

Take pride in our Catholic schools

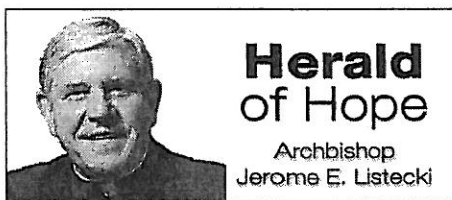
Throughout the archdiocese there are smiling faces of young children making their way to school, and there are a few tears being shed by parents whose babies are entering those school years – a true sign that their children are growing up.

I can remember my first day of school at St. Michael; it was kindergarten, and my teacher's name was Sr. Alipia. She was a legend in her work with the very young and everyone loved her. I have often said that the teacher in the earliest years of schooling sets the tone for the rest of one's academic life. In fact, there was a book written which reflected that sentiment.

I was so proud on the first day of school. I was joining my cousins and neighbors in my rightful place in society. Papa went to work and I went to school. When I entered the school, those eighth graders looked sooooooo old and I wondered if I would ever get to that grade level, if I would ever be that big, if I would ever be that smart. Now, years later, those eighth graders look so young it's hard to remember that we were ever that age. Today, we are much bigger and wider in many ways than we were in eighth grade and, of course, we all realize that many of us are not as smart as even a fifth grader. Just watch the quiz show.

Education is so important. Our Lord clearly established teaching as part of the mission of the church: Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you (Matt 28: 19-20).

The tri-fold role of the bishop is to administer, teach and sanctify. Every pastor of a parish joins in these responsibilities (Canon 519). I have often said there may be a parish without a school campus but there is no Catholic parish without a school. Conversely, a Catholic grammar or high school does not exist apart from the parish.



It has been Catholic education that has made us the strong Catholic Church that we are in the United States and for this we all owe our deepest gratitude to the religious sisters and brothers who courageously staffed our schools and provided an educational environment not only for our Catholic community, but for our society as well. The story of their commitment and sacrifice needs to be told again and again.

The church recognizes that parents have the primary responsibility for the education of their children. "The fruitfulness of conjugal love extends to the fruits of the moral, spiritual and supernatural life that parents hand on to their children by education. Parents are the principal and first educators of their children. In this sense, the fundamental task of marriage and family is to be at the service of life (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1653).

Knowing that parents want what is best for their children, I look to our Catholic parents to be collaborators with our parish and school staffs in the education of their children. In today's world we need to be proactive in assisting our school system to provide the safest and best educational environment possible. We can accomplish this if we work together.

Since parents are the primary educators, I would like to remind all parents of the necessity of attending Mass on Sundays with their children. The greatest example that one could give to their children is the example of practicing one's faith. Catholic schools exist to form students spiritually as well as intellectually and parents participate in that formation.

A little known secret is that all of our Catholic students receive support from the generosity of the faithful of the archdiocese and namely from the parish. No Catholic school can fully function without that additional support. Tuition often only covers a part of the total cost. Parents should contribute to the support of the parish whose generosity supports Catholic education.

Beside the monetary support, volunteering some time to the school or parish is a wonderful way to become involved in the school or parish community. It also demonstrates a social responsibility to our brothers and sisters. For parents who are unable to have their children attend a Catholic school, vigilance should be maintained over the religious instruction of their children by knowing their teachers, examining their textbooks and discussing with them their lessons. If possible, parents should participate in the catechetical programs, possibly be a catechist, or teacher's assistant, and, of course, parents should attend Sunday Mass as a means of assisting in their own spiritual formation and the spiritual formation of their children.

I realize that we have problems confronting our Catholic schools, e.g., spiraling costs, changing demographics and a weak economy. However, I am excited about the new school year. We have a new superintendent of schools, Kathleen Cepelka, a well-respected educator whose love and commitment to Catholic education is known to all in our community. She is assisted by Sue Nelson, Carol Ward, Brenda White and Br. Nivard Scheel — four individuals who instill confidence as we go forward and attempt to fashion Catholic education in today's church.

I am optimistic because all I can envision is those smiling faces of our students who represent Jesus yesterday, today and tomorrow.

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