

How to prepare schoolchildren for tomorrow

Thinking about educating children for a new century and a new millennium is daunting, to say the least. Research has indicated that 70 percent of the "knowledge" currently taught in our high schools will be obsolete within five years. How then do schools prepare students to be contributing adult members of their community when many of the jobs they will be doing do not yet exist? What do we teach? And how do we teach it?

Catholic schools have always been effective in developing in children an inner discipline and the ability to become self-learners. Focusing on "the basics," Catholic schools produce students who are committed to their faith, optimistic about the future, demonstrate sincere concern for those less fortunate, and actively dedicated to being of service to others. Secondly, we strive to instill the concept that faith formation and learning are lifelong propositions. So what is our curriculum for the 21st century? Simply, faith, values and excellence.

Catholic schools have always been identified as an important ministry of the church. This was reinforced most recently by our diocesan Synod, which named lifelong faith formation as our top priority. Our schools have always enjoyed remarkable levels of support from three key groups: pastors, donors and teachers. Because tuition covers only a portion of

guest
columnist



TIMOTHY J. DWYER

the actual cost of Catholic education, the financial support of parishes and the generosity of individual donors is essential. Please know of our unending gratitude for this commitment. In addition, our schools enjoy the support of hundreds of volunteers who share and support our work.

In recent years, our schools have been the recipients of some remarkable gifts from individuals who believe in the ministry of Catholic education. The staggering generosity of Robert and Peggy Wegman in supporting our inner-city schools, and gifts of \$15 million and \$400,000 made by anonymous donors within the past 10 months are examples of people who know the difference Catholic schools made in their lives and want to offer that opportunity to others.

Often overlooked in any discussion of those who subsidize Catholic education are

the teachers who share their faith and gifts with children, and produce the wonderful results we see year after year. Currently, our teachers make about 60 percent of what they could make in a local public school. That most stay with us is a testament to their dedication and understanding that their work is a ministry as well as a profession. While we will never be able to pay them what they deserve, we are actively trying to find new and creative ways to demonstrate our appreciation for all that they do.

In turn, Catholic schools actively seek out ways in which they can be a positive presence in their parishes and community. Recent elementary school outreach projects have included clothing drives, food drives, writing greeting cards for senior citizens, and fundraising for Habitat for Humanity. Developing a world view that is driven by Gospel values and church social teachings is the most effective way to prepare children for adulthood in a world we can't yet foresee.

We have every right to be proud of our schools and the students they produce. Catholic schools are our investment in and our gift to the future. Happy Catholic Schools Week!

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Dwyer is superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Rochester.



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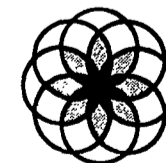
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