

CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Looking to the Future with Confidence

A Pastoral Letter
to the Clergy, Religious and Laity of the
Archdiocese of Washington



By
Most Reverend Donald W. Wuerl, S.T.D.
Archbishop of Washington

Grace and peace to you in Christ.

INTRODUCTION

CHRIST IS OUR TEACHER. He offers his people the words of truth and everlasting life. “For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth” (Jn 18:37). Today his teaching mission endures in those whom he sends.

The Archdiocese of Washington has a long and faith-filled history of spreading the good news - the Gospel. Integral to that ministry is Catholic education, particularly parish religious education programs and our Catholic schools. Through these important educational efforts the Church continues to send those who proclaim the word of God and prepare our youth to live it. At the heart of our message is the word of God. It constitutes the content of the Church's proclamation.

It is with this awareness that we turn our attention to our educational ministry. As we begin this new pastoral/academic year and return to a full schedule of activities in the parishes, I invite you to look to the future as our local Church addresses the long-range goal of strengthening and supporting Catholic education throughout the archdiocese, both in our schools and in our other parish catechetical programs.

In this pastoral letter I would like to reflect on the importance of our educational ministry, on the need for an overall assessment of and plan for Catholic education across the archdiocese and on some of the major elements of such an effort. The plan, to be developed through a process that will include consultation with a wide range of people, will address practical steps to review and renew together how well we are meeting the challenge to be Christ's witnesses to our world. It is by celebrating our strengths, identifying areas for improvement and working together that Catholic education will flourish for generations to come, bringing them Christ's Gospel and helping them grow in their encounter with the living Lord.



Teach Them to Observe All That I Have Commanded You



“Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

—Matthew 28:20—



As Jesus prepared to turn over to his apostles and disciples a share in the mission entrusted to him by his Father, he empowered and commissioned them to teach in his name. As the Gospel narrative of the life of Jesus concludes, it paints a picture of Jesus sending his followers to share with others the good news: “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 28:18-20)

We are asked to envision ourselves with those disciples who were called to share the good news. We are part of that same body of disciples. Christ continues to remain with us in his new body — his Church — alive in the gift of his Holy

Spirit — the Spirit of Truth. Centuries may separate us from the initial group of followers who were sent as witnesses but nothing separates us from Christ and his challenge to us. Each of us is asked to stand in the midst of our family, our parish and our community, aware of our faith, proud of it and part of the effort to share this wonderful gift. We are witnesses. We bear testimony to the Truth.

The words “You will be my witnesses” echo in the pages of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:8) where we find an account of the early Church. In living continuity since those days, the Church has passed on the words — the revelation — that introduces us to Jesus of Nazareth who is Mary’s son and God’s son, to Jesus who is the Logos — the Word — come among us. Our faith and call to be witnesses are the incentive for our work throughout this archdiocese to share the good news.

Our efforts this year seem all the more appropriate since it was only last April that our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, came to Washington to encourage us in our mission and particularly to highlight the role of evangelization, catechesis and education. As he began his homily at Nationals Park, our Holy Father told us that he came to strengthen us in the faith that comes to us from the apostles. Pope Benedict said, “In my exercise of my ministry as the successor of Peter, I have come to America to confirm you, my brothers and sisters, in the faith of the apostles (cf. Lk 22:32). I have come to proclaim anew, as Peter proclaimed on the day of Pentecost, that Jesus Christ is Lord and Messiah.” Throughout his visit, the Pope both confirmed us in our faith and challenged us to share it and live it to the full.

It is in that context that we take a critical look at our archdiocese to see where we are and where we want to be in the overall context of the Church's mission to bring Christ to the world and to tell others of Jesus and his answers to the great questions of life. We recognize that it is in the encounter with Jesus Christ that we find our identity as his followers and answers to the questions that are a part of the human

condition, such as how shall I live; what are the values that will direct my life; and what is the purpose of life. This is the enduring message of Christ for more than 2,000 years and therefore, as Catholics, our message.

In his encyclical *Deus caritas est* (God is Love), Pope Benedict XVI spoke of three essential elements of the life of the Church: “The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her threefold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*)” (25).

In our structured, organized religious education efforts Christ's voice is heard today and his Gospel announced. Perhaps it is for this reason that during his visit to the United States our Holy Father addressed Catholic educators at The Catholic University of America and spoke so encouragingly about the ministry of education. He said, “Education is integral to the mission of the church to proclaim the Good News. First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God, who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth. (cf. *Spe salvi*, 4)”



We live in an increasingly secular and materialistic society, which is often at odds with our Christian messages and values.



The Many Expressions of Catholic Education



“I thank my brother bishops, priest and deacons, men and women religious, parents, teachers and catechists... (for) your own fidelity in handing on the treasure of our Catholic faith.”

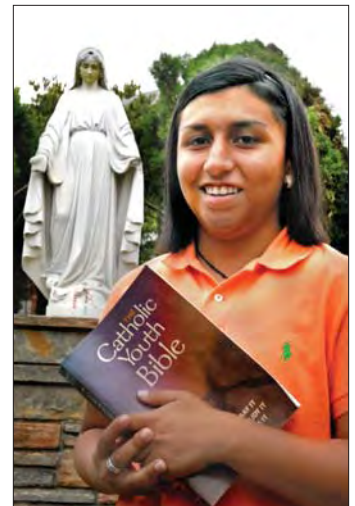
—Pope Benedict XVI, Homily at Mass at Washington Nationals Stadium, 2008—

Catholic education in all of its forms has as its primary task the communication of the person and message of Christ to adults, youth and children. This unfolds through a wide range of efforts but the goal is always the same. In our Catholic elementary and secondary schools, parish religious education programs, adult faith formation, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, sacramental formation programs, and the many forms of youth ministry, campus ministry and evangelizing outreach, the threads of the encounter with Christ and his life-giving message are woven into the fabric of our human experience.

We realize that Catholic education is the responsibility of the whole Church. In his June 2007 address at the Rome diocesan convention, Pope Benedict XVI underlined that the “entire Christian community, with all its many branches and compo-

nents, is challenged by the important task of leading the new generations to the encounter with Christ.” We look to the future of Catholic education throughout our archdiocese with the hope to renew in the hearts of all the members of this Church a sense of ownership of all of the expressions of education, particularly our schools.

As we begin this initiative, we recognize there are successful educational activities carried on by dedicated faith-filled clergy, religious and laity throughout the archdiocese. The goal of this process focused on Catholic education is simply to renew and strengthen our efforts to pass on the faith. The first step in achieving this mission is to assess where we are today to determine how effective our efforts are. This unfolds in two primary areas: parish religious education programs and Catholic schools. These programs support what families are



The task before us today is to assess how effectively we are transmitting the faith to our young people and assisting parents in their role.

doing in their own homes to live the word of God and pass on the faith to their children.

We embark on this work with the full realization of the unique time in which we live, as well as the complexities of today's society. As our Holy Father noted in his talk to the United States bishops last April, our world is materialistic and secular, which presents its own challenges. In a culture that does not readily support our faith, a culture where ever-more complex ethical decisions too often are made without consideration of important moral principles, our religious education efforts take on a new and critical relevance.

The United States bishops raised similar concerns in their 2000 statement, "We live in an increasingly secular and materialistic society, which is often at odds with our Christian messages and values. The emphasis on individual rights has eroded the concept of the common good and our ability to call people to accept revealed teaching that cannot be changed by democratic process." The statement goes on to reference the "disintegration of the community and social structures that once supported religious faith and encouraged family life" and how these support systems have been replaced by a media- and technology-driven culture that makes catechesis especially difficult. Religious instruction and catechesis compete against entertainment and sports for time in people's busy lives." (*In Support of Catechetical Ministry, June 2000*)

Our children today, as they grow up in an ever more complex world, need to be firmly grounded in knowledge of the authentic faith the Church professes so they can be prepared to live a full, happy and holy life in communion with Christ.

The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) found in a February 2008 study that only 37 percent of those surveyed said that "living my life consistent



with Church teaching is 'very' important to their sense of what it means to be Catholic" (*Sacraments Today: Belief and Practice Among U.S. Catholics, Executive Summary*). This suggests that while Catholics in the United States value religion, there is still much to learn about the role and impact of Church teaching in their lives.

In that same month, the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life released the results of a survey on religion in the United States that found 92 percent of Americans believe in God, and yet far fewer see the need for any connection to a specific religious affiliation and its teachings. It is in light of these cultural challenges that we strive to foster a richer appropriation of the faith in those now entrusted to our educational care.

We also face financial and economic realities:

- How do we ensure we are offering academically excellent and affordable schools to as many children as possible?
- How can we better assist families who are making sacrifices for their children's education?
- How do we adequately compensate our valued teachers and administrators?

The task before us today is to assess how effectively we are transmitting the faith to our young people and assisting parents in their role. We will first need to be informed on what is actually taking place so together we can evaluate what works best, how these experiences might be shared and what requires additional attention.

During this year we will look at all the ways in which the teaching of the Church is presented. This evaluation will help us provide support and oversight so that the faith is presented in an appropriate and comprehensive manner. We shall also focus on our Catholic schools to work together towards a more equitable manner of sustaining them across the archdiocese.

Two central initiatives are underway to accomplish our goals:

- A parish catechetical visitation assessment process, and
- The development of archdiocesan-wide policy and strategy for our archdiocesan Catholic schools.

The decision to initiate this archdiocesan-wide assessment process grows out of both the archdiocesan Catechetical Convocation in October 2006, attended by over 2,300 people engaged in religious education, and the archdiocesan Convocation on Catholic Education in October 2007, involving people from throughout the archdiocese who were actively engaged in and supportive of our Catholic schools. Both gatherings resulted in a call for a more systematic review of all of our religious education efforts in our parish and school programs in order to provide support for them and to strengthen them.



Parish Religious Education

Education in the faith begins in the family. Parents are the first teachers of their children.



“We celebrate and express our deepest gratitude for the many thousands of persons who serve the Church as catechists.”

—United States Catholic Bishops, In Support of Catechetical Ministry, June 2000—

The October 2006 archdiocesan Catechetical Convocation was intended to thank and to encourage the hundreds and hundreds of catechists, volunteer and career, throughout this archdiocese who day in and day out expend so much time, energy and talent on instilling the faith and encouraging its growth. We cited then and again now the words of the United States bishops, “Because effective catechesis depends so heavily on human effort — on professional preparation, planning, performance, and evaluation; on personal qualities and commitments; and especially on the faith, hope, and love of catechists — we celebrate and express our deepest gratitude for the many thousands of persons who serve the

Church as catechists. Through their personal efforts at evangelization, they plant the seeds of faith in people of all ages throughout the United States. We are aware of the efforts catechists make to be faithful instruments of God’s Word and the personal sacrifices they make to teach in the name of Christ and his Church; we give thanks to God for their efforts.” (*In Support of Catechetical Ministry, June 2000*)

For the parish, catechists are a blessing for so many reasons. They embody a central aspect of the Church’s responsibility to teach the faith. They do so, sometimes with the assistance of a catechetical leader, in an orderly and systematic manner. They also act under the guidance of the pastor,

thus assuring their connectedness with the Church's apostolic mission. Last academic year over 2,400 parish catechists dedicated hours upon hours to pass on the faith to over 24,200 youth.

Following the Catechetical Convocation and in consultation with many others, the decision was made to begin a review and assessment of the religious education programs in parishes and schools throughout the archdiocese. The purpose of such an assessment is to become aware of and share information relative to the successes that abound and to determine where assistance might be needed to strengthen the teaching of the faith.

Such a review and assessment seems all the more appropriate in view of the widely recognized fact that we are dealing with a generation and more of Catholics, of which some have not appropriated a sufficient understanding of the faith. They thus are, many times, ill-equipped to offer the faith foundation to their children. They look to the Church for help.

Catholics, young and adult, face decisions each day, some critical. If we work out of a diminished or faulty knowledge of the faith or if we are not fully aware or convinced of what Jesus taught or the wisdom his Church provides, such decisions become all the harder to make in a way that brings the Gospel into our lives.

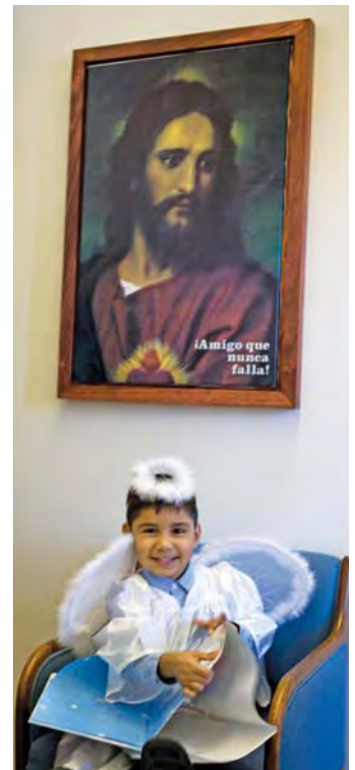
Education in the faith begins in the family. Parents are the first teachers of their children. So much of the effort to pass on the faith to the next generation has as its context the family, the home, the "domestic Church." As the child grows, the parish community offers educational support as well as an introduction into the faith community, particularly in preparation for the reception of the sacraments. The experience of most of the Catholic faithful in sharing the gift of faith with their children includes the transition into either a

Catholic school or a parish religious education program. It is for this reason that we are turning our attention so directly to the effectiveness of our religious education programs and the stability and future of our Catholic schools.

We are mindful that some parents choose to home school their children. This laudable commitment that places so much responsibility upon the parents still involves the life of the parish and the Church's involvement with the family, particularly in the preparation for the reception of the sacraments and in supporting parents with helpful guidelines for religious education and the availability of appropriate religious education resources. Even should the parish religious education program or school, if available, not be the means a family might choose in educating its children; nonetheless, the family is still a part of the faith community — the parish. The family's pastor and those at the appropriate archdiocesan offices want to walk with the parents and their children in their faith journey.

It is for this reason that, as a part of the overall review of Catholic education in its many forms, the archdiocese intends to initiate a dialogue with home schooling parents to assess with them how best to assist them. Here we find encouragement and direction in the words of our Holy Father, "the Christian family, the small 'domestic Church,' and the larger family of the Church must take care to develop the closest collaboration, especially with regard to the education of children (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 11)." (*Address to Participants in the Convention of the Diocese of Rome, 2007*)

This might be an appropriate place to note that a number of resources are available to the Church to aid our task of assessing the teaching of the faith and to help ensure that the actual teaching itself is in conformity with the authentic faith of





the Church. We are the beneficiaries of a series of resources at the level of the Church universal and those adapted for the Church in our country. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* along with the *General Directory for Catechesis* offer guidance to the whole Church on both the content of the faith and the manner in which that message should be shared. The *National Directory for Catechesis* and the recently published *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* provide us with direction and resources well suited for focusing our catechetical efforts and effectively teaching the faith, especially to younger generations and those, perhaps, who have not had the benefit of sustained and appropriated catechesis.

As recently as the November 2007 meeting of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, two additional documents were approved that are also most helpful. The first of these is *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age*. As the introduction points out, "In addition to providing guidance about the doctrinal content of catechetical instruction for high-school-age, this framework is also designed to help those same young people develop the necessary skills to answer or address the real questions that they face in life and in their Catholic faith." The second is *Catechetical Formation in Chaste Living*. In its introduction we read, "These guidelines may also be helpful to assist parents/guardians, catechists, and Catholic school teachers in their respective roles in this crucial and delicate task."

The archdiocesan Office for Religious Education, which is a part of the Secretariat for Education, has begun to visit parishes and schools. The program, entitled the Parish Catechetical Visitation and Assessment Process, is the result of the wisdom and experience of pastors, parish

religious educators, Catholic school leaders and those involved at the archdiocesan level. A number of visits as part of a pilot program have already been conducted and refined materials for the visits are now in place for wider use this academic year. The parish visits and assessments will continue at an increased rate.

Essentially, the program has the overall goal of promoting religious education planning in parishes and schools and supporting the skills necessary to accomplish effectively this task. The catechetical visitation process unfolds in four steps: an initial meeting between a representative of the Office of Religious Education and the pastor and key parish catechetical leaders; an online parish self-assessment of its catechetical efforts, using benchmarks from the *National Directory for Catechesis*; an on-site review of the data and recommendations with the parish catechetical leadership; and sharing of best practices by the archdiocese.

The pilot visits involved a number of parishes and identified some clear needs for the future. One of the initial findings was the need to begin a review of our religious education guidelines and curricula. While the current guidelines clearly outline the content of the faith that is to be taught, it is time to improve the curriculum through the addition of religious education standards that indicate what a student should know after a course of instruction. For this reason, proposals are currently being reviewed that focus on a way to update the religion curriculum guidelines for use in parishes and schools.

Another need identified through the pilot visits was for improved formation and preparation for parish catechists and also the development of some basic new materials that will assist the catechists in their task.

Overview of Our Catholic Schools



*“First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God, who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth (cf. *Spe salvi*, 4)”*

—Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting with Catholic Educators, The Catholic University of America, 2008—

Our Catholic schools are a proven instrument for passing on the faith. We have long recognized the role of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton whose efforts in Maryland in the early part of the 19th century, with the encouragement of Bishop John Carroll, are seen as the beginning of the Catholic system of schools throughout our country.

Mission of Our Catholic Schools

Historically the Church has turned to Catholic schools to help carry out her teaching mission. In 2005 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops noted, “These Catholic schools afford the fullest and best opportunity to realize the fourfold purpose of Christian education, namely to provide an atmosphere in which the Gospel message is proclaimed, com-

munity in Christ is experienced, service to our sisters and brothers is the norm, and thanksgiving and worship of our God is cultivated.” (*Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*, 2005)

In a June 2007 address, Pope Benedict XVI said, “By educating in the faith, a very important task is entrusted to Catholic schools. Indeed, they must carry out their mission on the basis of an educational project which places the Gospel at the center and keeps it as a decisive reference point for the person’s formation and for the entire cultural program. In convinced synergy with families and with the Ecclesial Community, Catholic schools should therefore seek to foster that unity between faith, culture and life which is the fundamental goal of Christian education.” (*Address to Participants in the Convention of the Diocese of Rome*, 2007)

Catholic schools should seek to foster that unity between faith, culture and life.



Who We Are: Our Catholic Schools

The 98 Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Washington, including 65 archdiocesan schools (63 elementary and two high schools) as well as schools operated or sponsored by religious communities or other groups confirmed by appropriate Church authority, are as diverse as the communities they serve. Close to 30,000 students come from the city, suburbs and rural communities, from the heart of Washington, DC to our five Maryland counties. Their families are financially wealthy, middle class and live in poverty. They are Catholic and not Catholic. They are new to our nation and they can trace their ancestry back nearly 400 years to the original settlers who in 1634 brought our faith to the New World and established Maryland as a place of religious freedom.

Our schools, where over 3,000 teachers provide instruction, are dispersed geographically across the entire region. There are 21 schools within the District of

Columbia, 36 in Montgomery County, 24 in Prince George's County, and 17 in Southern Maryland.

These schools are identified as Catholic through the presence of an archdiocesan-approved religious education/faith formation program that ensures that the faith is integrated into and permeates the whole educational process at the school. Catholic identity also is visible in pastoral ministry programs that nurture personal spirituality and formation of the students into a living experience and witness of Christian life.



Where We Are Today

At the October 2007 Convocation on Catholic Education, pastors, principals, catechetical leaders and members of parish councils, finance councils and other advisory groups arrived at a number of important conclusions. First was the recognition of the need for an overall and shared vision for Catholic education throughout this archdiocesan Church. Second was the need to develop a strategy to achieve this vision. In addition, there was agreement that we must work together to distribute equitably the responsibility for Catholic schools across the archdiocese. Catholic schools are the patrimony of the whole archdiocese and should benefit from archdiocesan-wide support.

The need to address the future of Catholic schools is not unique to our archdiocese. Nationwide, nearly 1,200 faith-based schools closed from 2000 to 2006, displacing approximately 400,000 students, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. In many cases, this occurred as the population moved from older northeastern cities to the southwest, from city to suburbs or beyond. The District of Columbia, for example, has lost approximately 30 percent of its population since 1950, including 10 percent between 2000 and 2005. Today there is a dramatically lower number of men and women religious teaching in the schools. Lay teachers account for 96 percent of Catholic school teachers in the archdiocese.

The Archdiocese of Washington has long sought to address these challenges and seek solutions. In 1997, the Center City Consortium was formed under the direction of Cardinal James Hickey to stabilize and revitalize inner-city Catholic schools in the neediest neighborhoods of Washington, DC. More than \$68 million over and above tuition income was invest-

ed in these schools by the archdiocese and its donors over the next 11 years.

The original Consortium began with eight financially and academically distressed schools. Eventually the Consortium was expanded to 14 schools between 2002 and 2005 in an effort to keep other financially distressed schools from closing. Two schools consolidated during the 2006-07 academic year.

By spring 2007, it was clear that the stress of the rapid expansion, combined with declining enrollments in many of the schools, simply overwhelmed financially the Consortium. Consultations were held at 12 schools and their parishes with over 1,300 people. Eventually approval was given to permit the conversion of seven schools to an independent charter group, return one, Saint Augustine, to parish oversight and continue to invest extra resources in four other schools organized as the Consortium of Catholic Academies. All these schools serve students from lower-income neighborhoods.

Today, 21 Catholic schools serve the District of Columbia, including 12 parish elementary schools. Half of the parish schools serve predominantly non-Catholic and low-income communities, continuing our mission of Catholic education in the center city, within the resources available.

The Consortium of Catholic Academies will ensure that its four schools have access to needed financial resources. This year a commitment has been made to provide \$3 million in funding during the 2008-09 school year. This includes \$2 million in grants, gifts and donations from donors, particularly those working with the consortium board and \$1 million from the archdiocese. Teachers will continue to be served by intensive professional development and other benefits.



We can, I believe,
be proud of the
breadth of the effort,
the extent of the
achievement
and the depth of
commitment.



In another approach to extend the range of collaboration to strengthen urban schools, Holy Redeemer School in the District is in its second year as a Magnificat School. This five-year partnership with the archdiocese and the University of Notre Dame brings professional development, technical assistance and other support.

The Salesians of Don Bosco and the archdiocese opened the Don Bosco Cristo Rey High School in Takoma Park, Maryland in fall 2007 to give very low income students access to a Catholic, college preparatory education through a creative work-study program. In addition to their studies and extracurricular activities, the students “job share” at corporate offices, gaining valuable work experience and covering a large portion of their tuition costs.

Other models include regional schools that serve and depend on the support of several parishes so costs and responsibilities are shared. Examples include Saint Pius X Regional School in Bowie and Archbishop Neale School in LaPlata, as well as Mary of Nazareth School, a multi-parish school in Darnestown that is separately incorporated.

As we complete this brief review of the Catholic education effort throughout the archdiocese and particularly that sponsored by the archdiocese itself we can, I believe, be proud of the breadth of the effort, the extent of the achievement and the depth of commitment. What we hope to do in this academic year is build on all of these positive points so that we can focus our energies, efforts and activities to ensure, well into the future, our Catholic schools.



Four Pillars of Catholic Schools



“Catholic schools exist ... to provide our children with an opportunity not only for academically excellent education, but a faith formation ... which will serve them the rest of their lives.”

—Archbishop Wuerl, Convocation on Catholic Education, 2007—

Out of the 2007 Convocation on Catholic Education came the commitment to develop an overarching strategy for promoting Catholic schools and policies to support such a vision. Four primary areas of attention, or “pillars,” of Catholic schools were identified.

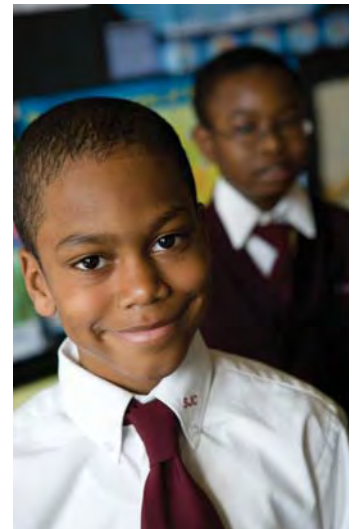
These represent broad areas in which planning should take place and goals set:

1. **Catholic identity**
2. **Academic excellence**
3. **Accessibility**
4. **Affordability**

These areas are consistent with those identified in the United States bishops’ statement on education: “It is the responsibility of the entire Catholic community — bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and

laity — to continue to strive towards the goal of making our Catholic elementary and secondary schools available, accessible, and affordable to all Catholic parents and their children, including those who are poor and middle class. All Catholics must join together in efforts to ensure that Catholic schools have administrators and teachers who are prepared to provide an exceptional educational experience for young people—one that is both truly Catholic and of the highest academic quality.” (*Renewing our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium, 2005*)

Building upon the work of the convocation, a task force, under the coordination of an oversight committee, was established



for each of the four key areas. Already, preliminary work is underway to gather the information necessary to envision specific goals and the types of policy needed to achieve the goals. During this academic year, the task forces will formulate suggested policies that address the four areas. Clearly, this is a substantial undertaking and at each stage will involve communication of information, consultation throughout the archdiocese including surveys and focus groups, and a high degree of collaboration. Initial consultation with both the Priest Council and the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council indicates strong support for this enterprise.



Catholic Identity

“At the heart of our Catholic schools is our Catholic faith.”

(Archbishop Wuerl, Convocation on Catholic Education, 2007)

During all the preliminary discussions about our Catholic schools, one clear fact emerged: our schools are and must be Catholic. While open to and welcoming of students of other faiths, our schools function with a clear Catholic identity. The schools offer each student faith and moral formation while providing an excellent academic education. Catholic identity is intrinsic to our educational effort and is the reason for its success. We name our schools “Catholic” not as a nod to their past history but as a proclamation of their purpose and identity today and of their connectedness to the Church that authenticates their identity.

At every level, elementary and secondary, the schools, with our support, must continue to do all that it takes to meet the challenge of presenting an educational alternative that is rooted in and takes its daily inspiration from the faith and in visible connectedness with the archdiocesan

Church. Our education effort derives from our conviction that our Catholic faith invites us into dialogue with God and offers us a way of life grounded in his word. Even in a culture that denies the need for this dialogue, there is a deep yearning in the human heart for just such a conversation with God. Our role in Catholic education is to provide a frame of reference for a life that reflects the words of everlasting life.

As the bishops’ 2005 statement on Catholic schools states, “We must provide young people with an academically rigorous and doctrinally sound program of education and faith formation designed to strengthen their union with Christ and his Church. The entire Catholic community must now focus on the future and the many challenges we face. We must then move forward with faith, courage, and enthusiasm because Catholic schools are so important to our future.”

While our schools are Catholic and present a vision of life inspired by Jesus, many of the students are not Catholic. They come because our schools work. Parents, guardians and students recognize the blessings of an education in a Catholic environment where our faith is the inspiration for the wholesome school culture that encourages academic achievement and also self-discipline, personal integrity and moral values.

Catholic schools become a gift to the whole community and are recognized as centers of learning that foster personal development and growth enriched with a sense of self-fulfillment and worth and guided by basic and essential moral values.

Our Catholic schools stand in the community as a reminder that education can and does work. It is capable of bringing forth the best from our students in a manner that transforms for them their possibilities and their future.

Academic Excellence

“Our responsibility is to present the Gospel message and an excellent educational program. Accountability and holistic assessment are, therefore, essential to that responsibility.”

(National Catholic Educational Association, Statement on Accountability and Assessment in Catholic Education, 2004)

Our Catholic schools long have had an excellent reputation for the academic achievement of all their students. Studies that focus on our inner-city schools highlight an exceptional level of academic accomplishment that reflects the excellence of the educational component of our schools. As the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) has noted, Catholic elementary and secondary school students, on average, outperform their public school counterparts. They send a higher percentage of their students to college (97 percent) and 99.1 percent graduate from high school (*NCEA, 2007-2008 Annual Statistical Report on Schools, Enrollment and Staffing*). In national achievement tests, according to NCEA, Catholic school students outscore their public school counterparts. Significantly, these statistics hold true for students of all socio-economic backgrounds.

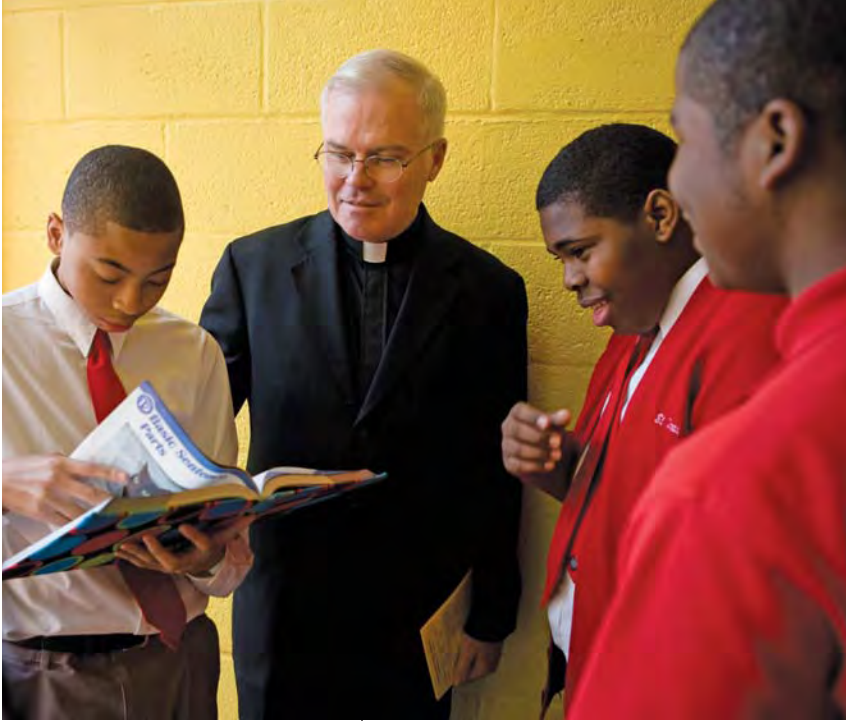
We need to ensure that our reputation continues to be deserved. Academic excellence must remain a hallmark of Catholic education. While we struggle to keep our schools open and strive to provide a tuition low enough to encourage students to attend, we must not, because of that, allow our academic instruction to be diminished in any way. That is why the archdiocesan Catholic Schools Office has begun implementing standards-based curricula in our schools.

Our overall goals for Catholic education must include the effort to develop, sustain



and manifest a verifiable level of academic excellence. The archdiocesan Catholic Schools Office plays a substantial role in this effort together with the leadership of each individual school. With this vision of academic excellence integrated into a deeply ingrained Catholic identity, we are able to provide students with the experience of hope — hope in Christ and hope in the future. In fact, many of our urban schools, in particular, are an oasis of hope in a desert lacking intellectual, spiritual and personal support.





Affordability

“The future of Catholic school education depends on the entire Catholic community embracing wholeheartedly the concept of stewardship of time, talent, and treasure, and translating stewardship into concrete action.”

(United States Catholic Bishops, Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium, 2005)

The future of our Catholic schools depends on the ability of all of us working together to meet their increasing costs and to assist families who are making sacrifices to give their children a Catholic school education. Generally, elementary schools in the archdiocese have had to increase tuition an average of six percent annually since fall 2002, largely to support higher instructional costs. Despite these increases, tuition still covers only 70 percent of the cost of education on average, though that ratio varies by school and in some cases, is far lower.

The funds to keep open our Catholic schools come from tuition payments and parish and archdiocesan subsidies, as well as fundraisers, from bake sales to galas, golf tournaments to annual fund appeals. In the case of some of the high schools, subsidies also are available from the sponsoring religious community.

The archdiocesan subsidy comes primarily from two sources: the annual archdiocesan operational funds (this includes money from the Archbishop's Appeal) and a two percent assessment on each parish for education. More recently some contribution has come from the earnings on the Forward in Faith endowment funds designated for both Catholic elementary and secondary schools.

In past years, nearly all the money from the two percent education assessment has

Accessibility

“The Catholic community is encouraged at every level to support the work of our Catholic elementary and secondary schools, keeping them available and accessible to as many parents as possible.”

(United States Catholic Bishops, Renewing our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium, 2005)

A goal of our archdiocesan-wide strategy is to ensure the geographic placement of Catholic schools throughout the archdiocese, within the resources available, so as many Catholic students as possible are within a reasonable distance of a Catholic school. The concept of accessibility is important since the distribution of limited funds to support Catholic schools must take into consideration where our schools need to be so they are accessible to students. The number and placement of schools will be a serious factor when parishes find it necessary to consider the consolidation of schools to achieve and sustain financial stability.

gone to meet the expenses of a relatively small number of parishes with schools that are greatly in debt. This year some of the money that would have been used to address the school shortfall at the end of the year was advanced to parishes to be used as tuition assistance now to increase the student body enrollment and thus, in the end, the total tuition yield for the school.

The archdiocese is assessing this new approach to funding schools with significant financial needs for operations. Piloted in summer 2008, this approach to tuition assistance has yielded initial results that are positive. Enrollment in several schools is up, thereby helping families while also reducing a school's need for operating subsidies because additional students are contributing some tuition.

In addition, we are reaching out to donors interested in supporting expanded tuition aid for families throughout the archdiocese in the hope of increasing the funds available for this new program. The two programs together, the regular tuition assistance program and the new incentive program, have made available funds this year that are more than double those of last year, nearly \$2 million as compared to \$800,000.

The archdiocese has taken other steps to keep the schools affordable. This includes cost savings programs such as an energy purchasing cooperative that began last year in two counties, saving participating parishes and schools approximately \$370,000. Those savings could increase significantly as the program, established through the Mid-Atlantic Consortium of Catholic Schools, a collaborative effort of six local dioceses, expands.

Families, both low income and middle class, work hard to find the means to give their children a Catholic education. Yet, even with all of this assistance, financial

need remains. That is why partnerships not only of the archdiocese with private scholarship groups are so important, but also partnerships with public entities. During the 2007-08 school year, Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Washington saved local governments close to \$385 million in tax expenditures for public schools.

Government Support for Families

“Advocacy is not just the responsibility of parents and teachers, but of all members of the Catholic community. As the primary educators of their children, parents have the right to choose the school best suited for them.” (United States Catholic Bishops, *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*, 2005)

When we look to the wider community for partnerships in supporting our Catholic schools, we do so with the awareness that more and more of our neighbors recognize the unique gift that Catholic education is to the community. With an ever-increasing number of non-Catholics attending our schools it is clear that the schools make a unique contribution to the community. Here the students develop self-discipline and moral values that come out of the faith-based environment of the school. These schools work. They merit the support of the entire community.

Simple justice requires that families who choose non-public schools benefit from the monies that we all pay in taxes for the education of all children. For choice to be real, there must be funding. The Catholic Church cannot be expected on its own to continue to provide a system of schools that work, that offer real opportunity and that provide for its students a future.

In the District of Columbia, a promising federal pilot program, the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program, is helping bring educational equality to low-income families

Families, both low income and middle class, work hard to find the means to give their children a Catholic education.

in the city. These federal grants provide families with tuition and some fees up to \$7,500. For our archdiocesan schools, the Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) typically has paid \$4,500 per child who qualifies for financial assistance and is granted one of the scholarships.

The difference between the grant amount and the real cost of education is paid for by the archdiocese and the Catholic schools where the children attend. While studies show high parent satisfaction and academic progress, the program unfortunately will end at the conclusion of the 2008-09 school year unless the United States Congress reauthorizes it.

The Opportunity Scholarships are an important part of a three-sector effort to bring new dollars to the city's public and charter schools as well as to private and parochial schools. This program helps families have choices. Without the scholarships over 85 percent of the recipients last year would have had to attend failing public schools, as identified by guidelines in the No Child Left Behind Act. Yet we

remain hopeful that the very success of the OSP will make a convincing case for its reauthorization.

Maryland families also can have hope. There is a legislative proposal in Maryland for a tax-credit program with the acronym of BOAST (Building Opportunities for All Students and Teachers). This would allow a wider partnership in support of the education of the next generation of citizens. The program is designed to strengthen the partnership between Maryland businesses and schools, and is based on a highly successful initiative put in place in Pennsylvania in 2001. Over six years, businesses in Pennsylvania qualified for tax credits by donating \$360 million for scholarships that benefited nearly 160,000 students in all schools and funded thousands of public education initiatives. Corporations and small businesses that donate to organizations that support Maryland's public and nonpublic school students and teachers similarly would receive a significant state tax credit, giving Maryland's schools a way to leverage more investment from their local business communities.



The donations from businesses would provide economic assistance to lower- and middle-income families who find it increasingly challenging to send their children to a Catholic or another nonpublic school. In addition, the funds would assist teachers across all school types by increasing access to professional development opportunities.

Concomitant with our archdiocesan efforts this fall will be a statement on education from the Maryland Catholic Conference which includes the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Diocese of Wilmington and the Archdiocese of Washington since all three include sections of Maryland. The Maryland Catholic Conference is the public advocacy arm of the Catholic Church in Maryland. It has the responsibility of bringing the concerns of the Church, the interests of the Catholic faithful, to the public debate and legislative process out of which comes the public policy that touches all of us.

The bishops' statement will highlight the importance of Catholic schools to the entire community and publicize specific initiatives through which the state can partner with us in our efforts to sustain the valuable service that Catholic schools have provided to generations of Marylanders. It also will include information on how Maryland's Catholic community can play an active role in legislative advocacy to advance these initiatives.

The Maryland Catholic Conference statement will seek to engage the entire Catholic community in the efforts to support public policy that will realize the dream of so many parents — a choice in education for their children.

By working together — parents, parishes, archdiocese and government — we can help ensure schools are affordable and accessible to as many students as possible.

Next Steps for the Schools

What is outlined here in broad terms — for all four priority areas — gives an idea of what lies ahead of us this academic year. My purpose in writing now is not to attempt to anticipate what the conclusion of the work of the task forces might be or what the consultation process might yield. It is, however, to say that we have a great deal to do, we have started to look at how we might do it and we need to work together if we hope to see a bright future for our schools.

While much is still to be determined, it is anticipated that the process could unfold in this manner. The four task forces already are gathering information. In collaboration with people from across the archdiocese, they will develop — as requested by the participants at the 2007 convocation — suggested policies and strategies within each area of concern.

The initial recommendations will be submitted for consultation. This will begin with such consultative bodies as the Priest Council, Archdiocesan Pastoral Council, Archdiocesan Board of Education and the College of Consultors. Once it is clear that a specific policy has a strong core of support, a more extensive communications process would follow, along with a wider parish-based consultation effort. The goal is to have some generally agreed-upon policies ready for implementation so that we can initiate this vision and strategy by the academic year 2009-2010.

As the United States bishops wrote in *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*, “The entire Catholic community must now focus on the future and the many challenges we face.”

The entire Catholic community must now focus on the future and the many challenges we face.

Looking to the future
of Catholic education,
we should do so
with hope, confidence
and enthusiasm.



CONCLUSION

The invitation and call to be Christ's witnesses continue to echo in our hearts throughout this archdiocese. This is a time for us to recognize the grace-filled opportunities that are ours. As the Holy Father told us in his homily at Nationals Park, “the Church in the United States is now called to look to the future.” Just as the Pope reminded us that he had come “to America to confirm you, my brothers and sisters, in the faith of the Apostles” he also said that he came “to proclaim anew, as Peter proclaimed on the day of Pentecost, that Jesus Christ is Lord and Messiah, risen from the dead, seated in glory at the right hand of the Father and established as judge of the living and the dead (cf. Acts 2:14ff).”

This is a time of new Pentecost for the Church in our country and the Church that is our archdiocese. As we begin this new year, we will undertake a review and assessment of our educational efforts as we have said, focusing on our parish education programs and our Catholic schools. Our goal is to participate in that pentecostal outpouring of God's grace and love by providing our young people with an excellent education and understanding of the faith so that they are well equipped to live out their lives as witnesses to Christ and the Gospel.

We are witnesses. In the proclamation of the message of redemption, we have the words of everlasting life. We are a people alive in the Holy Spirit and we must be motivated by our eagerness to share that extraordinary gift with the next generation.

What marks the current moment is a deepening awareness of both the importance of what we have to say — the message — and the willingness of so many throughout the archdiocese to work in an organized manner to pass on the message. Looking to the future of Catholic education, we should do so with hope, confidence and enthusiasm knowing that we bring something to those we teach that no one else can. We share the story of Jesus.

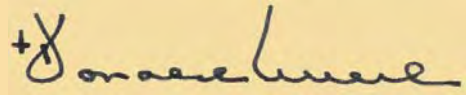


We can rejoice in the accomplishments that are reflected in our parishes and schools and, at the same time, engage all of our energies in coming together to see that what we do can always benefit from a careful review and thoughtful assessment. In the very process we should find ourselves confirmed in our desire to truly be his witnesses.

As we start down this road, we do so with faith, with appreciation of who we are as God's family and our need for mutual support and collaboration. We turn also in prayer, asking God's gift of the Spirit to enlighten and sustain us, guide us and keep us always aware of the signs of his presence with us.

May God bless the efforts of all of us to be effective witnesses to his Son and our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light yellow background. The signature begins with a small cross symbol followed by the name "Donald Wuerl" in a cursive script.

Archbishop of Washington

September 14, 2008
Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Archdiocese of Washington
P.O. Box 29260
Washington, DC 20017-0260
301-853-4500
www.adw.org

Photo credits:

Archdiocese of Washington: Don Berkemeyer, Paul Feters, James Kegley; Catholic Standard/El Pregonero: Rafael Cristosomo, Michael Hoyt, Leslie Kossoff; Other: Bishop McNamara High School, Elizabeth Seton High School, Georgetown Preparatory School, Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School, Our Lady of Good Counsel High School (cover photo), St. Anselm's Abbey School, Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart

