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ARTICLES

THE ACCESSIBILITY OF AMERICAN CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS TO THE VARIOUS SOCIOECONOMIC CLASSES OF CATHOLIC FAMILIES

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The purpose of this study was to discern which socioeconomic classes are represented in Catholic high school populations across the United States. In addition, the study sought to discover the motivations of those families whose children were currently enrolled in American Catholic high schools. Also explored were the reasons why Catholic families who have sent their child or children to Catholic elementary schools were electing not to continue Catholic education at the secondary level. Because financial aid availability has risen along with tuition (Tracy, 2001), this investigation included the extent to which such financial aid was considered by Catholic families, as well as the perceptions of Catholic families as to its availability at the secondary level. As tuition rates rise at a level higher than the cost of living and average wage increases, this study additionally examined the extent to which the assertion (Baker & Riordan, 1998, 1999; Riordan, 2000) that American Catholic high schools were becoming more elitist is true. The Catholic Church's statements as to the accessibility of Catholic education to all social classes provided a framework throughout the investigation.

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, enrollment in Catholic schools hit its peak in the mid-1960s (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Youniss & Convey, 2000). As the decline in numbers began, a dilemma increasingly developed which gradually compromised the average American Catholic family's financial ability to avail itself of Catholic secondary education. Catholic high school tuition has risen steadily at a rate consistently higher than both family income increases and the rate of inflation. Over a 30-year period, this trend has forced Catholic high school demographics to involuntarily shift from working class families to families of significantly higher income levels. This reality challenges Catholic high schools in light of the mission of Catholic education to be

accessible to all. Researchers Baker and Riordan (1998, 1999) claim that the “eliting” of the Catholic school has created an educational environment in many schools which favors high academic standards while putting the Catholic and Christian nature and mission of the school “on the back burner.” Sociologist Greeley (1998, 1999) vehemently disagreed, pointing out that financial aid has increased significantly, and Catholic schools have many success stories in urban populations with minority students.

From the very foundations of Catholic education in the United States, the Church has strived to make Catholic education accessible to all of its families. Although the secondary school was not yet common in the late 19th century, the Council of Baltimore expressed its belief that Catholics, and particularly the poor, had the right to a Catholic education (Burns & Kohlbrenner, 1937). Decades later, the Catholic high school was no longer a rare commodity, but rather widely available to most Catholics in the United States. After the 1960s, enrollment in American Catholic schools began a downward trend at the same time that the numbers of religious women and men working in schools decreased. The decrease in religious who worked for very little meant that faculties and administrations of Catholic schools were staffed in increasing proportions by lay people, thus causing the expenses for running Catholic schools to increase. Such increases over the following decades affected the ability of Catholic families of lesser means to be able to pay school tuition.

Since Catholic secondary schools in the United States were for the most part independent of parishes and thus had no parochial financial support, their tuition had always been higher than the tuition of Catholic parochial elementary schools. Both the American Church and the Vatican began to address the dilemma of the accessibility of Catholic education. Although there exists no singular document from the Church specifically addressing this dilemma, the variety of Church documents which made mention of this trend formed the conceptual framework for this study. The focus and concern of this study was well expressed by the Church in 1977:

In some countries...the Catholic school runs the risk of giving counter-witness by admitting a majority of students from wealthier families. Schools may have done this because of their need to be financially self-supporting. This situation is of grave concern to those responsible for Catholic education, because first and foremost the Church offers its educational service to “the poor or those who are deprived of family help and affection or those who are far from the faith.”...If the Catholic school were to turn its attention exclusively or predominantly to those from the wealthier social classes, it would be contributing towards maintaining their privileged position, and could thereby continue to favor a society which is unjust. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, §58)

Current demographic trends indicate that the percentage of children from working class and middle class families in Catholic schools is declining, while the percentage of the number of children from families of a significantly higher socioeconomic status is increasing. Table 1 illustrates the compilation of data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) as analyzed by Riordan in 2000. It displays a change in the 1990s toward a Catholic secondary school population coming increasingly from the highest quartile of family incomes, with a simultaneous decrease of students coming from the lowest quartile of family income, as defined by the NCES.

Table 1

Socioeconomic Status Composition of Catholic Secondary Schools, 1972-1992

Quartile	1972	1980	1992
Percentage lowest quartile	12.3%	15.2%	5.5%
Percentage highest quartile	29.7%	35.5%	45.8%

Note. Source (Youniss & Convey, 2000). Adapted with permission.

This study endeavored to measure the reality of this trend after the change of the millennium. Specifically, the study addressed the following questions:

- Which socioeconomic classes of students are currently being served by Catholic secondary schools across the United States?
- To what extent are Catholics of more modest incomes choosing not to send their child or children to a Catholic high school because of tuition rates?
- To what extent is there a demographic shift in the American Catholic high school population toward non-Catholic students who come from a socioeconomic background that can afford the tuition?
- What financial aid policies are in place in American Catholic high schools to ensure that what the Church has stated about the accessibility of Catholic schools to all socioeconomic classes is being addressed?
- What are the perceptions of the parents of eighth graders from Catholic parishes concerning the availability of financial aid in Catholic secondary schools?

- What are the motivations for attendance of the families whose ninth-grade children are currently enrolled in American Catholic high schools?

METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION

This investigation used a mixed-methodology consisting of four surveys and eight follow-up interviews. A combined methodology offered the potential for a more complete picture of the situation than if measured in just one fashion (Krathwohl, 1998). The surveys enabled the gathering of information pertaining to Catholic secondary school populations in the United States from a range of families. They were given across 6 archdioceses and 6 dioceses in the United States, two in each of the six national regions (see Table 2) as identified by the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA). Four surveys were given across 12 (arch)dioceses in the United States.

Table 2

Survey Distribution by Region and (ARCH)Diocese

Region	(ARCH)Diocese
New England	Springfield, MA HARTFORD, CT (elementary) Providence, RI (secondary)
Mideast	Buffalo, NY Pittsburgh, PA
Southeast	Arlington, VA Savannah, GA
Great Lakes	DETROIT, MI MILWAUKEE, WI
Plains	ST. LOUIS, MO SAINT PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS, MN
West/Far West	SEATTLE, WA Dallas, TX

Twelve high school administrators (or their delegates) were asked to provide demographic information about their school population, including tuition, financial aid procedure and statistics, and list of zip code distribution of student families. The return rate was 83% (10 surveys returned).

Survey II was sent to 480 families of eighth grade students in parochial schools and had a return rate of 69.4% (333 surveys returned).

Survey III was sent to 400 families of eighth grade students in religious education programs at their parish, but who do not attend a Catholic school. The survey had a return rate of 43.2% (173 surveys returned).

Survey IV was sent to 480 families of ninth grade students in Catholic high schools, with a return rate of 71.9% (345 surveys returned).

The interviews were conducted with a random sample of volunteers obtained from Surveys II and III. They were conducted by telephone and provided the opportunity for those surveyed to elaborate on their responses. The researcher probed the reasons behind the answers given by the respondents. The respondents were likewise provided the opportunity to dialogue about questions raised in the survey and to elaborate on issues that the survey may or may not have identified.

DATA ANALYSIS

The survey data were analyzed in various ways. As Survey I asked for the zip codes of the student body, the number of students living within a particular zip code indicated to some extent the level of income the student's family received. The average family income was obtained from the United States Census Bureau for each represented zip code. Survey I also asked administrators for school information related to finances: tuition rates, the percentage of students receiving financial aid, the average grant, the total amount of aid given, and the perception of the administrator as to the extent that the financial aid offered by the school was sufficient to meet the need. This information painted somewhat of a portrait of the socioeconomic makeup of the high school population, and the extent to which financial aid affected the population.

The other surveys, Surveys II, III, and IV, were given to parents of students, and the data from those surveys were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to determine means and frequencies of income levels, motivational levels for attendance (or lack thereof) to Catholic education, as well as families' perceptions of the availability of financial aid. Cross-tabulation was used between various questions on the three surveys in order to determine the number and percentage of aid being requested by those attending Catholic schools. Comparisons of means were used for several questions in order to determine whether statistical differ-

ences existed among the means of the responses of the three populations. In order to examine the predictive nature of the predictor variables of income, the parents' Catholic education history, and the number of children in the family on the criterion variable of intention to enroll in Catholic high school, both multiple regression and discriminant function analyses were used for respondents of Surveys II and III, as these survey subjects were potential parents of future Catholic high school students.

RESULTS

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Survey I had 10 (83%) of 12 surveys that were sent to high school administrators returned. For Survey II, 333 (69.4%) of 480 surveys sent to parents who had a child enrolled in an eighth grade parochial school were returned. For Survey III, 173 (43.2%) of 400 surveys that were sent to parents who had a child enrolled in seventh or eighth grade religious education at their parish, but who did not attend their parochial school, were returned. For Survey IV, 345 (71.9%) of 480 surveys were returned.

When compared to the self-reported incomes of high school families, the zip code analysis did not prove to be a statistically relevant indicator of family incomes: for the most part, families reported an income level much higher than the average family income for their zip code. The data supplied by the high school administrators, on the other hand, provided a picture of the difference between tuition and available aid from one school to the next. It is important to point out that schools were chosen to represent a variety of types of Catholic high schools: inner-city, suburban, single-gender, and coeducational. The financial data from the 10 schools consulted in Survey I are provided in Table 3. Table 3 provides the mean tuition, which was over \$6,000 for the 2003-2004 school year, with a mean of 27.2% of families receiving some kind of financial aid.

The self-reported income levels of families of each of Surveys I, II, and III are reported in Table 3. The population from the families of ninth grade Catholic secondary school students had the highest income levels, followed by families of eighth grade parochial school students. The families of seventh and eighth grade students who chose not to send their child to a Catholic school, yet still had their child attend religious education at their parish, reported the lowest incomes. These figures gave credence to the assertion that those who access Catholic education are of a higher income level than Catholics who choose not to send their child to a Catholic school. Tuition rates between eighth and ninth grade Catholic education are significantly different. Survey II respondents reported a mean difference of \$4,605

between eighth grade parochial school tuition and ninth grade Catholic high school tuition. This may be attributed to the fact that many families of students attending Catholic secondary school earn a higher income than the other two groups.

Table 3

Catholic High School Financial Aid Data

School	Population	Percentage receiving aid	2003-04 tuition*	Average grant	Percentage Catholic	Ability to meet need*
School 1	788	8.6%	\$7,700	\$3,900	93.0%	4
School 2	836	50.0%	\$6,875	\$2,026	85.7%	5
School 3	1,147	24.0%	\$7,300	\$1,500	83.0%	2
School 4	193	70.0%	\$4,200	\$1,800	75.0%	4
School 5	822	12.0%	\$5,980	\$2,000	94.0%	5
School 6	195	46.0%	\$7,450	\$2,462	86.0%	6
School 7	1,043	25.0%	\$6,950	\$1,200	86.0%	4
School 8	401	11.0%	\$5,000	\$ 621	91.0%	-
School 9	633	30.6%	\$8,376	\$2,517	75.7%	6
School 10	783	35.0%	\$4,300	\$ 795	76.0%	3

Note. Five of the high schools reported two tuition rates: one for practicing Catholic families and one for non-Catholic families. The tuition rates that were included for this study were those for practicing Catholics. "Ability to meet need" was based on a Likert scale of 1-7.

The means provided in Table 4 thus show that financial aid was on the increase, as well as the percentage of the school population receiving financial help. The mean percentage of Catholic students in the Catholic secondary school populations remained high, although lower than the percentage of Catholics in parochial schools.

Table 4

Mean Catholic High School Financial Aid Data

	Survey I data
Mean percentage to receive aid	27.2%
Mean tuition	\$6,413
Mean financial aid grant	\$1,882
Mean % of Catholic students	84.5%

One interesting factor is that while considering the family incomes of all three survey groups, they differ from reported family incomes from the U.S. Census Department, indicating that Catholic families who access Catholic education or at least send their child to religious education at their parish earn a higher mean income than American families in general. Table 5 indicates the span of income ranges of American families from the 2000 U.S. Census.

Table 5

Households by Total Money Income (U.S. Census 2000)

Income range	Percentage
Under \$5,000	3.1%
\$5,000 to \$9,999	5.9%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	6.9%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	13.3%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	12.4%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	15.4%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	18.4%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	10.8%
\$100,000 and over	13.8%

Note. Source (DeNavas-Walt, Cleveland, & Roemer, 2001).

The incomes provided in Table 6 are self-reported incomes, which are not always reliable. However, parents should have had a tendency to under-report their incomes rather than over-report them. Thus for those worried that Catholic education is becoming more and more a haven for those of high incomes, the percentages of families reporting high incomes could be troubling. A vast majority of families of ninth-grade Catholic high school students report incomes of over \$80,000, with over 35% of the total families reporting incomes of over \$120,000.

Table 6

Income Distributions of Families, 2003

	Survey II (Parochial)	Survey III (Religious education)	Survey IV (CHS)
Under \$20,000	1.6%	3.4%	2.4%
\$20,001 - \$40,000	4.8%	14.2%	10.5%
\$40,001 - \$80,000	31.0%	33.8%	23.2%
\$80,001 - \$120,000	35.5%	29.7%	28.6%
Over \$120,000	27.1%	18.9%	35.2%

For those families who did access Catholic education, their motivations were both academic as well as religious. Respondents identified their top motivations by ranking their motivations from a given list on the survey, with the opportunity to add a motivation not present. Each ranking was assigned a certain number of points. The breakdown is shown in Table 7. Catholic tradition and philosophy were high motivations in both Surveys II and IV. It was ranked first among the eighth grade parochial families, and second among Catholic high school families. While some may interpret this to mean there was less interest for the Catholic character of the school from the high school population, others may point out that it would be normal that families be more interested in the academic nature of the school once their child has begun studies at a Catholic high school, most of whom are considered to be college preparatory schools.

Table 7

Motivations for Sending Child to a Catholic School

Reason	Survey II	Survey IV
	eighth grade	high school
	Percentage of points	
Catholic tradition and philosophy	25.1%	18.5%
Strong academics	20.1%	28.1%
Discipline	19.3%	8.4%
Safe environment	7.1%	7.4%
Christian values	5.6%	13.8%
Location	4.8%	--
Best way to get quality college acceptance	3.4%	3.5%
Community aspect	2.9%	1.8%
Reputation	2.9%	5.7%
Siblings attends/attended	2.9%	2.1%
Sports program	1.1%	1.8%
Quality teachers	0.9%	4.3%
Arts program	0.6%	0.7%
Extracurricular activities	0.5%	0.9%
Music program	0.1%	0.6%

Approximately 20% of the parochial school population, and 80% of the religious education population (those Catholics who had chosen not to send their child to their parish school) indicated they were not considering sending their child to a Catholic high school. When asked to rank their reasons in their respective surveys, the most popular reason was financial: they considered the Catholic high school too expensive. The most common reasons given are provided in Table 8. Remarks from parents who either chose to write comments on their surveys, or from those who were interviewed, elaborated as to the financial dilemma. Some indicated that as they had no choice but to pay school taxes to support the public schools, it was wiser to send

their child to a public school. Others indicated their concern for the high costs of higher education, and their need to save for college. A few indicated that the Catholic school was unacceptable, for reasons such as a lack of diversity, lack of a coeducational environment, lack of resources to create a well-rounded education, or that the Catholic high school was not a reflection of the real world in which their child would soon be living.

Table 8

Reasons Preventing Families From Choosing a Catholic High School for Their Child

Reason	Percentage of total points	
	Survey II parochial	Survey III religious education
Catholic high school tuition is too prohibitive	51.4%	29.7%
Public school has more to offer	13.6%	20.1%
Our tax money goes to public schools*		7.4%
Family saving for college*		7.2%
Catholic high school location is too far	12.7%	9.1%
Catholic school lacks diversity	4.2%	6.4%
Catholic high school academics may be too difficult	3.3%	3.5%
We prefer a non-Catholic private school	3.0%	2.9%
Other: learning disability/difference*	0.6%	

When separating the Catholic responses from the non-Catholic responses from the Catholic high school populations, there was little difference among motivations. Non-Catholics were still motivated by a desire that their child's education contain Christian values, although both Catholics and non-Catholics alike ranked strong academics as their highest motivation for having their child attend a Catholic secondary school. These comparisons are displayed in Table 9.

Table 9

Top 5 Motivations for Attending Catholic High School Separated Between Catholics and Non-Catholics

Motivations for attending	Percentage of total points
Catholic	
1: Strong academics	22.2%
2: Catholic tradition and philosophy	15.0%
3: Christian values	14.1%
4: Discipline	10.0%
5: Safe environment	7.9%
Non-Catholic	
1: Strong academics	19.3%
2: Discipline	12.5%
3: Christian values/ Quality teachers	12.1%
4: Safe environment	11.4%
5: Reputation	11.0%

On the subject of financial aid, 27.2% of the respondents of the high school survey reported having received aid, as previously displayed in Table 3. Table 10 provides the breakdown of those who applied for aid and those who received it according to income. These figures indicate that financial aid was being provided in the 12 school populations surveyed to a large spectrum of family incomes, not just to the poorest of families. The majority of families earning \$70,000 or less reported receiving aid. According to the United States Census Bureau, the mean American household income reported in 2001 was \$42,288 (DeNavas-Walt & Cleveland, 2002), thus financial aid was given to families who sometimes far exceeded this average.

Table 10

Application for and Distribution of Financial Aid According to Income Level

Income brackets	<i>n</i>	Number who applied for aid	Percentage who applied for aid from income bracket	Number granted aid who had applied	Percentage who applied and were granted	Percentage of income bracket who receive aid
Under \$20,000	8	8	100%	7	87.5%	87.5%
\$20,000 - \$30,000	14	10	71.4%	10	100%	71.4%
\$30,001 - \$40,000	20	15	75.0%	13	86.7%	65.0%
\$40,001 - \$50,000	19	13	68.4%	10	76.9%	50.0%
\$50,001 - \$60,000	21	13	61.9%	9	69.2%	42.9%
\$60,001 - \$70,000	18	11	61.1%	9	81.8%	50.0%
\$70,001 - \$80,000	19	9	47.4%	4	44.4%	21.2%
\$80,001 - \$90,000	18	7	38.9%	1	14.3%	5.6%
\$90,001 - \$100,000	27	12	44.4%	5	41.7%	18.5%
\$100,001 - \$110,000	31	10	32.3%	3	32.3%	9.7%
\$110,001 - \$120,000	19	6	31.6%	1	16.7%	5.3%
Over \$120,000	115	8	7.0%	4	50.0%	3.4%

Table 11

Results of the Step-Wise Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Eighth Grade Catholic School Participants' Intention to Enroll Their Child in Catholic High School

Step	Variable	Cumulative			
		R^2	F	R^2 Change	Beta
1	Income	.08	11.04**	.08	.28**
2	Parents attended Catholic high school	.11	8.02**	.03	.46*

Notes. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$; $n = 129$

The surveys asked for demographic and motivational information. Much of that information has been provided in Tables 1-9. When using multiple regression in order to determine the statistically significant factors for choosing a Catholic high school for one's child, two indicators were proven to be statistically significant: family income and whether or not the parents themselves had attended Catholic high school. Table 11 provides the extent to which these two predictors were statistically significant.

ANSWERS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Which socioeconomic classes of students are currently being served by Catholic secondary schools across the United States?

Survey results indicated that over half of the respondents reported a family income of over \$100,000, which is double that of the average household income as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau for 2001 (see Table 5 for complete distribution).

To what extent are Catholics of more modest incomes choosing not to send their child or children to a Catholic high school because of tuition rates?

Survey results indicated that both populations of families with eighth grade students in parochial and in public schools who choose not to send their child to a Catholic high school indicate that the high tuition rate is the number one reason they cannot or will not consider a Catholic high school for their child.

To what extent is there a demographic shift in the American Catholic high school population toward non-Catholic students who come from a socioeconomic background that can afford the tuition?

Survey results indicated that a large majority of Catholic high schools remain Catholic, with a mean percentage of slightly over 85%. Although a majority reported academics as the most important reason for choosing a Catholic high school, a vast majority identified either Catholic tradition/philosophy or Christian values, or both, as an important reason for choosing the school.

What financial aid policies are in place in American Catholic high schools to ensure that what the Church has stated about the accessibility of Catholic schools to all socioeconomic classes is being addressed?

Survey results indicated that all schools offer financial aid, although the amount varies from school to school. All schools reported that they cannot fully meet the needs of those who apply for aid. Twenty-seven percent of survey respondents reported receiving financial aid. A majority of families earning less than \$70,000 a year reported receiving financial aid. The average grant is less than half of the yearly tuition price.

What are the perceptions of the parents of eighth graders from Catholic parishes concerning the availability of financial aid in Catholic secondary schools?

Survey results indicated that parents were well aware that financial aid was being offered, yet their knowledge of the extent to which aid was available was often lacking. Some of those who were aware of the aid had the perception that the aid was available solely to those of very low incomes, and was not available to an efficacious extent to the middle class

What are the motivations for attendance of the families whose ninth-grade children are currently enrolled in American Catholic high schools?

Survey results indicated that families were motivated to access Catholic secondary education for many reasons, the most important being, in order of preference, “Strong academics”; “Catholic tradition and philosophy”; “Christian values”; “Discipline”; and “Safe Environment.” Many stated that their public schools were unacceptable. Those who could afford Catholic secondary education were more likely to send their children to a Catholic high school if they themselves attended a Catholic high school.

Several parents indicated on the survey that a major motivation for sending their son or daughter to a Catholic high school was their child’s preference. Because this study focused on the financial and religious motivational questions, a motivation based on student preference was not a printed choice on the survey. Parental comments indicated, however, that student preference was also a contributing factor. A separate research study could investigate the reasons behind student preference (i.e., sports, social atmosphere, etc.). Detailed motivations on the students’ part go beyond the purpose of this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The data of this study suggest that:

- Catholic parents should take a serious look at how Catholic high schools might be of benefit to their children. This may accompany an honest and soul-searching discernment on whether the schools are really inaccessible to them, whether the sacrifice needed to pay tuition is really impossible, or whether the family is putting other more material priorities ahead of a Catholic education for their children.
- Catholic high schools must continue to strive, and find new and creative ways to raise funds for their institution, in order to build endowments restricted to financial assistance.
- The Church should endeavor to petition Catholics of higher incomes to sponsor the Catholic education of children in need. In its attempts to

reach financially successful Catholics, the Church should remind those individuals who were educated in the Catholic school system that the resources which enabled their own education were provided by the generous self-giving of religious communities of sisters, brothers, and priests. In the absence of religious communities present in the schools, perhaps financially successful Catholic school graduates could now offer their own generosity and self-giving in an attempt to give back to the schools that in many ways formed them.

- Despite obstacles, the Church, both through the diocese and through the administrations and communities of individual Catholic secondary schools, should continue to strive for public funds to support Catholic schools. This has been the consistent call of the universal Church in its various documents on Catholic education. At the same time, Church and Catholic school officials must be careful that accepting such aid will not compromise in any way the autonomy, independence, and religious freedom of the school.

CONCLUSION

Catholic secondary education continues to face the dilemma of making itself accessible to all Catholic families despite their socioeconomic status. The realities of the current American situation, however, have forced schools to rely on high tuition costs as a means to survival. The high tuition inhibits accessibility to many families at a time when the spiraling costs of higher education stare parents in the face many years before their child is college-age. For many Catholic families, paying tuition is a difficult sacrifice. For others, it is a hurdle they consider too difficult to overcome, and a majority of Catholic high school students attend public schools. Most, if not all Catholic high schools never had the intention of becoming so elite so as to exclude a majority of Catholic families.

As a religion which has its roots in Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church is an inclusive community of believers who attempt to live as well as promote the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, every ministry or institution within the Church must constantly assess and reassess how effectively it is meeting the challenge of the Gospel, which is articulated and espoused not only in Sacred Scripture itself, but also within the documents and statements of the Church. As a ministry of the Catholic Church, Catholic high schools in the United States struggle with issues of accessibility, Catholicity, and fidelity to the mission of Jesus Christ as espoused by the Church. The Church has acknowledged the challenge that Catholic schools have faced in many different countries to make their schools available to the entire Catholic population. The extent of this problem has gradually increased in the United States over the

past few decades. Financial accessibility and elitism are two important challenges that Catholic secondary education is facing at the beginning of the third millennium. The Church as a community of followers of Jesus Christ cannot be passive in its quest to deal with these issues, within the context of the Church at large. Despite their status as autonomous institutions under the jurisdiction of the bishop of their respective dioceses, Catholic high schools are one extension of many within the mission of the Church, and must always live out its mission within such a context.

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