

In the Heartland With Bishop Pates

“Catholic Schools – Dividends for Life”

The week of January 31, 2010 will mark the annual celebration of Catholic Schools Week. This year the theme is “Catholic Schools – Dividends for Life.”

Catholic schools constitute a tremendous asset both to the Church and to the civic communities which they serve. The academic outcome is highly positive. The students of the seventeen Catholic schools in the Diocese of Des Moines consistently outscore their counterparts in other educational settings in their standardized test scores. The schools also provide opportunity for extracurricular activity in which healthy competition, teamwork, and cooperation are encouraged with highly positive results. The morals and ethical values reflect the religious environment which is at the core of the school’s identity. These characteristics lead to the development of healthy, balanced persons.

All of the foregoing occurs in a setting that is secure and builds upon the experience and priorities of the families who are a part of a particular school.

One of my great joys as Bishop is the opportunity to visit each of our schools which I try to do each year. A typical visit includes the celebration of Mass, visits to the classrooms and an enjoyable “gourmet” lunch prepared by some of Iowa’s finest lunch ladies. Each year I also try to have a conversation with our seniors at Dowling Catholic and St. Albert in Council Bluffs. Every time I leave a school I come away stimulated by the energy, upbeat spirit and wholesome outlook of our young people. Their optimism is contagious.

One of the most encouraging features of our diocesan schools is that they are the enterprise of the entire Catholic community. I am tremendously edified by the support of our parish communities. Your commitment is verified by your significant investment. You give credence to this year’s theme: “Catholic Schools – Dividends for Life.”

In addition to parish support there is special need many of our families have because of their financial situation. Two opportunities to provide help are “Project Hope” and the “Catholic Tuition Organization” - CTO. You will have an opportunity to donate to Project Hope in the coming weeks. All proceeds go directly to student financial assistance. Iowa is one of six “enlightened” states which allow a tax credit. In our state it is a 65% tax credit both for individuals and corporations. Coupled with the federal deduction provided the donor – the CTO generates both opportunity and incentive to enable many families through designated scholarships to have a choice in education.

A particularly generous gift to our Catholic education ministry occurred this past year when a gentleman by the name of Charles O’Malley through his estate established assistance to St. Patrick School in Perry in the amount of \$4.5 million over a 15 year time span. Mrs. Nora O’Malley, Charles’s mother, campaigned vigorously for a Catholic

School in Perry in 1921. Her son, Charles, was an early recipient of that education. He went on to be remarkably successful in business and remembered St. Patrick School in sharing the bounty of his lifelong work.

Our schools also have pushed forward in updating and expanding their facilities. St. Malachy in Creston constructed an addition to house their sixth, seventh and eighth grades. St. Malachy's has experienced remarkable growth in student population in recent years. In addition St. Albert Schools in Council Bluffs built a new grade school and the Sheryl K. Johnson Childcare Center. Dowling Catholic High School in Des Moines has undergone a terrific facelift and improvement of its facilities to match its first class academic program. Both St. Albert and Dowling Catholic are working vigorously to conclude the final phases of the capital campaigns that were undertaken in support of these initiatives.

In conjunction with the Diocese of Des Moines centennial in 2011 several initiatives are under study in order to expand the opportunity for Catholic education.

- Under the leadership of Sara Eide a centennial committee is examining the possibility of a Catholic daycare and preschool program in downtown Des Moines. In addition, discussion by the same committee has begun about opening a Spanish immersion program under Catholic sponsorship. A similar program has enjoyed success in the Archdiocese of Dubuque.
- There is support to begin a new grade school (pre-k through grade 8) in conjunction with a new parish in Ankeny. Studies are ongoing as to this possibility.
- A feasibility study in conjunction with the centennial regarding the possibility of a Cristo Rey School in Des Moines has commenced under the leadership of Kathleen Kauth and Jason Kurth. There are currently 24 such schools belonging to this network throughout the United States. The schools offer specialized programs targeted to a specific audience. Basically, each school's student body is a high risk population of students who traditionally have not completed high school or further education. A Cristo Rey school enables them to do so. Ninety-six percent of Cristo Rey students go on to achieve college diplomas. Another way in which Cristo Rey differs from a typical Catholic High School is that it secures support from the broader community because of its obvious social and economic benefits.

The feasibility study under way regarding Cristo Rey is exactly that – determining whether or not the broader Des Moines community is positioned to support such an initiative. It is important because if developed such a school would provide opportunity for individuals in achieving dreams they might not even have imagined. In addition, the community benefits in terms of productivity and the utilization of gifts that might have remained dormant.

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Des Moines have seen many changes in the century-plus they have existed. Religious men and women over the years have been the staff.

Today our schools are operated almost exclusively by capable and dedicated laity. The facilities, technology and activities in our schools have been upgraded and expanded in keeping pace with contemporary educational standards. But what has gone unchanged is the Catholic character by which our schools are committed to a vision of life that embraces the development of the human person in a Christian spirit explicitly embodying love of God and love of neighbor.