



September 2008

Archbishop Wuerl on Catholic Education

*Pastoral letter calls on all of us to
pass on the faith*



Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl recently published a pastoral letter on education entitled *Catholic Education: Looking to the Future with Confidence*, which calls on all of us to look for new and better ways to sustain our Catholic schools and help them flourish.

The Archdiocese of Washington has a long history of spreading the Gospel through Catholic education in our parishes and schools. Today, 30,000 children attend 98 Catholic schools in the archdiocese. Another 24,200 youth participate in parish religious education programs, as well as 10,300 adults. Our Catholic schools are the patrimony of the whole Church and not just the parishes with schools.

As a follow up to the letter, here is a summary of its most important points:

WHY CATHOLIC SCHOOLS MATTER

- Every Catholic is called to pass on our faith (cf. Matthew 28:19) and to be a witness to the message of Christ. This means all of us have a responsibility to support Catholic education for our youth and for future generations. Catholic identity is intrinsic to our schools and the reason for their success, although children of other faiths are welcome.
- In light of this responsibility to “go and make disciples,” the faithful are invited to join in a comprehensive archdiocesan effort to assess how well we are providing Catholic education and to strengthen and sustain it for the future. The planning finds its roots in the archdiocesan-wide Catechetical Convocation (Fall 2006) and Convocation on Catholic Education (Fall 2007).
- The need to do this now is clear. We live in an increasingly materialistic and secular world. Our youth must be grounded in their knowledge of the authentic teaching of the Church so they can live full, happy and holy lives in Christ. We face economic realities as we seek to provide academically excellent and affordable Catholic schools to as many youth as possible. And, we recognize many parents themselves did not receive a sufficient understanding of the faith and are looking to the Church to help them pass on the faith to their children.

“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.”

“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.”

From *Catholic Education:
Looking to the future with
confidence*
by Archbishop Wuerl

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

The effort is moving forward on two tracks: through an ongoing assessment of religious education and through a planning effort for our Catholic schools focused on four areas: Catholic identity, academic excellence, affordability and accessibility.

The Parish Catechetical Visitation and Assessment Process, started last year, includes visits to parishes and schools by staff of the archdiocesan Office of Religious Education; a self-assessment; on-site review of information and recommendations; and sharing of best practices.

An outcome of this process is a planned review of our religious education guidelines and curricula. Religious education standards will be established to make it clear what a student should know at each grade level. In addition, there are plans to develop new materials to better prepare parish catechists for their important task.

Planning also is underway for Catholic schools, which are at a crossroads. Nationwide, Catholic schools face

new challenges caused by population shifts and rising costs. The archdiocese has long sought effective solutions such as creating a consortium (now called the Consortium of Catholic Academies) to bring new resources to urban schools; establishing a partnership between the District's Holy Redeemer School and the

University of Notre Dame; establishing Don Bosco Cristo Rey High School; and developing regional elementary schools in the suburbs, such as Archbishop Neale School.

Task forces have been established to gather information and to develop initial policy recommendations for

the four critical areas of Catholic identity, academic excellence, affordability and accessibility. These recommendations will undergo parish-based consultation and consultation, including surveys and focus groups, with archdiocesan boards such as the Board of Education, Pastoral Council, Priest Council and the College of Consultors.

4 PILLARS OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

- Catholic identity
- Academic excellence
- Accessibility
- Affordability

CATHOLIC SCHOOL PRIORITIES

- Catholic identity is intrinsic to our schools and the reason for their success, although children of other faiths are welcome.
- We must ensure we continue to deserve our reputation for academic excellence.
- Our schools should be accessible geographically, within available resources, to as many students as possible.
- Our schools must be affordable. Together, we must assist families sacrificing to give their children a Catholic education. Currently, funding comes from tuition, fundraisers, Forward in Faith and subsidies from the archdiocese and parishes.
- The archdiocese is actively seeking new ways to help parents. This year, outreach to donors and a new pilot tuition assistance program for schools with great financial need have more than doubled tuition assistance from \$800,000 to nearly \$2 million. Early results of the pilot partial-tuition program have been positive.
- Yet, we cannot fill the financial need on our own. Government partnerships are critical for families. Our schools benefit the entire community through tax savings (nearly \$385 million during 2007-08) and the academic strength and values instilled in our students. Families, who pay taxes, need and deserve government assistance so they can choose the best school for their children, including a Catholic school.
- The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program, a federal pilot program that provides tuition and some fees for low-income children to attend a non-public school, has been successful. Unfortunately, the program will expire at the end of 2008-09 unless Congress reauthorizes it, putting the students' futures at risk.
- Maryland families can have hope through a proposed business tax credit program called BOAST (Building Opportunities for All Students and Teachers) that the legislature has been considering. Businesses would get tax credits from donations that support scholarships for non-public schools, professional development for teachers and for public education initiatives.

Learn more about Catholic education and read Archbishop Wuerl's pastoral letter online at www.adw.org