Blue Ribbon Committee on Catholic Schools Issues Strategic Plan to Archbishop

The committee empanelled by Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien, Archbishop of Baltimore, in March of 2009 to develop a strategic plan for the long-term sustainability of Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, has completed its work and issued a report today with 56 recommendations to the Archbishop at a press conference at the Catholic Center in Baltimore.

The recommendations, which are aimed at strengthening and improving Catholic schools and the Catholic school system in the Archdiocese, focus on four key areas: Catholic identity, academic excellence, governance and stewardship. Throughout its 16-month planning process, the Committee acknowledged that comprehensive financial support for Catholic schools is needed to help grow student enrollment. In addition, needed capital improvements, expanded advancement efforts, including an Archdiocesan-wide capital campaign, were cited.

The Committee made the following additional key recommendations in its report:

- creation of an Archdiocesan Catholic School Board;
- new hybrid governance model for elementary schools;
- financial support of Catholic schools by all Catholic parishes; and
- expanded tuition assistance for students.

"Once this Strategic Plan is implemented, the declines in enrollment that have taken place in our Catholic school system in recent years will stop and we will begin to see the growth of Catholic school education for the first time in many, many years," Bramble said.

The full list of recommendations, with detailed descriptions, can be found in the full report, Blue Ribbon Committee on Catholic Schools; A Strategic Plan for Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, at www.archbalt.org/aplacetogrow.

The Archbishop formed the 17-member Blue Ribbon Committee—comprised of leaders from the fields of education, philanthropy and business—due to growing concerns about sharp declines in school enrollment and increased financial challenges faced by several schools in the Archdiocese.

"This Strategic Plan is a road map for the future of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore," Archbishop O'Brien said. "The plan offers leadership and promise; it anticipates the opportunities that have yet to come and moves our schools and the students we serve forward into the next era of Catholic education."

Annual enrollment declines doubled over the past two years—from 600 to 1,200 students—and Catholic schools owed the Archdiocese $11.7 million at the end of 2009 as they were unable to meet expenses due to the resulting shortfall.

The Archbishop announced the creation of an office to formulate an implementation plan for the recommendations with a goal of November 1, 2010. He also acknowledged that some recommendations may be implemented prior to the completion of that plan.

Serving on the Committee with Mr. Bramble, Director of Bank of America Corporation, are the following members: Dr. Andres Alonso, Chief Executive Officer of Baltimore City Public School System; Ms. Maureen Creel, teacher, St. John the Evangelist School in Severna Park; Mr. James C. Davis, Chairman, Allegis Group; Dr. Nancy Grasmick, State Superintendent of Schools, Maryland State Department of Education; Dr. Joseph Hairston, Superintendent, Baltimore County Public Schools; Msgr. Robert Hartnett, Pastor, Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Church; Mr. Owen Knott, Chief Operating Officer, Knott Mechanical; Rev. Michael T. Martin, OFM Conv., President, Archbishop Curley High School; Rev. Joseph Muth, Pastor, St. Matthew Catholic Church; Ms. Pamela Sanders, Principal, St. Ambrose School; Dr. Mary Pat Seurkamp, President, College of Notre Dame of Maryland; Mr. James Stojak, Independent Consultant, Citicorp (retired); Mr. Casper Taylor, Government Relations Consultant, Alexander & Cleaver; Sr. Helen Wiegmann, S.S.J., Former elementary school teacher; Mr. Thomas E. Wilcox, President and CEO, Baltimore Community Foundation; and Rabbi Lawrence Ziffer, Executive Vice President/Director, Center for Jewish Education.