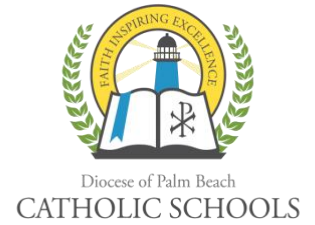
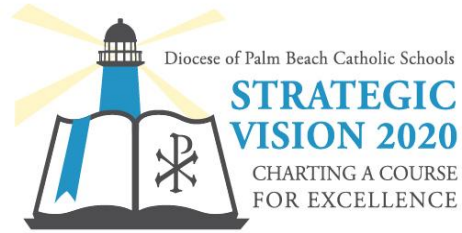




Diocese of Palm Beach



White Paper

Catholic Identity and Mission

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Mission and Catholic Identity permeate the *Defining Characteristics of a Catholic School*. More than ever, the statement that graced the entrance to many Catholic schools: "Be it known to all who enter here that Christ is the reason for this school. He is the unseen but ever present teacher in its classrooms. He is the model of its faculty and the inspiration of its students" can now be judged through a series of benchmarks. The standards themselves serve to insure that "From the first moment that a student sets foot in a Catholic school, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment, one illuminated by the light of faith and having its own unique characteristics, an environment permeated with the Gospel spirit of love and freedom." (The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, #25).

If numbering denotes priority, then the first four standards are considered the most important when addressing the mission of a Catholic school. In 2005, in an address at the Catholic University of America entitled "The Holy See's Teaching On Catholic Schools," Archbishop J. Michael Miller, C.S.B. said, "It is precisely because of its Catholic identity, which is anything but sectarian, that a school derives the originality enabling it to be a genuine instrument of the Church's apostolic mission." The challenge to be an authentic vehicle that makes a "significant contribution 'to the evangelizing mission of the Church'" (Miller) is foundational to Standard 1.

Standard 1

An excellent Catholic school is guided and driven by a clearly communicated mission that embraces a Catholic Identity rooted in Gospel values, centered on the Eucharist, and committed to faith formation, academic excellence and service.

Embracing a Catholic identity rooted in Gospel values

The remnants of the outward signs of Catholic identity linger in movies and in our culture. One sees a crucifix rather than a cross, a chapel veil covers a woman's head as she enters a church, people go to confession in a box, and Friday fish fries can be spotted, even outside of Lent. However, the real signs of Catholic identity, the ones that form the very DNA of our lives, have not changed. Like the words of Antoine de Saint Exupéry in *The Little Prince*, "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." The real signs of Catholic identity aren't as immediately visible as some of the ones previously mentioned.

In fact, Pope Benedict XVI, in his address to Catholic Educators in 2008 at the Catholic University of America, spoke earnestly when he said, "Clearly, then, Catholic identity is not dependent upon statistics. Neither can it be equated simply with the orthodoxy of course content. It demands and inspires much more: namely, that each and every aspect of your learning communities reverberates within the ecclesial life of faith. Only in faith can truth become incarnate and reason truly human, capable of directing the will along the path of freedom."

The essential marks of a Catholic School, as noted by Archbishop Miller, include:

- **Inspired by a Supernatural Vision:** to foster the growth of good Catholic human beings who love God and neighbor and thus fulfill their destiny of becoming saints.
- **Founded on Christian Anthropology:** Its duty to cultivate human values in their own legitimate right in accordance with its particular mission to serve all men has its origin in the figure of Christ. He is the one who ennobles man, gives meaning to human life, and is the model which the Catholic school offers to its pupils.
- **Animated by Communion and Community:** Three particular ways in which the Holy See would like to see the development of the school as a community: the teamwork or collaboration among all those involved; the interaction of students with teachers and the school's physical environment.
- **Imbued with a Catholic Worldview:** Catholicism has a particular "take" on reality that should animate its schools. It is a "comprehensive way of life" to be enshrined in the school's curriculum.

NCEA's Educational Leadership Monograph series was designed to assist administrators in embracing these concepts. Richard Jacobs used the analogy of teaching grammar to explain his core concepts. Here are four of those six that have particular bearing on Catholic identity.

- God is the Beginning & End of human existence
- Education is essentially a moral endeavor
- The subject of education is the student
- Teaching is an intimate communication between souls

Jacob's initial tenet and Archbishop Miller's essential marks are expanded in Thomas Groome's answer to *What makes a school Catholic?* in the *Contemporary Catholic School* when he lists "Anthropology, Sacramentality, Community, Tradition, Rationality, Personhood, Justice and Catholicity." Timothy J. Cook suggests that the bricks used to build these foundations are found in the school's "Core beliefs and values, Heroes and heroines, Symbols, Ritual Tradition, Human Communication, History and Cultural Players."

Our vision of the world comes from the two stories of creation. From the Elohist tradition we acknowledge that we are God's partners and thus co-creators. From the Yahwist tradition, we recognize that all of life is a gift from God. These are the two eyes with which we look out into the world. Essentially we treat everyone as a child of God. The subjects we teach are never more important than the individuals we teach. We are a grateful people who as Saint Augustine reminds us, "We are an Alleluia people from head to toe."

Centered on the Eucharist

The Catechism of the Catholic Church #1324 affirms that "The Eucharist is 'the source and summit of the Christian life.'" Quoting St. Irenaeus, the Catechism states that "the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith: 'Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking.'" Herein lies one of the challenges facing the Catholic school community who is to center its thinking around the Eucharist: "...this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit" (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #14).

The NDC (#33) continues this thought by stating that "Through the Eucharist, the people of God come to know the Paschal Mystery ever more intimately and experientially. They come not simply to the knowledge of God – they come to know the living God." This concept was realized by a young man of Jewish faith who taught for a

year in a Jersey city Catholic school. What he discovered and shared in his memoir, *In the Classroom*, was that all his best classes occurred after all school liturgies. In other words, there was something that happened as these students prayed together that made them more disposed to learning, to listening and to treating on another as brothers and sisters in Christ. He could actually see the difference in them and their learning attitude after celebrating the Eucharist as a community of believers.

Committed to faith formation

From the start, faith formation is evangelizing in purpose and in practice. It connects the head, the heart and the hands. In inviting us to imitate Jesus, the US Bishops issued *To Teach as Jesus Did*, with the instruction that “The educational mission of the Church is an integrated ministry embracing three interlocking dimensions: the message revealed by God (didache) which the Church proclaims; fellowship in the life of the Holy Spirit (koinonia); service to the Christian community and the entire human community (diakonia). While these three essential elements can be separated for the sake of analysis, they are joined in the one educational ministry” (#14).

The principal in *Mr. Holland’s Opus* reminds him that “A teacher has two jobs; fill young minds with knowledge, yes, but more important, give those minds a compass so that knowledge doesn’t go to waste.” In the Catholic school, we call this the formation of a conscience and is a remarkable aspect of the Catholic faith. One of the most inspiring examples of teaching Kohlberg’s six levels of moral development occur in the book, *Teach Like Your Hair’s On Fire*. If Raef Esquith can teach these concepts to fifth graders in a public school, imagine what we can do in an environment that is steeped in values of faith and reason.

Cardinal Wuerl, while serving as Chairman of the NCEA Board of Directors, wrote that “To the great questions of life: How shall I live?, What is the purpose of life?, and How shall I direct my actions? we find our response in Jesus Christ. What we try to communicate is an understanding of life that only faith can provide.” All are called to join Christ and his apostles “in announcing the coming of God’s kingdom of love, justice, and peace with clarity, enthusiasm, and resolve.” (NDC, #8).

Standard 2

An excellent Catholic school adhering to mission provides a rigorous academic program for religious studies and catechesis in the Catholic faith, set within a total academic curriculum that integrates faith, culture, and life.

Rigorous program for religious studies and catechesis in the Catholic faith

It is easy to slip into an academic program that concentrates solely on knowledge of the faith, because that is the easiest to evaluate. However, it is important to understand that knowledge of the faith is only one of six tasks that are required of catechesis. “These six tasks of catechesis constitute a unified whole by which catechesis seeks to achieve its objective: the formation of disciples of Jesus Christ” (NDC, p. 63). The other five, some of which are found in the other standards, are:

- Catechesis promotes a knowledge of the meaning of the Liturgy and the sacraments
- Catechesis promotes moral formation in Jesus Christ.

- Catechesis teaches the Christian how to pray with Christ.
- Catechesis prepares the Christian to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church.
- Catechesis promotes a missionary spirit that prepares the faithful to be present as Christians in society (NDC, #20, PP 60-62).

In addressing the faith of the Catholic Church, the NDC refers to Sacred Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church as “The Symphony of Faith” (#24). A familiarity and comfortability with both the Old and New Testaments is essential. “Catechesis should take Sacred Scripture as its inspiration, its fundamental curriculum, and its end because it strengthens faith, nourishes the soul and nurtures the spiritual life” (NDC, #24B, p.70). Parables can be told, stories can be recalled and sayings can be learned by heart, rather than mere memorization. The hunger for heroes can be quenched with the lives of the saints and the living witness of faithful disciples. These stories will illuminate our own call to be saints of God. “Catechesis is enriched when the Word of God shines forth in the life of the Church, especially in the lives of the saints and in the Christian witness of the faithful” (NDC, #18, p. 54).

Academic curriculum that integrates faith, culture and life

The importance the role faith plays in the person of the teacher cannot be minimized. All teachers, not only those who teach the academic subject of religious studies, are catechists. Paragraph 156 in the GDC states that “No methodology, no matter how well tested, can dispense with the person of the catechist in every phase of the catechetical process. The charism given to him by the Spirit, a solid spirituality and transparent witness of life, constitutes the soul of every method.” Archbishop Miller affirms the importance of understanding the Catholic view of the world by not only teachers but by all school personnel as well as parents and other adults who interact with the students when he states,

As well as fostering a Catholic view across throughout the curriculum, even in so-called secular subjects, "if students in Catholic schools are to gain a genuine experience of the Church, the example of teachers and others responsible for their formation is crucial: the witness of adults in the school community is a vital part of the school's identity." Children will pick up far more by example than by masterful pedagogical techniques, especially in the practice of Christian virtues.

Standard 3

An excellent Catholic school adhering to mission provides opportunities outside the classroom for student faith formation, participation in liturgical and communal prayer, and action in service of social justice.

Student Faith Formation opportunities outside the classroom

Faith formation “is closely linked with the responsible activity of the Church and of Christians in the world. The ecclesial community ... has the responsibility of welcoming them into an environment where they can live as fully as possible what they have learned. If catechesis is done well, Christians will be eager to bear witness to their faith, to hand it on to their children, to make it known to others, and to serve the human community in every way” (Catechesi Tradendae, #24).

Part of learning is the understanding and awareness that occurs when one has the opportunity to reflect on one's actions. Retreats are an excellent opportunity in which this can occur. Likewise, preparation for the reception of sacraments lies with the parish and not the school, therefore, all efforts should be made to support the parish in its role. Extracurricular activities should always afford students opportunities to pray, not as an obligation or duty, but something that comes willingly as a natural response to planned and unplanned situations.

Participation in liturgical and communal prayer

Chapter 5 of the NDC is entitled Catechesis in a Worshipping Community and reminds us that "Liturgical prayer is the participation of the People of God in Christ's work; the public prayer of the Church." We have a great responsibility to not make God small. The very names we use for God can limit God. Scripture alone has 144 names for God and that does not include the desert mothers and fathers. As leaders of prayer we need to expand students awareness of God and introduce them to the rich varieties of prayer that exist in the catholic Tradition. The NDC encourages us to emphasize at least the following eight forms of prayer:

- Communal
- Private
- Traditional
- Spontaneous
- Gesture
- Song
- Meditation
- Contemplation

Action in service of social justice for students and adults

Pope Paul VI is often quoted from his encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* that "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." The school plays a vital role in ensuring that service becomes a way of life rather than a requirement to fulfill. While some of the opportunities for Christian service can be targeted at the students, the potential for a greater impact grows when parents and other members of the parish community are involved. The Search Institute indicates that in the External Assets categories of Support and Empowerment that children and youth need positive family communication along with an awareness that (s)he is welcomed, valued and appreciated by nonparent adults.

Besides learning the principles of Catholic social teaching, students can put into action these ideas and in actuality have the words become flesh. The actions become incarnate of the teachings. When they participate in this service for social justice with adults, they increase their understanding and experience of community as well as deepening their sense of belonging to the body of Christ. In reflecting on the experience, the children/youth have the opportunity to hear how these social justice principles have been integrated into the lives of these adult believers who are on their own faith journey. "Society can take note from the Catholic school that it is possible to create true communities out of a common effort for the common good (The Catholic School, #62).

Standard 4

An excellent Catholic school adhering to mission provides opportunities for adult faith formation and action in service of social justice.

Opportunities for adult faith formation

The initial focus of this standard is the faculty and staff of the school. The NDC (No. 54B9d, p. 233) outlines this responsibility when it states that “The Catholic school affords a particularly favorable setting for catechesis with its daily opportunities for

- Proclaiming and living the Gospel message
- Learning and appreciating the teachings of our Church
- Acquiring deep understanding, reverence, and love of the Liturgy
- Building community
- Prayer
- Proper formation of conscience
- Development of virtue
- Participating in Christian service

In *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*, the US Bishops affirm that “Faith formation of personnel is understood to be integrally connected to the core business of Catholic schooling and is built on the hope that ‘an adult community whose faith is well formed and lively will more effectively pass that faith on to the next generation. The witness of adults actively continuing their own formation shows children and youth that growth in faith is lifelong and does not end upon reaching adulthood’ (#68) To be effective, the ongoing formation of the faculty and staff, as well as the parents should be on three levels:

- Human Level
- Spiritual level
- Intellectual level (NDC, #55E)

The formation activities in these three areas should include but are not limited to

- Help them develop an apostolic zeal
- Encourage them to become evangelizers
- Show them how to build a community of faith
- Keep abreast of the life of the Church
- Help them overcome discouragement and burnout (NDC, #54)

We all know parents are the primary educators of their children but it is often easier, both for the parent and for the school, to let the school teachers teach the faith rather than to be a source of help and support for the parents in their role to foster their child’s faith. When this happens, the school is not sharing the educational responsibility as much as it is expropriating the parents’ obligation. The concept of partnership is essential if we seriously intend to pass on the faith. This partnership includes the parish and the diocese. Parents are critical and this generation desires to spend more time with their parents. It is important that we foster those relationships rather than detract.

Concluding Thoughts

“The integration of religious truth and values with the rest of life is a hallmark of education in Catholic schools” (NDC, 61A, 4B). First and foremost, the mission of the Catholic school is a ministry that is “an apprenticeship of the entire Christian life” (GDC, #67). The mission serves as the compass to give direction for all decisions regarding the operation of the Catholic school. The object of the school’s mission is discipleship; the development of an intimate relationship with the person and message of Jesus Christ. It is in within the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, that the Gospel values will arise and deepen one’s Catholic identity. Never forget that “Jesus Christ himself is always the first and last point of reference because he is ‘the way and the truth and the life’” (NDC #19B).

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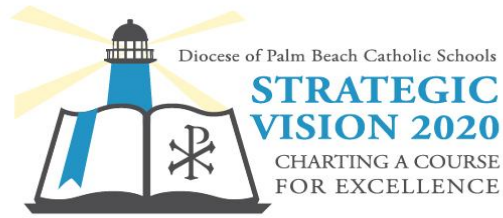
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