



EDUCATION

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The importance of Catholic education

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As Catholics, in following Jesus Christ we must also follow his command to "make disciples of all nations." Faith is never a private matter. It is always public. The Christian cannot remain silent about the Gospel. We must bear witness to the world, for the sake of the world. Neither the world nor the Church can draw nourishment from invisible or anonymous Christians.

In the ancient Church, to be a witness to the crucified Christ—our Lord and God—led to the use of the Greek word *martus* (martyr). While the manner of witness may have changed, the need for it has not. Catholic education is called to prepare "people of God" to be witnesses of the Holy Trinity in the world.

It is one of the main works of evangelization of the Church: to avoid "conformity to the spirit of the world" and to remain unique, a people set apart, a priestly community. In other words, Catholic education helps Catholics to draw the line between "being" and "doing."

Being Catholic is a gift of faith, hope and love; a life-time journey to experience and to live according to the identity that it signifies. Education in Catholic schools—which includes a parish community and faith practiced in the home—exists to implement a specific educational ideal: to foster a deepening of faith and knowledge to be used to give witness to Christ.

Pope John Paul II reinforced this mission in his encyclical letter "Fides et Ratio," writing: "Faith needs reason if it is not to wither into superstition, and reason needs faith if it is to be saved from endless disappointment ... it is only in truth that the human heart will find rest."

Following the teaching of Holy Mother Church, Catholic education, then, strengthens Catholic Christians to live and to do their proper roles in the life of the Church in the world. It provides a sound knowledge of the Catholic faith and a sure understanding of Catholic moral and social teaching in the lifelong journey of prayer and contemplation.

It leads Catholics to a personal relationship with Jesus the Lord our God, develops love of his Church and inspires hope of salvation for all.

In the midst of secular humanism, materialism and nihilism, Catholic education must embrace the difference that Pope John Paul II wrote about: to teach the truth of the Catholic faith, and the reasoning of Catholic moral and social teaching.

Being a Christ-centered institution, a Catholic school ought to teach children to have a deeper relationship with God and others in prayerful worship, and to appreciate human dignity and the supreme value of human life.

In 2000, I had the privilege to offer the Eucharist at the 50-year anniversary of my parent's wedding and my 10-year anniversary as a priest. After they renewed their vows, I blessed a new set of wedding rings for my mother and father, to replace their original wedding rings, which they had sold when I was a child in order to pay my tuition.

They made a tremendous sacrifice for my Catholic education. At that Mass, I presented them, with tears of joy and thanksgiving, a new set of wedding rings as a token of my appreciation. Their sacrifice gave me an opportunity to become a witness of Christ Jesus in my daily life.

I also want to tell you about my old parish and school pastor in Vietnam. Even though our church was poor, our pastor created a scholarship award to help needy students to remain in the school. I gained that blessing by studying hard to be worthy of that scholarship.

When I came to this country as a refugee in early 1982, the Archdiocese of Denver helped me to continue to study for the priesthood. The Church invested sacrifices of time, talent, treasure and prayer to help me become your servant as your priest. Without my parents' sacrifice of faith and love, without the support of my pastor and parish in Vietnam, and without the support of the people of the Archdiocese of Denver, I would not have become the priest that I am.

Indeed, the Catholic education I received and have been nourished by is continuing to transform me—and you—to be a witness of the Good News of Jesus in the world.

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