



CELEBRATING THE GIFT OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION TO OUR CHURCH AND NATION

Each year *Catholic Schools Week* (CSW) is celebrated nationally. This year it will be held on January 25–31. Catholic Schools Week celebrates the role that Catholic elementary and secondary schools across our country play in providing a Christ-centered education for America's young people.

This year's theme is *Service*. Service emphasizes the duty and delight of giving back. Catholicism has a long and rich tradition of providing direct service to those in need, as well as bringing about social justice to end social ills like racism and homelessness. Catholic schools incorporate service projects into the curriculum, teaching students the value of helping others as an expression of faith and good citizenship.

Catholic schools' \$19.8 billion gift to the nation

While auto manufacturers, secondary mortgage lenders and investment bankers are reaping billions of dollars in federal funds, one entity is saving the nation billions of dollars - the network of almost 7,400 Catholic schools across the country. According to Dr. Karen Ristau, president of the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA), Catholic schools provide \$19.8 billion in savings each year for the nation. The figure is based on the average public school per pupil cost of \$8,701 and the total Catholic school enrollment of more than 2.2 million students.

"Catholic schools are a gift to the church - and to the nation," said Ristau. "The enormity of this gift is more striking during these challenging economic times."

In addition to the monetary rewards, the nation gains in other ways. Catholic school students excel academically on standardized tests, 99.1% graduate and 94% attend college. Studies show that graduates of Catholic schools are reliable workers, good citizens and more likely to attend church.

"Our graduates have a strong commitment to community service because that is a foundation of our schools," added Ristau.

Some of the ways students at Ascension participate in service or outreach projects are: bringing food for our Food Pantry to their Wednesday school Mass, collecting toys for migrant children at Christmas, collecting and assembling backpacks of supplies for homeless people,

raising funds to purchase animals for the poor (heifer project) (see www.heifer.org).

Faith touching every area of the curriculum

In a Catholic school, the Good News which Jesus came to share touches every area of the curriculum. In math and science classes, students discover the goodness and order of God's creation. In history, students trace the actions of God through time. In literature, music, and art classes, students see expressions of human creativity and God's love for human beings.

Ten reasons to consider and support Catholic education

When asked why they sacrifice to place their children in Ascension Catholic School, Brett and Nicole Hymel gave the following reasons:

1. They receive religious education on a daily basis.
2. They are developing a closer relationship with Jesus.
3. They are taught to pray throughout the day.
4. They are taught to reach out to the less fortunate through participation in service projects.
5. They are encouraged to always put forth their best effort.
6. Students are recognized for their achievements.
7. Students develop close relationship with their teachers and classmates from Pre-K through 8th grade.
8. Parents are encouraged to volunteer, share ideas, and take an active role in their children's education.
9. There is a strong sense of community at Ascension.
10. Ascension offers many extra-curricular activities including chorus, band, cub scouts, boy scouts, girl scouts, drama, chess club, Odyssey of the Mind, recreational soccer and basketball leagues, and a wide variety of team sports. Students are given many opportunities to develop their interests and talents.

In a letter to the editor of the magazine *U.S. Catholic*, Brendan McGrath writes:

As a devout 23-year old Catholic who just graduated from Georgetown University and who attended Catholic Elementary and Catholic High School, I am adverse to anything that could possibly lead to anything but wholehearted devotion to the Catholic School system. I believe that for education to be fully authentic, it must be permeated by religion, which for Catholics means Catholicism. True education cares for the whole person, and since our spiritual/religious dimension permeates

our whole existence, body and soul, an education that is not religious is inherently incomplete. This doesn't mean that public schools aren't of value, certainly God's grace is at work in their students, and their teachers are doing God's work in building the kingdom as well. However, public schools operate on a reduced and qualitatively different level compared to Catholic schools, like a circle compared to a sphere. This would remain true even if all public schools were better academically than Catholic ones.

Public schools may have "character education," but Catholic schools have God and the Blessed Mother and so much more. Certainly there are numerous good reasons why parents send their children to non-Catholic schools, but we should work to minimize those reasons however we can. Catholic kids in public schools are really missing out.

It is very clear from the above two testimonies that a good education involves more than academics. If we are interested in the soul and spirit of a child, the part of us that is immortal, then we will seek to do everything possible to nurture that dimension of a child's life. A Catholic school environment is a great place to do that. As stated above, in a Catholic school, faith permeates every subject and every part of a child's day.

Some facts

There are 494 students in our school. The average class size in Pre-K 4 is 18, in Kindergarten 20, in grades 1 thru 8 is 24. We have three Pre-K 4 classes this year and they are free. The parish receives from the state a stipend of \$2,586.60 for each VPK student.

Ten of our faculty/administrative staff have a Master's degree. Our weekly school Mass is Wednesday at 8:30 AM. You are welcome to attend.

This current school year, we have budgeted the following amount for tuition aid.

- \$150,000 from parish offertory
- \$ 60,000 from School endowment
- \$ 45,000 from Thrift Store

I am very proud to say that at Ascension, no child is denied access to our school because of money.

Let's be convinced...

No school is perfect and that includes Catholic schools. No school has perfect principals, teachers or pastors. Parents and students can have bad experiences in any school, including Catholic schools. Having said that, let us not weaken in our conviction about the value of a Catholic school education. Above you read the Ten Reasons piece and the witness of Brendan McGrath. This weekend you heard our students proclaim the Word of

God at Mass and you listened to one of our school parents' share why it is important for them to sacrifice to keep their children in our school.

All of us make decisions on how we want to spend our money. I hope that all of you interested in the future of Catholicism are convinced that supporting families seeking to send their children to a Catholic school is one of the best ways you can spend your money.

I am most grateful to all of you who use the special school envelope found in your monthly package.

Seven Thank You's

- I thank all the **parents** in our parish who have made the **good choice** of giving their child a Christ-centered education.
- I thank **grandparents** who are helping their grandchildren have a Catholic education.
- I thank **Hank Laneuville** and all our **bingo workers** for their dedication to our parish. Thursday night bingo revenue goes to the school. This year, bingo will contribute \$135,000 to the operation of the school.
- I thank the **Thrift Store** volunteers for their wonderful work in raising funds to serve the needy in our area. This year they are contributing \$45,000 to our Tuition Aid program.
- I thank **Sr. Joseph**, our school Development Director, and all the dedicated school parents who work with her. Each year, their main fundraiser has been our annual **Gala Event** which last year netted \$74,000.00. This year's **Gala Event is Saturday, March 21, 2009** in our School. Last year's **Casino Night** turned out to be great fun and netted \$15,000.
- I thank all of you who contribute to the special **school envelope** found in your monthly package. This past calendar year of '08, donations received totaled **\$69,853**. The average monthly collection is \$5,821. 433 parishioners participate with an average donation of \$28.00. If you are in a position to participate in this form of support to our school and presently do not, I invite you to consider doing so. Investment in Catholic school education is an investment in the future of Catholicism.
- I thank all those individuals who make **special donations** to our school to help with miscellaneous special projects.

The Principal's Wish List can be found on the next page. **I am glad that Mr. Workman will be returning as school Principal next year.**

Have a blessed week,

