

Nobody Says It Better

The Catholic Review

Thanks to Archbishop Timothy Dolan, whose column in the September 10 issue of Catholic New York perfectly captures the fervor of so many of us in promoting our Catholic schools.

Catholic Schools Are Worth the Effort

Welcome back to school, students and teachers!

God's blessings upon a new academic year!

(And parents, stop grinning!)

The last words of the Divine Teacher, Jesus, on earth were the imperative to His disciples—us!—to “Go, teach all nations.”

Such is certainly the grand legacy of these acres of His vineyard called the Archdiocese of New York. This very week, about 154,000 of our young people, in 296 Catholic universities, colleges, high schools and grade schools, will be back under the care of Jesus and His Church flourishing in an atmosphere that gently yet effectively forms soul, mind, heart, character and body, with faith, virtue and discipline as hallmarks.

(In my next column I'll write about our excellent programs of religious education apart from our prized Catholic schools.)

One thing is so very clear: our Catholic people love and defend their schools. Our parents will scrape and sacrifice to support them, and our parishes and sponsoring religious orders will fight to save them. Everywhere I travel throughout this great archdiocese, police officers, firefighters, physicians and health care workers, cab drivers, waiters, bartenders, politicians, attorneys, business leaders, artists, actors—you name it—will greet me and tell me with immense pride what Catholic school they attended, and let me know how much we appreciate them.

People not even Catholic praise them to the skies. Not long ago a gentleman who described himself as “an agnostic at best” gave us a handsome check for our schools. He could see I was grateful, yet perplexed. “I don’t support your schools just because they teach the faith; I support them because they’re the best around, especially for kids who don’t have much of a chance.”

No surprise there. Since the beginning, our schools have had a double mission: for one, to pass on the faith, sure enough; but, two, also to revive the broader community by offering a first-rate, holistic education that calls forth what is most noble, freeing and uplifting in the hearts of our kids.

Now, let’s be honest here: to support this massive enterprise of Catholic schools is chokingly expensive, demanding of intense time and effort. Anyone enthusiastic about our schools—pastors, parents, principals, presidents, people, boards, teachers, volunteers, grandparents, alumni, benefactors...and, yes, bishops—has to have a candy dish full of Maalox and Tylenol extra-strength on the desk!

We have problems galore:

- they cost a bundle, and threaten to consume parish budgets and parents’ income;
- they only educate about 25 percent of our kids;
- they can hardly keep up with the “bells and whistles” of our government and other private schools;
- they struggle to pay our devoted teachers a living wage, at least approximate to the salaries given in government schools;
- they strain to recruit and retain quality principals and teachers;
- they battle the changes in demographics that lead to lower enrollments.

I could go on, but you get the point: our Catholic schools present us an array of towering problems.

But, they are worth it:

Regarding formation in faith, scholars report studies proving that those who graduate from Catholic schools pray better and more often, are more frequent in Sunday Mass attendance, have happier marriages,

volunteer more for Church, community and charitable initiatives, are more attuned to issues of social justice and pro-life, and respond more often to Christ's invitation to become a priest, sister, or brother. Not bad at all...

Regarding education, other studies demonstrate that children entering Catholic elementary school have a much higher rate of graduation from high school and college, better test scores in the essentials, are more eager to go to school each day and consider themselves in a safer environment.

They're worth every dollar, every heartburn, headache, sweat and tear!

Thank you, priests, sisters, brothers, devoted principals, teachers, volunteers, boards, and benefactors!

Thank you, parents, grandparents, parishes, sponsoring religious orders and generous benefactors!

Some tell me the days of Catholic schools are over, they're way too expensive and troublesome, our people can't afford them, and it's time to admit reality and let go of them.

Some have lost their nerve and are just plain tired of the struggle and strain.

Sorry, but this archbishop, like his brave predecessors, is not going to give up.

Yes, we must get strategic in more intense collaboration, sharing of resources, and consolidations, and cooperation;

Yes, we must expand the breathtaking initiative of the wider community supporting our inner-city schools, and even extend such endeavors to include our suburban and rural schools;

Yes, we must not reduce our children not in Catholic schools, but in our

religious ed programs, to second-class citizens;

Yes, we must call forth our alumni to “put their money where their mouth is” and support our schools;

Yes, we must continue to convince our business and civic leaders that an investment in a Catholic school is an eminently wise one for the future of our community.

But, no, we will not give up on them.

We owe it to our youth, our families, our parishes, our Church, our country.

We owe it to those going “back to school” right now!

We owe it to Jesus and His final command: “Go, teach all nations.”