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AND... THEIR CULTURAL RICHNESS



'The function of a beacon is to guide, mark and assure'

By Michael Walker
Rochester Federation of Catholic School Parents

I often wonder who comes up with new slogans for an annual event. Catholic Schools Week is a national happening, and probably this year's slogan was brought into being by some appointed task force. At first the phrase "beacon of hope" didn't appeal to me, but on further reflection I must admit it is a very apt theme.

When most of us think of a beacon, we probably think of ships or planes being guided by some sort of signal. I know next to nothing about ships and can only guess at the amount of help the audible beacon or "fog horn" provides for shipping on Lake Ontario. I do know a little about flying and can assure you that the beacons available to flyers are considered great friends.


The pilot of a well-equipped aircraft has three or four different types of electronic beacons to follow and instrument indicators to tell him the distance to a particular beacon. All these devices help to assure us that Flight 229 carrying our loved ones will arrive at Gate 22 safely.

The function, then, of a beacon is to guide, mark and assure. As we travel life's journey, we certainly need guidance, markers and assurance. If one were to possess the "right stuff" of life, he would need moral and ethical training, with perhaps a certain amount of religious training for good measure. Public institutions that formally teach moral or ethical principles in today's world are few and far between. Perhaps we're back to those beacons of hope - the Catholic schools.

The Church hierarchy and we, the Catholic laity, need to think very hard about how our Catholic schools can remain viable. Surely you are aware that, in addition to teaching morality and the elements of our faith, our schools are required to maintain governmental standards. Educators are presently renewing their commitment to producing excellence in public schools; this, we are told, will require the expenditure of large sums of money. Catholic educators cannot stand by smugly. We must also dedicate ourselves to excellence. We need stronger schools: elementary, secondary and at the college level. We have recently lost a battle for tuition tax credits, I say "a battle" and not "the war" because the issue will be back. Its passage would surely help private education.

People generally understand these issues, but many times they are unsure of what they can do to help. Here are some suggestions: We are celebrating Catholic Schools Week - visit a Catholic school open house, volunteer at your school, serve on your school board or home/school association, and contact the Rochester Federation of Catholic School Parents for more suggestions.

Our schools are indeed "beacons of hope." We need support for Catholic education. We need to make sure the circuits are functioning, the bulbs are bright and the lenses are polished.




St. Augustine's Gospel Choir, begun in 1982, has grown in size from 11 students to twice that number. Members from grades six, seven and eight, represent a variety of churches throughout the city. The choir performs for schools, churches, hospitals and nursing homes.

'Parents have found in the Catholic schools a reason for hope for their children'

By Sr. Edwardine Weaver, RSM
Superintendent of Diocesan Schools

"Catholic Schools Beacon of Hope," is the theme of Catholic Schools' Week this year. Through the knowledge of the contributions that Catholic Schools have made to American Education we recall memories of the past, review the present and anticipate the future.

In reflecting on the past we are conscious that 1984 marks the centenary of the Third Plenary Council. This pastoral letter issued by the bishops at this council bound the clergy and the laity, wherever possible, to establish parish schools. The bishops stated:

"We cannot ignore the palpable fact the school is an important factor in the forming of childhood and youth - so important that its influence often outweighs that of home and Church. Religion, in order to elevate a people should inspire their whole life and rule their relations with one another. Therefore the school, which principally gives the knowledge fitting for practical life, ought to be preeminently under the influence of religion."

What a tremendous challenge to a church of poor immigrants. Yet, how they responded! The parochial school became the pride of the American Church. Amid the self sacrificing, the poor and the often hungry Catholics


made sure the parish school was there to provide for the young Catholic. It is this proud past that is part of our cause for celebration this week. Due to these efforts, schools grew and expanded and today by every measurement, the Catholic school produces a valuable product for Church and country.

Today, with over 7,950 elementary and 1,482 secondary Catholic schools in the country, and with the fine reputation that Catholic schools command, it seems as if the prelates have gained the hopes manifested by the Third Plenary Council. Current findings regarding the state of education in American schools give Catholic elementary and secondary education affirmation for the work that they are doing. With their long-standing commitment to the basics, to academic excellence, to a learning environment that reflects order and discipline, they consistently work toward their goal of providing quality education imbued with moral values. So too are parents affirmed in their choice of Catholic school education for their children.

In a very special way the urban Catholic school has been and is a "Beacon of Hope." Throughout its history the urban schools have served the children of minorities and newcomers to America. Today, more than one half of the nearly 10,000 Catholic schools in this country are located in major cities. Parents have found in the Catholic schools a

reason for hope for their children. They place their hopes on schools where basics are stressed, where pupils are challenged to become all they are capable of becoming, while applying Gospel values to their own lives and the world about them. To thousands of students and parents across our country, Catholic schools represent an extension of the family, a spirit of community, and neighborhood stability.

As we celebrate Catholic Schools' Week we point with pride to the living beacon of hope that is the Catholic school. We encourage you to become knowledgeable of the Catholic school as it is today by participating in the many opportunities open to the public that are offered by Catholic schools during this week. We express our gratitude to the many who have and continue to support the cause of Catholic schools and we pray for guidance that each of our schools will continue as a mission of the Church to be a "Beacon of Hope."



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