

KNOWLEDGE IS THE KEY

Knowledge is the key that unlocks the secret of true fulfillment as a human being. To the degree that one possesses knowledge and acts upon it, one enjoys true fulfillment.

Speaking about himself as the Shepherd, Jesus said: " I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full (Jn 10: 10)." The author who recorded this Good News of the Christ called him the Word. That Word came to reveal a truth more encompassing than any up to that time. Through his sharing of that truth, He made it possible for us to "have life and have it to the full."

With that in mind, I write to recognize the excellence of the Catholic schools within this Diocesan Church. Those who have made and those who continue to make them possible deserve our recognition and gratitude. That includes parents as well as teachers, pastors as well as diocesan staff, and those who give support locally as well as throughout the Diocese. Our schools provide a well-rounded education: one that is academically on a par with or superior to the public schools of our area. All thirty-five schools within our Diocese are now accredited. Above all, they include God in their curriculum, who is both the source and goal of human knowledge. All of this is provided within a framework of healthy discipline, helping the child to come to an understanding of himself or herself as a child of God.

The current situation in our society warrants concern. With partial information, misinformation, and disinformation, future generations are being formed to enter adult life lacking key portions of knowledge which could make a significant difference in their lives and in the lives of others. Searching for freedom and not knowing where to find it has brought about the "me" generation, the sexual revolution, the drug culture, and a philosophy that considers success in life as being based on the material and the pleasurable.

For whatever reason, law, or agenda, public schools are not allowed, nor are they equipped, to offer an education that can prepare an individual to live the kind of life about which Jesus speaks. Even at best, the separation of aspects dealing with the same universal truth, experienced by students attending public schools and religious education programs, is not ideal. It gives the impression that what is taught in one place is more important than what is taught in another. The various aspects might be seen as various truths rather than aspects of the same truth. This problem is not new. It is the very reason why several generations of believers built countless Catholic schools in their parishes.

In speaking to the Bishops of Southern Germany on December 4, 1992, our Holy Father cautioned: In the face of the widespread religious indifference and ignorance found in today's society, sporadic and piecemeal initiatives for catechesis outside the school are no longer sufficient."

Catholic schools are a preferred option in education because they allow the acquisition of knowledge without placing limits. It is an accepted truth that Catholic schools as a whole do a very good job in educating the future citizens of this nation. But, even more importantly, they impart an integrated knowledge which includes God. Our Christian, and, indeed Catholic, tradition believes in the integrity of the person. We were created as a whole person; so we take care of the whole person. And, we need to educate the whole person.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, in their pastoral message on Catholic education *To Teach As Jesus Did*, of November 1972, affirmed that an integration of religious truth and values with life "distinguishes the Catholic school from other schools. This is a matter of crucial importance today in view of contemporary trends and pressures to compartmentalize life and learning and to isolate the religious dimension of existence from other areas of human life."

When speaking in New Orleans on September 12, 1987, the Holy Father praised Catholic schools in the United States. He referred to their enjoying a reputation for academic excellence and community service. Going on to praise those who make Catholic schools possible, he said: "At this point I cannot fail to praise the financial sacrifices of American Catholics as well as the substantial contributions of individual benefactors, foundations, organizations and business to Catholic education in the United States. The heroic sacrifices of generations of Catholic parents in building up and supporting parochial and diocesan schools must never be forgotten. Rising costs may call for new approaches, new forms of partnership and sharing, new uses of financial resources. But I am sure that all concerned will face the challenge of Catholic schools with courage and dedication, and not doubt the value of the sacrifices to be made."

Indeed, we may not forget the sacrifices already made by our parents and grandparents in order to provide for their children schools which include God. Their foresight needs to be admired and gratefully acknowledged. We continue to marvel at what they were able to accomplish, while needing to remember that their life was not that different from our own and that we are able to accomplish as much. Times may have changed; but, to the better, not to the worse. Proportionally, we are better off than our forebears. We have more than they ever dreamed of having. Their ability to accomplish what they did was the result of their commitment to and arrangement of priorities. We may not commit ourselves to anything less.

The Bishops of the United States, through their 1990 statement *In Support of Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools*, communicated their commitment through the setting of goals for 1997, the 25th anniversary of *To Teach As Jesus Did*. Those goals include the following:

- 1) That Catholic schools will continue to provide high quality education for all their students in a context infused with gospel values.

- 2) That serious efforts will be made to ensure that Catholic schools are available for Catholic parents who wish to send their children to them.
- 3) That new initiatives will be launched to secure sufficient financial assistance from both private and public sectors for Catholic parents to exercise this right.
- 4) That the salaries and benefits of Catholic school teachers and administrators will reflect our teaching as expressed in Economic Justice for All.

This Diocesan Church's continued commitment to Catholic school education has been stated quite clearly. That commitment needs to find expression, first of all, in the homes of faith-filled Catholics. It, then, needs to have support within the parish family. Finally, an authentic expression of that commitment needs to be found in each one of our Catholic schools, both elementary and secondary.

I note with regret that a Catholic school education is not available to many of our people. Nevertheless, the entire Diocesan Church has a responsibility to maintain a Catholic school effort to the best of its ability. This has been voiced throughout our planning process, by clergy and laity alike. That, on the part of this Diocesan Church, is an expression of our concern and love for the youth who will become the leaders of tomorrow. In preparing them to meet their responsibilities fully equipped, we also reach out to those whose lives they will touch and who will come to believe in the Good News of Jesus because of them.

It has been evident to me during the past five years and more that the success of Catholic schools is largely a matter of attitude and the setting of priorities. That was the key in the time of our ancestors who built the schools of which we have now become the stewards. It is the key now. May our awareness of that fact prompt us to be responsible stewards of future generations and their right to the knowledge which our Catholic schools provide.



(Most Rev.) Joseph V. Adamec
Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown