

*Superintendent's Address*  
*September 7, 2010*  
*Holy Cross Church*  
*Dewitt, NY*

A special word of thanks to Bishop Cunningham for presiding at our celebration of the Eucharist and for charging us once again with living out the vocation to which we have been called. Having worked side by side with him over the past year, I can assure all of you gathered here today that our Bishop is a pastor in every sense of the word and that his love for Catholic schools runs deep. Believe me when I say that we are blessed to continue to have an advocate for Catholic education as our local shepherd.

I wish to extend a special welcome to all of our new staff members here in the diocese. Let me say to you that you have entered into something very special and that you are now ministering side by side with the finest educational professionals in all of Central New York. If you learn nothing else this year, whether you are a new teacher or new principal, remember that yours is a unique vocation and one which God supports you in each and every day. Your presence among us here today and every day is our blessing.

My dear colleagues in Catholic education welcome to the start of the 2010-2011 school year-

A new academic year in a new decade-

The second decade in this new millennium-

Once upon a time a very strong woodcutter asked for a job from a timber merchant, and he got it. The pay was fantastic and so were the work conditions. For that reason, the woodcutter was determined to do his best.

His boss gave him an axe and showed him the area where he was supposed to work. The first day, the woodcutter brought 18 trees in.

"Congratulations," the boss said. "Now, go on that way!"

Very motivated for the boss' words, the woodcutter tried harder the next day, but he only could bring in 15 trees.

The third day he try even harder, but he only could bring in 10 trees.

Day after day he was bringing less and less trees.

"I must be losing my strength", the woodcutter thought.

He went to the boss and apologized, saying that he could not understand what was going on.

"When was the last time you sharpened your axe?" the boss asked.

"Sharpen? I had no time to sharpen my axe. I have been very busy trying to cut trees..."

Fortunately we gather this morning to sharpen our axe...to step away from how busy we have been to prepare for the new year....to step away from how busy we are about to become....and to reflect on our lives as Catholic educators here in the diocese of Syracuse. As you look around remember that you are not alone in this vocation. Over 800 employees, who come from 7 different counties, 24 different schools for a common purpose: To touch the hearts of students and to perform miracles each day.

This morning we stand together to look forward into another year filled with hope and challenge. But as we peer into that future together this morning let us not discount for a minute that which we have accomplished already. One year ago we gathered here to begin the 09-10 school year and in what was my first Superintendent's address, I took the opportunity to lay out a new vision for our schools in the form of "5" Pillars. These pillars represent to me what we must be about if we expect to be successful in our mission.

Catholic identity in light of the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Church  
Quality administration, teaching and coaching  
Commitment to educating Digital Natives  
Sound Fiscal Stewardship with emphasis on development work  
Boldness of new ideas

What has been accomplished in each of these areas?

### Catholic Identity

In the 2009-2010 school year our office made a special effort to lead in the spirit of collaboration and transparency. We created more open lines of communication, listened more intently to the needs of our administrators and in doing so paved the way for a more mutually respectful future.

In addition we have sought to make ourselves much more visible in the school communities where each of you serve. In the past year we have come to pray with you

during your school liturgies, we have come to listen to you at several faculty meetings and we have simply stopped by your classrooms to offer our support.

At the local level, you have responded to the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Church by being more engaged in the prayer life of our students and you have challenged them to become Church for one another by promoting Christian service as paramount to the Gospel message of justice.

Finally, we have honored this Catholic identity pillar by creating leadership teams, both in our office and in our schools, with those most familiar with the unique mission of Catholic education. So much of what we do is about leadership so we must have leaders that know what we are about and can lead us into what we can become.

### Quality

In 2009-2010 we introduced a new model of teacher supervision that holds teachers to higher levels of accountability. Any day of any week and any lesson of any day can now be observed by our principals on a regular basis. More importantly, positive and constructive suggestions can be made by our administrators on a more regular basis. We have stepped up in our efforts to supervise our principals, holding them more accountable for their role as leaders in our communities.

This past year we have changed the quality of our monthly administrators meetings, adding more substantial content including professional development in the area of technology integration, data analysis and student life.

Finally, in the area of quality we have refocused our Diocesan School Board and re-established their purpose and goals as they seek to serve the Bishop and the Catholic schools of the diocese.

### Digital Native

Last year saw the hiring of a Director of Educational Technologies. A full time position dedicated to teaching teachers the best modes of communicating their lessons to students in this new cyber age.

We have taken a comprehensive look at the diocesan needs in terms of both hardware and software and have begun to respond to those needs by leveraging title funds, grant opportunities and e-rate funding.

Across the diocese we have hosted more than 260 professional development sessions to our teachers especially related to 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching skills. And to that end we have had over 500 of you take part in those trainings.

## Fiscal Stewardship

Following sound fiscal policies is no easy task because it challenges people to think differently and to act differently when it comes to the financial realities facing us. Still, this past year we took seriously our tuition policies and held families accountable for the commitments that they have made.

In addition, we had unprecedented oversight of all school budgets, providing local boards and finance committees with relevant data on a regular basis.

Personally, I have spent hundreds of hours with our pastors, their parish councils and their finance committees, leading them to understand the importance of Catholic education and listening to the struggles that they face in their parishes.

We have implemented alternative, cost effective strategies and solutions including dozens of lighting projects in our schools sponsored by National Grid.

And thanks to the sacrifice that each of you made going into this new school year, we were able to offer our parents the lowest tuition increase in over a decade.

## Boldness

No one can say that we weren't bold this past year! Last fall we held a convocation here in the western region and finally agreed that the vision for a system of diocesan elementary schools in this area of the diocese is not sustainable, so we are reversing course and asking our 4 academies to examine the viability of returning to a parish school model.

In the eastern region we have moved forward into the next phase of a bold vision that will allow us to create one central campus in Utica with a new elementary wing and new gymnasium.

And in announcing our tuition increase of \$150 to our parents, we were bold enough to ask them to contribute more if they could.

I share this laundry list of accomplishments with you this morning only that you might realize how our vision is becoming a reality each and every day. And while there are many, many more items that could be added, our purpose here today is to look forward.

There is a story told about a little boy on his first day of school who attracted his teacher's attention the first day of school with his display of weeping.

"What's wrong, Billy?" asked the teacher.

"I don't like school at all. I don't like it here and they told me I have to stay in school until I'm 18," protested Billy.

"Don't let it worry you," suggested the teacher, "I have to stick with it until I'm 65".

So given the fact that we have to stick with it awhile longer...let us look forward!

It was the 19<sup>th</sup> century biologist Thomas Huxley that once wrote:

***The rung of a ladder was never meant to rest upon, but only to hold our foot long enough to enable us to put the other somewhat higher.***

As your colleague in Catholic education and as your Superintendent I want to assure you that I have no intention of resting upon this rung of the ladder. What we have accomplished in 12 short months is remarkable, but we have even greater distances to travel when it comes to sustaining our future. These are overwhelming days for us all. The state of Catholic education here in the northeast is not without its challenges. But here in the Diocese of Syracuse the Catholic School Office, your Superintendent and your principals are going to do everything we can to face these challenges with creativity, with hope and yes, with boldness.

Like me, many of you in this church today have given your life to Catholic education. This school system has endured because of your passion and your dedication. Do not underestimate the witness that your life offers as veterans of this system. New teachers will look up to you, hang on your every word and seek out your advice and counsel. We need our veteran teachers to lead with dignity and grace so that your life's work may continue on for generations to come. As a parent of 4 young children I fully expect that this school system will continue to serve the needs of my children and their children for the next several decades. I have no intention of letting my kids down.

In order to do this we must move to the next rung of the ladder.

### CATHOLIC IDENTITY

First, in the area of Catholic identity we will be revisiting our Religious Certification program this year in order that we might better form our teachers in the ways of the faith. Veterans of the system have been through this process and will be asked to continue their formation while teachers new to the system will be required to begin the process of certification immediately. No matter what content area one teaches and no matter what grade level one is engaged in, we must all be formed in the basics of the faith so that our children can see our lives as a witness to the mission of the Church.

This year I challenge all of you to use your classrooms as a home for Catholic culture to thrive. Pray often with your students. Participate in service programs along side of them. Let them see in you a model of Christian charity in your words and in your actions. See in your non-Catholic students the opportunity to introduce them to the person of Jesus

Christ and to the rich traditions of our Church. Promote vocations and be wise enough to plant the seed of a vocation in the mind and heart of those students that God might be calling to the priesthood and religious life. For decades statistics have shown that religious vocations overwhelmingly had their beginning in Catholic school settings. Be that teacher, be that mentor, be that sower of a seed that God will nurture in the years to come. Above all, remember the words of Saint Francis of Assisi who said: Your life may be the only Gospel some people will ever read. (REPEAT)

## QUALITY

Second, in order to be faithful to our vision of quality, we must constantly look at ways of improving what we do. This year we have revised further our teacher supervision model so as to allow for a more honest assessment of the quality of our classrooms. The commitment to supervision that we are engaging in this year and every year beyond is a commitment to make sure that we are animating the academic excellence that we promise in our schools. Our principals have been charged with the responsibility of affirming those staff members that are living up to their potential for excellence. Additionally they have been charged too with the responsibility to challenges staff members to grow and to improve instruction where necessary. But please understand this new model is not one of SNOOPERVISION; not a model where we nose around buildings to find the worst in schools. Instead it is a genuine attempt to bring out the best in our schools and make schools that are already superior even better.

One concrete sign of this vision both to our parents and to the community at large will be the implementation of a diocesan-wide student information solution called My Students Progress. This state of the art software solution will raise the bar of accountability to a whole new level. For teachers it will mean more accountability in the areas of lesson planning, grading and parent communication. For students it will mean more accountability in the areas of homework completion, test grades, attendance and discipline. And for parents it will mean accountability for tracking their student's progress, their student's accomplishment and their student's challenges.

Be assured that I very much recognize that an initiative such as this takes some of us in to an uncomfortable place. That is why our office and our principals are committed to making this transition as smooth as possible for all of us. Our intent is to lessen the administrative tasks of the teacher so that more time can be spent on the task at hand, teaching. Elementary report cards will be generated by the click of a button, not with the click of pen. Grade books will be customized to your liking so that you have a running record of each student each day. And the days of attendance registers in elementary schools will be a distant memory. But in the end, it is my expectation that this diocesan wide solution will set us apart as a system of schools with the most modern of tools for

our teachers, students and parents alike. This can only be accomplished with your cooperation so I thank you in advance for taking this step with me in the coming weeks.

### DIGITAL NATIVES

Next, while the My Student's Progress initiative will strengthen our education of the digital native, we will not stop there in this regard. This year will be stressing the need to continually educate these young people in the area of cyber ethics and cyber safety. As you may already know, in the past we have taken seriously our responsibility to educate children about the dangers of the real world. Programs such as Kids and Company have been our standard curriculum base when it comes to this topic. But in the age that we now live in more must be done. That is why we are looking more closely at programs that focus specifically on cyber safety and internet awareness. Moreover we will be announcing plans to educate our parents on the very real dangers that their children face in the digital world. At the high school level we hope to bring greater awareness to our students about the advantages and disadvantages of social networking sights and blogging. We will place an emphasis on cell phone dangers, sexting and other realities facing our teenagers today.

In addition to our Diocesan Director of Educational Technologies, we have appointed a teacher in the Southern Region to take on an additional role to assist teachers in Broome County with technology integration.

Finally, in this area of educating the digital native, I encourage all of you to re-examine the tools with which you teach. Be reminded that students of today learn differently from the students of yesterday. You will see, for example, very little linear thinking coming up through our lower grades. Younger learners have been multi-tasking since their infancy. They listen to music while studying, they instant message while in the classroom, they download music while they are surfing the web, they talk on their cell phones while driving a car. Apparently then, they have a capacity for parallel processing. They are clearly not linear thinkers so there is no need for linear instruction.

### FISCAL STEWARDSHIP and DEVELOPMENT

As I said earlier today, I have grown quite fond of our Bishop over the past year. One of my most favorite quotes, among many, that I have heard him say is: Christopher, remember, every mission has a margin.

The reality of our mission, indeed the very reality of all of our lives, is that we must have financial resources to support our efforts, no matter what those might be. In one of the

earliest New Testament epistles we are reminded: *“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.”*

1 Peter 4:10

I am pleased to report to you today that as Catholic schools across this diocese, we have indeed been good stewards of the resources entrusted to us for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2010. We have changed the financial course of Catholic education in this diocese by holding ourselves more accountable than ever before and by taking seriously our duty to act responsibly. But as with everything more must be done.

When I approach this subject of financial responsibility I do so with the humbling realization that no dollar that comes to our schools is our own. It comes to us because our parents have chosen to invest in their children, our parishes have chosen to invest in their future and our alumni have chosen to invest in their alma maters. As a result we must care for these investments with great integrity and honesty.

As you have heard me say before the future of our funding for Catholic education very much depends on the generosity of our donors and alumni. That is why this year we have commissioned a Development Audit of our five high schools here in the diocese. The goal of this audit is to provide our schools with insights into what they are doing well and what they could do better. From this review, we expect to learn how our schools can better respond to the financial realities of our mission by reaching out more aggressively to alumni and benefactors who have been influenced by Catholic education. This Development Audit will be the first step in preparing our high schools for a more solid financial future when it comes to planned giving, annual campaigns and the establishment of endowments.

We know that real development efforts work and we are now seeing those results in this the 2010-2011 school year. Thanks to the vision of our previous diocesan shepherd, another champion of Catholic schools, Bishop James Moynihan, the Heritage Endowment for Catholic Schools has continued to provide us with resources that directly impact the lives of our children. I am pleased to share with you today that this year's Heritage allocation to the schools of our diocese totals \$590,000. In a time when our public school counterparts are struggling to keep programs and in a time when state education budgets are being slashed, we are able to add programs, increase financial aid and maintain our high standards of excellence. This is due primarily to Bishop Moynihan's vision and to his commitment for large scale, bold development work.

This \$590,000 grant from the Heritage Endowment will allow us to accomplish the following this year:

- ◆ \$125,000 of additional financial aid : over and above the \$500,000 already awarded by the Hope Appeal.

- ◆ \$175,000 of program enhancement grants for our schools across the diocese. Grants that were applied for by the principals and awarded earlier in August. Our new diocesan wide student information system comes to us courtesy of this same program enhancement grant.
- ◆ \$130,000 will help us to continue our marketing and development initiatives as well as to expand programs that examine enrollment management, especially in the Southern Tier.
- ◆ Over \$80,000 will allow us to maintain our vision to educate Digital Natives across the diocese by providing for different technology needs across the diocese.
- ◆ Almost \$20,000 has been granted so that we can maintain our vocation programs and religious certification program in our schools.
- ◆ \$50,000 has been granted to continue our partnership with LeMoyne College in the area of teacher training, leadership development and overall professional development.

And, in addition to the \$590,000 in grants named above, the Catholic School office secured an additional \$75,000 in Financial Aid from the Joe and Elaine Scuderi Catholic Education Fund, \$25,000 in financial aid from the Catholic Education Foundation of Broome County and an additional \$30,000 for financial aid from other sources across the diocese. In total, an additional \$225,000 in financial aid was secured this year for our students, over and above the Hope Appeal's annual allocation of \$500,000.

It is my sincere belief that when purposeful development work is done, the results can be astounding. That is why we must build on the momentum of this year and take our work to the next level in the coming months.

### BOLDNESS

Finally, we intend to once again be bold this year. I once again invite all of you to consider thinking big. I repeat what I said to you a year ago: no idea is too bold, no new initiative is too outlandish and no suggestion will go unheard. My office remains open to the wealth of creativity and innovation that exists in this church today. All of those ideas that you once wanted to suggest, all of those programs that you thought could enhance your school, all of those times when you felt that taking the risk could result in something great for your students...the School Office is now listening, your time is now!

And we will be doing our part in this area as well. In the second week of October we expect to be publishing for the very first time a Report on Catholic Education here in the

diocese. This document will be a transparent look at the realities of our school system and will give all of our parents, parishoners and alumni a snapshot of what makes us great.

In addition the Catholic School Office will be conducting a far reaching review of our policies, our handbooks and our contracts. It has become clear over the past several months that our policies and procedures have not kept pace with the times in which we live. Therefore we are committed to making sure that these policies best reflect who we are and what we hope to become. The teacher's and administrators handbook, last revised in 1987, will be examined carefully with your input and we will work to assure our parents and our students that content area certification remains a priority for our professional staff.

And so my friends, the vision remains constant, the 5 pillars continue to guide our future as we begin this new year. The vision is taking shape in so many corners of our diocese but there is still much to be done. And I am counting on you to make it happen.

Early enrollment numbers for the 2010-2011 school year tell me that we are reversing a trend that has plagued our diocese for the past 5 years. Namely, in each of those years we have seen a decrease of enrollment of somewhere between 9% and 11%. Early projections for this year show that we have cut that trend in half with the possibility of even more. But this is not enough. We must constantly push ourselves to understand the realities of how we can better retain our students. Because the data shows that we are gaining new families all of the time; it's our current families that we are losing at an alarming rate. That is why the Catholic School Office remains committed to keeping the tuition increase as low as possible from year to year and, thinking more creatively, even trying to produce a multi-year tuition schedule that will allow parents to know the cost of tuition several years out. But tuition increases are not the only reason that we lose our current families. More often than not we lose them because we are not delivering on what our brochures promise. We are often losing them due to factors that ARE in fact in our control. That is why I am asking you this morning to recommit yourselves to parent communication, customer service, if you will, so that our parents know that the investment they are making in their children is one of distinct value and worth. Rest assured, the parents will still know that our schools are staffed by competent professionals: so this is not an invitation to come in and run our schools. Instead, my challenge to you is to be aware that our parents today expect more from their investment, so give it to them. Communicate often, know their child's name, show compassion to their child, be fair, be consistent and above all, love them as if they were your own. As a parent and as your Superintendent I would expect nothing less.

In closing, I would like to share one final story with you.

It's the story of a young man who was approaching high school graduation. For many months he had admired a beautiful sports car in a dealer's showroom, and knowing his father could well afford it, he told him that was all he wanted. As Graduation Day approached, the young man awaited signs that his father had purchased the car. Finally, on the morning of his graduation his father called him into his private study. His father told him how proud he was to have such a fine son, and told him how much he loved him. He handed his son a beautiful wrapped gift box. Curious, but somewhat disappointed the young man opened the box and found a lovely, leather-bound Bible. Angrily, he raised his voice at his father and said, "With all your money you give me a Bible?" and stormed out of the house, throwing the Bible across the room, leaving it there in the corner of the room. Many years passed and the young man was very successful in business. He had a beautiful home and wonderful family, but realized his father was very old, and thought perhaps he should go to him. He had not seen him since that graduation day. Before he could make arrangements, he received a telegram telling him his father had passed away, and willed all of his possessions to his son. He needed to come home immediately and take care of things. When he arrived at his father's house, sudden sadness and regret filled his heart. He began to search his father's important papers and saw the still new Bible, just as he had left it years ago. With tears, he opened the Bible and began to turn the pages. As he read those words, an envelope dropped from the back of the Bible; it had been taped there all of these years. Inside of it there was an invoice and a tag with the dealer's name, the same dealer who had the sports car he had desired. On the invoice was the date of his graduation, and the words...PAID IN FULL.

As we depart from this gathering today, let's not make 2010-2011 a year of regrets. I challenge you to seize every opportunity placed in front of you and to welcome each student entrusted to your care with the same enthusiasm on day 180 that you have on day 1. Be assured of my continued admiration, respect and esteem for the work that you do each and every day. Yours is the work that matters most because it is your hand that directly touches the hearts of our students. On behalf of the Church of Syracuse, I thank you for dedicating your lives today to the parishioners, priests, sisters and Church leaders of tomorrow. Have a wonderful year and may God bless the work of our hands!