



Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time January 30, 2011 A

A+ FOR AMERICA—CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Each year at the end of January, *Catholic Schools Week* (CSW) is observed nationally. 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.

The 2011 theme for *Catholic Schools Week* is *A+ for America—Catholic Schools*.

The logo displays these words beneath a stylized banner of stars and stripes in red and light blue. The theme celebrates the fact that Catholic schools are an added value (“A plus”) for the nation. Because of their traditionally high academic standards and high graduation rates, all supported by strong moral values, Catholic schools and their graduates make many positive contributions to American society every day. Catholic schools give a high level of service (the A+ level) to local communities because of the many service projects students undertake. “Giving back to the community” and “helping others” are values instilled in every Catholic school student. Catholic schools give a high level of service to the nation (the A+ level) by serving students from all economic backgrounds and giving them a strong academic and moral foundation, allowing them to succeed in life, serving in the government, industry, business, non-profit and educational fields.

Almost 30 percent of students in Catholic schools are minorities, and almost 15 percent are non-Catholic, showing that families from diverse backgrounds seek the benefits of a quality education with moral underpinnings. Catholic schools are present in every area of the country—urban, suburban and rural—providing an excellent, well-rounded and faith-filled education that allows young people to achieve their dreams and goals. This, in turn, benefits the nation, as graduates share their talents in the areas of business, government, industry, education—and ministry. A significant number of today's priests, religious and lay ministers attended Catholic schools.

Catholic schools' \$19.8 billion gift to the nation

I gave the following information last year in my column in case some of you remember it, but it is surely worth repeating.

In a time when auto manufacturers, secondary mortgage lenders, and investment bankers received billions of dollars in federal funds, one entity saved 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.

In the light of the above, every Catholic community has a right to be very proud of the *gift* that our Catholic school system gives to our church and nation.

While some Catholic schools have closed down in areas very badly hit by the economy, it is good to know that 24 new Catholic schools opened in the last year and 171 new schools in the past five years. 25% of the schools have waiting lists.

Some stats

This current school year, we have 475 students from Pre-K3 to 8th grade. 110 students are receiving tuition assistance. We are proud of the *diversity* of our student population with 20% having a Hispanic, Asian or African-American background. Our children also come from every economic level. Nine of our teachers have a master's degree.

Computer update

Interactive SMART boards have been proven to engage and involve learners and helps to keep their attention, too.

Almost every classroom is now equipped with SMART interactive white boards, projectors and computers.

We intend to continue adding the boards and projectors until the school is completely outfitted.

Last year, \$75,000 from our *Alive in Christ* campaign money was used to purchase 38 new desktop computers and 60 netbooks along with 2 wireless netbook carts.

The school computer lab was completely renovated with 27 state of the art computers. Additional new computers went into classrooms.

Each cart has a wireless access point allowing access to network and internet resources and holds 30 touch screen netbooks, that are equipped with antimicrobial keyboards. This allows us to put a netbook in the hand of every student in any classroom throughout the school and allows teachers to use them to instruct or enhance the classroom curriculum in an age appropriate way. Even the prekindergarten students use them!

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 averse 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.

Let's be convinced that it is indeed worthwhile for every parent and grandparent in the parish to sacrifice to send their children/grandchildren to our school. Besides the academic, great community spirit and safety factors, the A+ factor in every Catholic school is the faith dimension—the ability to insert Christian values into every area of our curriculum and school life. Supporting

our Catholic school with our time, treasure and talent is a wonderful way to exercise Christian stewardship.

Eight Thank You's

I thank all the **parents** in our parish who have made the **good choice** of giving their children a Christ-centered education.

I thank **grandparents** who are helping their grandchildren have a Catholic education.

I thank our Principal, Doug Workman, our teachers and administrative staff for their dedication to making the school a wonderful environment where children can develop in mind, body, spirit and socially.

I thank all of you who contribute to the special **school envelope** found in your monthly package. This past calendar year of 2010, donations received totaled \$71,000 from 500 families. The average monthly collection was \$5,900. If you presently do not participate in this form of support for our school but are in a position to contribute, I invite you to consider doing so. Subsidizing Catholic school education is an investment in the future of Catholicism. Do continue to write checks to *Ascension Catholic School* to avoid a diocesan assessment on money given to this cause.

I thank **Hank Laneville** and all our **bingo workers** for their dedication to our parish. Thursday night bingo revenue goes to the school. This year, bingo will contribute \$110,000 to the operation of the school.

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 \$79,000. This year's **Gala Event will be held on Saturday, March 26, 2011** in our School. Last year's **Casino Night** turned out to be great fun and netted \$16,000. I thank all those individuals who make **special donations** to our school to help with miscellaneous special projects.

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 \$48,000 to our Tuition Aid program.

Monies raised during the Parish Festival also goes to the school. This year \$18,000 was raised. I thank John Kelly and his committee for co-coordinating this event.

Have a blessed week,

