

Catholic schools at a turning point: A time for decision



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by William D. Booth

Catholic Schools at a Turning Point: A Time for Decision

The history of Catholic schools in the United States is unique in the history of the church. Over more than a century and a half, the American Catholic community has constructed the largest system of Catholic schools in the world. Historically, Catholic schools have served to educate and to help assimilate large numbers of immigrants into a new nation. These schools have been instrumental in helping to form a basis for an American Catholic community and culture. In our own Archdiocese of Baltimore, the first in the nation, Catholic schools have been an integral and cherished part of the church's presence and ministry.

We cannot recall the rich history of our schools without a deep sense of gratitude to the many women and men religious and laity who have

staffed these schools over the decades. Their dedication and religious witness is a vital part of the spiritual heritage of American Catholic education. Neither can we remember this history without a profound sense of admiration for the many sacrifices of parents and clergy which allowed the building and maintenance of our schools, and which give eloquent testimony to the importance of Catholic schools to the American church. Indeed, the history of Catholic schools gives us much to be proud of, and the continuance of these schools provides us with an invaluable instrument for helping to shape the future of American Catholicism.

Today, the history of Catholic schools in the United States is at a turning point. These schools, which historically have served us well, have been

experiencing increasing financial difficulty, which has closed some of our schools and which threatens the continuance of others. Moreover, the evolution of American Catholic schools has brought them to a point where they are seeking a renewed identity and purpose in fulfilling their task as part of the educational mission of the church.

Consequently, this is a time when we, as American Catholics, must reclarify in our own minds the values which have inspired our creation of the world's largest system of Catholic schools. Furthermore, it is a time when we must examine the purposes and goals which ought to shape the identity and functions of our schools, as they seek to respond to the changing needs and circumstances of the American Catholic community. Finally, it is a time which challenges us to critically evaluate the manner in which we structure and finance our schools, so as to secure for the future, the integrity of our efforts and the fulfillment of our goals.

I have recently received the final recommendations of the Archdiocesan Task Force on School Financing, and the responses to these recommendations from the Priests' Council and the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council. I am deeply grateful to the members of the Task Force for their difficult and creative work, and to all those who have participated in the deliberations on these issues.

The Task Force sought to articulate principles of Catholic education, and to suggest manageable and supportable methods for financing our schools. The responses to their recommendations reflected general agreement on many of the principles behind Catholic education, but there also emerged a lack of consensus on the means of financing the future of Catholic schools. The work of this Task Force and the discussions which surrounded its recommendations served to make clear both the importance of Catholic schools, and the complex nature of the problems we must face to shape and finance a school system which can serve the future educational needs of the Catholic community.

I believe we now stand at a significant juncture in our history. Our experience convinces me that, if the magnificent contribution of our Catholic schools to the evangelical and educational mission of the church is to continue to help shape our future, we need a clear and realistic vision of what Catholic schools can and should be as we approach the year 2000. It is for this reason that I write this pastoral statement to set forth the elements of such a vision and to define the directions which I believe we must follow in our planning for the future of Catholic schools. Our shared vision and planning must include the following elements:

1. an appreciation of the historical role which Catholic schools have played for the American Catholic community;
2. a re-affirmation of the continuing value and need of Catholic schools as part of the total educational and formational mission of the church;
3. an openness to change in our ways of thinking and institutional operation that may be necessary for the creation of a system of Catholic schools that is best suited to the needs and conditions of the 21st century.



I. The historical role of Catholic Schools

A legacy of values

Throughout our history, American Catholic schools have never constituted a uniform "system" in the strict sense, yet there has been a definite pattern of Catholic education, which reflected certain presuppositions about the goals of education and the nature of the person being educated. The philosophy which has guided the establishment of our Catholic schools has reflected the church's belief in:

- the spiritual nature of the person
- the inherent dignity of every person
- the fact that the nature and destiny of the human race is most fully presented in the redemptive plan of God as revealed in Jesus Christ
- the possibility of each person attaining an integrated personality through the development of one's intellectual, spiritual, physical, individual and social powers.

Throughout the various changes in curriculum and programs, the underlying assumptions governing the goals and purposes of Catholic schools have been that:

- The school is to be a vehicle for fostering the pursuit of truth.
- The purpose of education is to bring the person to understand and live the basic relationships with God, neighbor, and the world, that are revealed in the Gospel.
- It is possible to achieve social integration based on a recognition of the essential unity of all people and an acceptance of our mutual responsibilities toward the Kingdom of God.
- The purpose of Catholic schools is to complement and strengthen the religious education and formation provided by the family, and which is primarily the responsibility of parents.

These traditional presuppositions reflect the belief and doctrine of the church. They have allowed Catholic schools, at their best, to be a witness to the wider society which has not always accepted the same beliefs about the nature and destiny of the human person. These fundamental principles and assumptions constitute the spiritual heritage and guiding vision of Catholic education, and must be re-affirmed as the principles which distinguish and justify the church's role in the establishment and maintenance of schools.

Throughout their history Catholic schools in the United States have always been an object of controversy. They have been the perennial targets of anti-Catholic and nativist prejudices which are deeply rooted in the American psyche. Catholic schools have also been the periodic object of controversy within the church. Yet, while being the object of some of the most vehement, and even violent controversies in the history of American Catholicism, Catholic schools have consistently enjoyed very strong support among the

American hierarchy and the majority of the Catholic community.

In large part, this support reflected the fact that Catholic schools were seen as serving the vital and changing needs which historical circumstances thrust upon the American church. The American Catholic community has consistently given witness to its conviction that their schools were an important vehicle, both for individual formation and for sustaining and developing the faith and culture of the Catholic community.

Historically, there have been three major needs which Catholic schools have been seen as serving in the United States: 1. the defense and preservation of the faith in a hostile environment; 2. the assimilation of large numbers of immigrants both into the American Catholic community and the wider society; and 3. the development of Catholic leadership, both lay and clerical.

Today, the second of these goals has, for the most part, been accomplished, as the American Catholic community is no longer primarily an immigrant church. Yet, the other historical goals of American Catholic schools retain an importance for our own day. Catholic schools remain an important tool for Christian formation in a society and culture whose values are often alien to the Christian vision of the human person. They also constitute an invaluable vehicle for the training of a core of active Catholic leadership.

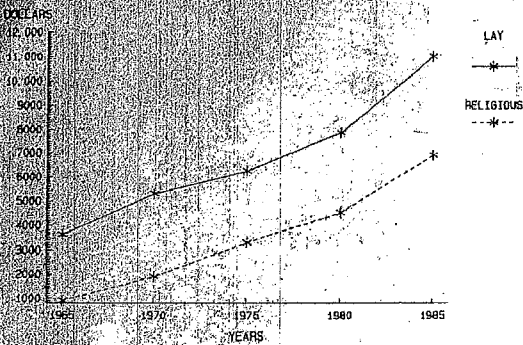
Since the 1960's the disputes which have been a part of the history of Catholic schools have arisen with renewed vigor, as these schools face a new era of crisis. This crisis has been brought on both by philosophical challenges to the purposes and validity of Catholic schools, and by the increasingly severe economic difficulty of maintaining them. Yet the evidence provided by all the studies done in the past two decades reveals that, as in the past, Catholic schools have excellent educational and formational value, and do enjoy the support of the majority of the Catholic community. (Examples of such studies can be found in: *Catholic Schools in a Declining Church*, Andrew Greeley, 1976, and *1983-84 National Assessment of Educational Progress*, NCEA, 1985.)

Our recent deliberations in the Archdiocese of Baltimore revealed a high level of support for our Catholic schools. Thus, in attempting to inaugurate plans to secure the future of our Catholic schools, I must affirm the strong conviction of our people that the Catholic schools, which have played such an important role in our past, continue to be of great and practical importance to the present and continuing needs of the American Catholic community and the teaching mission of the church.



II. The continued Catholic Schools: F

ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE
CATHOLIC SCHOOL SALARIES - RELIGIOUS/LAY RATIO
1965 - 1985

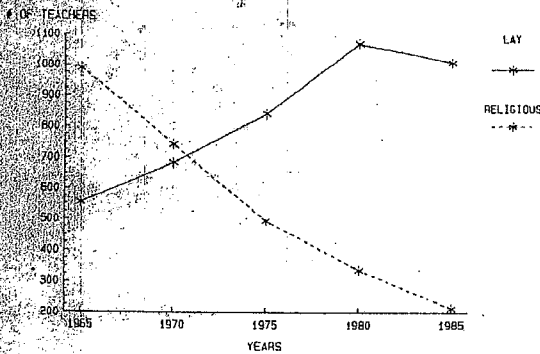


Graphs by Joann Szulinski

Source: Division of Research and Planning

Teachers' salaries have inched up from \$3,600 for lay teachers in 1965 to about \$11,000 in 1985 — but Religious' wages have crept up at a much lower level. Contributing to rising costs has been the number of lay teachers which are better paid has skyrocketed while fewer and fewer Religious are teaching.

ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE
CATHOLIC SCHOOL STAFFING - RELIGIOUS/LAY RATIO
1965 - 1985



In its "Declaration on Christian Education" (*Gravissimum Educationes*) the Second Vatican Council clearly affirmed the goals of Christian education:

Such an education . . . is especially directed towards ensuring that those who have been baptized, as they are gradually introduced to a knowledge of the mystery of salvation, become clearly more appreciative of the gift of faith which they have received. They should learn to adore God the Father in spirit and truth (Jn. 4:23), especially through the liturgy. They should be trained to live their own lives in the new self, justified and sanctified through the truth (Eph. 4:22-24). Thus they should come to true personhood, which is proportioned to the completed growth of Christ (Eph. 4:13), and make their contribution to the growth of the Mystical Body. Moreover, conscious of their vocation, they should learn to give witness to the hope that is within them (1 Peter 3:15) and to promote the Christian concept of the world whereby the natural values, assimilated into the full understanding of man, redeemed by Christ, may contribute to the good of Society as a whole.

An important feature of this declaration, which reflects the spirit of Vatican II, is its insistence on the integration of Christian education with the whole pattern of human life. In contrast to the spirit of previous times, the goal of Christian education is not to isolate Christians from the world so as to protect them from corruption. Rather, Christian education is, in a real sense, in and for the world. Its goal is to prepare Christians to work out their salvation in the concrete circumstances of society and culture in which God has placed them and to contribute to the whole human community of which they are an inseparable and integral part.

In the church's execution of this educational mission, the Vatican Council also affirmed that:

Among the various organs of education, the school is of outstanding importance . . . since the Catholic school can be of such service in developing the mission of the People of God and in promoting dialogue between the church and the community at large to the advantage of both, it is still of vital importance even in our times. (Par. 5 & 6).

In the light of the teachings of Vatican II and our own historical experience, there are a number of principles which must govern our approach to shaping the future operation and structure of our Catholic schools, and which I have decided must serve as norms for archdiocesan policy and planning.

1. We must continue our commitment to maintain quality Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

2. Our approach to Catholic schools must be in the context of total Christian formation.

Catholic schools are a vital part of the church's educational mission, but that mission is not to be solely identified with schools. Our concern for

Christian education must also include the importance of maintaining quality educational programs for adults and for the youth who are not in Catholic schools.

Consequently, Catholic schools must be operated in a manner that is conscious and accepting of their role within the total educational mission of parishes for children and youth. Catholic schools are important agents in serving the educational mission of the parishes, and they deserve and need support from all the parishes of our archdiocese. Schools should recognize, support and develop effective communication with the other ministries which also serve the educational mission of the church, especially parish religious education programs for children, youth and adults.

3. Catholic schools are a complement to and not a substitute for the religious education and formation of children that must take place in the family.

The studies which have been done on the effectiveness of Catholic school education have all demonstrated that Catholic schools have been most effective in influencing those children who belong to families with a strong religious environment. Therefore, our school policies should insist that Catholic parents who wish their children to attend Catholic schools be accepting of their own responsibilities for the spiritual formation of their children, and be willing to be active participants in supporting the educational and formational activities of the school.

4. Our schools must maintain their identity and purpose as Catholic schools.

They must be consciously committed and administered to serve that special function which Vatican II stipulated as the reason for Catholic schools: ". . . to develop in the school community an atmosphere animated by a spirit of liberty and charity based on the Gospel . . . so that the knowledge which the pupils acquire of the world, of life, and of people is illuminated by faith." (Declaration on Christian Education, Par. 8).

In particular, the need to preserve the Catholicity of our schools requires that we insure that the administration and the majority of the faculty are active Catholics committed to the goals and governing values of Catholic education. Furthermore, just as we must insist upon excellence in teaching qualifications for instruction in areas of secular knowledge, so too we must insist upon authentic Catholic faith, thorough preparation, professional qualifications and competence among those who teach religion and related subjects.

5. One of the primary goals of Catholic schools should be the formation of a core of active Catholic leadership.

Historically, the goal or hope of many of those responsible for the development of Catholic schools in the United States was to provide a school system which would educate the mass of Catholic children. This was perhaps best seen in the goal of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore to have "every Catholic child in a Catholic school." Yet, this goal was never achieved, and

ed importance of Principles for action

most American Catholic children received their religious formation without the benefit of attending a Catholic school. The years since the Third Plenary Council clearly revealed the economic impossibility of ever achieving the Council's goal.

We cannot envision that in the future Catholic schools will be able to accommodate the mass of Catholic children any more than our present schools do. It is, therefore, necessary to be clear on the goals we have in mind for the student population we will be able to serve in our schools:

a. First, the archdiocese must commit itself to insure that those who attend Catholic schools are not limited to the middle or upper class who can afford the tuition. While we will not be able to accommodate everyone of every background, we must be conscious of providing for as many as we can.

b. Recognizing that the student population of our schools will only be a part of our Catholic youth, we must seek to make these schools attractive to the most talented and involved of our youth. In this, our aim would not be to create simply an academic elite, but to use our schools as a vehicle for the formation of a core of committed Catholic lay leadership. These schools should also seek to be a source of vocations to religious life and the priesthood.

c. Consequently, the admission standards and policies of these schools should reflect the desire to attract not only talented students but also students from families who have demonstrated a strong faith commitment and active service to the mission of the church. Catholic applicants would also be given preference over non-Catholics. Non-Catholic students would, of course, continue to be admitted and upon acceptance, would be expected to participate fully in the life of the school.

d. We must also make every effort to ensure that the quality of general education offered in our schools is of the highest possible calibre. As part of this effort we should continue the policy of having all of our schools work toward Middle States accreditation.

6. Catholic schools can also serve an important role in the evangelizing mission of the church in areas where the majority of potential students are non-Catholic.

Besides stressing the importance of Catholic schools in the spiritual formation of Catholics, the Second Vatican Council also recognized the importance of Catholic schools in areas where the majority of students would be non-Catholic.

Catholic schools may assume different forms in keeping with local circumstances.

The church attaches particular importance to those schools which include non-Catholics among their students. This Sacred Synod earnestly entreats pastors of the church and all the faithful to spare no sacrifice in helping Catholic schools to achieve their purpose in an increasingly adequate way, and to show special concern for the needs of those who are poor in the goods of this world or who are deprived of the assistance and affection of a family or

who are strangers to the Faith. (Declaration on Christian Education, par. 5 & 9).

Because Catholic schools largely emerged in the United States to educate the children of Catholic immigrants, we have an historically conditioned attitude of seeing them as justified solely by a predominantly Catholic student body. Yet, in fact, the church universal has a long history of maintaining schools in predominantly non-Catholic areas, and today Catholic education is very strong in parts of Asia and Africa where the majority of students are not Catholic.

Such schools must maintain their Catholic identity by the faith commitments of faculty and administrators, and by the school's philosophical commitment to the values of Catholic education and the importance of religious instruction. By offering a quality education enlivened with the faith of the church, such schools can be important vehicles for evangelization and witnessing to the church's vision of society. Moreover, these schools can be an important part of the church's ministry to those most victimized by poverty and societal exclusion. Therefore, we must, to the extent that our resources allow, seek to maintain the presence of Catholic schools in those areas of the archdiocese where it is judged that they may produce an opportunity for evangelization and social witness, even though the majority of potential students are non-Catholic. These students participate in the religion program of the school and educational opportunities are offered to parents to enable them to learn more about the mission and goals of the Catholic Church.

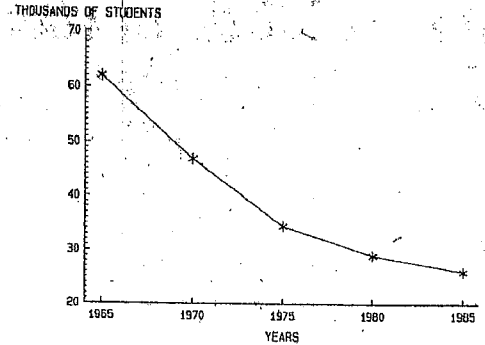
7. The provision for Catholic schools throughout the archdiocese is the responsibility of the entire local church.

Since the 1960's, our archdiocese, along with the rest of the church nationwide, has had to face the necessity of closing or consolidating some of our schools. This experience has been emotionally wrenching for clergy, religious and laity alike. Not the least of the reasons for the trauma of this experience has been the parochial identity of our schools.

Because Catholic schools in the United States have evolved mostly under parish sponsorship, the identity of parish and school have become closely intertwined. Consequently, the closing or consolidation of a parish school, has naturally almost always caused a major disruption of emotional ties and the insecurity that comes from seeing familiar and traditional patterns of parochial life and structures seriously changed.

These experiences have frequently occasioned the expression of legitimate fears about the possible loss of Catholic education, and the effect of the loss of a school on parish membership and loyalty. Yet, unfortunately, these events have sometimes also served to reveal very narrow parochial attitudes towards the church's mission of education, and a lack of realism in dealing with the factors determining the future economic viability of Catholic schools. Similarly, parishes which do not have schools, or which have closed their schools, sometimes exhibit the attitude that they do not share directly in the responsibility for

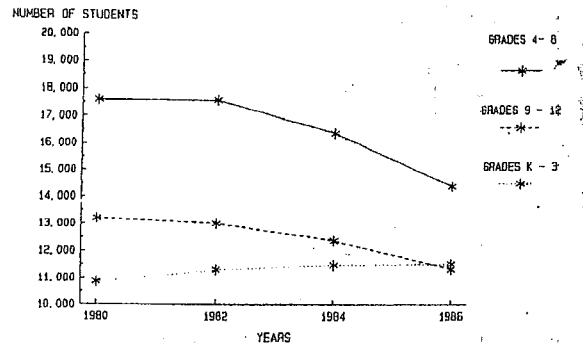
ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS ENROLLMENT CHANGES — K - 8 1965 - 1985



Graphs by Joann Szulinski

Source: Division of Research and Planning from data provided by the schools. In 1965, Catholic schools were packed with children, 61,917 of them. But as the number of children fell off in the general population, so did enrollment in Catholic schools. It was down to 25,915 last year. But there is hope, a modest hope. The number of older children is still declining but in the primary grades, classrooms are full — and the numbers are still on the rise.

ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE CATHOLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT 1980 - 1986



the maintenance of Catholic schools in the archdiocese.

If we are to affirm seriously the continuing validity and importance of the mission of Catholic schools, we must also affirm the necessity of all of the people and parishes of the archdiocese taking personal ownership of the responsibility to provide for these schools. Furthermore, if Catholic schools are to continue to be a strong and viable means of Christian formation and quality education, we can not simply confine ourselves to an attempt to preserve parish schools as they are presently structured.

Rather, we must begin to think and plan in terms of constructing an interparochial school structure to serve the future of the archdiocese. This obviously entails the challenge of developing a new identity for our Catholic schools, viewing them as joint regional interparochial enterprises, and not simply as the programs of one or several parishes.

III. Directions for shaping the future

'The evolution of these structures will better enable us to secure a future of quality education.'

Based upon these principles, I wish to set forth certain policy directions which must shape our future planning for the development of our Catholic schools. The specific details for the implementation of these policy directions must be the subject of our next phase of consultation and study. Yet, on the basis of our most recent deliberations, and upon reflection on our past experience, I have decided that any future planning must move us in these directions.

To move in these directions will necessarily mean the eventual creation of different structures for the operation and financing of our schools. I believe, however, that the evolution of these structures will better enable us to secure a future of quality for Catholic education in the archdiocese.

1. *It is necessary to move toward the establishment of interparochial schools serving the different regions of our archdiocese.*

This reorganization is necessary for the consolidation of the financial resources and educational talent needed to insure the economic viability and educational quality of our schools. It no longer seems reasonable to assume that the needed level of financial and educational resources can continue to be achieved on the strictly parochial level. Also the question of salaries for both lay and religious teachers, as well as other school personnel, has justifiably been more openly recognized in recent years as a matter of justice within the church. While we cannot project parity with public school salaries, we cannot hope to provide reasonable efforts at appropriate salaries without such interparochial consolidation.

Thus, the ultimate goal and benefit of this

interparochial consolidation will be the pooling of the resources of the parishes of the various regions of the archdiocese to support Catholic school education in their region. In areas where there are not enough resources to support needed Catholic schools it will be the responsibility of the entire archdiocese to assist.

I am committed to seeking ways in which archdiocesan resources can be developed to offer needed assistance to parishes in supporting an interparochial school structure. It is clear, however, that current archdiocesan resources cannot subsidize the present system of parochial schools, not do they offer the hope of direct subsidy by central Archdiocesan funds as a means of supporting Catholic schools in the future.

The interparochial school structure, which I envision, is an ultimate goal which will have to be implemented gradually in accordance with the needs and resources of each region. Demographic and other factors shaping the needs and character of each region will determine the timing and manner of creating interparochial schools for each region. Thus, there will be an interim period in which we will have both parochial and interparochial schools. Where parochial schools are thriving, they will not be eliminated or forced to merge. Furthermore, since the process of interparochial consolidation will be gradual, it will be possible to maintain current enrollments.

The development of this interparochial school structure will be done in consultation with the Regional Councils. Working with the Vicar Bishops, and the Archdiocesan Division of Schools, the Councils will be asked to coordinate substantive consultation on the parish level to help determine where new schools or mergers are needed in the archdiocese. The Councils will also be involved in consultation on the design and implementation of pilot projects to start our movement toward an interparochial school structure.

2. *It will be necessary to establish corporate interparochial school boards to be responsible for the maintenance and running of these interparochial schools.*

The exact details of the operational structure of the interparochial schools is yet to be worked out, and will be a focus of future consultation. Yet it is important to be clear here on the nature of the interparochial schools which are envisioned in this statement.

These schools will be incorporated by all the parish corporations of the regions which they serve. Thus, they will differ from the traditional concept of a regional school in that they will be directly owned and operated by all the parishes of a given region through the vehicle of a corporate school board created by these parish corporations. Also they will differ from what we have experienced with cluster schools in that these interparochial schools will be incorporated by all the parish corporations of a particular region and not only by parishes which currently have parochial schools. In this way the interparochial schools which will eventually exist in the various regions of the

archdiocese will be genuine joint interparochial enterprises of the parishes of those regions.

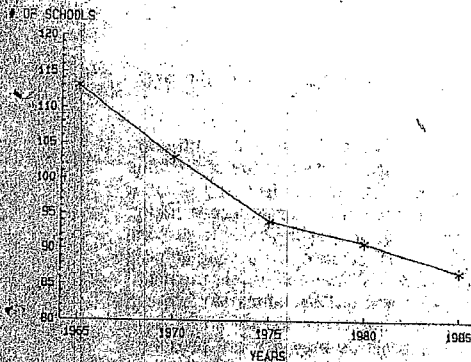
The corporate interparochial school boards created to direct and maintain these interparochial schools will be directly responsible to the archbishop through the superintendent of schools as his delegate. The membership of these school boards will consist of the pastors and other representatives of the parishes of the region which incorporate the school. It will be their responsibility to see to their parish's acceptance of ownership and responsibility for the school, and also to foster awareness that the school exists to support and develop the mission of the parish.

3. *Tuition for our schools must be set at cost, with a commitment to tuition assistance for those families unable to pay the full cost.*

Besides being a financial necessity, it seems only a matter of justice that those families who can pay the full cost tuition should do so. For those families who cannot afford this, we must commit ourselves to establishing a mechanism for parishes to offer them tuition assistance, and for the entire archdiocese to help poorer parishes in doing this. Our adoption of a plan for tuition assistance must also be done in close consultation with the parishes and regional councils to develop a methodology that is both practical and equitable, and which takes account of the economic needs and resources of each region of the archdiocese. Our implementation of such a plan for tuition assistance will also have to be gradual and coordinated with our implementation of an interparochial school structure.

Thus, these three goals of an interparochial school structure, corporate interparochial school boards, and a program for full cost tuition with the availability of tuition assistance, are elements vital to our planning for the future of our Catholic schools. They are essential to our practical ability to maintain a system of schools which can embody the principles of Catholic education, which I have set forth in this statement, and to ensure that the Church of Baltimore will be able to enjoy in the 21st century the service and witness which Catholic schools have provided throughout its history.

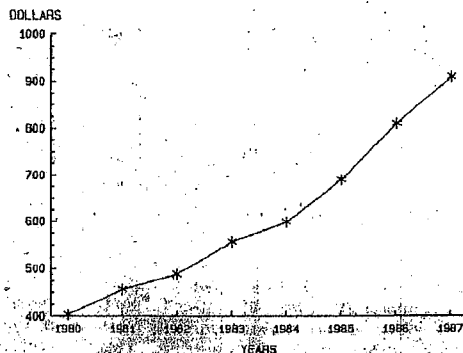
ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE
CHANGE IN NUMBER OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
1965 - 1985



Graph by Joann Szullinski
Source: Division of Research and Planning

Fewer Catholic schools are operating in the Archdiocese of Baltimore than there were 20 years ago. In 1965 there were 113. Last year there were 87. Clustering or regionalization of schools — in which two to five schools consolidated under one administration — is responsible for much of the decline.

ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE
1980 - 1987 CATHOLIC SCHOOL AVERAGE TUITION
(Parishioners)



Graph by Joann Szullinski
Source: Division of Research and Planning

Tuition had held steady for many years but beginning in 1980 it started a sharp ascent — which still hasn't stopped. Families paid an average of \$404 to send a child to school in 1980. Next year, they'll pay \$908.

'I envision this process as encompassing three steps over the next two years.'

I have directed the Vicar Bishops to initiate a process within their regions aimed at developing consensus on concrete proposals to achieve these goals. The objective of this process will be to inform and educate on the necessity of these goals and to plan the best practical way to achieve them. Specifically, I envision this process as encompassing three steps over the next two years.

First, this coming year will be devoted to an educational process to facilitate a greater mutual ownership of the need to cooperatively plan and provide for the future of Catholic schools.

Second, the following year the Vicar Bishops, together with the Division of Catholic Schools, will coordinate intensive consultation in each region to develop specific proposals to present to me for implementing the policy objectives I have set forth in this statement.

Third, by the end of this second year, and on the basis of the recommendations I have received, I hope to be able to make a final decision on a concrete methodology to begin a transition to an interparochial school structure with corporate interparochial school boards and a system of tuition assistance. At that time, I plan to establish a special Archdiocesan School Commission with

the authority to implement and monitor the execution of this plan.

The Vicar Bishops will address their Regional Councils within the next two months to present a format and guidelines for this process and to begin deliberations on the issues raised in this statement. If we approach the next two years of planning in a spirit of realism and cooperation, I believe that we can achieve a workable strategy for the future of our Catholic schools. In implementing the policy objectives I have set forth, we will be able actively and constructively to plan the future of our schools, and not merely be swept along unthinkingly by the winds of inevitable change.

In issuing this pastoral statement, I once again express my deep confidence in our mutual commitment to the value and importance of Catholic schools and my profound trust that through the guidance of the Holy Spirit we will be able to achieve our goals.

William D. Borders

Archbishop William D. Borders

