

THE CALL TO TEACH

MAGISTERIAL GUIDANCE ON WHAT IT
MEANS TO BE A CATHOLIC EDUCATOR



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Magisterial Guidance on What it Means to be a Catholic Educator

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Summary:

Over many decades, and especially since Vatican II, the Catholic Church has called upon educators to fulfill their essential role as witnesses to the faith in both word and deed. This booklet presents those teachings in a readily accessible manner for those seeking to understand Magisterial expectations for the Catholic educator.

It identifies and summarizes five broad areas found in the teachings: The Church's Mission in Catholic Education; What Does It Mean to Be a Catholic Teacher?; Qualifications to Effectively Impart an Authentic Catholic Education; Apostolic Witness and Conduct Required to Be an Authentic Christian Role Model; and Assimilation of Catholic Culture. Making the Church's rich and deep understanding of the role of Catholic educators available to those who share in the Church's mission affords an opportunity to take a renewed look at the Catholic identity of schools, reflect on an abundant treasury of wisdom and inspiration, and ultimately ensure that students are provided an excellent and faithful Catholic education.

Introduction

There have been many changes in Catholic education in the United States since the first missionary schools were established in the Americas, and among the most significant has been the late-20th century shift to primarily lay Catholic teachers. In recent years, efforts to strengthen the Catholic identity of schools in the United States have prompted measures to reinforce the expectations and formation for teachers in Catholic schools, emphasizing moral qualities in addition to professional competence.

The Vatican has consistently recognized that teachers—lay, clerical, or religious—have an essential role in Catholic education and must serve as witnesses to the faith, in both word and deed. This constant appreciation for the role of teachers—of great importance to the Church’s leadership as well as to those parents who enter into a partnership with Catholic schools—is presented in the Church’s magisterial teachings. A review of these teachings provides understanding of the importance of the Catholic teacher and the teacher’s role in fulfilling the mission of the Church by preparing students to live virtuous lives in service to society and the Church.

The Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965), outlines the basic principles of Christian education, acknowledging the Church’s reliance on Catholic educators and the importance of preparation in “secular and religious knowledge”.¹ Twelve years later, the impact of cultural and social pluralism on Catholic education was addressed by the Vatican’s Sacred Congregation for Education in *The Catholic School* (1977). Among its concerns was that, “Often what is perhaps fundamentally lacking among Catholics who work in a school is a clear realization of the identity of a Catholic school and the courage to follow all the consequences of its uniqueness.”²

1 Pope Paul VI, *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965), #8.

2 Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (1977), #10.

Historically, Catholic identity in schools was strong, as they were administered and staffed by men and women from religious orders, whose professional and spiritual formation created an environment of Christian witness with a program integrated with Gospel values. However, after Vatican II and in the years following, the Church has become increasingly dependent on laity to serve the more than 6,500 Catholic schools in the United States, which educate approximately two million students. There has been a gradual but steady transition away from clergy and religious—now just 2.8 percent of Catholic full-time professional staff, according to the National Catholic Educational Association.³

In 1982, due to increased reliance on laity to staff Catholic schools, the Sacred Congregation focused special attention on teachers in its document *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*. It seeks to detail the “specific character of their vocation” and presents “a true picture of the laity as an active element, accomplishing an important task for the entire Church through their labour”.⁴

The Congregation expanded on the distinctive characteristics of Catholic education in 1988 in *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, restating, “Prime responsibility for creating this unique Christian school climate rests with the teachers.”⁵ Less than ten years later, to address the “crisis of values” in contemporary society, the Congregation issued *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997). The document includes the fundamental characteristics of schools necessary to be effective agents for the Church and the need to recruit teachers who are “competent, convinced, and coherent educators” who serve as a reflection of the one Teacher, Jesus Christ.⁶

As America entered the twenty-first century, concern over Catholic school closures and waning Catholic identity was addressed by the United States

3 NCEA, *United States Catholic Elementary and Secondary School 2014-1015: The Annual Statistical Report on Schools, Enrollment and Staffing*. (2015). Retrieved from <https://www.ncea.org/data-information/catholic-school-data>.

4 Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #5.

5 Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988), #26.

6 Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997), #14.

Conference of Catholic Bishops in *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*. Noting that ninety-five percent of those working in Catholic school were laity, the Bishops state, “The formation of personnel will allow the Gospel message and the living presence of Jesus to permeate the entire life of the school community and thus be faithful to the evangelizing mission.”⁷ The criteria they present for personnel in a Catholic school include being grounded in faith-based culture, being bonded to Christ and the Church, and being witnesses to the faith in both their words and actions.

Today, Catholic schools continue to struggle against secularization and moral relativism in every aspect of our society. Laying out plans to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, the Congregation for Catholic Education issued *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion*, which describes the impact of contemporary culture as an “educational emergency”. Along with the many issues facing Catholic education—identity, limited means and resources, legal, pastoral—the document discusses the challenge associated with lifelong training of teachers, noting that educators need unity and a willingness to embrace and share a “specific evangelical identity” and “consistent lifestyle”.⁸

Supported by these and other magisterial documents, this report explicates the teachings of the Catholic Church summarizing the role of lay Catholic teachers and their qualifications; pedagogical, educational, and cultural goals; relationship to the Church; and Gospel witness. The purpose of the report is to provide an account of the qualities deemed important by the Church for teachers to maintain strong Catholic identity in schools and thereby fulfill the mission of the Church in this apostolate.

The findings are organized into five sections based on recurrent themes found in the magisterial teachings describing a Catholic educator. Each summary is written using key phrases from the Church documents, followed by the complete citations to provide a contextual reference. The

7 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary & Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium* (2005).

8 Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion* (2014), III, 1.j.

first section considers the general mission of Catholic education as serving the mission of the Church.

Described in the second section is the vocational aspect of the Catholic educator, exploring how an understanding of this role is critical to fulfilling the Church's mission in education.

The third section details the spiritual and professional qualifications required of teachers to effectively impart an authentic Catholic education. Compared to their secular counterparts, teachers in Catholic schools have additional responsibilities associated with the spiritual dimension of their work. Included in this analysis are pedagogical aspects associated with the "harmonious" development of students' physical, moral, and intellectual talents,⁹ integrating Catholicity into subject areas, and ensuring the protection and the dignity of each child. References to professionalism of the Catholic teacher refer to those qualities deemed important to the integral formation of students, summarized within the context of the magisterial teachings. The reader will discover that multidimensional criteria for teaching in a Catholic school surpass the standards typically associated with educational credentialing.

Expanding on the spirituality of Catholic educators, section four explores expectations associated with apostolic witness and conduct of an authentic Christian role model. In the formational years, the adage "actions speak louder than words" could not hold more meaning than for those who interact with children and young adults on a day-to-day basis. Magisterial teachings detail the importance of faculty behavior based on Gospel values to prepare students for a life of moral and Christian living.

Building on the prior four areas, the fifth section investigates how the blending of instruction, pedagogy, and witness allow for the systematic and critical assimilation of Catholic culture. This culture of conviction, where truth is fundamental in the search for wisdom, freedom, justice, and human dignity, is the foundation by which students learn their responsibilities to God, themselves, each other, and society.

⁹ *Code of Canon Law*, 795.

The Church's Mission in Catholic Education

A review of documents from the Vatican and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops provides clarity on the Church's mission in Catholic education. Catholic education is an expression of the Church's mission of salvation and an instrument of evangelization. Through its schools, members encounter God, who in Jesus Christ reveals His transforming love and truth. As a faith community, students, parents, and educators, in unity with the Church, give witness to Christ's loving communion in the Holy Trinity. With this Christian vision, Catholic education fulfills its purpose of transmitting culture in the light of faith, integrally forming the human person by developing each student's physical, moral, spiritual, and intellectual gifts, teaching responsibility and right use of freedom, preparing students to fulfill God's calling in this world, and attaining the eternal kingdom for which they were created.

The Salvific Mission of the Church: In the fullness of time, in His mysterious plan of love, God the Father sent His only Son to begin the Kingdom of God on earth and bring about the spiritual rebirth of mankind. To continue His work of salvation, Jesus Christ founded the Church as a visible organism, living by the power of the Spirit.

Moved by the same Spirit, the Church is constantly deepening her awareness of herself and meditating on the mystery of her being and mission. Thus she is ever rediscovering her living relationship with Christ “in order to discover greater light, energy, and joy in fulfilling her mission and determining the best way to ensure that her relationship with humanity is closer and more efficacious”—that humanity of which she is a part and yet so undeniably distinct. Her destiny is to serve humanity until it reaches its fullness in Christ.

Evangelization is, therefore, the mission of the Church; that is she must proclaim the good news of salvation to all, generate new creatures in Christ through Baptism, and train them to live knowingly as children of God.

Means available for the Mission of the Church: To carry out her saving mission, the Church uses, above all, the means which Jesus Christ has given her. She also uses other means which at different times and in different cultures have proved effective in achieving and, promoting the development of the human person. The Church adapts these means to the changing conditions and emerging needs of mankind. In her encounter with differing cultures and with man's progressive achievements, the Church proclaims the faith and reveals "to all ages the transcendent goal which alone gives life its full meaning."

She establishes her own schools because she considers them as a privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole man, since the school is a centre in which a specific concept of the world, of man, and of history is developed and conveyed... It is precisely in the Gospel of Christ, taking root in the minds and lives of the faithful, that the Catholic school finds its definition as it comes to terms with the cultural conditions of the times. It must never be forgotten that the purpose of instruction at school is education, that is, the development of man from within, freeing him from that conditioning which would prevent him from becoming a fully integrated human being. The school must begin from the principle that its educational program is intentionally directed to the growth of the whole person. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (1977), #5-9)

Catholic education is an expression of the mission entrusted by Jesus to the Church He founded. Through education, the Church seeks to prepare its members to proclaim the Good News and to translate this proclamation into action. Since the Christian vocation is a call to transform oneself and society with God's help, the educational efforts of the Church must encompass the twin purposes of personal sanctification and the social reform in light of Christian values. (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *To Teach as Jesus Did* (1972), #7)

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching

them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matthew 28:19-20)

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). (Pope Benedict, XVI, Meeting With Catholic Educators (2008), Washington, DC)

Christ is the foundation of the whole educational enterprise in a Catholic school. His revelation gives new meaning to life and helps man to direct his thought, action and will according to the Gospel, making the beatitudes his norm of life. The fact that in their own individual ways all members of the school community share this Christian vision, makes the school “Catholic”; principles of the Gospel in this manner become the educational norms since the school then has them as its internal motivation and final goal. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, The Catholic School (1977), #34)

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 illumined by the light of faith, and having its own unique characteristics... The Gospel spirit should be evident in a Christian way of thought and life which permeates all facets of the educational climate. (Congregation for Catholic Education, The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (1988), #25)

The implementation of a real *educational community*, built on the foundation of shared projected values, represents a serious task that must be carried out by the Catholic school... The preparation of a shared project acts as a stimulus that should force the Catholic school to be a place of ecclesial experience. Its binding force and potential for relationships derive from a set of values and a *community of life* that is rooted in our common belonging to Christ.

Derived from the recognition of evangelical values are educational norms, motivational drives and also the final goals of the school. Certainly the degree of participation can differ in relation to one's personal history, but this requires that educators be willing to offer a permanent commitment to formation and self-formation regarding a choice of cultural and life values to be made present in the educational community. (Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools, A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* (2007), #5)

When Christians say *communion*, they refer to the eternal mystery, revealed in Christ, of the communion of love that is the very life of God-Trinity. At the same time we also say that Christians share in this communion in the Body of Christ which is the Church (cf. *Phil 1: 7; Rev 1: 9*). Communion is, therefore, the "essence" of the Church, the foundation and source of its mission of being in the world "the home and the school of communion," to lead all men and women to enter ever more profoundly into the mystery of Trinitarian communion and, at the same time, to extend and strengthen internal relations within the human community. (Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools, A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* (2007), #10)

Since true education must strive for complete formation of the human person that looks to his or her final end as well as to the common good of societies, children and youth are to be nurtured in such a way that they are able to develop their physical, moral, and intellectual talents harmoniously, acquire a more perfect sense of responsibility and right use of freedom, and are formed to participate actively in social life. (*Code of Canon Law, 795*)

To fulfill the mandate she has received from her divine founder of proclaiming the mystery of salvation to all men and of restoring all things in Christ, Holy Mother the Church must be concerned with the whole of man's life, even the secular part of it insofar as it has a bearing on his heavenly calling. Therefore she has a role in the progress and development of education. Hence this sacred

synod declares certain fundamental principles of Christian education especially in schools. (Pope Paul VI, *Gravissimum Educationis, Declaration on Christian Education* (1965), Introduction)

Education today is a complex task, which is made more difficult by rapid social, economic, and cultural changes. Its specific mission remains the integral formation of the human person. Children and young people must be guaranteed the possibility of developing harmoniously their own physical, moral, intellectual and spiritual gifts, and they must also be helped to develop their sense of responsibility, learn the correct use of freedom, and participate actively in social life (cf. c. 795 Code of Canon Law [CIC]; c. 629 Code of Canons for the Eastern Churches [CCEO]). A form of education that ignores or marginalises the moral and religious dimension of the person is a hindrance to full education, because “children and young people have a right to be motivated to appraise moral values with a right conscience, to embrace them with a personal adherence, together with a deeper knowledge and love of God.” That is why the Second Vatican Council asked and recommended “all those who hold a position of public authority or who are in charge of education to see to it that youth is never deprived of this sacred right.” (*Congregation for Catholic Education, Circular Letter to the Presidents of Bishops’ Conferences on Religious Education in Schools* (2009), #1)

It is important for Catholic schools to be aware of the risks that arise should they lose sight of the reasons why they exist... Catholic schools are called to give dutiful witness, by their pedagogy that is clearly inspired by the Gospel... They have the responsibility for offering Catholic students, over and above a sound knowledge of religion, the possibility to grow in personal closeness to Christ in the Church. (*Congregation for Catholic Education, Educating in Intercultural Dialogue in the Catholic School: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love* (2013), #56)

The young people we are educating today will become the leaders of the 2050s. What will religion’s contribution be to educating younger generations to peace, development, fraternity in the uni-

versal human community? How are we going to educate them to faith and in faith? How will we establish the preliminary conditions to accept this gift, to educate them to gratitude, to a sense of awe, to asking themselves questions, to develop a sense of justice and consistency? How will we educate them to prayer? (Con-
gregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A
Renewing Passion* (2014), III)

What Does It Mean to Be a Catholic Teacher?

The Catholic teacher's vocation is to participate in the saving mission of the Church and to assist in the building of the Body of Christ. The teacher is called by God to work for the sanctification of the world and to communicate truth. The Catholic educator has special qualities of mind and heart and is led by the Spirit and the Gospel to make Christ known to others by a life filled with faith, hope, and charity.

Perfect schools are the result not so much of good methods as of good teachers, teachers who are thoroughly prepared and well-grounded in the matter they have to teach; who possess the intellectual and moral qualifications required by their important office; who cherish a pure and holy love for the youths confided to them, because they love Jesus Christ and His Church, of which these are the children of predilection; and who have therefore sincerely at heart the true good of family and country. (Pope Pius XI, *Divini Illius Magistri* (1929), #88)

Beautiful indeed and of great importance is the vocation of all those who aid parents in fulfilling their duties and who, as representatives of the human community, undertake the task of education in schools. This vocation demands special qualities of mind and heart, very careful preparation, and continuing readiness to renew and to adapt. (Pope Paul VI, *Gravissimum Educationis, Declaration on Christian Education* (1965), #5)

For, “they share a common dignity from their rebirth in Christ. They have the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection. They possess in common one salvation, one hope, and one undivided charity”. Although it is true that, in the Church, “by the will of Christ, some are made teachers, dispensers of mysteries and shepherds on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ”. Every Christian, and therefore also every lay person, has been made a sharer in “the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ”, and their apostolate “is a participation in the saving mission of the Church itself... All are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself”. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #6)

One specific characteristic of the educational profession assumes its most profound significance in the Catholic educator: the communication of truth. For the Catholic educator, whatever is true is a participation in Him who is the Truth; the communication of truth, therefore, as a professional activity, is thus fundamentally transformed into a unique participation in the prophetic mission of Christ, carried on through one’s teaching. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #16)

They live in the midst of the world’s activities and professions, and in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life; and there they are called by God so that by exercising their proper function and being led by the spirit of the Gospel they can work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven. In this way they can make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope, and charity. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #7)

When it considers the tremendous evangelical resource embodied in the millions of lay Catholics who devote their lives to schools, it recalls the words with which the Second Vatican Council ended

its Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, and “earnestly entreats in the Lord that all lay persons give a glad, generous, and prompt response to the voice of Christ, who is giving them an especially urgent invitation at this moment; ...they should respond to it eagerly and magnanimously ...and, recognizing that what is His is also their own (Phil. 2, 5), to associate themselves with Him in His saving mission... Thus they can show that they are His co-workers in the various forms and methods of the Church’s one apostolate, which must be constantly adapted to the new needs of the times. May they always abound in the works of God, knowing that they will not labour in vain when their labour is for Him (Cf. I Cor. 15, 58)”. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #82)

Qualifications to Effectively Impart an Authentic Catholic Education

Those who oversee Catholic education recognize and depend on teachers to fulfill the goals and programs of the school. Based on its divine mission, it is crucial for teachers in a Catholic school to be prepared to assume the responsibilities associated with both the spiritual and professional dimensions of their ministry in Catholic education.

The Spiritual Dimension

Catholic schools are called to recruit teachers who are practicing Catholics and who can understand and accept the teachings of the Catholic Church and the moral demands of the Gospel, and contribute to strengthening Catholic identity and apostolic goals. The Catholic educator is entrusted with and shares in the sanctifying and educational mission of the Church. Each teacher must “consciously inspire his or her activity with the Christian concept of the person” in communion with the Church. Participation and active engagement in the liturgical and sacramental life of the school provides a visible manifestation of their faith and commitment. Catholic school personnel are called to be filled with Christian wisdom

so as to guide students to Truth. The Catholic educator is challenged to integrate religious truths and values into daily life, both in their private and professional lives, to personally guide and inspire their students into a deeper faith and more profound levels of human knowledge.

The instruction and education in a Catholic school must be grounded in the principles of Catholic doctrine; teachers are to be outstanding in correct doctrine and integrity of life. (*Code of Canon Law*, 803 §2)

Catholic leadership is called upon to “recruit teachers who are practicing Catholics, who can understand and accept the teachings of the Catholic Church and the moral demands of the Gospel, and who can contribute to the achievement of the school’s Catholic identity and apostolic goals. (*U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, National Directory for Catechesis (2005), #231)*)

And if there is no trace of Catholic identity in the education, the educator can hardly be called a Catholic educator. Some of the aspects of this living out of one’s identity are common and essential; they must be present no matter what the school is in which the lay educator exercises his or her vocation. (*Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith (1982), #25)*)

In today’s pluralistic world, the Catholic educator must consciously inspire his or her activity with the Christian concept of the person, in communion with the Magisterium of the Church. It is a concept which includes a defense of human rights, but also attributes to the human person the dignity of a child of God... It establishes the strictest possible relationship of solidarity among all persons; through mutual love and an ecclesial community. It calls for the fullest development of all that is human... Finally, it proposes Christ, Incarnate Son of God and perfect Man, as both model and means; to imitate Him... (*Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith (1982), #18)*)

To this lay person, as a member of this community, the family and the Church entrust the school's educational endeavor. Lay teachers must be profoundly convinced that they share in the sanctifying, and therefore educational mission of the Church; they cannot regard themselves as cut off from the ecclesial complex. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #24)

The lay Catholic working in a school is, along with every Christian, a member of the People of God... Every Christian, and therefore also every lay person, has been made a sharer in "the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ", and their apostolate "is a participation in the saving mission of the Church itself... All are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself". (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #6)

As a visible manifestation of the faith they profess and the life witness they are supposed to manifest, it is important that lay Catholics who work in a Catholic school participate simply and actively in the liturgical and sacramental life of the school. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #40)

Since the educative mission of the Catholic school is so wide, the teacher is in an excellent position to guide the pupil to a deepening of his faith and to enrich and enlighten his human knowledge with the data of the faith... The teacher can form the mind and heart of his pupils and guide them to develop a total commitment to Christ, with their whole personality enriched by human culture. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #40)

A teacher who is full of Christian wisdom, well prepared in his own subject, does more than convey the sense of what he is teaching to his pupils. Over and above what he says, he guides his pupils beyond his mere words to the heart of total Truth. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (1977), #41)

The integration of religious truth and values with the rest of life is brought about in the Catholic school not only by its unique curriculum, but, more important, by the presence of teachers who express an integrated approach to learning and living in their private and professional lives. (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *To Teach as Jesus Did* (1972), #104)

Most of all, students should be able to recognize authentic human qualities in their teachers. They are teachers of the faith; however, like Christ, they must also be teachers of what it means to be human. . . . A teacher who has a clear vision of the Christian milieu and lives in accord with it will be able to help young people develop a similar vision, and will give them the inspiration they need to put it into practice. (Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (1988), #96)

The Professional Dimension

In a Catholic school, a teacher commits to make integral human formation the heart of the profession, a calling that is enhanced by adequate preparation in both secular and religious knowledge and pedagogical skills. Qualifications for the classroom include creativity, management skills, and the ability to create an effective learning environment in which each student's gifts and talents are acknowledged and respected. Through the synthesis of faith, culture, and life, the Catholic educator integrates Gospel values into all aspects of the curriculum to demonstrate the relationship between knowledge and truth. Professionalism, within the context of the Catholic teachings, is one of the most important characteristics of the teacher in living out an "ecclesial vocation" and includes preparation and ongoing development in the pedagogical, cultural, and psychological areas of the teacher's work. Teaching and learning cannot be based solely on a professional relationship but one built on mutual esteem, trust, respect, and friendliness with parents, students, members of school communities, and fellow Catholic educators.

Every person who contributes to integral human formation is an educator; but teachers have made integral human formation their very profession. When, then, we discuss the school, teachers

deserve special consideration: because of their number, but also because of the institutional purpose of the school. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #15)

The task of a teacher goes well beyond transmission of knowledge, although that is not excluded. Therefore, if adequate professional preparation is required in order to transmit knowledge, then adequate professional preparation is even more necessary in order to fulfill the role of a genuine teacher. It is an indispensable human formation, and without it, it would be foolish to undertake any educational work. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #16)

They should therefore be very carefully prepared so that both in secular and religious knowledge they are equipped with suitable qualifications and also with a pedagogical skill that is in keeping with the findings of the contemporary world. (Pope Paul VI, *Gravissimum Educationis, Declaration on Christian Education* (1965), #8)

Professional competence is the necessary condition for openness to unleash its educational potential. A lot is being required of teachers and managers: they should have the ability to create, invent and manage learning environments that provide plentiful opportunities; they should be able to respect students' different intelligences and guide them towards significant and profound learning; they should be able to accompany their students towards lofty and challenging goals, cherish high expectations for them, involve and connect students to each other and the world. Teachers must be able to pursue different goals simultaneously and face problem situations that require a high level of professionalism and preparation. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion* (2014), #7)

The integral formation of the human person, which is the purpose of education, includes the development of all the human faculties of the students, together with preparation for professional life,

formation of ethical and social awareness, becoming aware of the transcendental, and religious education. Every school, and every educator in the school, ought to be striving “to form strong and responsible individuals, who are capable of making free and correct choices”, thus preparing young people “to open themselves more and more to reality, and to form in themselves a clear idea of the meaning of life” (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #17)

Professionalism is one of the most important characteristics in the identity of every lay Catholic. The first requirement, then, for a lay educator who wishes to live out his or her ecclesial vocation, is the acquisition of a solid professional formation. In the case of an educator, this includes competency in a wide range of cultural, psychological, and pedagogical areas. However, it is not enough that the initial training be at a good level; this must be maintained and deepened, always bringing it up to date. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #27)

The synthesis between faith, culture and life that educators of the Catholic school are called to achieve is, in fact, reached “by integrating all the different aspects of human knowledge through the subjects taught, in the light of the Gospel [...and] in the growth of the virtues characteristic of the Christian”. This means that Catholic educators must attain a special sensitivity with regard to the person to be educated in order to grasp not only the request for growth in knowledge and skills, but also the need for growth in humanity. Thus educators must dedicate themselves “to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity”. (Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools, A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* (2007), #24)

The epistemological framework of every branch of knowledge has its own identity, both in content and methodology. However, this framework does not relate merely to “internal” questions, touching upon the correct realization of each discipline. Each discipline is

not an island inhabited by a form of knowledge that is distinct and ring-fenced; rather, it is in a dynamic relationship with all other forms of knowledge, each of which expresses something about the human person and touches upon some truth. (Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating in Intercultural Dialogue in the Catholic School: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love* (2013), #64-67)

Teaching and learning are the two terms in a relationship that does not only involve the subject to be studied and the learning mind, but also persons: this relationship cannot be based exclusively on technical and professional relations, but must be nourished by mutual esteem, trust, respect and friendliness. When learning takes place in a context where the subjects who are involved feel a sense of belonging, it is quite different from a situation in which learning occurs in a climate of individualism, antagonism and mutual coldness. (Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion* (2014), #3)

Active participation in the activities of colleagues, in relationships with other members of the educational community; and especially in relationships with parents of the students, is extremely important. In this way the objectives, programs, and teaching methods of the school in which the lay Catholic is working can be gradually impregnated with the spirit of the Gospel. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #51)

Apostolic Witness and Conduct Required to Be an Authentic Christian Role Model

The Church relies on those who work in the teaching vocation to fulfill the mission of Catholic education and serve the students entrusted to their care. Teachers are called on in a special way to make the Church present and operative, as through their witness they impart a distinctive character to Catholic schools. The teacher in a Catholic school is deeply

motivated to witness to a living encounter with Christ, the unique Teacher, and then live out the school's values and ideals in word and action. The teacher writes on the "very spirits of human beings," forming relationships that assume enormous importance as the teacher confronts the problems associated with imparting a Christian vision of the world. Permeated by Christian spirit, the Catholic teacher integrates culture and faith as well as faith and life. The lay teacher in a Catholic school gives a concrete example of what it is to be a Christian living in a secular world. The teacher demonstrates what it is to be an "ideal person" through a habitual attitude of service, a personal commitment to students, a fraternal solidarity with everyone, and living a life that is integrally moral. Living with integrity in a pluralist society, the teacher is a "living mirror" by which those in the school community will see a reflected image of a life inspired by the Gospel.

It seems necessary to begin by trying to delineate the identity of the lay Catholics who work in a school; the way in which they bear witness to the faith will depend on this specific identity, in the Church and in this particular field of labor. In trying to contribute to the investigation, it is the intention of this Sacred Congregation to offer a service to lay Catholics who work in schools (and who should have a clear idea of the specific character of their vocation), and also to the People of God (who need to have a true picture of the laity as an active element, accomplishing an important task for the entire Church through their labour). (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #5)

Therefore, "the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can she become the salt of the earth." In order to achieve this presence of the whole Church, and of the Savior whom she proclaims, lay people must be ready to proclaim the message through their words, and witness to it in what they do. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #9)

Intimately linked in charity to one another and to their students and endowed with an apostolic spirit, may teachers by their life as much as by their instruction bear witness to Christ, the unique Teacher. (Pope Paul VI, *Gravissimum Educationis, Declaration on Christian Education* (1965), #8)

The project of the Catholic school is convincing only if carried out by people who are deeply motivated, because they witness to a living encounter with Christ, in whom alone “the mystery of man truly becomes clear”. These persons, therefore, acknowledge a personal and communal adherence with the Lord, assumed as the basis and constant reference of the inter-personal relationship and mutual cooperation between educator and student. (Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools, A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful* (2007), #4)

By their witness and their behavior teachers are of the first importance to impart a distinctive character to Catholic schools... This must aim to animate them as witnesses of Christ in the classroom and tackle the problems of their particular apostolate, especially regarding a Christian vision of the world and of education, problems also connected with the art of teaching in accordance with the principles of the Gospel. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (1977), #78)

The integration of culture and faith is mediated by the other integration of faith and life in the person of the teacher. The nobility of the task to which teachers are called demands that, in imitation of Christ, the only Teacher, they reveal the Christian message not only by word but also by every gesture of their behavior. This is what makes the difference between a school whose education is permeated by the Christian spirit and one in which religion is only regarded as an academic subject like any other. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (1977), #43)

Catholic schools require people not only to know how to teach or direct an organization; they also require them, using the skills

of their profession, to know how to bear authentic witness to the school's values, as well as to their own continuing efforts to live out ever more deeply, in thought and deed, the ideals that are stated publicly in words. (Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating in Intercultural Dialogue in the Catholic School: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love* (2013), #80)

Thus, Catholic educators can be certain that they make human beings more human. Moreover, the special task of those educators who are lay persons is to offer to their students a concrete example of the fact that people deeply immersed in the world, living fully the same secular life as the vast majority of the human family, possess this same exalted dignity. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #18)

Conduct is always much more important than speech; this fact becomes especially important in the formation period of students. The more completely an educator can give concrete witness to the model of the ideal person that is being presented to the students, the more this ideal will be believed and imitated... Without this witness, living in such an atmosphere, they may begin to regard Christian behavior as an impossible ideal. It must never be forgotten that, in the crises "which have their greatest effect on the younger generations", the most important element in the educational endeavor is "always the individual person: the person, and the moral dignity of that person which is the result of his or her principles, and the conformity of actions with those principles." (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #32-33)

Professional commitment; support of truth, justice and freedom; openness to the point of view of others, combined with an habitual attitude of service; personal commitment to the students, and fraternal solidarity with everyone; a life that is integrally moral in all its aspects. The lay Catholic who brings all of this to his or her work in a pluralist school becomes a living mirror, in whom every individual in the educational community will see reflected

an image of one inspired by the Gospel. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #52)

Teaching has an extraordinary moral depth and is one of man's most excellent and creative activities, for the teacher does not write on inanimate material, but on the very spirits of human beings. The personal relations between the teacher and the students, therefore, assume an enormous importance and are not limited simply to giving and taking. Moreover, we must remember that teachers and educators fulfill a specific Christian vocation and share an equally specific participation in the mission of the Church, to the extent that "it depends chiefly on them whether the Catholic school achieves its purpose." (Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (1997), #19)

Assimilation of Catholic Culture

The Catholic educator aims for the critical, systematic transmission of culture in light of faith through the Gospel values conveyed by the Church. Communication must be oriented toward truth to develop in students a deeper level of understanding of what it means to be a responsible human being and cultivate virtues characteristic of a Christian. The Catholic teacher accomplishes this through the synthesis of culture and faith as well as of faith and life. All subjects are integrated and explored in a Christian worldview and from a Christian concept of the human person. It is through Catholic education that students are able to grasp, appreciate, and assimilate the values that will guide them toward "eternal realities." The Catholic teacher is crucial to this task, for it is through personal contact and the teacher's "witness to faith," as revealed through actions, that relationships grow in a dialogue of openness which allows the teacher to make Christ known to students.

The specific mission of the school, then, is a critical, systematic transmission of culture in the light of faith and the bringing forth

of the power of Christian virtue by the integration of culture with faith and of faith with living. Consequently, the Catholic school is aware of the importance of the Gospel-teaching as transmitted through the Catholic Church. It is, indeed, the fundamental element in the educative process as it helps the pupil towards his conscious choice of living a responsible and coherent way of life. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (1977), #49)

For the accomplishment of this vast undertaking, many different educational elements must converge; in each of them, the lay Catholic must appear as a witness to faith. An organic, critical, and value-oriented communication of culture clearly includes the communication of truth and knowledge; while doing this, a Catholic teacher should always be alert for opportunities to initiate the appropriate dialogue between culture and faith—two things which are intimately related—in order to bring the interior synthesis of the student to this deeper level. It is, of course, a synthesis which should already exist in the teacher. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #29)

These premises indicate the duties and the content of the Catholic school. Its task is fundamentally a synthesis of culture and faith, and a synthesis of faith and life: the first is reached by integrating all the different aspects of human knowledge through the subjects taught, in the light of the Gospel; the second in the growth of the virtues characteristic of the Christian. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (1977), #37)

The communication of culture in an educational context involves a methodology, whose principles and techniques are collected together into a consistent pedagogy. A variety of pedagogical theories exist; the choice of the Catholic educator, based on a Christian concept of the human person, should be the practice of a pedagogy which gives special emphasis to direct and personal contact with the students. If the teacher undertakes this contact with the conviction that students are already in possession of fundamentally

positive values, the relationship will allow for an openness and a dialogue which will facilitate an understanding of the witness to faith that is revealed through the behavior of the teacher. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #21)

The cultural heritage of mankind includes other values apart from the specific ambient of truth. When the Christian teacher helps a pupil to grasp, appreciate and assimilate these values, he is guiding him towards eternal realities. This movement towards the Uncreated Source of all knowledge highlights the importance of teaching for the growth of faith. (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School* (1977), #42)

Let them do all they can to stimulate their students to act for themselves and even after graduation to continue to assist them with advice, friendship and by establishing special associations imbued with the true spirit of the Church. (Pope Paul VI, *Gravissimum Educationis, Declaration on Christian Education* (1965), #8)

Conclusion

The Church's magisterial teachings convey the immense responsibility that teachers assume in the ministry of the Catholic education. In addition to professional qualifications, a Catholic school teacher must have an understanding of and commitment to the Church and be a "living mirror" of Christ by modeling a life inspired by the Gospel.¹⁰ In contemporary society, the challenges associated with imparting a Christian vision of the world, which is often seen as counter-cultural, require Catholic school teachers to be spiritually stable and faithful Christian role models.

Concern for the preparation, recruitment, development, and ongoing formation of Catholic teachers is a recurrent theme throughout the magisterial documents. In 2005, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in *Re-*

10 Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith* (1982), #52.

Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary & Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium stated, “The preparation and ongoing formation of teachers is vital if our schools are to remain truly Catholic in all aspects of school life... [to] allow the Gospel message and the living presence of Jesus to permeate the entire life of the school community and thus be faithful to the school’s evangelizing mission.”¹¹ Reliance on laity to fulfill the educational mission of the Church requires not only teachers who have educational and managerial skills, but also teachers who are spiritually prepared to be witnesses of the faith to their students.

With today’s renewed focus on Catholic identity in schools, it is critical to encourage the witness of those who are tasked to impart education that is faithful to the teachings of the Church. *In Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion*, the Congregation for Catholic Education laments the decline of “believers” among educators and asks, “How can a bond with Jesus Christ be established in this new educational context?”¹² The Church in the United States must recommit to hiring policies that identify teachers who are suited to advancing the mission of Catholic education and to forming teachers as witness of the faith. This is what the magisterial documents expect and what Catholic families deserve.

Our hope is that by making the Church’s rich and deep understanding of the role of Catholic teachers accessible to Catholic school leaders as well as the teachers themselves, enhanced discussions, new programs, and clarified expectations will assist in a new springtime of evangelization and a resurgence of Catholic education.

11 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary & Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium* (2005)

12 Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion* (2014), III,1,g

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