



PRINCE of PEACE
Catholic Church & School
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Pastoral Letter on Catholic Education and Prince of Peace Catholic School

6 August 2016

Dear Friends in Christ,

In 1884, the Catholic Bishops of the United States met at Baltimore and decreed that every parish in the country should have a school. One of the greatest success stories in American education is the network of Catholic parish schools that has handed on the Catholic faith and built up generations of leaders for Church and society. In 2003, Prince of Peace realized that vision for our parish by opening the doors to a school which has since distinguished itself as one of the best places for learning in the nation. In this pastoral letter, I would like to explain a bit more about why our school exists, how it functions and what our challenges and hopes are for the future.

Why Catholic Schools Exist

Whenever a Catholic is married in the Church, he promises that he will raise any children that come from that sacramental, indissoluble union, in the Catholic faith. That solemn obligation is the joy and duty of parents, who are always the primary educators in the faith. Their parish church may assist them to form themselves and their children in the faith by Mass, Confessions, religious education programs and ministries of all types. The Church has always valued the intellectual life; for Catholics, faith and reason cannot contradict because God is the Author of both. Catholics have always been in the forefront of providing the very best education for men, women and children of every age. The human person is a rational being that tends towards God; the intellectual life is one important way in which we tend towards God, who is our final end.

Catholic schools exist for one reason: to help us on the way to heaven. By forming the intellect and the will towards the contemplation of Sacred Truth, we come closer to heaven itself. The mission of a



Catholic school has to be oriented towards that goal. Everything that happens in the classroom must be geared towards that end. It also means that families who choose Catholic schools enter into a partnership with the leadership of parish and school to assist them towards that goal. The day to day administration, governmental and financial policies and methods of teaching and discipline are all part of that Catholic ethos. They mark out Catholic schools as distinctive among other types of schools.

In the past 50 years, declining birth rates, theological confusion and demographic shifts have had a powerful effect on



Catholic schools. As many Catholics accommodated to the spirit of the world and gradually abandoned their unique identity, they became increasingly secularized. As a result, families began to seek out other options. Schools weakened their Catholic identity, and they, and the parishes fed by school families, began to close all over the country.

As Monsignor Charles Pope, Pastor of Holy Comforter-S Cyprian Parish in Washington, DC, wrote in the *National Catholic Register* earlier this year, “**At the end of the day, numbers matter; not just in terms of money, but in terms of people as well.** Frankly, our problem in the Catholic Church today is *not* one of

money, but of people. When only 30% of Catholics go to Mass and many of those give less than 2% of their income to the Church, many activities, buildings, and institutions can no longer be sustained or maintained. **Evangelization matters. Effectively handing on the faith to the next generation matters.** Attending Mass regularly and supporting the work of the Church matters. Vocations matter. Sacrificially offering our time, talent, and treasure matters. These truths matter throughout the Church and in every different setting.”¹

For a Catholic school to be faithful to its mission, and to survive in the increasingly diverse marketplace of educational choices, parishes and schools have to be very attentive that those who enter into a relationship with them understand the mission and be committed to every aspect of it. That means Catholic families have to be active and supporting members of their parishes, as well as handing on the faith inside and outside of the classroom.

Different Types of Catholic Schools

In this country, we see many different institutional models for Catholic schools. In some places, the Diocese runs a school system not unlike the way our public school systems work. In others, Religious orders run schools. There are also many independent schools, like St Joseph’s here in Greenville, that are run by lay boards. In all of them, tuition and fundraising are the means of keeping those schools running. There are now even experiments with charter schools with limited Catholic focus.

The Parish School: Primary Apostolate of the Parish

The vast majority of Catholic schools in the United States, and almost all of them in South Carolina, are parochial schools. The parish is the local community of the Catholic faithful in a given territorial area, led by the pastor. All Catholics belong to a parish, either the one in whose territory they reside or they have



¹ <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/msgr-pope/an-urgent-warning-about-the-future-of-the-traditional-latin-mass>

registered in. The parish is prior in time and being, to the school. Because Catholic education in a school setting is a high indicator of future practice of the faith, parishes have a vested interest in handing on the faith, and keeping parishes going, by means of Catholic schools. In fact, the school is the primary apostolate of the parish. It is the most important means by which the parish and her clergy support the faithful in their desire towards heaven.

In some parishes, the weekly offertory subsidizes part or all of the school. If Mass attendance and stewardship of the parish slip, then the parish is forced either to cut other parish ministries or pass on expenses to the school. Bishop David Thompson of Charleston some thirty years ago indicated that schools should work towards as much financial self-sufficiency as possible. The painful experience of parish and school closings in the Northeast demonstrated that the business model of complete parish subsidy of schools only worked when faithful weekly Mass attendance accompanied by committed stewardship from each family in the parish made both parish and school spiritually fruitful and financially viable.

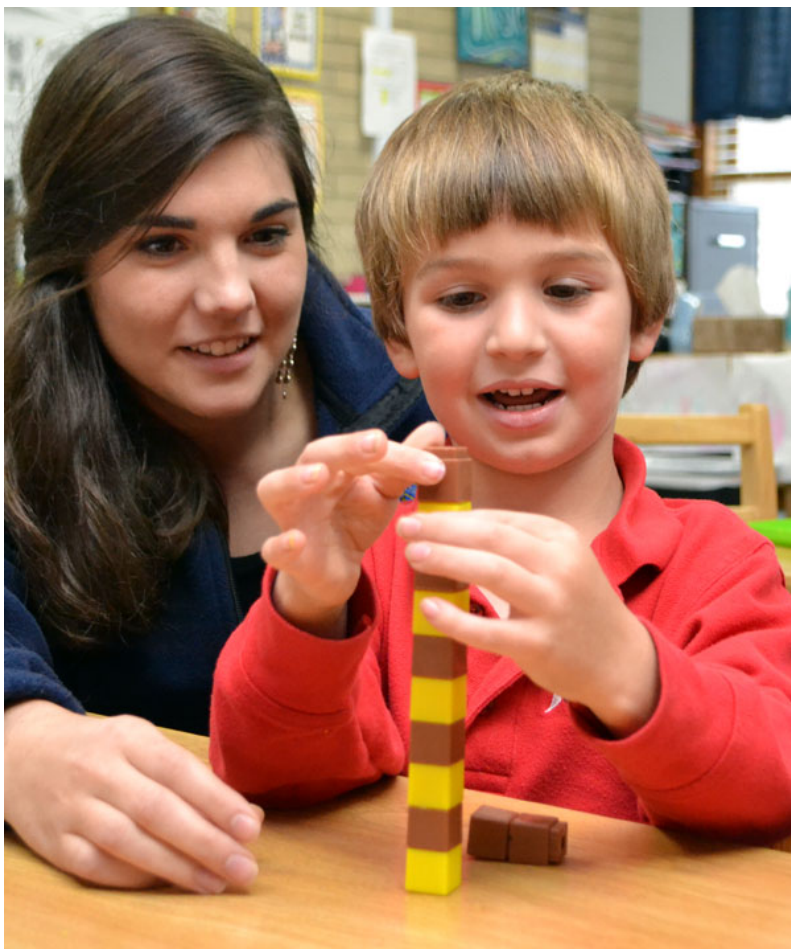
Challenges to Catholic Schools Today

Weekly Mass attendance, stewardship and volunteer hours are not the only challenges to Catholic schools today. The increasingly secular nature of our society means that many people do not share the same moral, religious and philosophical vision without which a Catholic school cannot be true to itself. A tendency in some, but by no means, all, towards individualism also manifests a lack of willingness to cooperate with parish and school leadership on the accountability for Mass attendance and stewardship without which no parish or school can survive.



There are also more and more alternatives in education than ever before. When the parochial school idea flourished in the United States, Catholics were often persecuted and the preservation of their faith was often difficult outside of parish-school enclaves. It was either that or public schools which did not always perform at the same level, and where the faith was often denigrated or challenged. Nowadays, that danger is no less real, but parents are choosing between all kinds of new educational ideas and programs that were unavailable to them before, in both public and private schools.

In a place like Greenville, we also have other parish schools and an independent school as well that are all models of Catholic identity and practice, and discussions are being had about even more schools in the future. While this is a good thing in and of itself, it also



means that competition for a limited number of Catholic students is fierce. Once upon a time, Catholics went to their parish and their school and that was it. Now, the sheer diversity of Catholic expression and the high level of educational opportunities mean that each school has to make certain vital decisions as to how to be attractive to the greatest number of families, decisions which also mean that other potential decisions cannot be made or have to be shelved.

Parents have lots of choices. At Prince of Peace, we believe that entering into a partnership with us by which families make of the parish and the school a real spiritual home, where they come to Mass and come to class, and give of their time, talent and treasure to Prince of Peace, is a powerful way to live the faith. Those who do make this commitment and are faithful to it, and cooperate with parish and school leadership, often find many blessings and happiness by doing so. When that commitment declines or fails, then it is a sad situation for all of us, and has a direct impact on the parish and school's viability and future.

Financing POPCS

No family pays the full freight of what it costs to educate a child at Prince of Peace Catholic School. Tuition defrays some of the cost, but not all of it. The principal, the PTO, the PopArt Party committee and many others do a tremendous amount of fundraising every year to help defray that cost. Benefactors in the parish and school often earmark funds for the school because they believe in what we are doing here.

As a parish school, however, we also have a financial relationship with the parish. Prince of Peace has as its fundamental goal to **provide a solid Catholic education at the highest level for the greatest number of children of the parish for the greatest value.** The terms on which the parish subsidizes the school are part of a discussion between the pastor and parish and school leadership. As the school grows and develops, that relationship has also developed over time.

For example, for many years the parish weekly offertory collection budgeted a certain amount each year for financial assistance for parish families who could not afford to pay full tuition. Currently, rather than providing tuition support to individual families (that would be taxed by the Diocese), the parish covers a significant portion of the utilities and plant management costs of the school, as well as janitorial services, capital improvements and some construction expenditures. That frees funds from the school budget to provide tuition assistance. In the fiscal year just ended, those expenditures amounted to just over \$109,000. Because parish and school share so many facilities, it is easier for there to be one central financial and business management of those aspects of parish and school life. It also indicates that the school is not independent of, or an appendage to, the parish, but is a vital part of its operations and future.

Tuition and fundraising dollars, which come overwhelmingly from the pockets of school families, make up a significant part of the real cost of educating a child here at Prince of Peace, but not all of it. Parish support is another important part of that, because the school is an expression of the parish's mission to make disciples of Christ. We are committed to keeping the tuition cost as reasonable as possible so that the greatest number of parish families can benefit from it.

There are four main challenges to reaching our goal.



1. As the school grows, takes over and builds more facilities and uses more technology and materials, the cost of educating a child continues to rise. Energy costs and maintenance, especially preventative maintenance, also rise. We also have a highly capable faculty and staff. They are unfortunately not currently paid at the same rate as their counterparts in the public schools, even though they should be paid far beyond that rate. As more and more of our faculty choose to stay with us and become more qualified and highly educated, the cost of their salaries and benefits rises as well.
2. For a time, as a school we chose to fundraise, not only for “extras” to enhance the educational experience here, but also for ordinary day-to-day operating expenses. If the school should become more financially self-sustainable, it is essential that tuition costs reflect the reality of the ordinary expenses of the school.
3. Sometimes families fall on hard times, and it is part of our Catholic faith to support them through those times. Delays or defaults in paying tuition have to be made up somewhere. If the parish or school budget does not account reasonably to manage or absorb extreme cases, then the entire school and families lose out on valuable people that enrich our community.
4. When families choose to no longer go to Mass and to support Prince of Peace, there is less availability of time, talent and treasure, and commitment to the school as well. The cost then is passed on to tuition. All families at Prince of Peace Catholic School have a vested interest in being active and sacrificially contributing members of the parish; failure to do so merely increases tuition for everyone, including those who are active and sacrificially contributing members of the parish.

Why do we go to Mass and give to the parish?

The Third Commandment is, *Keep the Sabbath Day holy*. We do that in part by going to Mass on the Lord's Day, Sunday, at our parish, with our families. We do not give to our parish as a condition of receiving a Catholic education or as an add-on to tuition, as remuneration for a benefit. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, along with attending mass on Sundays and holy days, receiving confession annually, receiving Communion during Easter, and fasting on appointed days, Catholics are required to “assist with the material needs of the Church . . . according to [their] own ability” (§2043). There are no other conditions or promised benefits attached to this obligation. We support the Church because we love Christ, and we love the priesthood founded by Our Lord and Savior himself. It is through the priesthood that the lay faithful have access to confession and to Holy Communion – the sources of the spiritual graces necessary for personal sanctity that are the fruit of the Cross. We support the church because the church asks us to support her. Material support of one's parish is an act not only of justice but of charity: the first a moral virtue, the other a theological virtue perfecting the soul and preparing it for the eternal life that is the reason a school exists.



Being a Part of This Intentional Community

Prince of Peace Catholic School exists to bring the children of the parish and their families, closer to heaven by involving them in a parish-school community. This community is made up, not of individuals who happen to like the educational opportunities we offer, but who are intentional disciples of Christ who enter into a covenantal relationship with the parish and school leadership to bring us all closer to our goal of eternal friendship with God.

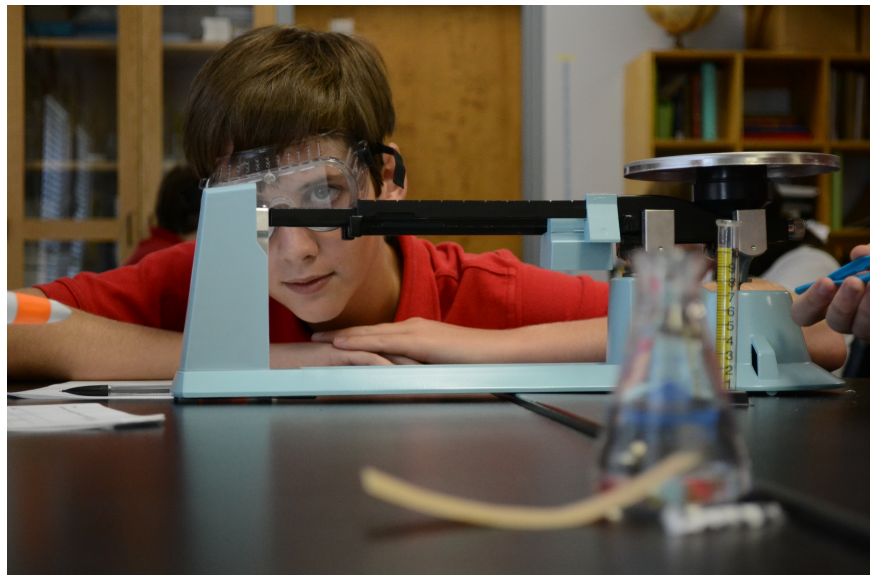
Being an intentional disciple of Christ means being a real part of this spiritual

home. It means weekly Mass attendance, volunteer hours, and sacrificial stewardship of the parish as well as supporting the school.

The more people commit to this beautiful vision of life, the greater the growth in our personal lives and of our parish and school family. The same vision of excellence animates everything we do here: spiritual, intellectual, liturgical and musical excellence are part of what make Prince of Peace a unique and creative part of the Lord's vineyard. We want you to be integral to this vision by your understanding of and participating in our vision of the relationship between parish and school.

Prince of Peace Catholic School, far from being a burden on the parish, is an investment in the future of our faith. It is perhaps the greatest asset we have to furthering the mission of the Catholic Church that is the reason why Prince of Peace Parish exists. As the only private Blue Ribbon School in South Carolina in the past six years, our children are engaging their faith at a very high level. We already have produced two vocations to the priesthood in our short history, and our students and alumni are models of the fruits of this intentional Catholic education.

I want to share with you a dream that I have for Prince of Peace. My dream is that every family that calls Prince of Peace their spiritual home is present in both parish and school, and that one day our parish is such a model of sacrificial stewardship that any child who calls Prince of Peace home can receive a Catholic education for free. This model is different than the current one that we have, which seeks as much self-sufficiency as possible for the school. There are places in the United States where that vision is a reality. But to make that happen, it required bold leadership from the pastor, accountability and cooperation on the part of parishioners and school families alike in those things which could make such a vision a reality, and a willingness to be intentional about living the Catholic faith in every way possible. I have seen it done, and it is amazing. Before we can move to even discuss that possibility here, we must address the involvement of school families in parish life and stewardship at a level to make that possible.



A casual, conventional and individualistic approach to the faith cannot bring that about; on the contrary, as we have seen in Catholic schools throughout the country, it tends to increase costs, cause dissatisfaction, and lead to decline. Prince of Peace is already, and can continue to be, a phenomenal success story, and buck the trend. I invite you to be a part of this wonderful story that God is writing with your lives and mine. The dream of providing Catholic education for as many as possible is within our reach; let us realize that dream together.

Sincerely in Jesus and Mary,

Father Christopher Smith, STD
Pastor



"Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News. First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth (cf. Spe Salvi, 4). This relationship elicits a desire to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Christ and his teaching. In this way those who meet him are drawn by the very power of the Gospel to lead a new life characterized by all that is beautiful, good, and true; a life of Christian witness nurtured and strengthened within the community of our Lord's disciples, the Church." ~ Pope Benedict XVI



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