

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND OUR CHURCH: FAITH MOVING FORWARD



Brothers and Sisters:

Catholic education is central to our faith. It is how we convey what we know and value to others. Through our Catholic schools we provide a daily living witness of our faith, imparting values and skills that promote the dignity of all.

A Catholic school is not a building, but an experience dedicated to the formation of the whole person in mind, body, and spirit. Our Catholic schools cultivate strong communities, joining parishioners, families, staff, and neighbors behind the indispensable task of teaching children to draw from their God-given gifts and share those treasures with others. Catholic schools act as a resource for parents, allowing them to better meet the demands placed upon them as the primary educators of their children. By focusing on faith, high academic standards, and personal accountability, our Catholic schools ensure that students depart school ready to meet the challenges of life and the world.

As Catholics, we all share in the responsibility of sustaining Catholic schools. The strength of our Catholic identity, our parishes, our religious education programs, and our community are closely aligned with our Catholic schools. The future strength of our Church is tied to the success of our schools, and our entire community suffers when these schools close. We urge the entire Catholic community to commit its time, talent, and treasure to support them.

Our schools are essential to the Church's mission to "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). Today, Wisconsin's 325 Catholic schools educate nearly 60,000 students, but this is only part of the story. Many thousands more in Wisconsin are themselves a product of Catholic schools, and they have enriched our state with their contributions as parents, citizens, and community leaders. Their lives affirm that Catholic schools nurture spiritual strength as well as intellect, impart values as well as knowledge, and foster a human excellence that bears fruit through service to others.

Catholic schools strive to serve everyone. Every person, by virtue of being made in God's image, has "an inalienable right to an education" (*Gravissimum educationis*). This is especially true for those in inner city neighborhoods and rural areas where access to quality education is more limited. Nationwide, 43 percent of all Catholic schools are located in inner city and urban areas. Serving these communities poses unique challenges, but Wisconsin's Catholic schools remain committed to providing those of limited means access to the same high quality educational opportunities enjoyed by others.

However to maintain this commitment, Catholic schools must meet serious challenges. Economic conditions have forced the closure and consolidation of Catholic schools in all of our state's five dioceses. The cost of educating students in Catholic schools continues to rise (since 2000 the cost of educating a student has risen around 60 percent). Tuition in a Catholic elementary school covers, on average, only 62.2 percent of the actual costs of educating a pupil, but Catholic schools see an increasing number of families unable to afford a Catholic school experience. Requests for tuition assistance continue to rise.

As the leaders of our five dioceses, we bishops of Wisconsin recommit ourselves to Catholic schools. We are dedicated to ensuring that Catholic schools remain available, accessible, and affordable to all. To our pastors, principals, and all those who serve in our Catholic schools, we offer our continuing gratitude and remain dedicated to making certain they are equipped with the tools necessary to guarantee an exceptional educational experience.

We also thank all our state's Catholics for all they have done to sustain our schools and urge their continued commitment. We invite those parishes or individuals who do not currently have ties to a Catholic school, to become engaged in the support of a nearby Catholic school community. We encourage parents and students to enroll in Catholic schools and experience the unique integration of spiritual and academic development they provide. Additionally, we urge continued recognition of the value our schools provide to the community by advancing policies that support their success, such as school choice initiatives and education scholarship tax credits.

Teaching is an act of faith. Ultimately we hope and trust that after we are gone, the seeds of faith we sow will bear fruit in the lives of those we teach. We urge all who read this letter to renew their personal commitment to the teaching ministry of Jesus Christ by supporting our Catholic schools.

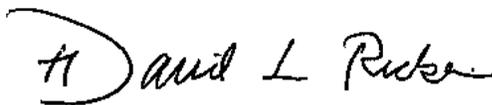
Sincerely yours in Christ,



The Most Reverend Jerome E. Listecky
Archbishop of Milwaukee



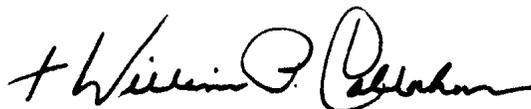
The Most Reverend Robert C. Morlino
Bishop of Madison



The Most Reverend David L. Ricken
Bishop of Green Bay



The Most Reverend Peter F. Christensen
Bishop of Superior



The Most Reverend William P. Callahan
Bishop of La Crosse