



# COURIER-JOURNAL

## Back to School and On to College

### 'The Way, and the Truth, and the Life'

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"Back to school" has a sound of normalcy about it — like the leaves falling or the birds beginning to go south. Somehow this year, however, it brings me a more serious sense. As school opens, the country continues to be inundated with Watergate concerns, now turned to the serious business of the replacement of a president. Civil servants in very high positions are indicted and found guilty of betraying the public trust. Some aspects of government appear to be run in an atmosphere that is without principles or morals.

From the National Conference of Catholic Bishops comes a document focusing on the growth of the secularistic, humanistic value system that permeates our society. "At the very least, many would say that for a large number of Catholics, the influence of secular society — and all that it implies, for good as well as ill — counts more heavily than the influence of the Church."

No one dreams that any one force or institution can completely shape society or each of the individuals in it. However, people perennially look to the schools to help a new generation cope effectively with the ills left behind by their predecessors. It is this hope, I think, that

gives a special soberness to the beginning of this particular school year.

For Catholic schools especially there is a purposefulness about this new start. Our Church community looks to the Catholic schools to bring a powerful influence for good into the lives of our students. These schools are called upon again to bring Gospel ideals and values into the curriculum. "To Teach as Jesus Did" — the Bishops' 1972 pastoral letter on education — now seems like an old friend. We feel at home with its mandates not only to teach the Gospel message but to build Christian community in schools and to lead young people to a sense of responsibility to serve their society. We feel refreshed and reassured by its ringing endorsement of Catholic schools as affording "the fullest and best opportunity to realize the threefold purpose of Christian education among children and young people." We feel very confident about the ability of our principals, teachers and other staff members to share with students their faith as well as their teaching talents.

Personally, I am edified and encouraged by the willingness of the Catholic people to re-examine the organizational basis of their Catholic schools. Working out interparochial arrangements for cooperation and consolidation is a difficult, sometimes painful, process.

Many parishes have succeeded in doing it and I congratulate them.

In their concern for the education of their children, Catholic school parents have this year been joined by the State Legislature which passed legislation providing a new series of student services. Even the Supreme Court has chipped in with a decision sustaining the constitutionality of certain remedial teaching provided through federal funds.

Success does not come by accident. It comes through the efforts of those willing to make a personal investment. My hope for the new school year is that the entire Catholic community will bring a renewed purposefulness to its efforts to provide Catholic education — through Catholic schools and through its other educational vehicles. The Bishops concluded their pastoral "To Teach as Jesus Did" with appropriate back to school advice for adult Catholics:

**"We face problems; so do those who came before us, and so will those who follow. But as Christians we are confident of ultimate success, trusting not in ourselves, but in Jesus Christ, who is at once the inspiration, the content, and the goal of Christian education: 'The way, and the truth, and the life.'"**

## Open Letter to Parish Education Committees

Dear Co-Workers,

When the beloved Pope John XXIII convoked the Second Vatican Council, his intention was not to define several new doctrines but to shed light on some very basic principles and doctrines which had been with the Church for ages, but needed renewed interpretation with accent on man's experiences and responses to present-day situations. Pope John and the voices of Vatican II possessed penetrating insight into the teaching mission entrusted to us by Jesus, the demands and blunderings of the Church's attempts to connect faith, culture, and man's own experiences, and the complexities of integrating religious values into life patterns and life choices. The legacy of Vatican II to us was a legacy containing mixed blessings — a legacy which affirmed that all of the Church's teaching ought to be directed towards the service of mankind, and then challenged us to critically examine the content of our teaching and the love and authenticity of our service, involving the laity in both the evaluation and the shaping of our future destiny.

I use the term "mixed blessing" because I am very well aware of both the pleasant and the painful effects of having Parish Education Committees who accept responsibility for the Church's teaching mission, but who occasionally make unenlightened or unpopular decisions. I am aware, too, of the variety of feelings of privilege and service, and of frustration and disappointment which well up in your hearts at tense meetings or during spells of committee spiritlessness and failure. There will be moments when all of us — pastors, priests, sisters, chairmen and members — join St. Thomas in his prayer of anguish, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Reliance on God, words of encouragement to one another and a sense of humor will sustain us through these dark moments.

Whether a parish is in a rural or an urban area,

whether it is large or small, whether it is composed of mostly young or older people, it possesses the same threefold mission: to proclaim God's love and mercy, to celebrate our shared faith, and to actively serve those in need. However, it is important that the educational programs and priorities respect the unique needs, age levels, talents, serious concerns and questions of the parishioners. It is important also that the programs be directed towards personal growth as well as towards the transformation of social conditions which interfere with or completely oppress man's growth and dignity.

I recommend that Parish Education Committees study the United States Bishops' Pastoral on Christian Education, To Teach as Jesus Did, so that they may be grounded in solid principles and convictions. The following statements from that Pastoral pose specific challenges to those who are playing a significant part in shaping a parish's educational directions.

**"The educational mission is not exhausted by any one program or institution. By their complementary functions and cooperative activities all programs and institutions contribute to the present realization of the Church's educational mission. All should remain open to new forms, new programs, new methods which give promise of fuller realization of this mission in the future."**

**"The educational mission is not directed to any single group within the Christian community or mankind."**

**"Like the mission and message of Jesus Christ, the Church's educational mission is universal — for all men, at all times, in all places."**

**"The Christian community has every reason for hope in confronting the challenge of educational ministry today. To all our efforts we join prayer for God's help, and for the intercession of Mary, the Mother**

of Jesus. We face problems; so did those who came before us, and so will those who follow. But as Christians we are confident of ultimate success, trusting not in ourselves, but in Jesus Christ, who is at once the inspiration, the content, and the goal of Christian education: 'the way, and the truth, and the life.'"

Education committees must themselves be a sign of the truth of the Gospel. You are dealing with more than an exercise in practical responsibility. You are searching for concrete ways of ministering to others, of expressing Christian values which enable men to hear the message of hope contained in the Gospel. You who serve as members must be persons who do the truth and not simply speak it. Listen graciously to each other, reflect the gospel-spirit in both your language and your actions. Recognize your differences and debate your views honestly without personally destroying one another. Convey a spirit of hope and openness to new possibilities, realizing that there is more than one way and more than your way to achieve the teaching mission of the Church. Deepen your own prayerfulness so that it offers you personal strength and helps you to give to Committee life.

God constantly calls each of us to new discoveries of Himself and to deepened awareness of His presence in our lives. May you recognize His presence in your Committee.

In gratitude for your leadership,

Sister M. James Lynch, SSJ  
Coordinator of Educational Services

For information on the services and resources available to Parish Education Committees and/or School Boards, please contact the Department of Education, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, New York 14624, Phone 328-3210.