

Catholic colleges, foundations urged to help K-12 schools

PALO ALTO, Calif. – Catholic colleges and universities must team up with foundations to help strengthen Catholic elementary schools and high schools, especially by identifying trends and helping schools respond to them, a leading foundation official said.

Francis J. Butler, president of Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities, spoke Sept. 28 in Palo Alto at a conference on “The Revitalization of American Catholic Education.”

“More than ever before, the church has the benefit of active and informed major donors deeply interested and involved in Catholic schools,” he said.

“But this new activism is also a formidable challenge for the schools,” Mr. Butler added. “For institutions unaccustomed to the culture of business, the language and practice of social investing, partnerships and quality control is a tall order. Add to this the intricacies of having to qualify for public funding through federal and state initiatives, and one can easily appreciate how much the schools must rely on outside assistance.”

Butler said much of the engagement by Catholic donors and foundations to date has focused on scholarships and increasing access to Catholic schools.

“I am convinced that millions of dollars in private and public assistance are left on the table each year and millions more are wasted because of inefficiencies and poor administrative policies,” he added.

That’s where Catholic higher education comes in, he said. “Universities and colleges can and must help Catholic schools do a better job of measuring their educational quality and overall management, staffing policies and funding,” Mr. Butler said.

Catholic higher education brings “research tools, the ability to measure and evaluate teaching methods and teacher training – the very elements so often missing in the

local Catholic school systems,” he added.

Colleges and universities also can help foundations and donors “to stay abreast of important trends in the field of education,” Mr. Butler said.

He cited as an example the fact that the Latino student population has grown by 4.5 million in the last 14 years but fewer than 5,000 of those students enrolled in Catholic schools. “Economics alone cannot explain why this is so – scholarly research could,” he said.

Mr. Butler also suggested that higher education could research other topics, including:

- “Ways to reduce operating costs by managing school properties differently.”
- Various approaches to building up enrollment at Catholic schools.
- The development of centralized purchasing and recruitment policies.

Catholic universities also could serve “as charter school operators to ensure religious identity is adequately maintained,” he said.

“To conclude, foundations and donors are more committed and knowledgeable than ever regarding the future of Catholic schools, and they are more proactive,” Butler said. “They consider grant-making a form of social investing and, accordingly, they insist on measurable results, a spirit of innovation and continuing improvement.

“The university community can make an enormous difference in these efforts as they join forces with the philanthropic community and others committed to promoting a culture of management excellence in the church as a whole, and thus help ensure a better future for Catholic primary and secondary schools in the United States,” he added.

The Sept. 27-28 conference, called a Carnegie Conversation on Catholic Education, was co-sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Institute for Educational Initiatives at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana.

Participants in the meeting included foundation leaders, leading figures in Catholic

elementary and secondary education and various academic experts in education.

Three other national conferences were to follow on themes from the Palo Alto meeting. A conference on teacher formation was scheduled for Loyola University in Chicago; one on enhancing scholarship and academic quality is to be hosted by Boston College; and the third, on stewardship and acquiring resources, was set for Notre Dame.