



## **Executive Summary**

### **Lighting the Path to Our Future: The Strategic Plan for Catholic Schools**

**Diocese of Joliet**

**November 4, 2010  
Feast of St. Charles Borromeo**

In April 2008 Bishop J. Peter Sartain addressed educators and leaders in Catholic education at the Catholic School Summit, *Carry the Light Forward*, about the decision to create a strategic plan for Catholic schools in the Diocese of Joliet. The commonly shared desire to assure a strong and thriving Catholic school system for the future as well as concerns about declining enrollment, demographic shifts and financial strains provided the impetus for the decision.

Knowing the vital role Catholic schools have in the Church's educational mission, Bishop Sartain stated: "We must never forget: Jesus Christ is the reason there are Catholic schools. We must be about moving from 'I' to 'we'. Each of us has concerns about our parish, our school. But from today forward we must have concern for "our" parishes and "our" schools. If we do not, no amount of planning we do will successfully guide us to fulfill the true goal of Catholic education." To build enrollment, increase retention, improve facilities and better serve the underserved populations of the diocese would require broad consensus around a comprehensive plan. Bishop Sartain announced that the plan would be made possible through the generous gift of a benefactor of the diocese and a strong supporter of Catholic education. He reassured everyone gathered that such generous support together with broad consensus would result in a fully realized and implemented plan.

Bishop Sartain directed a Steering Committee, comprised of key diocesan administrators, to approve a new mission statement that centered on the education of the whole child in partnership with parents and parish communities.

*Jesus commissioned His apostles to teach and make disciples. Mindful of this twofold mandate, Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Joliet provide formation in the Catholic faith as well as superior academic education to students of diverse backgrounds. Our Christ-centered education nurtures a personal relationship with Jesus and service to others. Our whole child approach integrates Catholic doctrine, prayer, sacraments, and moral decision-making with academic achievement and physical health. Working in partnership with parents and parish communities, Catholic schools prepare students for success in further education, a productive career and a life eternal with God.*



This new mission statement extends and deepens the diocese's strong and successful tradition of educating and forming young people in the Catholic faith and preparing students to be contributing members to our Church and world. It echoes the words of the United States Bishops, "this mission is vital to the future of our young people, our nation and, most especially, our Church."

Diocesan staff, school board members, school administrators, pastors, community leaders and parents formed a Planning Committee that analyzed demographic trends, situational analyses and financial projections. Wide consultation with the Planning Committee utilized the data collected to adopt goals and make recommendations to the Steering Committee about the future vision of Catholic education in the Diocese of Joliet. Among them are the following:

**Catholic Identity** – Catholic schools will continue to help students and their families to develop and nurture a lifelong relationship with Jesus Christ and deeper incorporation into the Church, embodied in ongoing sacramental participation, service in the community, and future leadership in the Church.

- ◆ Schools will be identifiable as Catholic and will work with parents and parishes to provide students sound instruction in the Catholic faith and foster a personal and life-long relationship with Jesus Christ in the Church through regular opportunities to participate in the celebration and reception of the Sacraments. Every elementary school will provide a weekly opportunity for every child to attend Mass.
- ◆ Catholic schools will be valued as a vital ministry of the Church and recognized as the shared responsibility of all parishes in the Diocese of Joliet.
- ◆ Strengthening and supporting the religious mission of Catholic schools will be a prime responsibility of the Catholic Schools Office.
- ◆ The Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese of Joliet and the principals of the Catholic high schools in the Diocese will collaborate on documenting criteria to be used during the vetting of high school religion teacher candidates and campus minister candidates.
- ◆ Each high school will evaluate its course of studies to determine how well students are being instructed in the core curriculum areas identified in *Doctrinal Elements of Curriculum Framework* published by the U.S. Bishops.
- ◆ Each high school will work toward the goal of having all students complete a four-year, eight semester course of catechetical instruction.



**Academic Excellence** – Catholic schools will maximize academic success for each student, helping students to continually enhance their individual academic achievement. Students' academic achievements will also be enhanced by ensuring that they are able to apply these achievements in the real world and in a manner consistent with the teachings of Church and the gospel message.

- ◆ Academic excellence rooted in a strong Catholic identity will be the hallmark of every school enabling it to educate the whole child and distinguishing it as uniquely different from other schools in the community.
- ◆ Catholic schools will provide program opportunities for students with a wide range of learning abilities.
- ◆ The effective use of technology will be integral to the instructional program in every school and classroom to support learning goals and provide students a strong technological foundation for future educational pursuits.
- ◆ Principals and teachers will engage in continuous professional development that enhances professional knowledge and skills, provides opportunities to engage in dialogue with other educators about instructional practices and is aligned with curricula and assessments.
- ◆ Teachers and students will be motivated to become communities of learners.

**Leadership for Schools** – Catholic schools will be led and staffed by talented educators, religious and lay leaders who are committed to helping students grow as faith-filled followers of Christ, and to maximizing each student's academic achievement.

- ◆ The Catholic Schools Office will actively recruit, nurture, and promote the development of talented educational leaders who are practicing Catholics with a strong commitment to and understanding of the Church's mission in the post-modern world. Consideration will be given to those schools that serve multi-cultural or particular ethnic groups and their need for educators from those communities with the necessary language and culture skills.
- ◆ Hispanic and bilingual educators will be identified and recruited to serve the growing number of Hispanic students in Catholic schools.
- ◆ The Catholic Schools Office will develop a plan to increase knowledge and broaden understanding of Catholic school education and its mission within the Diocese of Joliet.
- ◆ Each elementary school principal and pastor will work with its local board to develop a comprehensive, multi-year strategic plan for the school, including a long-range facilities plan. Each school will be guided by its plan and use it as a point of reference informing all decision-making processes.



**Marketing/Enrollment Management** – Catholic schools will be the most attractive choice for all Catholic families, and efforts will be made to ensure that the schools are accessible for these families regardless of income level. Non-Catholic families will also be valued members of the school community.

- ◆ Catholic school education will be marketed effectively to create a strong public image throughout the Diocese, promote the benefits and value of Catholic schools, support development efforts and increase enrollments. The Catholic Schools Office will provide leadership and set direction for this effort.
- ◆ Individual schools will implement focused marketing/recruitment/retention programs to increase enrollments and consistently operate at 90% of capacity or above.
- ◆ Catholic schools will be embraced as integral to the Church's educational mission. Parishes with and without a school will actively encourage parents to choose a Catholic school education for their children.

**Governance of Schools** – The ongoing vitality of Catholic schools will be ensured by consistently active school boards, with local community leaders working in close collaboration with Parish leaders to ensure that the mission of each Catholic school is achieved in both the short and long-term.

- ◆ Schools throughout the Diocese will subscribe to one of two governance models: the parish school model or the multi-parish school model. Schools will consistently follow the same template so that governance operates in a consistent manner across all schools.
- ◆ Parish school boards will have responsibility in limited areas as delegated by the pastor.
- ◆ Multi-parish schools will function with a two-tiered system of governance comprised of a Board of Members and a School Board.
- ◆ Boards of Members, School Boards, pastors (including those who are pastors of parish schools and those sitting on a Board of Members for a multi-parish school), business managers, and school administrators will be well oriented and trained in their respective roles.
- ◆ The Catholic Schools Office will provide support to principals and chief administrators so they can acquire the skills, knowledge and resources necessary to recruit qualified board members, as well as build and work with successful boards.



The Diocese of Joliet Board of Education endorsed the plan in March 2010 and submitted it to Bishop Sartain. With the acceptance of our plan, *Lighting the Path to Our Future: Strategic Plan for Catholic Schools*, by Bishop Sartain, a detailed implementation plan will be required. A Finance Task Force will recommend ways to assure the comprehensive financial support needed to increase tuition assistance, make capital improvements and provide operational support.

The ramifications of the implementation of *Lighting the Path to Our Future: Strategic Plan for Catholic Schools* will be far-reaching. Stakeholders will better understand the value and advantages of Catholic schools, focused marketing efforts will result in increased enrollment and greater outreach, school improvement planning will foster a professional school culture that emphasizes continuous improvement, increased collaboration among schools within the diocese will promote Catholic education throughout the diocese, development of lay leadership will give local school boards a heightened sense of responsibility and ownership of vibrant schools, and the Catholic identity of high schools and elementary schools will be improved through expanded and renewed religion curriculum and the common commitment to form students in the gospel message.

Bishop Sartain has summarized and reaffirmed our purpose saying “We do something more: we proclaim Christ himself, the very Lord of life, the One through whom all things were created, who sustains all things, who has redeemed all things, and who is the destiny for which all of us came into being. Faith gives life and fulfills life because Jesus Christ is life. Catholic schools give life because they lead children to Christ the Teacher. Literally introduced to *Him* first at home and then in Catholic schools, children begin a life-long relationship with Christ in the Church; He will be an unfailing Teacher and Guide, in every situation and every circumstance, year after year, for the rest of their lives. We must never forget: Jesus Christ is the reason there are Catholic schools.”