

## **OUR SCHOOLS**

Catholic Schools are an important ministry within the life of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown. Several groups have been assisting me, as Diocesan Bishop, in studying ways that our schools can be made financially viable and their future as excellent educational institutions be assured. Following upon the suggestion made at the June 21, 2006, Diocesan Finance Council meeting, I am calling together several key groups for a day-long “retreat.” Various proposals will be presented and discussed at that gathering.

Besides the Diocesan Catholic Schools Task Force and the Altoona Area Catholic School Task Force, the members of the Diocesan Presbyteral Council and the Diocesan Finance Council will also be present. Several experts in the field have been invited to make presentations. This will be followed by a panel discussion. A number of my staff will be present as resource persons. I have called the gathering “A Day of Dialogue, Assuring a Future for Our Catholic Schools.”

This will all take place on Wednesday, November 8. I hope that the day can result in a proposal that will outline 1) the structure within which our Catholic Schools are to operate in terms of governance, 2) an approach that will ensure Catholic identity in terms of teaching and formation, as well as 3) a plan by which they can be made financially viable. The Diocesan Presbyteral Council and the Diocesan Finance Council will, then, take up that proposal at their meetings on Wednesday, December 6, 2006. Such a consultation is necessary in accord with the Code of Canon Law for the Church.

Those two canonical councils will make their recommendation to me. My goal is to be able to execute a decree relative to the future functioning of Catholic Schools within the Diocesan Church of Altoona-Johnstown by December 20 of this year. The direction outlined in such a decree would be effective for the 2007/08 academic year.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops begins its document *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium* with the following statement: “Young people are a valued treasure and the future leaders of our Church. It is the responsibility of the entire Catholic community – bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and laity – to continue to strive towards the goal of making our Catholic elementary and secondary schools available, accessible, and affordable to all Catholic parents and their children, including those who are poor and middle class.”

Much time, effort, and resources have already been expended in the pursuit of an appropriate future for the Catholic Schools within our Diocesan Church. A number of good ideas have surfaced. I recognize all of that and express my gratitude for the generosity and commitment of so many. While I do not expect that the outcome of the process will be totally acceptable to everyone, it is my hope that it will be the best that we can offer. Furthermore, it is my prayer that, as such, it will have the support of all who have contributed to the process.