

# Ensuring our Catholic Identity

DSB Resources for  
Diocesan In-service  
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## **Catholic Documents on Education**

<i>Declaration on Christian Education</i>	1965
<i>To Teach as Jesus Did</i>	1972
<i>Teach Them</i>	1976
<i>The Catholic School</i>	1977
<i>Sharing the Light of Faith: National Catechetical Directory</i>	1979
<i>Lay Catholics in Schools: Witness to Faith</i>	1982
<i>The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School</i>	1988
<i>In Support of Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools</i>	1990
<i>The Catholic School: The Threshold of the Third Millennium</i>	1997
<i>Renewing our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium</i>	2005
<i>National Directory for Catechesis</i>	2005

## **Church Documents on Catholic Education**

Listed below are the significant Church Documents issues since Vatican Council II related to Catholic schools. In each case the general content of the document is described, and salient ideas are quoted.

**Declaration on Christian Education** is one of the documents of Second Vatican Council. It was issued in 1965. The text reflects on the duties of parents, the civil society and the church in education. It speaks to the Catholic school as being of “utmost importance” and urges “pastors and all the faithful to spare no sacrifice in helping Catholic schools fulfill their function in a continually more perfect way”. Identified as the distinctive function of the Catholic school are these purposes: “to create for the school community an atmosphere enlivened by the gospel spirit of freedom and charity, ...to help the student in such a way that the development of his own personality will be matched by the growth of that new creation he became by baptism...(and) to relate all human culture eventually to the news of salvation” (art. 8). Teachers are especially challenged in their vocation, which “demands special qualities of mind and heart, very careful preparation and continuing readiness to renew and adapt”. The declaration also has encouragement and advice for Catholic colleges and theological schools.

**The General Catechetical Directory** was issued in 1971 by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy in Rome. “The intent of this Directory,” the forward says, “is to provide the basic principles of pastoral theology...by which...the ministry of the word can be more fittingly directed and governed”. The document was written for all those who have some responsibility for catechesis (i.e., “ecclesial action which leads both communities and individual members of the faithful to maturity of faith”). The General Catechetical Directory speaks about revelation (how God’s word comes to us? and about the hierarchy of faith truths (the four basic mysteries being the triune God who creates, the incarnate Christ, the sanctifying Spirit and the Church). It offers some insights regarding the catechetical approach appropriate for different age groups; it emphasizes the importance of formal preparation for catechist; and it addresses in a general way structures and tools for carrying out catechesis.

**To Teach as Jesus Did** is a pastoral message by the National Council of Catholic Bishops, which was issued in 1972. It identified three main goals for all of Catholic education: to teach the gospel message, to help people grow in fellowship of the Christian community and remind the Christian of the obligation to service. It offered specific counsel to various components of Catholic education: adult education, college campuses, Catholic schools, CCD, youth ministry, etc. On the Catholic school, it sounded a very up-beat note: “Of the educational programs available to the Catholic community, Catholic schools afford the fullest and best opportunity to realize the three fold purpose of Christian education among children and young people”.

**Teach Them** is a statement specifically on Catholic schools, which was released by the Bishops of the United States Catholic Conference in 1976. It reaffirms the support of the American hierarchy for Catholic schools. “The reasons are compelling. Generally these schools are notably successful educational institutions which offer not only high quality academic programs but also instructions and formation in the beliefs, values and traditions of Catholic Christianity...They have a highly positive impact on adult religious behavior.” The document encourages efforts to sustain Catholic schools, which serve poverty areas. It also complements and challenges parents, teachers, administrators and pastors.

**The Catholic School** was produced by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education in Rome in 1977. The document is a ringing endorsement of the pastoral value of Catholic schools. They are seen as places where faith is part of the school’s culture and where “all members of the school community share this Christian vision”. The schools are called to integrate “all the different aspects of human knowledge through the subjects taught in light of the Gospel” and to help people “grow towards maturity in faith”. Teachers are particularly challenged to “reveal the Christian message not only by word but also by every gesture of their behavior”.

**Sharing the Light of Faith** is also called the National Catechetical Directory (NCD). It was written by the United States Catholic Conference for the American Bishops and was approved by Rome in 1978. It is our country’s sequel to the General Catechetical Directory and is now one of the most important documents relating to our Catholic education.

It speaks first to some general principals on catechetics. For example, it defines the source of catechetics as “God’s word, fully revealed in Jesus Christ...” and identifies the “signs” or manifestations of God’s word as falling into four categories: biblical, liturgical (Mass and sacraments), ecclesial (e.g., creeds) and natural (God’s presence in the world).

Next, the NCD outlines the content of the catechetical message. This is a beautiful concise summary of Catholic faith. After this, there follows special chapters on catechesis for worship, for social ministry and for faith maturity (including sections on conscience formation and sexuality).

Finally the directory offers some insight and guidance in the very practical areas of personnel, organizations and resources for catechists.

In it’s guidelines for Catholic schools, the NCD advises schools “to have a set religion curriculum with established goals and objectives,” to build and foster community among staff and students, to provide for the “creative paraliturgies and sacramental celebrations,” to introduce students to the practice of Christian service and to develop in students “a social conscience sensitive to the needs of all”. Of the Catholic schools’ uniqueness the NCD says, “Growth in faith is central to their purpose”. The schools are called upon to integrate their educational efforts with those of the parish/es, and teachers are charged witnesses to the Gospel demonstrating commitment to community, service and the teaching authority of the Church.

**Lay Catholics in Schools: Witness to Faith** was issued by the Vatican Congregation for Catholic education in 1982. This document provides a theological rationale for the role of the layperson as educator. “The lay Catholic educator is a person who exercises a specific mission within the Church by living in faith in a secular vocation in the communitarian structure of the school”. The statement calls the educator, by his/her example, instructional methods, and personal contacts with student, to show respect for the individual dignity of each student, to provide principles by which students can think and act both critically and creatively within their culture, to communicate information truthfully and to encourage students toward social awareness and responsible decision making. The document stresses the importance of ongoing professional and religious education for educators. It takes “all believers (to) actively collaborate in the work of helping educators to reach the social status and economic level that they must have if they are accomplish their task”. This includes “an adequate salary guaranteed by a well defined contract.” Finally, the document states that the lay educator “should participate authentically in the responsibility for the school.”

**The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School** was issued by the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education in 1988. Offered as guidelines for reflection and renewal, this document is addressed primarily to local ordinaries and the superiors of Religious Congregations dedicated to the education of young people and invites them to examine whether or not the words of the Second Vatican Council have become reality. The distinguishing characteristics of a Catholic school are described as follows:

*The Catholic school pursues cultural goals and the natural development of youth to the same degree as any other school. What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love. It tries to guide the adolescents in such a way that personality development goes hand in hand in with the development of the “new creature” that each one of us has become through baptism. It tries to relate all of human culture to the good news of salvation so that the light of faith will illumine everything that the student will gradually come to learn about the world, about life and about the human person. In this statement, the Congregation states that the Council declared that what makes the Catholic school distinctive is its religious dimension, and this is to be found in: a) the educational climate, b) the personal development of each student, c) the relationship established between culture and the Gospel, and d) the illumination of all knowledge with the light of faith.*

Each chapter addresses one of these distinctive characteristics and presents challenges and specific recommendations for evaluation.

Of particular interest to board members is the concluding section stating “that a Catholic school needs to have a set of educational goals which are ‘distinctive’ in the sense that the school has a specific objective in mind, and all of the goals are related to this objective. Concretely, the educational goals provide a frame of reference which:

- Defines the school’s identity: in particular, the Gospel values which are its inspiration must be explicitly mentioned;
- Gives a precise description of the pedagogical, educational and cultural aims of the school;
- Presents the course content, along with the values that are to be transmitted through these courses;
- Describes the organization and the management of the school;
- Determines which policy decisions are to be reserved to professional staff (diocesan staff, principals and teachers), which policies are to be developed with the help of the parents and students, and which activities are to be left to the free initiatives of teachers, parents or students;
- Indicates the ways in which student progress is to be tested and evaluated.”

**Renewing our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary schools in the Third Millennium.** This statement contains an understanding of and vision for the future of Catholic schools that ought to assist diocesan and community leaders, vicars, superintendents, pastors, principals, teachers, and parents in addressing the numerous challenges faced the days and years ahead.

#### RESOURCES

National Catholic Educational Association, [www.ncea.org](http://www.ncea.org)

Ensuring Catholic Identity in Catholic schools, edited by Carole Stable Ed. D

Learners and Leaders: Spirituality for Board Members, by Mary Benet McKinney OSB, D. M

Benchmarks of Excellence: Effective Boards of Catholic Education, Regina Haney

Continuing to Ensure the Future Full of Hope, Carole Cimino, SSJ. Ed.D

Diocese of Phoenix, [www.dioceseofphoenix.org/catholicschools](http://www.dioceseofphoenix.org/catholicschools)

Board

Planning