



Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time January 31, 2010 C

CELEBRATING THE GIFT OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION TO OUR CHURCH AND NATION

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

As you can see from the logo above, this year's theme is *Catholic Schools: Dividends for Life*. The logo designed for the week features a cross superimposed on an outstretched hand. Rays coming from behind the hand express the concepts of *faith, knowledge, morals* and *discipline*—all beneficial aspects of a Catholic education. Catholic schools provide good things for students and families—high expectations and daily experiences of faith. In these challenging times, the theme also reminds parents that the *dividends of a Catholic school education*—students prepared in faith, knowledge, morals and discipline—*last a lifetime. There is no better way to invest in a child's future—or the future of our world.* Sure a Catholic education demands much sacrifice of parents, grandparents and parishes. But what better investment can families and parishes make than that of investing in a Christ-centered education and formation of children—tomorrow's leaders in society and the Church.

Catholic schools' \$19.8 billion gift to the nation

This past year 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.

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.

Letters from two graduates of Catholic Schools.

In the Winter Edition of the *Notre Dame Magazine*, Terri Piatt writes the following letter to the editor.

The meaning of education

Thank you for printing Peter Wicks' essay ("A Defense of My Life's vocation"), which I read shortly after reading a Newsweek cover story entitled "Why College Should Take Only 3 Years." The contrast between the two viewpoints was startling: One side advocates eliminating "nonessential" courses and attending school year-round while the other reflects what higher education is ideally about, namely learning how to think critically and having time to reflect and grow. Philosophy and the humanities are an important part of the well-rounded liberal arts education that every Notre Dame graduate receives, and this is part of what makes a degree from a top university like Notre Dame valuable.

I was an EE major and, like many engineering students, I felt that all of my required, nontechnical classes were a waste of time. Then I took Moral Problems, a philosophy class that changed my world view. It remains the best class I have ever taken. Since graduating I have learned time and again that while my engineering and math skills are strong, what really sets me apart from my fellow graduate students and co-workers is all those “useless” theology, philosophy and humanities classes I was required to take. I have nothing but admiration for the scholars who devote themselves to these often undervalued areas.

I wonder, when it comes to the elementary school (and High School) education of their children, how many see the religious dimension as a “non-essential”. If the writer of the above is to be believed, the religious dimension of education is the one that has the most lasting effect, the part that impacts a person’s whole worldview. I am so grateful that we at Ascension can say to more and more parents your child can have a Catholic education even if you cannot afford our tuition costs.

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.

It is very clear from the above two testimonies that a good education involves much 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 stats

Our school has 502 children, 43 of whom are non-Catholic. Our grade level ranges from PreK3 through 8th grade. **This year we have 3 VPK 4 classes, which are free.** This current year 112 students are receiving tuition aid totaling \$276,380. Nine of our teachers have Masters Degrees. Recently we have totally replaced the 27 computers in our technology room. We are in the process of purchasing mobile laptop computers.

Let’s be convinced...

No school is perfect and that includes Catholic schools. No school has perfect principals, teachers or parents. 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 a school parent share why it is important for them to have their children receive a Catholic education.

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* we can spend your money.

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 all of you who contribute to the special ***school envelope*** found in your monthly package. This past calendar year of ‘09, donations received totaled \$80,000 the average monthly collection is \$6,550. 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. Hence forth, write checks to *Ascension Catholic School* to avoid a diocesan assessment. More on this next week.

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 \$130,000 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 \$78,000. This year's **Gala Event is Saturday, March 27, 2010** in our School. Last year's **Casino Night** turned out to be great fun and netted \$9,500. 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 \$45,400 to our Tuition Aid program.

Monies raised during the Parish Festival also goes to the school. This year \$16,000 was raised. I thank John Kelly and his committee for co-coordinating this event.

Have a great week,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Le Parron". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L" and a long, sweeping underline.