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# Our Schools--Our Hope: Reflections on Catholic Identity from the 2011 Catholic Higher Education Collaborative Conference

## **Authors**

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## Our Schools—Our Hope: Reflections on Catholic Identity from the 2011 Catholic Higher Education Collaborative Conference

*These proceedings include selected presentations on Catholic identity by six participants of the 2011 Catholic Higher Education Collaborative (CHEC) Conference on Catholic Identity at The Catholic University of America (CUA). The conference, jointly sponsored by CUA and St. John's University, is the fourth in a series of five national conferences sponsored by the collaborative. Each of these presentations looks at Catholic identity from a different perspective, including collaborative partnerships between K-12 schools and higher education; school policies that promote Catholic identity; curriculum; research into Catholic social teaching; and leadership. Contributors include Bishop David M. O'Connell, C.M., 14th president of CUA and current Bishop of Trenton, New Jersey; Reverend Donald J. Harrington, C.M., president of St. John's University; Sr. Barbara L. Monsecur, CFMM, principal of Lourdes Catholic High School, Arizona; Karen Vogtner, principal of St. John the Evangelist School, Georgia; Thomas W. Burnford, secretary for education, Archdiocese of Washington; and, Mary Jane Krebbs, associate dean for graduate studies in the School of Education, St. John's University.*

### Catholic Schools, Our Hope—Keynote Address

Bishop David M. O'Connell, C.M.  
Trenton, New Jersey

**T**he two critical elements in the life of any organization—whether that organization is related to social services, health care delivery, or education—are identity and mission. In other words, “who you are” and “what you do.” The health and integrity of any organization can be determined by demonstrating that its mission flows from its identity as St. Matthew’s Gospel indicates, “by their fruits you shall know them” (Matthew 7:16). In understanding identity at its deepest level, you not only get a sense of “who” but you also get a sense of motivation—the “why” of the organization. In seeing that identity—the “who” and “why” of an organization—you should see a “mission” whereby you begin also to see and grasp the “what” and “how” of an

organization, the manner of its acting appropriate to its identity.

When an organization acts in a way that is contrary to its identity—when its mission and motive and manner—are not mutual and clear, the organization begins to break down and unravel. When, however, identity and mission are in balance, there is a much stronger argument for an organization's success. There will be challenges and tensions within even the most successful organization but with good, effective leadership and careful, thoughtful ongoing evaluation by that leadership in collaboration with those who constitute that organization, challenges can be addressed and tensions minimized if not resolved altogether.

I have personally seen that happen in the field of Catholic education, especially Catholic higher education. This morning, I would like to focus our attention on the ideas of (1) identity; (2) mission; and (3) leadership.

We are here today because we believe deeply in Catholic education. In fact, we have made and, for most of us, we will continue to make Catholic education our life's work. In my own case, I have spent my entire ministry as a Catholic priest involved in some form of Catholic education: at the high school, seminary, and university levels. I have been privileged to serve as a teacher and an administrator and I use the word "privileged" carefully and deliberately. As a teacher, the job is defined as imparting knowledge and inspiring learning in the next generation, handing on truth and access to truth—what could be better or more important, more privileged than that? As an administrator, the job is defined as serving, guiding, and enabling those who teach and inspire, and who hand on or give access to truth. This is also a pretty great thing. Of course, we all know that there is much, much more involved in both aspects of Catholic education. In the end, however, it is the administrator of our Catholic schools who must lead the charge! To do so, the administrator must understand and believe in the Catholic identity of the school; must see its mission determined, supported, and motivated by its Catholic identity; must lead the school effectively—its faculty, staff, students, parents, alumni, and benefactors—toward the accomplishment of its mission; and, must motivate his/her collaborators in the process of institutional assessment or evaluation so that everyone will recognize that the school is what it says it is, does what it says it does, and is excellent at both. That is what we have come here today to think about and discuss.

### Perspective on Catholic Identity

I am bishop of a diocese of almost 850,000 Catholics. The diocese that I lead has one Catholic university, five Catholic campus ministries at non-Catholic institutions, 39 Catholic elementary schools, and 11 Catholic high schools. Prior to becoming a bishop, I served as president of The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, the national university of the Catholic Church, for almost 13 years, and I remain a consultant to the Vatican Congregation of Catholic education since 1995. Prior to that, I served at St. John's University in New York as the dean of St. John's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for 8 years. I mention these things not in any prideful way, although I certainly feel I have been blessed in my priestly ministry. I mention them so that you can see that I have a vested interest in Catholic identity.

Although the whole project of Catholic education today is very complex and made more so because of the particular challenges it faces with regard to enrollment, staffing, institutional support, and finances, *the idea of Catholic identity is very simple*. A Catholic school derives its institutional identity from Jesus Christ, from the Gospels, from the Church and its teachings, history and traditions, and from its central place within the Catholic Christian community at the parish and diocesan levels. That is who we are. And our Catholic identity has not changed since Jesus Christ stood on the Mount of the Ascension and commanded his followers, as we read in St. Matthew's Gospel: "Go, therefore, and teach all nations" (Matthew 28:19) and in St. Mark's Gospel: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). Our Catholic identity draws itself from those very commands and has remained the same since the very first Catholic schools were created. That is certainly true within the United States. Our Catholic schools are about Jesus Christ who promised us at his Ascension, "Behold I am with you all days" (Matthew 28:20). Our Catholic schools are one way that Jesus' promise continues to be fulfilled. That is our Catholic identity. That is our hope.

When he visited the United States, Pope Benedict XVI spoke to Catholic educational leaders in the United States at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. I sat next to him on the stage that day as he told us:

Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News. First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals

his transforming love and truth (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 4). This relationship elicits a desire to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Christ and his teaching. In this way those who meet him are drawn by the very power of the Gospel to lead a new life characterized by all that is beautiful, good, and true; a life of Christian witness nurtured and strengthened within the community of the Lord's disciples (Pope Benedict XVI, 2008).

Our Catholic schools are and must be “a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth.” That is our Catholic identity. That is our hope. Our Holy Father continued:

This task is never easy; it involves the entire Christian community and motivates each generation of Christian educators to ensure that the power of God's truth permeates every dimension of the institutions they serve. In this way, Christ's Good News is set to work.

Our Catholic schools are about “Christ's Good News.” That is our Catholic identity. That is our hope.

A little over 10 years before Pope Benedict XVI's visit to our country, the Vatican Congregation entrusted with oversight of Catholic Schools throughout the world issued a letter entitled “The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium.” It stated:

It is from its Catholic identity that the school derives its original characteristics and its “structure” as a genuine instrument of the Church, a place of real and specific pastoral ministry. The Catholic school participates in the evangelizing mission of the Church and is the privileged environment in which Christian education is carried out...The ecclesial nature of the Catholic school, therefore, is written in the very heart of its identity as a teaching institution. It is a true and proper ecclesial entity by reason of its educational activity, “in which faith, culture and life are brought into harmony.” Thus it must be strongly emphasized that this ecclesial dimension is not a mere adjunct, but is a proper and specific attribute, a distinctive characteristic which penetrates and informs every moment of its educational activity, a fundamental part of its very identity and the focus of its mission. The fostering of this dimension should be the aim of all those who make up the educating

community. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, para 11)

My friends—that is who you are.

A few years ago, in the midst of seemingly endless conversations about the meaning of Catholic identity, a student at Catholic University raised a very pointed question at a university forum: “*What does being Catholic give me?*” The answer to his question provides the rationale for what we do in Catholic schools and why we do it. But if I posed that same question to you today, what would you say to your students? As principals, what would you say? What difference does it make? Is it worth the effort? Is it worth your effort, your sacrifice, your commitment? *What does being Catholic give them and offer?*

### Perspective on Mission

When discussing education at any level, it is common to hear the distinction between public and Catholic education expressed in terms of “values,” that Catholic education’s unique contribution is the presentation of “values.” While I understand the point, I think that distinction is simply too easy and too vague. Any true educational experience is going to present “values.” Even when we specify “faith values” as the distinguishing characteristic, we are being too simple and too vague. Catholic education is not simply about values or even “faith values.”

The mission of Catholic education is about a vision and a personal investment in a vision that comes from the Gospel that create the values by which the Catholic school is known and identified and that make its values real and alive and applicable to life. The mission of Catholic education is also about passion. The vision, the passion that is uniquely ours in the Catholic educational enterprise, is “evangelization,” a vision, a passion that views every young person in our Catholic schools, every parent, every teacher, every administrator, every staff member, every alumnus, and every benefactor as a partner—or “potential” partner—in the Church’s mission to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We do this in season and out of season, in the classroom and on the playground, when school is in session and when it is not, in the school, in the home, in the neighborhood and community. *What* we do—our mission—is to educate. The enduring effects of what we do, however, depend upon *how* we do it and that’s what makes us different, unique, and worthy of support.

There is a popular quote attributed sometimes to William Butler Yeats and other times to Ralph Waldo Emerson that states “Education is not the filling

of a pail but the lighting of a fire.” In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus makes a similar claim when he proclaims his educational mission, “I have come to set the world on fire and how I wish it were blazing already” (Luke 12:49). Jesus set the world on fire by proclaiming the Good News for all people. That is what evangelization is and does. That is what Catholic education is and does: It brings the Good News into every human situation (Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975, p. 10). There is no true evangelization, no true Catholic education if the name of Jesus, his teaching, his life, his promises, his kingdom, his mysteries—the Good News remain unknown and unannounced (Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975, p. 22) and un-lived! Catholic schools are places, as the saying goes, “where faith and knowledge meet” but unless that meeting inspires, unless that meeting engages, unless that meeting lights a fire, unless that meeting changes lives, our schools are simply that, just “schools.”

To inspire, to engage, to light a fire, to change lives—these are our mission and the results of a Gospel vision and passion that occur within a committed partnership, a convinced and courageous partnership that educates in a way that is unambiguously and, therefore, distinctively Catholic. Because of that identity, we have in the Catholic school an unambiguous and distinct mission to evangelize. That is where the vision and the passion come in. Evangelization, Catholic education, is a vision and passion for excellence in living our Catholic faith and life. And here is precisely where we come in as Catholic principals.

### Perspective on Leadership

So much has been written about leadership that entire sections of libraries and bookstores could be dedicated to the topic! In today’s academic environment, academic leaders must also be entrepreneurs. One definition of entrepreneurship that I have seen states that entrepreneurship, “is a process through which individuals identify opportunities, allocate resources, and create value. This creation of value is often through the identification of unmet needs or through the identification of opportunities for change” (Watson, 2011). Clearly, that is what principals do in our Catholic schools. But they could not do that if they were not, at first, “leaders.”

I read somewhere, and I forget where, that a leader needs to be a messenger, a manager, and a missionary. The “message” we have already addressed. What needs to be “managed” you know better than I in your concrete situations. The principal as missionary requires that you act as messenger and manager with



missionary zeal. Here is some humble advice that is not new or original but, nevertheless, compelling:

- Strive for excellence and encourage your colleagues to do the same.
- Set achievable goals for yourself and your colleagues and manage expectations.
- Be fair and consistent, especially when you are challenging your colleagues.
- Be civil.
- Never take revenge.
- Trust and empower your colleagues, recognizing and rewarding success whenever possible.
- Speak the truth.
- Think before you speak, pray before you act, and be decisive, following through on commitments and promises.
- Work hard and encourage your colleagues to do the same.
- Always try to do the right thing.
- Never forget who is in front of you, the students and colleagues whom you serve and why.
- Realize that all these things derive from an awareness of your Catholic identity in the Catholic schools and never apologize for that identity and what it means and requires of you.
- Read and reflect often on your mission statement.
- Remember that it is all about Jesus Christ and the mission he has entrusted to you which makes you, the principal, a missionary for him and his witness.
- Keep in mind the great words of Pope Paul VI: “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses (Paul IV, “Address to the Members of the *Consilium de Laicis*,” October 2, 1974, referenced in Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 1975, p. 41).

### Conclusion

Let me close my address today with gratitude for your kind and patient attention, using the words Pope Benedict XVI spoke as he closed his remarks to Catholic educators in Washington 3 years ago:

To all of you I say: Bear witness to hope. Nourish your witness with

prayer. Account for the hope that characterizes your lives (cf. *1 Pet* 3:15) by living the truth which you propose to your students. Help them to know and love the One you have encountered, whose truth and goodness you have experienced with joy. With St. Augustine, let us say: “we who speak and you who listen acknowledge ourselves as fellow disciples of a single teacher” (*Sermons*, 23:2).

Catholic schools are our hope. Such hope can never be in vain. Bear witness to it!

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## Catholic Identity from an Ecclesial Perspective: The K-12 through Higher Education Continuum

Reverend Donald J. Harrington, C.M.  
St. John's University, New York

*When viewing Catholic identity from the ecclesial perspective, it becomes apparent that all levels of Catholic education are one in their mission because together they spring ex corde ecclesiae from the heart of the Church. This address focuses on the fact that Catholic education is shaped as and is most effective as a continuum. With this view the hopes, dreams, concerns, and challenges within any level in Catholic education today must be shared by all levels.*

When I was invited to share reflections at this conference, I was told that my comments need not be lengthy. With appropriate presidential deference the person added that I could speak for as long as I wanted, but that 20 minutes would be wonderful. As I am sure most of you realize, presidents rarely say anything in 20 minutes, but I will do my best!

My assigned topic—indeed, the topic of this conference—is Catholic identity. I am sure we all agree that this is a somewhat ambitious topic for a 20-minute presentation. As a result, I have attempted to refine and focus my reflections upon one central point shaped by the common interest which joins us—namely the relationship between Catholic higher education and Catholic K-12 education, especially during these challenging times.

In speaking of Catholic identity, one could easily and most appropriately address this from a theological perspective and speak for hours! Another approach could be a canonical or legal analysis of essential elements or characteristics. Yet another might well be purely pedagogical or curricular. Mine is none of the above. I will speak today from an ecclesial perspective. What can we learn about the Catholic identity of Catholic institutions on every level by viewing that identity from an ecclesial perspective, our perspective as members of one and the same Church?

We are all so very familiar with the papal document *ex corde ecclesiae*. We know well that those words are part of the opening sentence in which Blessed John Paul II reminds us that our work as Catholic educators in higher education springs historically from the very heart of the Church—*ex corde ecclesiae*, where all universities find their origin. This afternoon I build upon that simple

statement and presume certain logic in saying that all Catholic education has precisely the same source. Together we who labor in Catholic higher education as well as Catholic education on the primary and secondary levels are blessed to share in work that springs from the heart of the Church. Just as a Catholic primary school or a Catholic high school would lose its identity if it were not a vibrant part of the local church, so the same is true of a Catholic college or a university. If Catholic institutions of higher education are not seen as vibrant elements of the local and, indeed, the international Church, they have strayed from their identity. While most of our institutions are independent from the standpoint of accreditation or governmental agencies, as long as we use the term Catholic in describing ourselves, we pronounce ourselves to be ecclesial entities. As a result, the concerns of the Church for education on the primary and secondary levels are likewise a concern for any Catholic college or university. We are one community and together we spring *ex corde ecclesiae* from the heart of the Church. For that reason I say to my colleagues in primary and secondary Catholic education that your concerns, your hopes, your desires must also be ours as leaders of Catholic colleges and universities. This is my understanding of the Church. Very simply, this is my understanding of our responsibilities and the sacred trust we share in educating young people. This, I believe, says much about the Catholic identity we share from an ecclesial perspective. Hence, my first conclusion in viewing Catholic identity from an ecclesial perspective is that we are one in the mission of Catholic education. Together we spring *ex corde ecclesiae*. Together we spring from the heart of the Church.

In addition to our common hopes and desires, I offer another observation—also from an ecclesial perspective. If one reflects upon the very purpose of Catholic education on every level we cannot help but recognize a continuum in what all Catholic education seeks to accomplish. Catholic education aims to provide the Church and society with men and women who are highly educated contributors to society who also live their faith in an informed way. To succeed, ideally, Catholic education must then be viewed as a continuum. Yes, there are those who graduate from our Catholic colleges and universities who perhaps have had no experience of Catholic education on the primary and secondary levels. Yes, there are those who graduate from Catholic primary and secondary schools who never move on to the collegiate levels of Catholic higher education. I would not claim that those individuals who have not experienced the entire continuum cannot be good, well-educated, and productive members of society and of the Church. I do maintain, however, that this

outcome is more likely when individuals have the experience of Catholic education at every level. Catholic education is shaped as a continuum. Catholic education is most effective as a continuum and we must never apologize for affirming that reality! For this reason, we in Catholic higher education must ever be concerned about the strength of Catholic education on all levels. And I believe those who labor in K-12 should encourage their graduates to further their education in Catholic institutions. From an ecclesial perspective, it is clear that we are part of the same continuum. I raise the question—do we recognize that, and are we faithful to it?

As a result, and as the president of a major Catholic university, I believe that I have an obligation to do what I can to support and strengthen all Catholic education. I believe the resources of St. John's University are to be shared with the schools of the dioceses in which we serve. I believe we should work hard to prepare teachers for those schools. I believe our own faculty should work with the faculties and administrators on other levels to assist and support them in ever enhancing the quality of the education their students receive. I believe we share a sacred trust of educating young people. We are part of the Church. We are part of the continuum of Catholic education.

Very briefly, I offer an example of how St. John's University seeks to fulfill this responsibility in our own dioceses. I do not imply that this is the only way. Each institution must respond as best it might to the needs of its own locale with our eyes firmly centered upon strengthening Catholic education.

Almost three years ago, St. John's University established the Institute for Catholic Schools. The purpose of this institute was to bring together Catholic educational leaders in the three metropolitan New York dioceses so as to share and respond to their needs. We undertook this task with the blessing of the local bishops and appointed an advisory board for the institute that would be representative of those dioceses. The superintendents of each diocese sit together on this board and assist the university in identifying their greatest needs and in responding together to these needs with shared resources. I, too, sit on this board to signal its importance and it is chaired by the dean of our School of Education. Our efforts are financed by university benefactors. I urge you to speak with the representatives of Brooklyn, Rockville Center, and New York to hear more about this collaborative effort in metropolitan New York. Our administrators and faculty, with the blessing and the guidance of the superintendents, work with local schools and provide special programs to strengthen the instructional effectiveness of the faculty. We likewise provide special programs for principals and for boards of independent schools. Our

graduate students will soon engage in research to strengthen schools and to explore new paradigms for Catholic education. These are but a few examples of what can be done through collaboration. Perhaps most significantly, the three superintendents and members of their staffs share their visions and their strategic plans, as well as their hopes and desires. They are quick to tell St. John's University what they need and, as possible, we are quick to respond. My friends, this is one very specific example of how a Catholic university can respond to the obligation which is ours to support and strengthen Catholic education on the primary and secondary levels.

Colleges and universities have great resources—resources which much smaller institutions on other levels could not possibly have. If indeed we are one, if indeed we spring together from the heart of the Church, if indeed we are partners in this continuum of Catholic education, colleges and universities should share those resources with these colleagues for our common purpose. This is my conviction. We are in this together. St. John's does not do what little it does out of charity. It does so because of our own vision and our own conviction that as Catholic educators the sacred trust we share is one and that the Church in which we find ourselves is one. We can only hope to continue to graduate strong, Catholic lay people who can make marked contributions to our society if we share this conviction.

In mid-August, 2011, I represented the university at the funeral of Governor Hugh Carey at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. Governor Carey was a 2-term governor of New York State and a seven-term representative in Congress. The governor had an outstanding career and in his death he was hailed nationally by some as one of the greatest governors of the modern era. As I walked down the aisle of St. Patrick's Cathedral at the end of his funeral reflecting upon this great man, I could not help but recall the countless conversations I had with the governor about the value of Catholic education. He would repeatedly point to his primary school education by the Sisters of St. Joseph, his secondary school education by the Christian Brothers, and his baccalaureate and legal studies at St. John's as the most formative years of his life. He would expound upon the impact that every level of Catholic education had upon shaping him as the informed Catholic layman who also had the skills needed to lead what was then the largest state in the union.

This is why we dedicate our lives to Catholic education—to send forth such graduates.

I am confident that each one of us gathered in this room today could relate similar stories. We know the impact Catholic education has had in bettering

society as well as in shaping Catholic leaders in our world. Again, I reiterate—we in Catholic education must do all that we can to support and strengthen the continuum of Catholic education. Our experience tells us how very, very critical this is.

My final reflection on Catholic identity is this. I make this statement well aware that I am being repetitive. All Catholic educational institutions are part of the local church. If we are to be true to that ecclesial identity, we must all function every day as vibrant and contributing members of that Church and do all in our power to strengthen this continuum of Catholic education. It is my hope that this conference will help each of us to grow ever more deeply in our conviction that this is indeed integral to our identity as Catholic institutions on every level.

I thank you for inviting me to share these thoughts with you.

*Rev. Donald J. Harrington is the president of St. John's University, Queens, New York. Prior to being named president of St. John's University in 1989, Rev. Harrington held a variety of teaching and administrative posts at Niagara University before serving as president from 1984–1989. Correspondence about this presentation should be sent to Rev. Harrington at [pres@stjohns.edu](mailto:pres@stjohns.edu).*

## Creating a Culturally-Responsive Perspective of Catholic Identity

Sr. Barbara L. Monsegur, CFMM, PhD  
Lourdes Catholic High School, Arizona

**G**ood morning and welcome to my alma mater. As a high school principal of a pre-K-12 private Catholic school located two miles from the international border between Arizona and Mexico, my perspective on Catholic identity is seasoned by three ingredients:

1. A dash of what the experts say
2. Three tablespoons of experience as teacher and principal
3. One cup of current demographic data

### Experts

First of all, what do the experts say? Br. William Carriere, FSC, PhD, executive director of Western Catholic Education Association, stated it best when referring to Catholic identity: “The purpose of a Catholic school is to ensure academic standards and to provide for the spiritual formation and religious education of the school community. This paraphrased imperative from Canon 806 states that the school is Catholic first” (Western Catholic Educational Association, 2009, p. 1). This requires the total integration of our faith into every aspect of school life. “From the first moment that a student sets foot in a Catholic school, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment, one illumined by the light of faith and having its own unique characteristics, and environment permeated with the Gospel spirit of love and freedom” (The Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988).

As noted by Tom Butler, assistant superintendent for the diocese of Stockton, California:

The Catholicity of a school is greater than the sum of its parts...Catholic identity is not measured in individual standards, but in the overall environment that exists...The reality of the community (never an institution) that *is* the Catholic school can best be summarized by looking at two areas: how well are we, the school staff living and modeling our



faith; and how well are we preparing our students for the future (Western Catholic Educational Association, 2009, p. 1).

### Experience

The second ingredient that seasons my perspective on Catholic identity is my 30 years of experience as teacher and principal. I believe that if a school is truly Catholic it ceases to be an institution and becomes a community. The definition of community as found in *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* (2011) is, "a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society." The common characteristic for our school communities is our Catholic identity. As noted in the Western Catholic Educational Association's *Catholic Identity Assessment Guide* (2009), Catholic identity can be evidenced if a school has the following:

- *A Mission and Philosophy* which indicate the integration of the Roman Catholic Faith into all aspects of school life.
- *Regular opportunities for Prayer and Sacraments.*
- *A Religion curriculum and instruction* that is faithful to Roman Catholic Church teachings, and meets the requirements set forth by the USCCB.
- *Ongoing formation of teachers* for catechetical and instructional competence.
- *Respect for Parents as the Primary Educators.* This is perhaps the most challenging because often the family from which our students originate, grow and develop is distracted by internal struggles and influenced by the culture in which it exists. Often academics at the high school level has become the fundamental concern, and spiritual education is sometimes, if at all, an afterthought.

The Catholic identity of a school is also evidenced if:

- *The school helps and encourages students to develop a service-oriented outreach to the Church and civic community* after the example of Jesus who said after he washed his disciples' feet, "I have given you an example so that you may do what I have done to you" (John 13:15). As noted in *To Teach as Jesus Did* (1972), more than any other program of education sponsored by the Church, the Catholic School has the opportunity and obligation to be unique, contemporary, and oriented to Christian service because it helps students acquire skills, virtues, and habits of heart required for effective

service to others.

- *Evangelization* plays a role in the school, with all school personnel actively engaged in bringing the Good News of Jesus into the total educational experience.
- Finally, *Catholic identity is evidenced if the school has widespread use of signs, sacramentals, traditions and rituals* of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the school.

### Demographic Data

The final ingredient that has seasoned my perspective of Catholic identity is demographic data of the past 10 years. Being the high school principal of a school that is only two miles from the international border may have made my situation unique 10 years ago. However, that is no longer the case.

- According to the 2010 census, “The Nation’s [Latino] population grew four times faster than the total U.S. population” (United States Census Bureau, 2011).
- 50% of all Catholics under the age of 25 are Latinos. (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007).
- In 2008 Latinos were already the largest minority group in public schools in 22 states (Fry & Gonzales, 2008, p. ii).

The question to ask ourselves is: Are our Catholic schools addressing Catholic identity as it relates to this growing population? Today’s American Catholic Church is in competition with secular, civic, and political perspectives, as well as other religious perspectives: (a) mainline Protestantism, especially those that resemble Catholicism, (b) evangelical Protestantism, including Pentecostals, and (c) non-Christian worldviews (D’Antonio, Davidson, Hoge, & Meyer, 2001). Of these religious perspectives, the one having the most influence on the Catholic identity of Latino Americans is evangelical Protestantism (Leal, 2004; Lugo, 2007; Perl, Greely, & Gray, 2006). As a result, more and more Latino Americans are leaving the Catholic Church to join different evangelical Protestant groups.

As mentioned earlier, one of the indications of the Catholic identity of a school is the widespread use of signs, sacramentals, traditions, and rituals of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the school. What we sometimes overlook is that Catholic signs, traditions, and rituals have a distinctly cultural

spirit. Much like our Catholic parish and school communities of the early 20th century, Catholic identity has a uniquely cultural flavor. The Church and its schools face the challenge of attracting, serving, and being engaged by the growing Latino population, as charged by the USCCB's statement, *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium* (2005). The Catholic Church would benefit from identifying what aspects of Latino parents' experiences influence their Catholic identity. Further, it may be useful to determine if Latino parents who identify closely with the American Catholic Church are more likely to send their children to Catholic elementary schools (Monsegur, 2011). Current research finds that Mexican Americans, who constitute the majority of Latinos in the United States, are the most educationally at risk (Ready, 2008; San Miguel & Valencia, 1998; Sikkink & Hernandez, 2003; Telles & Ortiz, 2008). Catholic schools have a history of success in reducing the achievement gap between Black and White students; however, they have not had the opportunity to do the same for Latino students because so few attend Catholic schools. If progress toward narrowing the achievement gap for Latino students is not greatly accelerated, they will continue to struggle with English proficiency, with acculturation, with breaking the cycle of poverty. The enormous potential contribution of Latinos to the United States' economic and cultural life as well as the Catholic Church will not be realized without making Catholic education an option for them.

Catholic Church leadership, members of the parish religious education programs, and Catholic school leaders must come to understand and accept that past treatment of Latinos by American religious institutions, including schools, impact today's Latino parents' educational decisions. Catholic Church leadership, members of the parish religious education programs, and Catholic school leaders must not continue that historic clash between the style and spirit of Spanish-speaking and English-speaking Catholicism. Ecclesial leaders must seek a community transformed by mutual respect and acceptance. This transformation to respect differences is made possible by a conviction to the truth that we are all the One Body of Christ. In this way, Catholic Church leadership can begin to meet its pressing responsibility of embracing the growing Latino population, (Monsegur, 2011).

Meeting this challenge is an enormous undertaking, but not an impossible one. In *To Teach as Jesus Did* (1972) the American bishops emphasized that of the educational programs available to the Catholic community, Catholic schools afford the fullest and best opportunity to provide a Christian education to children and young people. As stated by Buetow (1988), the Catholic

school is, in fact, an ecclesial base community; the starting point for full participation in the life of the Church. This supportive educational role that the Catholic school has within the larger Church is often lost in the priority given to maintaining academic achievement demonstrated through high test scores, concern over parish subsidies, and the unhealthy rivalry that exists between Catholic schools and parish religious education programs.

As a starting point, the formation offered by the diocesan chancery to clergy, superintendents, directors of catechesis, principals, and parish directors of religious education on the primary role of Catholic school within the larger Church must be made clear. Once this is in place, diocesan mandates to pastors to conduct demographic assessments of their population should follow, to include liturgical cultural sensitivity. A mistaken belief that continues to trouble the outreach to Latino Catholics is the assumption that the structures the Catholic Church has, including its schools, are fundamentally adequate to meet the needs of the Latino community. They are not adequate, and this reality must be examined and also conveyed by Church leadership to parish boards, school boards, and all stakeholders. If Latino families do not feel welcomed in their parishes, they may leave the Church for one in which they do feel welcome, and they will never see the parish Catholic school as an educational option for their children.

If traditional Latino cultural values are not accepted in American Catholic parishes, the value Latino parents place on Catholic faith formation, the primary reason for the existence of Catholic schools, can be lost. The Catholic Church in America is at a pivotal moment in its history. It is going through a very profound transition in its membership. One of the most important aspects of that transition is the growth of the Latino communities and the way the Church will relate to those communities could determine the future of the Church in the U.S.A. (Figueroa Deck, 1993). As a third-generation Latina I was unaware of many of the signs, traditions, and rituals of my Mexican-American Catholic border community when I was first missioned there. Fortunately, God is good, and people are very willing to share. Therefore, I encourage everyone present to learn about your particular community and become culturally responsive to its Catholic identity. This I believe is a necessary first step to insuring the Catholic identity of our schools, as the face of the American Catholic Church continues to evolve.

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## Nurturing Catholic Identity: Sharing Your Faith Story

Karen Vogtner  
St. John the Evangelist School, Georgia

**T**he most rewarding aspect of my vocation as a Catholic school principal is nurturing a strong Catholic identity and culture within the school community. There is a hole in one's heart that only God can fill. When we allow Him that prominent place in our hearts, then our work, our lives, our relationships bear new meaning and a higher purpose. Catholic identity and culture begin by reflecting upon and sharing one's own faith story.

The faculty and staff bring a variety of faith experiences, catechetical knowledge, and generational perspective that adds to the collective faith "wisdom" of the school. When one shares his or her individual faith journey (special rituals and prayer experiences), it broadens the faith experiences of others. Preplanning prayer services, faculty retreats, and dedicated time during faculty meetings provide opportunities for faculty to share faith experiences and grow in faith.

### Mission and Core Values

My story is embedded in the mission and core values of our school. A strong Catholic mission statement unifies the school community toward one common purpose.

Our mission is to prepare students for everlasting life, teaching them the Catholic Faith and traditions, to provide time and resources to put their faith into action through worship and service, and to ensure a thorough foundation of knowledge for successful transition into secondary study.

The mission statement hangs proudly in the foyer of the school, and every publication from admissions packets to weekly newsletters includes the mission of the school. The mission statement serves as a moral compass guiding decisions, programs, and the vision for the future of the school.

When parents enter the school and read the mission statement, they know immediately that St. John School is, first and foremost, a Catholic school.

While parents may be attracted to the school for its academic excellence, they stay at St. John School for the solid Catholic values, spiritually nurturing learning environment, and the strong sense of family. Core values reflected in the school motto, “Reverence, Respect and Responsibility,” reinforce the school mission and enhance the positive Catholic culture of the school.

### **Active and Rich Prayer Life**

Faculty, staff, and students live the mission through prayer, worship, and service. Each day at St. John School begins with morning assembly. This gathering of the school family provides opportunities to discuss real-world social issues from a Catholic perspective, clarify common misconceptions noted on the Assessment of Catechesis/Religious Education (ACRE), and allow students opportunities to share personal reflections on service projects. The prayer leader (principal, student, or faculty member) sets a spiritual tone for the day. Various forms of prayer are offered, including traditional prayers, scriptural rosary, and prayers that have significant meaning for faculty members such as a Christmas novena, the divine chaplet, and the memorare. For serious situations like surgery for a parent, student, or teacher, prayers are offered on the hour. Praying for others by name and as a whole faith community is a powerful experience, which binds everyone as a school family. The students know the power of prayer, and prayer is a way of life at St. John the Evangelist School.

### **Vibrant Worship and Meaningful Service**

Celebrating Eucharist with one another at Friday Mass is the most important thing the school community does during the school week. When planning liturgies and prayer services, teachers strive to engage the senses and create those “Godprints” that touch the heart and soul by incorporating cultural customs, celebrating special feasts (Our Lady of Guadalupe) and infusing liturgical dance. Students love going to Mass and enthusiastically participate by singing and praising God.

A natural extension of worship is service. Meaningful service projects begin with a real-world connection. Speakers from a service agency (Catholic Relief Services, CDC, Crisis Pregnancy Center) put a faith story and a human face to the projects students undertake. A monthly Catholic newsletter, “At Home with Our Faith,” provides opportunities for parents to deepen their faith. Parents also participate in a schoolwide, “Feed the Hungry” service project in No-



vember. Primary students decorate bags, while parents, teachers, and students make sandwich meals for the homeless shelters in Atlanta. A prayer service concludes the evening reminding all that “whatever we do to the least of our brothers, we do for Jesus.”

### Rituals and Symbols

We are not only Catholics through our hearts and hands, but rituals and symbols remind us daily of God’s presence in the school. Rituals like the commissioning of the eighth grade as leaders of the school, the blessing of patrols and student council representatives, adoration, live reenactment of the Stations of the Cross, and celebration of the sacraments contribute to the Catholic culture and Catholic identity of the school.

Students and faculty participate in the sacrament of reconciliation and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament several times a year. Age-appropriate guided mediations help students and teachers move from the pressures of a busy day to the quiet of their hearts where Jesus patiently awaits. Primary students kneel before the Blessed Sacrament and whisper, “I love you, Jesus,” before departing the church. Middle school students gather around the altar, and one can almost see the graces that pour out from the monstrance on the altar. There is no doubt that students are in deep communion with their God.

Symbols of the Catholic faith permeate the school. The school logo, uniforms, the Service Cross, religious statues, student work, bulletin boards, the 9/11 perpetual candle, and spiritual corners in the classrooms serve as reminders that God is in the center of all school life.

A significant symbol of Catholic identity at St. John School is a framed cross with photographs of the faces of every student, faculty, and staff member. In the center of the cross is the face of Jesus. The rich cultural diversity of the school is apparent at a glance, but it is Jesus who unites us as a school family. When gathered around the table of the Lord, students see each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.

### Building Spiritual Leadership

Nurturing Catholic identity is a team effort. The principal serves as spiritual leader of the school; however, building spiritual capacity of others in the building ensures thorough integration of Gospel values, Catholic teachings, and catechetical formation in the life of the school. At St. John School,

the Catholic identity/Service Implementation Team works to enhance the Catholic identity and culture in the school by organizing schoolwide service projects, planning faculty prayer services and retreats, and leading catechetical studies at faculty meetings. These spiritual leaders challenge colleagues to stretch outside of their comfort zones, to maintain a focus on Catholic social teachings, and ensure that Catholic identity permeates every aspect of school life.

### **Assessing the Effectiveness of the Catholic Culture**

How is the effectiveness of the Catholic identity and culture assessed in the school? The ACRE charts the basic knowledge of the Catholic faith students acquire. The affective portion identifies issues and areas of need. Observing students in everyday life, how they interact with one another, and what they say and do, indicate if faith has taken root. When students gather the abundant leftover snacks at an academic competition and spontaneously give them to a homeless couple on the side of the road, one sees faith in action. One knows the seeds of faith have taken root when these students run to the principal exclaiming, "Ms. Vogtner, we just fed Jesus!"

Catholic schools play an important role in the evangelization mission of the Church. With a strong Catholic culture, people want to be a part of it fully. It is a blessing to see students join the Catholic Church each year. Father will often allow the school family to celebrate and witness this special event at a Friday Mass.

### **Higher Education Helping Schools Foster Catholic Identity**

Higher education can help foster Catholic identity in elementary and secondary schools by offering online catechetical courses/webinars to teachers for catechetical certification credit and consider innovative delivery systems to provide this service. Support for programs like the Alliance for Catholic Education at University of Notre Dame, Pacific Alliance for Catholic Education in Portland, and the Urban Catholic Teacher Corps at Boston College encourage bright, young college students to consider a vocation as a Catholic school teacher. Universities offer strong Catholic leadership programs; however, they should consider creative delivery systems for these programs (i.e., begin cohorts in other states, use Skype presentations/online courses). In addition, Catholic school principals need spiritual and professional development. Offer

summer principal academies on campus and address topics like 21st-century leadership with a Catholic perspective.

University campus ministers should build relationships between high school campus ministers and share resources on Catholic social teaching (immigration, right to life, dignity of all life, death penalty). They could also collaborate with high school campus ministers to conduct class retreats with high school students.

Finally, higher education can share educational research on the positive outcomes of a Catholic education and help promote the benefits of a Catholic education. Continue to offer forums on current issues such as enrollment of Hispanic students in Catholic schools, school choice, governance, and finance in Catholic schools. Addressing these topics will help keep Catholic schools viable for the future.

### Conclusion

Catholic identity is defined by faith experiences that allow all to encounter the living God. Each faith story, embedded in the mission and core values, is lived through prayer, worship, and service. Symbols and rituals in Catholic schools ignite the senses, so all may SEE, HEAR, TOUCH, SMELL, and TASTE the goodness of Jesus. It is these faith experiences that allow us to encounter a living, loving God at Catholic schools.

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## Fostering Catholic Identity through Effective School Policy

Thomas W. Burnford

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One of the real issues when talking about Catholic identity in schools, from the perspective of a practitioner, is how do we live as leaders? How do we witness to the faith, particularly as products of Catholic education ourselves, and what does that look like? How is our faith reflected in the daily aspects of our lives, whether it's in a staff meeting, whether it's working with parents, if a school is in trouble, whatever it is. We proclaim to others that Catholic identity must pervade the entire school—and that starts with Catholic identity pervading the entire life of us as Catholic education leaders.

But another fundamental issue has to do with the perception of parents of children who are not, or not yet, in our schools—what do they think or know about Catholic identity and its role? During surveys of parents as part of the process of developing policies in the Archdiocese of Washington three things came up as the top reasons why parents send their children to Catholic schools: 1.) because they're academically great; 2.) because they are safe; and 3.) because they have strong Catholic identity. Although these three reasons were at the top of the survey, the order of priority changed depending upon the location of the parents. For example, in the District of Columbia, the city, safety was first, whereas in some suburbs academics were first. So it changed a little bit depending on location, but these were the top three. But whatever the case, getting parents across the threshold of our schools is imperative. Once they are in we can evangelize and our schools will speak for themselves. And that brings to the fore the fundamental mission of the Church, which is to evangelize. Catholic schools are a great tool but the Gospel has to be proclaimed firstly through our parishes but then it has to be proclaimed by laity reaching out to other laity, their neighbors, and introducing them to the person of Christ and saying, "Come...come encounter the risen Lord. Come to the Eucharist. Come into the Church through the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. And then we'll see more people experiencing conversion. It is in light of conversion that parents can make a choice and say, "I want my child formed in the faith—not just taught, but formed."

In Washington we have new Catholic school policies. These policies have

four sections: Catholic identity, governance, academic excellence, and affordability and accessibility. They begin with a quote from the Holy Father which we have heard numerous times. *“Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the good news. First and foremost every Catholic institution is a place to encounter the living God, who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth.”* And that’s what we’ve tried to do. For us the challenge of writing policy was to make the policies really practical for 98 schools with 30,000 students in this particular archdiocese, and also to ensure they were created out of extensive consultation with stakeholders. We’ve tried to do so in some specific ways.

In terms of Catholic identity, the first area that we find essential is communion and cooperation with the archbishop. There has to be a link between what happens in the schools and the archdiocese, the local church, and the bishop who is the successor of the apostles. After all it was to the apostles that Jesus said, “Teach them all that I have commanded you.” So how does that look? One way is our policy that says all Catholic schools shall communicate, consult, and collaborate, with all involved parties—including specifically the archdiocese and the Catholic Schools Office.

Communicate, consult, and collaborate. Now there’s a lot in those words. Our Catholic schools are required to tell people the truth about enrollment trends, academic excellence, finances, and facility usage because it is part of who we are as a Church to tell people the truth. We do not want people saying (and I’ve heard this), “If only you had told me of the problem, I could have helped you fix it.” Hearing this is bad—because people feel that the Church wasn’t straight with them. If you go out and tell people the truth, they will not always be happy and they may get angry because there’s a problem. Sometimes they’ll get angry with the diocese because they have to get angry with someone and they love the pastor and principal. That’s OK. But at the end of the meeting they’ll often come up to us and say, “Thank you for sharing this with us. Let’s work together. Let’s figure out a solution.” Consultation is integral to ecclesial communion.

The second pillar of our Catholic identity policies is appropriate celebration of sacramental life. We have a policy that states that all Catholic students are expected to attend regular Sunday liturgies at their home parish and to frequently receive the sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist. We state that in policy as an expectation right up front.

Our third pillar is the teaching of the faith. We realized that the archdiocesan religion curriculum needed updating, which we’ve done (see [www.adw](http://www.adw).

[org](#)). It was just promulgated and is currently being used. It's a complete religion curriculum with standards and a matching assessment to go along with it. Since teaching the faith is at the heart of our schools we have to ensure that it is done well and students are held accountable to the same standards as all other subjects. We must do it as well as, if not better, than we do in all the other subjects. To do so involves a lot of work in training and teaching our catechists, and also a proper assessment tool, now also in place.

The fourth element in Catholic identity is the Catholic environment which includes, for example, a school having pictures of the Holy Father, the archbishop, and a statue of Mary, but beyond that it talks about our expectations of all teachers and staff. We expect them to live in accord with the teaching of the Church and to not violate the principles or tenets of the Catholic faith. The policy provides pretty clear, strong language. It also talks about school guest speakers and various other ways a school can visibly manifest its Catholic identity.

This is just a brief overview of our policy. To have the policy really helps because it's a guide. What helps even more is to know that 10,000 people were asked to provide input on these the policies and 3,000 actually did. (The policies are available at [www.adw.org](http://www.adw.org)) So this policy is the fruit of consultation, which means in some sense, from the perspective of stakeholders, that we all have a right to be held accountable to it because we all had a chance to share input into its creation. It took us a number of years. We had to identify the problem at a convocation at Trinity College in 2007. In 2008 a vision was set and Cardinal Wuerl wrote a pastoral letter on education. Policies were then written in April of 2009 and over 1,000 people assembled at large meetings to talk about the specifics. They were promulgated in the fall of 2009 and implemented in 2010. Now there is significant buy-in for these policies, which makes the work of the central office and the schools a lot easier.

My final thought is let's really think about the new evangelization and evangelizing all Catholics because when we view our work through this lens then there will not be a problem with enrollment in our Catholic schools.

Thank you.

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## Content and Culture: Fostering Catholic Identity through an Integrated Curriculum

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*This article focuses on the seamless and intentional integration of religious values throughout the Catholic school curriculum as a hallmark of Catholic identity. A rich heritage of Church documents that are cited throughout the article support this view of Catholic identity.*

Through this address I hope to: 1.) show that an integrated curriculum is a hallmark of Catholic identity; and 2.) raise awareness of the rich heritage of Catholic literature that supports this integration.

The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education stated in *The Catholic School* (1977) that “it is essential to keep in mind the basic premise of what a school is because that which does not reproduce the characteristic features of a school cannot be a Catholic school” (Article 25). Catholic schools must be noted for academic excellence AND Catholic identity; we must build communities of learning AND faith. We must be good schools AND good Catholic schools.

We expect schools to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic; to socialize children; to equalize them; to produce participative citizens; to teach students to think and to problem-solve using their imagination and creativity every step of the way. We ask Catholic schools to do ALL of the above AND to preserve the Catholic faith; to produce participative members of the Roman Catholic Church; to use the Gospel as their moral guide.

Whatever definition we use for curriculum, suffice it to say that curriculum is generally regarded as the central organizing plan that a student experiences in an educational program. Curriculum in a Catholic school is ripe with opportunities for us to do what we can do only and better in Catholic education. We do this through the “intentional integration of Catholic teaching into other parts of the curriculum” (Convey, 2010). In truth, it is this element that separates us from public school education and from religious education programs. Religious truths and values are seamlessly woven into the entire Catholic school environment; they are not compartmentalized or scheduled to

a distinct and separate time slot within the school day.

There is a rich heritage of Church documents which supports the integration of Catholic truths, values, and doctrines throughout the curriculum. The Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Christian Education* (1965) noted that the Catholic school "pursues cultural goals and the natural development of youth... in an atmosphere enlivened by the Gospel...so that the light of faith will illumine the knowledge which students gradually gain of the world" (Flannery, 1996, n. 8). The National Conference of Catholic Bishops promulgated *Teach Them* in 1976 in which they stated that "the integration of religious truth and values with the rest of life is not only possible in Catholic schools; it distinguishes them from others" (p.3). In 1988 the Congregation for Catholic Education stated that "religious values and motivation are cultivated in all subject areas and in all of the various activities going on in the school" (Article 107). The United States Catholic Conference in 1997 highlighted the fact that integration is one of the reasons parents choose Catholic schools in its *General Directory for Catechesis*. "The special character of the Catholic school, the underlying reason for it, the reason why Catholic parents should prefer it, is precisely the quality of the religious instruction integrated into the education of students" (CT 69).

There are numerous curriculum design models that enable teachers to integrate Catholic values. Gini Shimabukuro's *Education for Transformation* (2007) shows a dynamic cycle of the elements of curriculum design which are supported by the integration of faith and values at its core. This core also serves to support the continuous revitalization of the curriculum. The *Educational Community Opportunity for Stewardship* (ECOS) model for curricular change, designed in 1972, is another template which can be used to infuse Catholic values into a particular unit. Using this template, teachers become aware of the richness of their curricular objectives and materials for potential integration. Teachers create integrated instructional activities using Gospel values, social justice themes, Catholic literature, encyclicals, etc.

The need to enhance and define the Catholic identity of Catholic schools has become quite significant. Affirming and strengthening Catholic identity was the central theme of the 2011 gathering of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. Catholic identity is among the top five need areas cited by pastors across the country. Benefactors consistently ask that our schools prove their academic excellence as well as their Catholic identity. This is not at all surprising as Catholic education enters a new life cycle within a society which seems to be advancing a new set of values. This was clearly stated



in 1998 when the Congregation for Catholic Education wrote in *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*:

The complexity of the modern world makes it all the more necessary to increase awareness of the ecclesial identity of the Catholic school. It is from its Catholic Identity that the school derives its original characteristics and its structure as a genuine instrument of the Church, a place of real and specific pastoral ministry (n.11).

When we speak about the nonnegotiables of Catholic schools, one defining characteristic is that the entire Catholic school community is motivated by an incarnational worldview. One of the most poignant descriptions that I have heard about our uniqueness came from Bishop Frank J. Caggiano (2009) in an opening address that he made to a group of Board members in the diocese of Brooklyn. Bishop Caggiano stated that in addition to all of the common responses with regard to the unique qualities of Catholic schools, he would add the word “AND.” Our origin is Jesus who is both God AND man, divine AND human. By origin, goal, AND participation we are who we are. This is what makes us who we are and enables us to do what we do! As Fr. Harrington noted earlier in this conference, our work springs from the very heart of the Church and allows that Church to continue. It is no wonder then that our Catholic identity, our inspiration, and our aspiration, must permeate every aspect of the Catholic school curriculum.

The task of the Catholic school is fundamentally a synthesis of culture and faith and a synthesis of faith and life: the first is reached by integrating all the different aspects of human knowledge through the subjects taught, in the light of the Gospel; the second in the growth of the virtues characteristic of the Christian (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 2009).

The culture and content of Catholic schools are rooted in our Catholic identity, enlivened by the Gospel, and celebrated in the rich tradition that helps to make us one continuous Church.

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