

# Catholic Schools Week!



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## Schools need foundation, expert asserts

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

GATES — Catholic schools need a national foundation to help fund their operations if they are going to survive into the next century, according to the director of the Catholic School Leadership Program at Boston College.

Sister Clare E. Fitzgerald, SSND, made her point in a speech at St. Helen's Church Sunday, Feb. 4.

Catholic schools are in financial trouble because they can no longer depend on the low-wage labor of nuns and priests, she said. "We're long past bingos and spaghetti suppers," she commented. "We have to think sophisticated ..."

Such sophisticated thinking entails aggressive marketing of Catholic schools to their communities, Sister Fitzgerald noted. Catholic school leaders need to remind the public that their schools have lower drop-out rates and exceed public schools in teaching of academic and ethical subjects, she said.

The award-winning educator, a past president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, used numerous statistics to prove that many

Catholics owe their high position in American society to Catholic education — an education affluent Catholics have an obligation to support, she asserted.

For example, she said, a survey of upper- and mid-management executives working for corporations in Philadelphia showed that 80 percent of them had attended Catholic schools. Upon learning this fact, the business community expressed its gratitude to the Catholic schools in the city by donating \$20 million to the schools' operation, she said.

Catholics across the country should learn from the example set by the Philadelphia business community, Sister Fitzgerald remarked.

"If 15 percent of the Catholic population contributed one percent of its income to a Catholic (education) foundation, in one year it would have \$2 billion," she said. "In 10 years, it would exceed the Ford Foundation."

To convince Catholics that their school systems are worth supporting, Sister Fitzgerald cited several studies showing that adult Catholics who graduated from Catholic schools are more likely to support the church and serve it on a volunteer basis than are their counterparts who attended public

schools.

She also related statistics showing that Catholics — constituting the largest, single Christian denomination in the nation — now are also the most well-educated and the single richest group of Americans. "We've got three things going for us, and what are you going to do about it?" she asked rhetorically.

Catholics should not be concerned that they would be unable to support their schools, she said, noting that impoverished European immigrants built the original parish-school system in the United States by pooling their meager resources.

In addition, Sister Fitzgerald said, it is time for Catholics to ask the U.S. government to fund their schools. The democracies of West Germany and Canada fund private schools to the benefit of the nation as a whole, she said.

She drew her speech to a close by recalling that Jesus fed a crowd of 5,000 with only a handful of loaves and fishes. A similar miracle in Catholic school financing could occur, she said, if Catholics are persistent in finding financial solutions.

"Keep (Catholic education) going, if you can, because it has something to say to the world," she concluded.