

Catholic Schools: Parents' Best Friend

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When a child is baptized, the parents are told: "You are the first teachers of your children in the ways of faith. May you also be the best of teachers, bearing witness to the faith by what you say and do."

Easier said than done! Parents today face enormous challenges and responsibilities in forming their children after mind and heart of Christ. Many cultural forces are arrayed against them. Parents themselves may not have been properly formed in the faith and many do not consistently practice their faith. Powerful voices in the culture try to tell us that religious faith is not only outmoded but dangerous. Technology is a wonderful tool but what a challenge it is for parents to keep their children safe in the expanding world of cyberspace. The news and entertainment industries often undermine authentic human and Christian values. Even our laws and government programs, which are supposed to enshrine and protect our values of this great land, sometimes part ways with the ideals upon which our country was founded.

Let me give you an example. Until recently, the Connecticut State Government sponsored a website which promotes so-called sexual diversity. It was aimed at young people and their teachers. Termed a "resource", it did not hesitate to identify which religions are "friendly" to inappropriate sexual behavior and those which are not. This website did not

hesitate to include an attack on Pope Benedict XVI and to misinterpret biblical passages so as to justify immoral behavior. All this is at taxpayer expense.

Taxpayer dollars fund a lot of other things that are harmful to our young people. Many of the textbooks used in public schools inject political agendas into history and teach science with scarcely any ethical limits. The “rightness” of abortion and premarital sex is taken for granted. And now the family structure itself is under attack. In the meantime, in many school districts, test scores are slipping. Because of expensive and ineffective public schools, our nation already finds it difficult to compete in a global economy.

I lament this not only because I love my country but also because many Catholic young people attend public schools. Sometimes I speak with parents who are distraught over what their children are being taught and the overall lack of respect for human values that prevails even in public schools with all the bells and whistles. It is in everyone’s interest that our public schools be reformed and that they succeed.

In the meantime, our Catholic schools remain the best friend parents could have in fulfilling their role as the first and best teachers of their children. Let’s begin with the obvious. Catholic schools are academically successful. At Kolbe Cathedral High School in inner-city Bridgeport, 100% of the 2009 graduating class will go on to college. Last year, the Diocese of Bridgeport had 14 blue-ribbon eligible schools – that is to say – the U.S. Department of Education recognized that their test scores are in the top 10% of all schools, both private and public. One of our schools won the blue ribbon and we’re expecting more of the same this year. We’re automating our libraries, improving science labs, using smart boards, and laptops on

carts. We are mapping curricula, providing principals with leadership training, and ensuring that our teachers are certified. Our test scores speak for themselves. Academically we're second to none.

Even more importantly, the faith is taught – systematically and lovingly – five days a week. This goes on not only in religion class but is also integrated throughout other subjects. Thus the student acquires a Christian world view. Young people have the opportunity to attend Mass, to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and to develop their relationship with God. Catholic schools give young people the opportunity to serve the needs of others, especially the poor. Parents are invited and encouraged to take part in the formation of their children. Parents who do so with an open mind and heart will have their own faith revitalized. Our schools don't proselytize but they do evangelize. And opening one's heart and mind to Christ and the Gospel is the best thing that can happen to any of us.

All this creates a learning atmosphere that is marked by respect. Walk into any Catholic school. They are places of learning, teamwork, and joy. Recently I took the Mayor of Bridgeport on a tour of our inner city schools. He was amazed at what he saw: kids who treat their teachers and peers with respect; schools that are clean and cared for by the whole school community; students with social skills; teachers who love their jobs.

Catholic schools are not a panacea but I'd submit that they are parents' best friend. They require parents to re-prioritize, to make financial sacrifices, to become involved. They require students to step up to the plate – spiritually, academically, socially. Catholic schools are not besieged by the prevailing culture but rather help provide both parents and their children

the resources to transform our culture from the inside out. Above all, they put parents and students in touch with the One who has loved us with an everlasting love.