



Florida Catholic Conference

The nonpartisan public policy voice of the Catholic Bishops of Florida

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Catholic Schools Week 2012

January 29 - February 5, 2012

As we join in celebrating national Catholic Schools Week, January 29 – February 5, 2012, we take this opportunity to express our true admiration and sincere thanks to Catholic school students and their parents, and to Catholic school administrators and teachers, for their dedication, sacrifice and commitment to Catholic education in our state. We also recognize our priests for the important role they play in the ministry of Catholic education and faith formation of our children.

This year's theme is *Catholic Schools: Faith. Academics. Service*. These three areas tie in with the components of the fourfold mission of Catholic education, message, community, worship, and service. The gift of *service* to those most in need, to those socially or economically disadvantaged, is a part of every Catholic school *community*, a part of our most basic *message* and always contemplated in our *worship*.

We wish especially to express our gratitude to the parents who have entrusted the education of their children to our Catholic schools. We have confidence that this investment will allow their children to make important contributions as responsible citizens and leaders in our Church. The financial sacrifices made by these parents in paying taxes to support public schools, while at the same time paying tuition, results in a huge savings for our state. Considering the \$6,267 average basic cost to educate a child each year in Florida's public schools, the over 82,000 students in Florida's Catholic schools save the state \$470 million annually. This considerable savings is realized after adjusting for the nearly 11,000 Catholic school students participating in State funded scholarship programs. We are proud of the valuable social contribution our schools make to the education of the residents of our state.

Today, the women and men who respond to Christ's invitation to teach in Catholic schools, build upon the foundation established by past generations of Catholics and Catholic school educators. We are grateful to each of them for sharing not only their academic expertise with today's youth, but also their faith by word and action, thus giving witness that the Catholic faith can be a lived reality in the world today. Theirs is truly a vocation of service to the Church. Like parents, they have made many sacrifices to teach in our schools.

Pope Benedict XVI has acknowledged that throughout the history of our country, Catholic schools have played a pivotal role in shaping American society. The Holy Father has stated that Catholic schools are as important today as they were to the immigrant Catholic population several centuries ago. We are especially proud that Catholic schools today are reaching out to more than 8,200 at-risk students who participate in one of three state-wide school choice programs. We join our brother Bishops in stating, "Catholic schools are often the Church's most effective contribution to those families who are poor and disadvantaged, especially in poor inner city neighborhoods and rural areas. Catholic schools cultivate healthy interaction among the increasingly diverse populations of our society. In cities and rural areas, Catholic schools are often the only opportunity for economically disadvantaged young people to receive an education of quality that speaks to the development of the whole person. As we continue to address the many and varied needs of our nation's new immigrant population, the Church and its schools are often among the few institutions providing immigrants and newcomers with a sense of welcome, dignity, community, and connection with their spiritual

roots.” (Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium), *USCCB 2005*

Catholic schools play a vital role in the formation of future leaders in the Church, future priests and religious as well as an educated laity. The burden of supporting Catholic schools cannot be met solely by those parishes with schools and parents who pay tuition. As generations for the past 200 years have done, we urge the entire Catholic community to continue to support our schools. We need all Catholics to focus on the spirituality of stewardship.

Catholic schools are a blessing to our state. They are a light to the nation and a rich resource to the Church. We celebrate their high standards of excellence and the quality of education available in Catholic elementary, secondary and special education schools, and give thanks for their many accomplishments and achievements. Truly, our Catholic schools are “the good news in education.”

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Archdiocese of Miami

Most Reverend Gerald M. Barbarito
Diocese of Palm Beach

Most Reverend Robert N. Lynch
Diocese of St. Petersburg

Most Reverend Frank J. Dewane
Diocese of Venice

Most Reverend John G. Noonan
Diocese of Orlando

Most Reverend Felipe J. Estévez
Diocese of St. Augustine

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Apostolic Administrator
Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee