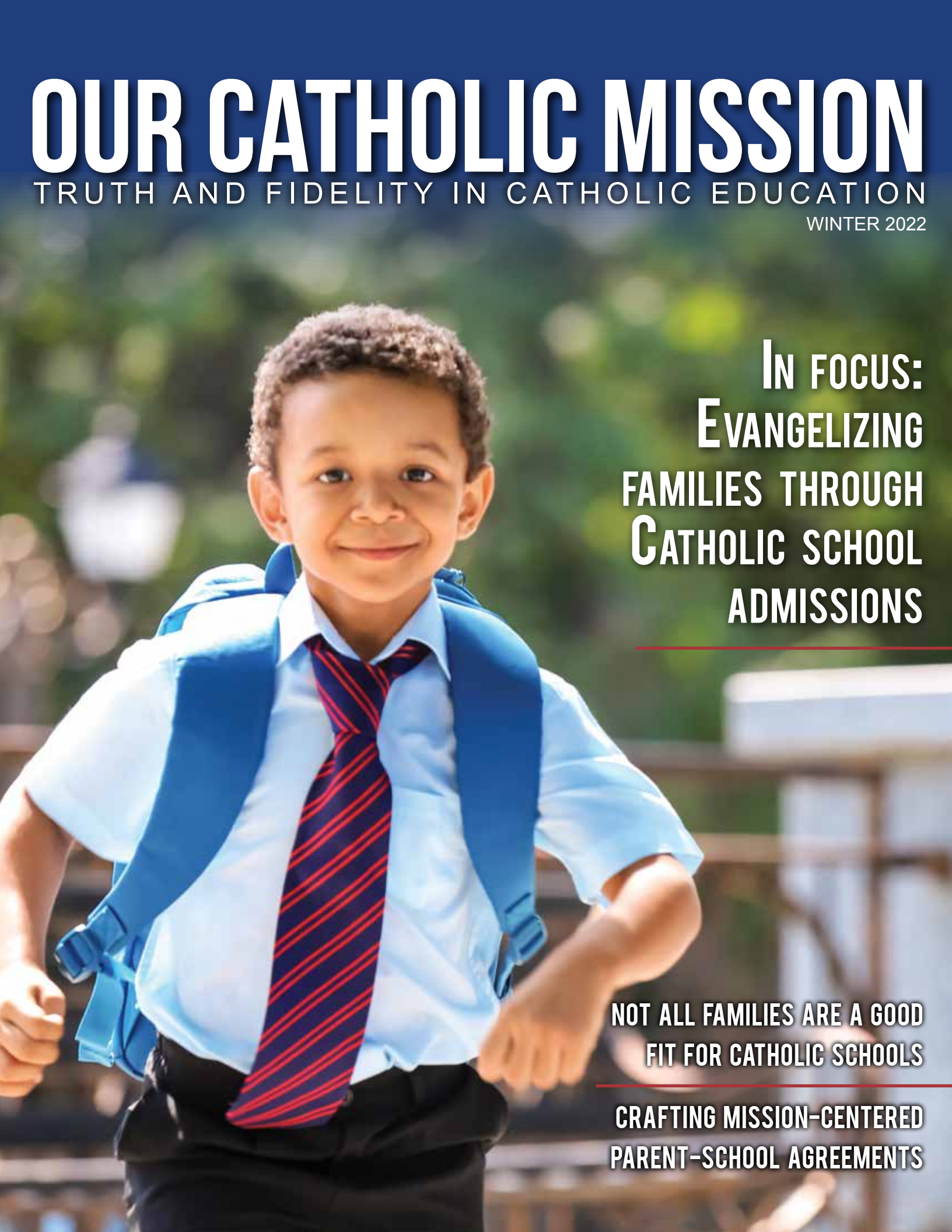


OUR CATHOLIC MISSION

TRUTH AND FIDELITY IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

WINTER 2022



IN FOCUS: EVANGELIZING FAMILIES THROUGH CATHOLIC SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

NOT ALL FAMILIES ARE A GOOD
FIT FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

CRAFTING MISSION-CENTERED
PARENT-SCHOOL AGREEMENTS



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THE CARDINAL NEWMAN SOCIETY
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WINTER 2022 ISSUE

In this Issue

We're pleased to share with you the Winter 2022 issue of *Our Catholic Mission*, a magazine of The Cardinal Newman Society.

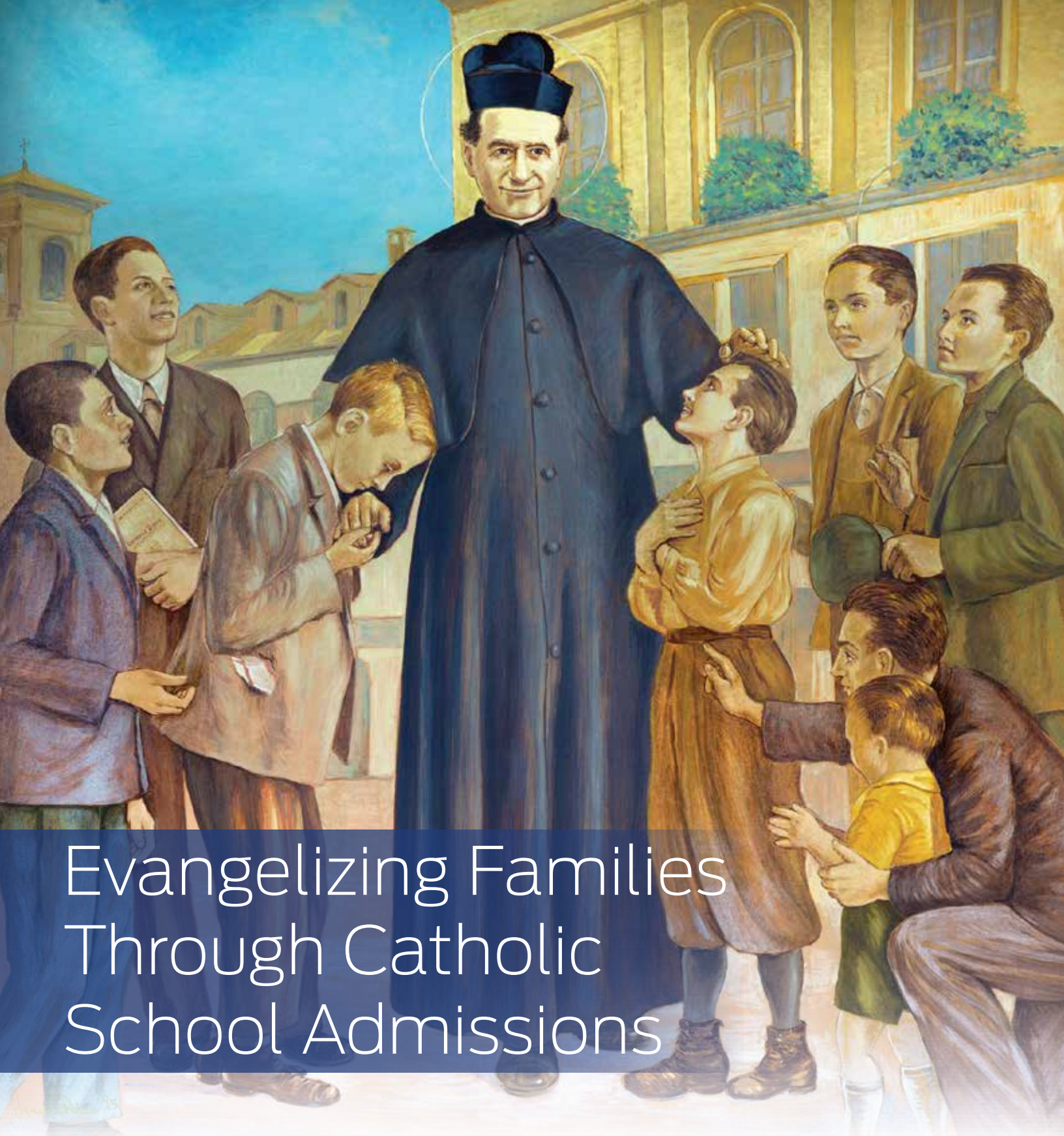
In this issue, we tackle the theme of Catholic school admissions, as Catholic schools across the country send out re-enrollment packages or receive applications from new families for next school year. Our keynote article on page 3 explains how building and protecting a school's community—which in itself is essential to the school's task of forming young people for Christian communion with others and with God—should be a central concern in admissions decisions.

But what about the tough cases of families who do not fit the mold of the traditional Catholic household? Dr. Dan Guernsey, education policy editor and senior fellow, explores on page 7 why some families are not a good fit for Catholic schools, and others require special consideration. He provides guidance on how to treat individual family situations with compassion and courage, for the good of everyone involved.

Finally, Dr. Denise Donohue, vice president for educator resources, stresses the importance of strong parent-school agreements. These can help Catholic families and educators start off on the same page—committed to the integral formation of students for this life and the one to come—while ensuring that parents are well-informed of school policies.

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If you have any questions or comments or would like digital copies of *Our Catholic Mission* to share with your staff and others in Catholic education, please visit NewmanSociety.org/OCM or email Programs@CardinalNewmanSociety.org



Evangelizing Families Through Catholic School Admissions

Don Bosco, one of the Church's greatest educator saints, welcomed Turin's poor and delinquent boys to his Oratorio—but only if they committed to receiving Catholic formation and refraining from behavior that would scandalize other students.

Although he was eager to bring the Catholic faith to boys on the peripheries, Bosco nevertheless turned away or dis-

missed those who would not repent of immoral behavior and presented an ongoing bad influence on others. He was renowned both for his kindness and for his discipline, always with primary concern for the ultimate good of the boys under his care—and even for those who were excluded, with hope for eventual repentance and reconciliation with God.

Continued on page 4



The oratory's admissions policy, then, was at once welcoming to all and uncompromising in its expectations. This served the oratory's primary purpose of evangelization, including care for those who were not yet able to participate constructively in the oratory's community of faith.

Prioritizing both mission and community is central to The Cardinal Newman Society's new *Policy Standards for Catholic School Admissions*, which is being circulated among Church leaders, Catholic educators and admissions experts for comment and further development before final publication early in the year.

Developing such guidance is no easy task. Today's Catholic schools face much different challenges than those addressed by Saint John Bosco. While he had to contend with sometimes unruly and even criminal youth, today the Church is confronted by widely accepted social norms and ideologies that conflict directly with Catholic moral teachings and even the nature of the human person.

Even so, the broad strokes of Bosco's approach are relevant as ever. Catholic education is the Church's most important means of evangelization, forming young people deeply in truth and fidelity to Christ. While not every family is ready to embrace that mission and participate in it—especially in an age of widespread confusion and denial of basic truths about man and God—the admissions process can be a work of charity and mercy for both those who are admitted and those who are not received into the school.

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Mission priority

Writing in his memoirs, Don Bosco sketched the outlines of a welcoming and compassionate policy for his oratory. Both a home and a school for needy children, the oratory preserved the core mission of Catholic education:

The purpose of this oratory is to keep boys busy and away from bad companions, especially on Sundays and holy days. Therefore, any boy may be admitted regardless of social condition.

Poor, abandoned and uneducated boys are particularly welcome, because they need more help to achieve their eternal salvation.

Boys entering this oratory must realize that it is a religious organization whose purpose is to train boys to become good Christians and upright citizens. Therefore, blasphemy, obscene conversation or language offensive to our Faith are strictly forbidden. Any boy guilty of such offenses will be admonished in a fatherly way the first time; if he does not mend his ways, he will be reported to the director for expulsion from the oratory.

Troublesome boys may also be admitted provided they do not cause scandal and are earnest in improving their conduct.

Especially to be avoided, according to the saint, was anything that might lead students away from God and the truths of the Catholic faith. “Only in matters of scandal let the superior be inexorable,” he wrote. “Better run the risk of



sending away an innocent boy than to keep one who is a cause of scandal.”

This concern is echoed in the Newman Society’s admissions standards, principally authored by Dr. Denise Donohue, vice president for educator resources, and Dr. Dan Guernsey, education policy editor and senior fellow.

“Unfortunately, there are situations where unrepentant students or parents provide counter-witness to the Gospel or through their lived example present and model sinful behavior as a good to be supported and pursued,” they write. “In such cases, the school must ask them to make other arrangements for their academic education due to the negative impact on the school and encourage them to work with other Church ministries as they strive to bring their lives in accord with God’s plan.”

These hard cases are carefully considered in the Newman Society’s two issue bulletins, “Not All Families Are a Good Fit for Catholic Schools” and “Working with Nontraditional Families in Catholic Schools.” Both are summarized by Dr. Guernsey in the article on page 7.

Beyond moral concerns, there are financial and other practical reasons why Catholic schools cannot accommodate every student, despite sincere efforts. “The Church needs to ensure robust evangelization programs for parish children not able to attend Catholic schools,” write Donohue and Guernsey, recognizing that every child deserves formation in the faith, and many need help filling the gaps and correcting the falsehoods in public education.

Community teaching communion

Our admissions standards conform to several broad principles that should govern admissions policies in Catholic schools, beginning with a concern for the school community. While other Catholic education programs may have similar goals and principles, the formal Catholic school is distinct in the amount of time students

spend together and the impact of parent and peer behavior on students.

“Because its aim is to make man more man, education can be carried out authentically only in a relational and community context,” the Vatican teaches in the 2007 document, *Educating Together in Catholic Schools*. “It is not by chance that the first and original educational environment is that of the natural community of the family. Schools, in their turn, take their place beside the family as an educational space that is communitarian, organic and intentional, and they sustain their educational commitment, according to a logic of assistance.”

Catholic education’s mission is, in part, to form young people for community life—for communion with each other and with God. Learning Christian communion requires the good example of others, and bad behavior can directly impact the education of all students in the community. The Vatican therefore describes Catholic education as “educating in communion and for communion.”

“The Catholic school, characterized mainly as an educating community, is a school for the person and of persons,” explains *Educating Together*. “In fact, it aims at forming the person in the integral unity of his being, using the tools of teaching and learning where ‘criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life’ are formed.”

Thus, it is important that the Catholic school community be a genuine Christian community. This does not mean that every member must be Christian or entirely free of sin, but all members of the school community are “harmonized by truth” and the “Christian vision of reality,” according to the Newman Society standards. “When Catholic values animate the environment, vision and moral purpose flourish.”

The Vatican’s 1988 document, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, cites conditions necessary to foster and sustain this culture of communion: “that everyone agree with the educational goals and cooperate in achieving them; that interpersonal relationships be based on love and Christian freedom; that each individual, in daily life, be a witness to Gospel values; that every student be challenged to strive for the highest possible level of formation, both human and Christian.”

Other Church documents on catechesis and education also articulate the importance of a strong faith-based community, where reference to Catholic traditions and beliefs and frequent reception of the sacraments are the norm. These practices help form young students and reinforce for older ones the perpetual need to ground their spiritual journey in the deep well of

abiding wisdom, grace and mercy found in the Catholic Church.

“A HEALTHY ADMISSIONS PROCESS BENEFITS ALL CONCERNED.”

The *Directory for Catechesis* teaches that “The Christian community is the primary agent of catechesis,” and

“paying attention to group relationships has a pedagogical significance: it develops the sense of belonging to the Church and assists growth in the faith.” Children learn from those peers and adults who surround them.

Ultimately, a healthy admissions process benefits all concerned, by ensuring a nurturing community, preserving the Catholic school’s mission of evangelization and helping families connect with schools that best serve their needs and interests. With these goals, a Catholic school can proceed confidently with clarity and consistency.

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Handling the Tough Cases: Admissions Policies for Nontraditional Families

By Daniel Guernsey, Ed.D.

Almost half of U.S. Catholics want the Church to recognize same-sex unions, according to the Pew Research Center. A majority support administering the Eucharist to cohabiting couples and divorced/remarried Catholics without an annulment.

These views differ sharply with the Church's clear teaching on marriage, and we see similar confusion and disagreement among Catholics and in society at large over moral behaviors concerning gender, abortion, dress, language and more. It is not only a matter of disagreement with Catholic doctrine, but actual immoral practices and disintegration of the family.

For Catholic schools, this makes the admissions process all the more difficult. Some families today who seek enrollment in Catholic schools are deeply wounded or confused about marriage, parenting and human sexuality as God intends. Are they a good fit for Catholic schools?





Seeking God's plan

Most of today's parents grew up in a post-“sexual revolution” world, where the media have relentlessly promoted values and behaviors at odds with Catholic teaching. Even many Catholic parents are either unaware of a Catholic understanding in these areas or have dismissed or rejected them. Students are also suffering with deep confusion, with media messages telling them there are numerous gender identities and that feelings can trump their biology.

In all cases, Catholic schools must handle each case in a sensitive and charitable manner while maintaining faithfulness to Church teaching. In working with non-traditional or wounded families, educators should listen and seek to understand their complexities and limitations. Schools should not underestimate the time, compassion and resources this worthwhile outreach will require or assume that the school is the best or only vehicle for evangelization in such cases.

Keep in mind that nontraditional families are not burdens, but beloved children of a God who loves them intimately and has a plan of growth, healing or conversion for them. During the admissions process, Catholic schools can facilitate the conversation around that divine plan. It may include delaying or denying enrollment if certain behaviors pose a threat to the school's religious mission or cause confusion and scandal. The expectation and right of enrolled students to receive formation that leads them to God—and not away from Him—takes priority over admitting a problematic new student.

Not every school has the capacity to sufficiently address the needs of children or

their family members who desire enrollment in the school. Some families must be turned toward other alternatives for education, either because their views of life's ultimate purpose and end are at odds with those of the Church, or because their example would lead others to sin. Such families might benefit from other forms of Catholic education, including homeschooling and parish catechetical instruction, that avoid some of the demands of a formal school community.

For instance, an atheistic family who vocalizes faith that a theistic God is a sham, or a family heavily into the occult or New Age religion. Admitting others who actively and publicly engage in cohabitation, polygamy, incest, or homosexual activity might be seen as condoning this type of behavior. The school must see that its religious mission of moral formation and evangelization is not publicly compromised, hindered or undone by significantly off-mission families.

Admitting such families might create mixed messages for the admitted student and others who are unable to rectify this cognitive dissonance. At some point, the school will teach a message opposite what the students are experiencing: that true Christian marriage is between one man and one woman, that God does in fact exist, that there are only two biological sexes, and so on. This will inevitably cause older children to question the actions of their adult family members or their teacher, pitting one against the other and creating skepticism of the teachings of the faith or distrust to authority in the minds and hearts of the students.

Many cases of nontraditional families (families other than a married couple of

“ARE ALL FAMILIES
A GOOD FIT FOR
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS?”

one man and one woman validly married in the Church) can be corrected through catechesis in the faith, such as for those who have a nascent understanding of Church teaching or those who come from a non-Catholic Christian background or other faith-based tradition. Cohabiting couples or parents who are divorced and remarried outside the Church have ways of correcting and regularizing their relationships.

Those Catholic families who struggle significantly with the acceptance of elements of Catholic faith or morals need the help of their parish priest or staff to discuss areas of conflict or uncertainty and to seek reconciliation with the Church. The integrity of such pastoral intervention is absolutely dependent on pastors and counselors being faithful to Catholic teaching and working closely in harmony with the Catholic school administrators and teachers as a cohesive team.

Examples of nontraditional families

Today there is a growing variety of family situations that pose difficulties for Catholic school admissions teams. Some are described briefly below, but I provide a deeper and more nuanced reflection in my paper, “Working with Nontraditional Families in Catholic Schools,” at the Newman Society’s website under educator resources.

Family from another faith: Catholic schools will normally welcome non-Catholic families of goodwill who are expressly and affirmatively supportive of the school’s primary Catholic religious mission, with the exception of Satanic, wiccan, occult or other blasphemous behaviors or practices

which are serious conflicts with a Catholic school’s mission. Open hostility, public defiance and public challenges against Catholic truths or morality are signs that a family is not a good fit for a school’s primary evangelical mission. Non-Catholic students deserve the same religious instruction as Catholics and attend the same religious services and activities, participating to the extent they are able. Formal or ritual non-Catholic prayer services or activities are inappropriate and may be blasphemous.

Single-parent household: A single-parent household is not normally a barrier to enrolling in a Catholic school. The parent—like all parents—agrees to work in harmony with the school as it teaches the Catholic faith concerning marriage, chastity and divorce and to avoid behaviors which are contrary to Catholic teaching such as sexual promiscuity or adultery.

Cohabiting couple forming a household: A school should refer such couples to the local pastor for counseling and catechesis, in the hope of starting down a path of regularization. A couple may avoid scandal by living in chastity appropriate to their state in life. But if a pastor is aware that a catechized couple refuses to strive for a life of chastity, and in his judgment the couple is unlikely to consider such a move with additional outreach and catechesis, he may need to instruct them against enrolling their student. This is especially necessary if issues of public scandal arise.

Parents divorced and remarried outside the Church: The Church considers a valid marriage to be a permanent union between a man and a woman. Those who

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have divorced and remarried outside the Church and are reasonably assumed to be sexually active are involved in living an immoral lifestyle. A school may ask the couple to meet with the local parish priest to determine their status and if and how that status might be regularized in the Church, while doing all they can to avoid scandalizing students. If a couple refuses to attempt regularization or is unwilling to strive to meet Church requirements given their marital status, it may be prudent to deny admission.

Same-sex union: This circumstance is not identical to that of other parents in irregular or immoral family situations, which often can be regularized and may be publicly ambiguous. Same-sex couples who advocate and persist in their union actively and publicly model a different morality, present a lived counter-evangelization, and have a different understanding of what Christian integration of the mind, body and spirit looks like. Admitting students from families formed around same-sex unions, therefore, is a certain cause of scandal in Catholic schools and invites moral confusion. The couple is openly engaged in and openly promotes public, unrepentant, objectively disordered behavior, and the school itself can become complicit in confusion and scandal if it generates the appearance of normalcy, since the couple cannot possibly be on a path of regularization.

Student presenting with same-sex attraction: All students are called to chastity, which is the successful integration of sexuality within the person according to their state in life. A Catholic school's mission is compromised if students are allowed to advocate or celebrate same-sex attraction as a personal positive good in the context

of classes, activities or events. The school should not permit identification with such terms as “gay,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” or “queer.” During the admissions process, a faithful Catholic school will present students who disclose same-sex attraction the beautiful and liberating teachings of the Catholic Church on God's design for the human person and human sexuality. These students should, as a condition of enrollment, work with appropriate Church and diocesan offices, ministries and counselors in the hope of living in harmony with Christ's teachings.

Parent identifying contrary to biological sex: The Catholic school can present such parents with the Church's teaching about the human person and God's plan for mankind and agree to this teaching for their children. In particular cases, parents may be directed to the local pastor and other faith-based psychologists and medical personnel, who can work with them to address their gender dysphoria. As a condition of a student's enrollment, the parent whose sense of sexual identity is compromised agrees not to draw attention to his or her gender incongruence, so as not to confuse or scandalize the students.

Student identifying contrary to biological sex: A faithful Catholic school will inform the student and the student's parents that the school interacts with all students according to their biological sex, not professed “gender identities.” The family should be willing to work toward integrating the student's sexual identity with their biological sex, including counseling with their pastor and other trained Catholic medical and psychological professionals who are best able to help them in clarifying and defining issues of self (and sexual) identity in accord with Catholic teaching and God's

natural plan. If the student or parents insist on a name, clothing or behavior that publicly signal gender dysphoria, the student may not be a good fit for the school.

Family utilizing in-vitro fertilization or surrogacy: Rarely is this publicly known and it may be repented of, but recently some have tried to compare it to the very different matter of same-sex guardians. Children are always a gift from God, no matter the parents' actions. But a parent's or student's public and persistent advocacy for these artificial and gravely illicit methods would be cause for denying admission.

Seeking true good for families

The challenges facing Catholic schools and the often-wounded families they are called to serve are significant and can almost seem overwhelming. This is a time calling not just for compassion, but also for courage. Courage to fulfill this ministry is required in a culture which may brand such teaching as judgmental or intolerant.

Instead, a faithful Catholic school demonstrates true compassion for nontraditional families. This may involve enrolling a family in a Catholic school, or it may require revoking, denying or delaying enrollment as a family undergoes faith formation and regularization through other Church ministries. In either case, the desire is to meet them where they are and eventually bring them home to full communion with Christ and His Church.

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Newman Society.



Crafting Mission-Centered Parent-School Agreements

By Denise Donohue, Ed.D.

Parents are the primary educators of their children, even when entrusting them to Catholic schools. This has implications for school communications with parents, but it also means that parents should be in full agreement with the evangelizing mission of a Catholic school before enrolling a student. It is best when that agreement is in writing.

Parent and school contracts or agreements should detail the mission of the school and the behavioral expectations for those within the school community. They can be separate documents or part of the school handbook, signed and returned to the school. They should explain the duties and requirements of teachers, administrators, students and parents. Parents have the right to know what student accommodations or classroom interventions their child might expect and in what areas the school is unable to accommodate their child.

The parent-school agreement or the handbook signature page acts as a contract between the two parties—the parents and the school—of which payment is only one part. An agreement helps clarify the relationship and school policies, especially those that may be flashpoints for conflict and potential litigation. Rather than shying away from difficult topics, advance agreements prevent confusion, help avoid potential lawsuits and aids the institution in safeguarding its religious mission.

Of course, many situations calling for disciplinary measures cannot be anticipated in advance. No handbook can cover everything, so many times a general clause or statement is entered into the school handbook that states the principal reserves the right to amend the handbook at any time and has final recourse for all disciplinary issues.

The goal is clarity from the Catholic school, helping parents understand the nature of Catholic ed-

ucation and the school's expectations for parents and students. Surprising families with rules and disciplinary actions after enrollment can upset parents and increase tensions.

Parent-school agreements have the added advantage of helping parents determine for their selves whether Catholic education is the right fit for their children. The admissions process is based on the acknowledgement that not every prospective student can or should be part of the school community. Explaining the school's mission and expectations before enrollment, so that parents can decide on withdrawing an application based on their inability to sign the parent-school agreement, is a much happier circumstance than having to deny admission—especially if parents remain confused or irate over the decision.

It can also be a good practice for Catholic schools to help parents understand the mission of Catholic education and expectations of students and parents even before applying for admission. A simple form requiring acknowledgement that parents have read certain materials explaining the school's approach to education can deter those who simply cannot abide by Catholic teachings, preventing the awkward situation of denying enrollment to a student who was initially admitted without knowing the demands of Catholic education.

It is well worth taking these steps to protect and nurture the learning environment, as strong supportive relationships and shared vision among parents and school personnel help facilitate the intellectual, moral, emotional, physical and spiritual development of children.

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DENISE DONOHUE, ED.D., is vice president for educator resources at The Cardinal Newman Society.



STRONG CATHOLIC IDENTITY IS SO IMPORTANT IN A K-12 EDUCATION!

Do families in your school or diocese also know the **importance of a faithfully Catholic higher education?**

During college, many students slide away from prayer, Mass attendance and Catholic beliefs—especially on secular campuses.

But it doesn't have to be this way! There are great Catholic colleges that can set up students for **success in their faith, family and livelihood.**

Our updated magazine, *My Future, My Faith*, shows the advantages of a faithful Catholic college vs. secular education.

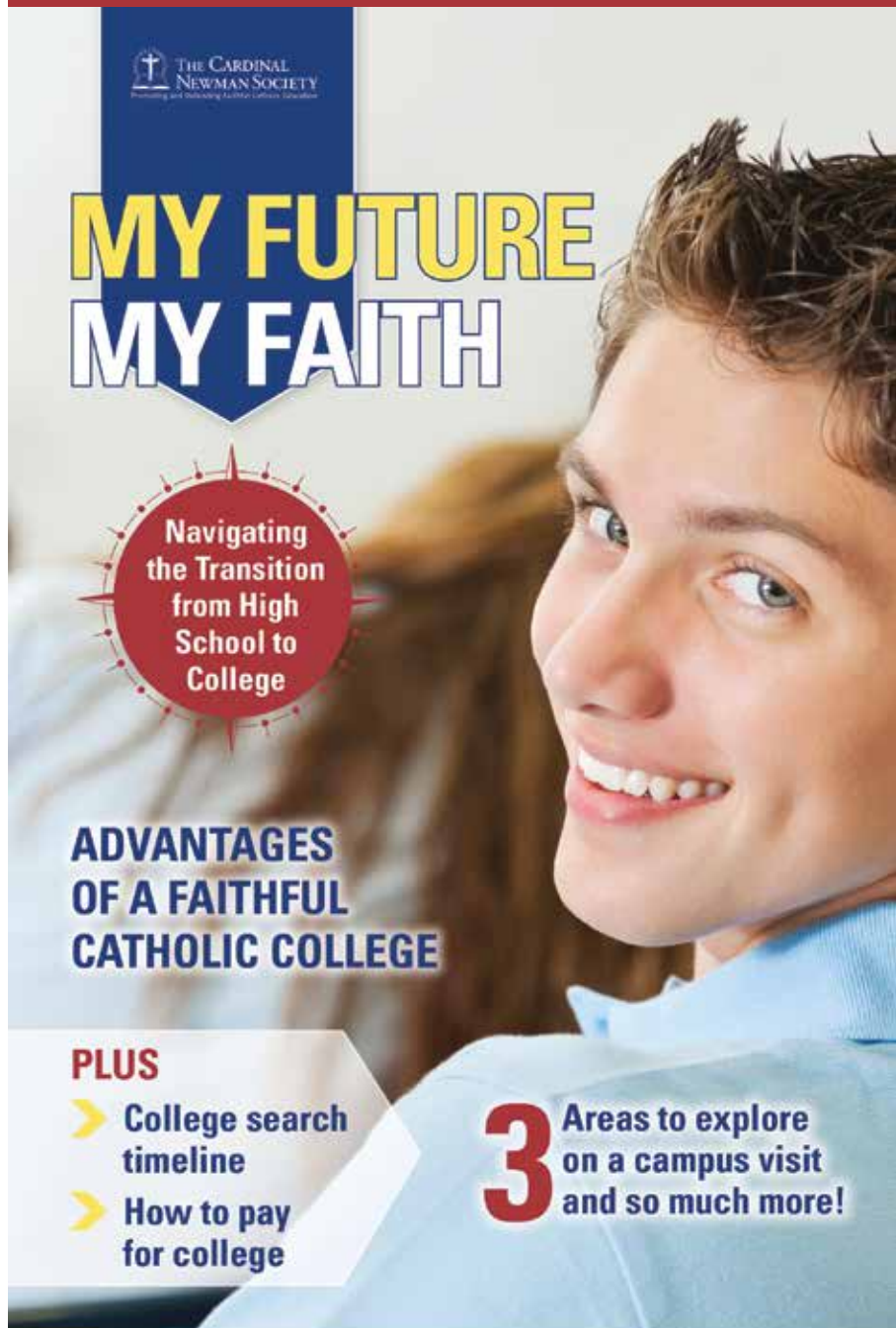
The magazine also includes advice on how to make a good campus visit, how to pay for college, what to look for in a college from a Catholic perspective, and so much more.

We have already distributed 35,000 copies of this magazine to Catholic students and families around the country this year! But we have a **limited number of copies remaining, available on a first come, first serve basis.**

Would you like complimentary copies of *My Future, My Faith* to share with families in your school or diocese? You can request hard copies or access our digital version online here: newmansoc.org/MFMRequest

Or you can email Programs@CardinalNewmanSociety.org.

Thank you for sharing about the value of faithful Catholic higher education, and may God bless you!



The image shows the cover of a magazine titled "MY FUTURE MY FAITH". At the top left, there is a logo for "THE CARDINAL NEWMAN SOCIETY" with a cross icon. The title "MY FUTURE MY FAITH" is prominently displayed in large, bold, yellow and white letters. Below the title, there is a red circular graphic with a sunburst effect containing the text "Navigating the Transition from High School to College". Further down, the text "ADVANTAGES OF A FAITHFUL CATHOLIC COLLEGE" is written in blue. At the bottom left, under the heading "PLUS", there are two yellow arrow icons pointing to the text "College search timeline" and "How to pay for college". On the right side, a large red number "3" is followed by the text "Areas to explore on a campus visit and so much more!". The background of the cover is a close-up photograph of a young man with brown hair, smiling and looking towards the right.

A resource from the creators of NewmanGuide.org, which recommends faithful Catholic colleges.