exist at every level to engage our parents in the mission of Catholic education. Parents have much more to offer beyond the tasks of fundraising and volunteering. We need to be deliberate about creating ways for them to honestly critique our programs, while at the same time, we maintain a healthy autonomy to make decisions for our students. Within a respectful but candid dialogue we can show our children the very meaning of communion and *develop an increasingly close bond between the values proposed by the school and those proposed by the family.*⁵

Section Three The Church's Role

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age."

Matthew 29:16-20

The Church's mandate to teach comes from Jesus Christ himself. The Church in Philadelphia has always honored that mission. Saint John Neumann, in his Pastoral Letter of April 11, 1852, wrote:

Though circumstances do not allow us to dwell at length on the subject, we avail ourselves of this earliest opportunity to express our thanks for the efforts which have lately been made to organize parochial schools. We exhort the pastors, and all who have at heart the best interest of youth, to spare no efforts to ensure success. Whatever difficulties may at first attend, and even obstruct this most

⁴ Educating Together in Catholic Schools, 48. Congregation for Catholic Schools, September 2007.

⁵ Educating Together in Catholic Schools, 48. Congregation for Catholic Schools, September 2007.

*desirable undertaking, will be gradually overcome by mutual good will and cooperation.*⁶

From her earliest days, our local Church has set the formation and education of young people as a high priority. That commitment continues today.

At the start of my ministry in Philadelphia we faced many painful decisions about our Catholic schools. But thanks to the labor of many pastors, parents and educators – too many to name – we have now begun to create the new structures and spirit that will help our schools be sustainable in the future.

As a first step, we will continually examine our financial aid and scholarship opportunities for young people. Our main partner in this effort is Business Leadership Organized for Catholic Schools (BLOCS), an independent charitable organization supported by companies and foundations of all sizes in the five county Philadelphia region. Since 1980, BLOCS has invested in tens of thousands of children throughout the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, including students from some of the poorest neighborhoods in the region. Children who attend grade school, high school or the schools of special education within the Archdiocese are eligible for BLOCS scholarships. Through its own resources and additional funds generated by the State of Pennsylvania's tax credit programs, BLOCS reaches more children in more communities than nearly all other private education charities in our area.

Second, we have recommitted ourselves to Catholic urban education and made big strides in ensuring that our presence in the city does not weaken but rather grows. The Independence Mission Schools (IMS) is a non-profit organization managing a network of 17 Catholic elementary schools across the City of Philadelphia. These schools are beacons of hope to their communities; they provide a high-quality, low-cost education to more than 4,100 children of all faiths from many of the city's most underserved neighborhoods.

Third, we clearly see the need to engage civic leaders and business professionals in helping us to manage our school system. As a result, in the first of its kind Catholic educational joint venture, we have, by a management agreement with Faith in the Future Foundation, given to them operational responsibility for our 17 high schools and 4 schools of special education, as well as operational oversight of the Office of Catholic Education.

⁶ Pastoral Letter to the Clergy and Faithful of the Diocese of Philadelphia, April 11, 1852. Bishop John Nepomucene.

Fourth, a “Foundation for Catholic Education” has been established as a way to strengthen our *elementary* schools across the Archdiocese. In addition to the Executive Board of Elementary Education, this Foundation works closely with our county advisory boards to oversee the important work of sustaining our schools through the State of Pennsylvania’s corporate tax credit programs.

Finally, as a local Church we remain grateful for and committed to the multiple partnerships that have been fostered over the years with local family foundations, our alumni and with our Catholic colleges and universities. Without their constant engagement in both our K-12 schools and our parish formation programs, we could not continue the mission of education in our Archdiocese.

Conclusion

While our new partnerships in recent years have been groundbreaking, a common thread defines our permanent mission: The main purpose of Catholic schools has been and always will be *religious*; in other words, to form students in Catholic faith, a love of God, and an abiding respect for the human person.

We place great importance on the academic excellence of our schools. And the reason is simple. A strong, well-rounded academic education helps to create mature citizens who build up the wider community. We also take great pride in our schools that exist as a service outreach in largely non-Catholic communities, welcoming students of every faith and no faith. These schools too are a vital part of our mission. In all of her social, spiritual and educational ministry, the Church seeks to benefit all persons of good will, while remaining true to her Catholic identity. We’re grateful for our role in serving Philadelphia’s families, *especially* in this year of preparation for the World Meeting of Families 2015; and we’re grateful to help cultivate the next generation of Philadelphia leaders -- Catholic and non-Catholic alike.

In the end though, Catholic education is not about being “socially useful.” Nor is it about good “values.” The values language of social science is too thin to satisfy the human soul, and too bland for the people of Christian character and courage God wants us to be. Catholic education is about making saints; about growing the seeds of *virtue and truth*. Anything less cheats our students of their dignity.

God built the Church we've inherited through the labor of generations of believers. Their generosity and witness made our faith possible. It's now our turn to shape the future by the zeal we bring to our own daily witness, especially with young people. It's our turn to act. It's our turn to live our Catholic faith with all the courage and strength Jesus Christ brought to loving the Church he founded.

The Church depends first on God who will always protect her. But she also depends on you and me -- teachers, principals, pastors, deacons, religious, catechists, parents and devoted single Catholics -- to carry Christ's mission into the world. We need to remember to pray, every day, for the young people we're privileged to educate. And as we do, let's recall the reason our schools and formation programs exist. Each of our students is eternally precious and infinitely loved by God. What they learn in our classrooms, they need to see lived with joy in our lives.

*+Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.
Archbishop of Philadelphia
All Saints Day
November 1, 2014*

