

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Professional Development Day; Ministry of Catholic Education, Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston

*Professional Development Day
Ministry of Catholic Education
Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston
Oct. 5, 2018*

I am delighted to join you for at least a portion of your professional day. And let me comment, right out of the box, how impressive the program is. As I reviewed the array of speakers and breakout sessions, I was sure that I had encountered a best practice. So I'll be bringing something home in my briefcase for the Archdiocese of Baltimore to emulate.

And I am very happy for the opportunity to express my gratitude to all of you who carry forward the ministry of Catholic education in this Diocese. Day in and day out you devote your time, energy, talent, and skill in helping to form new generations to be men and women of faith who will also be equipped to carry forward the mission of the Church and to create a society that is just, generous, and compassionate.

The Value of Catholic Education

Even though I am only a short-termmer, you interim pastor, as it were, it is important for you to know that I am a product of Catholic education, maybe not you're best product, but a product nonetheless! And throughout my 41 years as a priest and 23 years as a bishop, I have been a strong advocate for and support of our Catholic schools. In the three dioceses where I have served, I learned about the value of Catholic education, not in merely in the abstract but by visiting classrooms, working with superintendents, principals, presidents, and a coming to know many Catholic educators. I have seen firsthand how our Catholic schools lift children out of

poverty, how they help foster priestly and religious vocations in the hearts of young people, how they help parents in their vocation to educate and form their children. I see you as role models both for our young people and for their parents. I see you as the heroes whom they look up to, in a society that is all too often short on heroes and long on villains.

And I enjoy visiting classrooms . . . some, I'll admit, more than others. When I walk in on a class where they're doing higher math, I am immediately reminded that God did not grant me the "math gene" and do my very best either to look appropriately amazed or to change the subject. If, on the other hand, the subject is religion or American history, then I'm along for the ride and I enjoy immensely. Mostly, though, I enjoy when I have a chance to visit with young people, to engage them, to listen to their comments, and to answer their questions.

When I engage with the students you educate so well, I realize that the world probably isn't going to Hades in handbasket after all, that God is blessing the Church and the world with extraordinary young people, if only we who are involved in pastoral ministry take up where you leave off. How wonderful if we were to develop much more intentionally what some have called "a continuum of ministry" for your young people as they journey from grade school to high school and from college and into young adulthood. It's as if various ministries each hold a piece of the puzzle but somehow we find it difficult to put the pieces together for the sake of the young people we hope will stay close to their families, to the Church, and to the communities of which they are a part.

As we know, the young people we educate face challenges that we could scarcely imagine when we were growing up. Perhaps it is presumptuous of me to say "we" because I am decidedly on the antediluvian side of things! Yet even if you are many years my junior, you recognize how drastically the culture has changed, and often not for the better. Think of what our young people see on-line, think of the opioid crisis, think of the disintegration of the family, the bullying on social media, and so many other things which my generation could not even have imagined. Yet, every day we see young people upon whom God has set his hopes, young people in whom God believes and thus in whom we should believe. Catholic education is not a panacea, it cannot turn things around for every child but I don't know of any

educational system in the country that can change lives as effectively as you can – and with all my heart I thank you!

Climate Change

But let us not ignore the proverbial elephant in the room. I'm sure that in your science classes you cover the phenomenon of climate change. A preponderance of scientists and indeed Pope Francis believe that our climate is changing to the detriment of many, especially the poor and urge us to take care of our common home. That is an important lesson in and of itself but it is also a metaphor for "the climate" in which you are accomplishing your ministry of Catholic education.

For, yes indeed, the "climate" both in the Church and in civil society has heated up. Earlier in my remarks I alluded to some of the cultural headwinds you face but I would be remiss not to mention the headwinds you face within the Church itself. In the wake of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report, the McCarrick scandal, and now the special challenges facing the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, there has developed in the Church a crisis of trust. People are outraged when faced with the enormity of abuse of innocent young people even if this occurred many decades ago. They are equally outraged at the failure of many bishops to respond to such abuse with candor and thoroughness. I'm sure you've faced these questions as you entered upon a new school year and that this crisis has made your already challenging mission more difficult. For this, I truly do apologize. You deserve better.

As you may have seen, the bishops plan to take some steps in our November meeting in Baltimore to address this crisis, most especially to hold ourselves accountable before Church and civil society, and to do our best to get to the bottom of difficult questions, especially those that pertain to Archbishop McCarrick. One bishops' meeting, of course, will not address all the issues that have been raised but we truly do hope to make a good start in addressing the crisis of trust that has come into full view.

You also deserve a good shepherd to guide you into a future full of hope. While I cannot predict exactly when that will happen, I hope and pray it will happen in the near future. In the meantime, I'm doing my best to get around, to listen, and to learn, so that I might understand better the true pastoral strengths and needs of the

diocese and get a genuine sense of the kind of shepherd who should lead this great diocese in the years that lie ahead. Let me also say that, as I come to know the diocese, I am impressed by the extensiveness of the services it offers throughout the State of West Virginia. With you I look for a shepherd who will build on the strengths of this diocese but also address its needs and accompany all of you in your ministries as we join together in proclaiming the Gospel of life and salvation!

I also want to thank you most sincerely for all that you have done and are doing to create a safe environment in our schools. Often, when we speak about all the Church has tried to do to create a climate distinctly inhospitable to predatory behavior, people are not sure whether or not they should believe this. But you know what is being done because you are the ones who do it – the background checks, the training, and the prompt reporting to civil authorities – all this and much more are things that are happening in your schools and for all of this I surely do thank you. Such efforts have created a much safer environment for our children & young people. Without you, none of this would have been possible.

Conclusion - Entrusting the Mission of to Mary and Joseph

Let me conclude these few remarks by entrusting your mission to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to St. Joseph, the Patron of this Diocese. They were the educators of the Lord Jesus in his humanity and it was to them that Jesus was obedient as before God and humanity he grew in age, grace, and wisdom. May Mary and Joseph intercede for you in the year ahead that you may also help the young people entrusted to your care to grow in age, grace, and wisdom to the glory of God and for the salvation of their souls!

And may God bless you and keep you always in his love!