



ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD  
OFFICE OF THE AUXILIARY BISHOP  
VICAR GENERAL  
MODERATOR OF THE CURIA

## WHAT DO OUR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS LOOK LIKE TODAY?

There are many features that define what our Catholic schools look like today. One feature, that could easily be overlooked, is the presence of a corps of willing, capable and dedicated volunteers who generously give of their time and talent to support the mission of our schools.

Every year in dioceses throughout the country, we recognize and honor these special individuals. They add an important dynamic that keeps our schools operating effectively in difficult times for education in general and challenging times for Catholic education.

Essentially, volunteers help our schools to operate smoothly. They enable them to continue their many services and opportunities by supporting staff members and stabilizing routine operations for students. They significantly improve the learning environment.

A number of years ago the noted sociologist of education, James S. Coleman, developed a theme that would have wide currency in educational circles, the theme of “social capital”. This theme is best described as the extra resources for affecting human behavior created by overlapping networks of relationships. These relationships include family, church, school and neighborhood. Coleman claimed that no effective vehicle of growth and behavior, no institution, thrives or prospers without this interactive network.

Our Catholic elementary schools witness to the accuracy of this insight. Volunteerism on behalf of our schools is a demonstration of the effectiveness of social capital. While it can be witnessed in many areas of society, nowhere is it more in evidence than in our Catholic schools.

Without this important resource very few of our Catholic elementary schools could operate effectively for very long. They certainly could not consistently provide for long the kind of quality education for which they are rightly known, or the emphasis on integrity and values to which they witness. Catholic schools simply do not have the dollars that other secular and many private institutions have at their disposal.

We do have other invaluable resources in the strong, unwavering support of our Church, the imaginative stewardship of our pastors, the vision of our school administrators, the dedication and faith of our teachers, and in the demand and plea of our parents to keep these unique resources available to their children. Even then, what makes it all work is the enthusiasm of thousands of dedicated, passionate volunteers.

Catholic schools are a phenomenon in our society today. The great, at times astounding success of our schools cannot, in other words, be attributed to greater financial resources of either parents or schools, but rather is the result of the greater social resources of a community that shares not only values but also relationships.

Our volunteers' time and talents, lovingly given to our schools are among our greatest treasures, cherished not only by our parishes and school administrators but by all of us as our schools are engaged in fulfilling the teaching mission of the Church. Their involvement reflects the shared responsibility of the laity for the Church's mission, a responsibility rooted in Baptism.

The message, so eloquently delivered in the United States Catholic Bishops' Pastoral, "To Teach As Jesus Did," issued in 1972, remains true today. It underscores the important role of Catholic schools in fulfilling the Church's teaching mission: to teach the message of Christ, to build communities of faith, and to provide service to the entire human community. These elements summarize the purpose of Catholic schools in the United States.

Our volunteers not only give a needed and effective helping hand but much more. In their enthusiasm, presence and help, in no matter how big or small a way, they affirm and remind us of the value and worth of what we do. They encourage us to greater efforts in the cause. They inspire us to continue this work against sometimes formidable odds.

Their efforts, sacrifice, and goodness are not taken for granted. They are deeply appreciated. We recognize that without them we would accomplish so much less. They contribute significantly to the wonderful outcome; young men and women prepared for life spiritually, intellectually, physically, emotionally and morally - to assume the tasks of adulthood and contribute to a more just and humane society.

This is what is unique about Catholic Schools. Not only do they provide the best in education, with limited frills, bells and whistles, but they seek to provide a moral compass, a sturdy inner integrity based on faith that offers their students the grace to shine in the best of times, the patience to endure the worst of times, and the vision to make choices which are honest, just and charitable...and to have all that come from within, from who they are. All this takes place against the background of a world that thoughtlessly dismisses the erosion of values in our day.

As society has become increasingly secular, and separates itself farther and farther from religious values, it has tried to make up for this by passing ever more laws in an effort to stem the tide of unethical behavior. We see the results of these efforts in waves of litigation, in new,

ever more sophisticated laws and, ultimately, in a failure to change people. The law can prohibit vice, but it cannot, of itself, instill virtue. In the end, this effort does not beget better citizens, it only generates more lawyers, builds more court houses and prisons.

This is precisely why Catholic education is so precious today, what it is uniquely equipped to do. This is why our schools are not luxuries. They are necessities. They provide what other institutions are not allowed or equipped to do, offer the moral compass, something internal, something at the heart of what it means to be human...humanity at its best and most moral.

This is the story of all our Catholic schools...effort gladly expended on something of infinite value for our young people now and in the future. This is the story of our volunteers who help to make this possible. For that we recognize them, honor them, treasure them and thank them. They are an important feature of what Catholic schools look like today.

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