

Education — an unwavering mission

It's often said that time appears to pass more quickly as one gets older. Still, I find it hard to fathom that summer is waning and that we are on the cusp of the 2004-05 school year!

Yet I am sure parents — many who probably look forward at this point to the sound of school buses humming again — already can see vast differences and growth in their children from only a year ago.

It is that wonderful growth — in mind, body and spirit — that so delights me when I have the opportunity to visit with children who attend our Catholic schools, which are the subject of many of the articles in this issue of the *Catholic Courier*.

Since this diocese was founded in the latter half of the 19th century, a major part of its mission has been to provide for the Catholic education of our children. During the course of our history, hundreds of thousands of students have been educated in our Catholic tradition, and many of them have assumed leadership positions in business, government, law, medicine, education and other professions, helping to make our community a better place



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

in which to work and live.

The importance of our educational mission has not wavered throughout our history, and does not today. My goal, one shared by our Department of Catholic Schools, the local school advisory committees throughout our diocese and the Monroe County Catholic School Board, is that we always will examine ways in which we can strengthen our schools and preserve the treasure of a Catholic education for future generations of young people.

I would like to thank all those families who choose Catholic schools for their children for your investment in their future, and for your desire to equip them with the academic ex-

cellence and moral values that will serve them well throughout their lifetimes. We truly value our relationship as partners with you in the most important endeavor of educating our youth in a manner based on the Gospel values we hold so dear.

You may not know it, but the Diocese of Rochester is blessed to have 45 Catholic elementary and junior high schools within its 12 counties, including 28 within Monroe County that operate as a school system. We also have consolidated systems in Wayland-Dansville, Auburn, Corning and Elmira. Last school year, more than 10,000 children in pre-kindergarten through grade eight attended our schools.

Some other things you may not know about our schools:

- All Diocese of Rochester Catholic school teachers are certified.

- Our schools feature state-of-the-art technology, which has helped our students win prestigious awards in national and international competition.

- Each of our schools offers art, music, technology and physical education as part of its instructional program.

- Our schools follow New York state curriculum guidelines and voluntarily take all state standardized tests as well as norm-referenced achievement tests.

I am very proud of the great success of our students and staff during the 2003-04 school year. On average, our students continue to compile scores on state and norm-referenced achievement tests that exceed state averages. They also continue to score off the charts in matters of heart and spirit — reaching out to others in their respective communities in countless ways, having learned the importance of sharing God's blessings.

I'm both heartened and humbled by the sacrifices so many make to provide Catholic education for their children. I'm mindful that many

families adopt a more modest lifestyle so that their young ones may attend our schools. I am reminded of the eloquent statements of a mother who, in a letter to the *Catholic Courier* in December, acknowledged the sacrifices she and her husband made, but went on to write that the gift of faith is one of the greatest gifts parents can give their children.

As for our teachers and principals, you'll find a wonderful article in this issue that highlights just some of their achievements from the previous year.

It is important to note the dedication and mission of our teachers, many of whom have resisted more lucrative offers from public schools in order to instill our traditional teachings and Catholic values in their students along with excellence in academics.

These represent some of our greatest challenges as we look ahead to the future of our diocesan schools. We certainly want to attract and retain the finest teachers available, and to do so we must continue in our efforts to offer more competitive wages.

Similarly, we want to continue to look at ways in which we can make Catholic education affordable for all. Over the course of the past few years, we have seen a trend of decreasing enrollment in our schools. A dip in the birth rate is one explanation, as is a general decrease in the population in our 12 counties. Yet we know that financial considerations play a role, too. I am committed to finding a way to utilize our resources so that Catholic education is within the reach of all who desire it for their children.

It is my fondest hope that the children entrusted to us for this upcoming school year will continue to grow in all areas. We see our partnership with you as a privilege and we will continue to look at ways in which we can make our schools even more effective and available for all.

I know that you will enjoy this back-to-school edition of the *Catholic Courier*, which features wonderful stories of the good things happening in our schools. Just reading about them also may help families get in the mindset for the start of school and the daily routine that returns to every household with school-age children.

As always, you are in my prayers, and I wish you a healthy and blessed summer and a safe, happy and productive school year!

Peace to all.

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