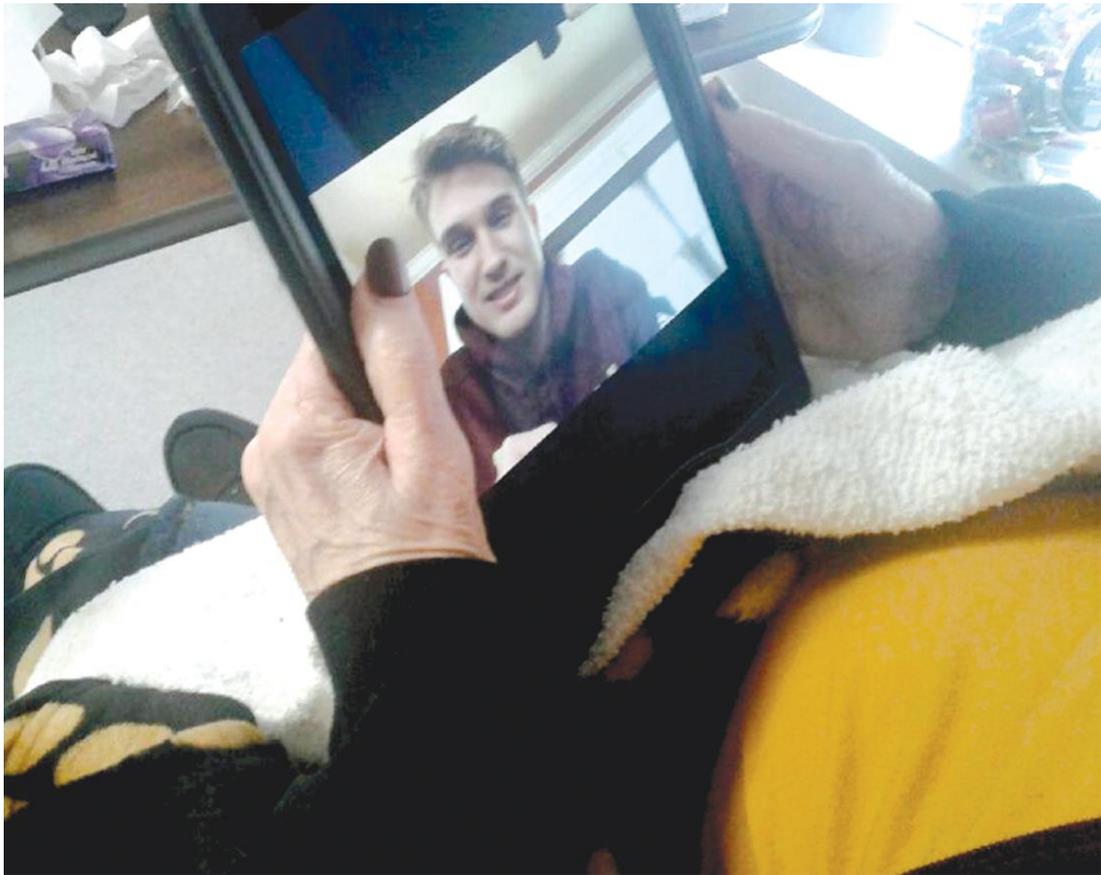


# THE CATHOLIC EDUCATOR

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## *A Word From Our Editor*

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Throughout the modern era, the Catholic Church has been concerned about the need for parents to be truly and wholly free in choosing the educational environment most suited for the growth and development of their children.

The first term paper I ever wrote (in freshman year of high school) was on the Canadian system of funding faith-based schools. In the early 1980s (those halcyon days of the very pro-Catholic President Ronald Reagan), a large portion of my work with the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights was dedicated to advancing programs like vouchers or tuition tax credits. My doctoral dissertation in school administration was devoted to the latent and overt anti-Catholicism behind most opposition to parental freedom of choice in education. As president of the Catholic Education Foundation, needless to say, the June 30 Supreme Court of the United States decision, [Espinoza v. Montana](#), which determined that school choice initiatives that exclude religious schools violate the freedom of religion clause of the First Amendment, was a source of personal joy and consolation.

Of course, this has been the unflagging position of the Catholic Church in this country since Archbishop John J. Hughes of New York in 1838 engaged the battle on behalf of Catholic children's education (reflective of universal and perennial Catholic social doctrine). The five justices of the majority had all benefitted from Catholic schooling; the lone graduate of a Catholic school to vote against the aid program was Sonia Sotomayor. Her dissent is a significant indication of both ingratitude and insensitivity: ingratitude, because she has stated publicly that, were it not for attending Catholic schools, she never would have "arrived" personally, professionally or socially; insensitivity, because she apparently feels no obligation to assist other inner-city youngsters to "arrive" by the same path as she.

Legal battles, however, should not be about emotions (although all too often they are) but about sound principles. The majority opinion, written by Chief Justice John Roberts, as well as the concurring opinions of the other majority justices, is an exercise in clear thinking and an honest assessment of history, about which more momentarily.

What is the precise case that wound its way to the Supreme Court? Michael Gilleran, who wrote an amicus brief on behalf of the aggrieved mother, sums up the case history and result very well on the website of Thomas More College on whose board of trustees he serves:

Yesterday the US Supreme Court, in *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue*, has swept aside the bulwarks of hundreds of years of government-sponsored religious bigotry in America. The Court held that state Blaine Amendments can no longer be used to block equal access of religious schools to a generally available public benefit, such as tax credit funded scholarships, which students can use to pay for attending private schools.

Where such tax credits are in place, they permit all state residents to take a small tax credit, with the funds then going into a scholarship program. The scholarship program then doles out the money to students to attend the private schools of their choice. Such a program was at issue in *Espinoza*. Ms. Espinoza is a single mother, whose two daughters struggled in public schools.

She moved them to private religious schools where they thrived. She paid for her daughters to attend these religious schools in part from the tax credits scholarship funds and in part from working three jobs.

The Blaine Amendments are toppling. As the Supreme Court itself points out, they were erected in the nineteenth century as part of a wave of anti-Catholic bigotry. Thirty-six states have them – including New Hampshire, where Thomas More College is located. They have been a bar to school choice for far too long.<sup>1</sup>

An earlier Supreme Court decision in 2011, *Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization v. Winn*, allowed to stand a program in the State of Arizona effectively permitting educational tax credits for nonpublic school children. Most commentators at the time believed that that decision of the Court would give rise to the enactment in many states of similar aid programs. They were right. Now, with *Espinoza* in our quiver, those committed to Catholic education will have to be in the vanguard of promoting school choice initiatives, which will mean being informed of the basic issues and, in turn, informing others through the various forms of media: op-eds, radio/TV spots, letter-writing to media and elected officials, information sessions for Catholic school parents. Please allow the present article to serve as a kind of vade mecum or guide for a campaign that should employ a multi-pronged approach. Each of the dimensions presented here needs to form part of a holistic pressing of the case in the public forum.

### ***Setting the Stage***

Throughout the modern era, the Catholic Church has been concerned about the need for parents to be truly and wholly free in choosing the educational environment most suited for the growth and development of their children.

The law of nature informs us that “man is constituted a part of family society before being constituted a part of political society.”<sup>2</sup> Theology also acknowledges this fact; thus *Lumen Gentium* of Vatican II refers to the family as the “domestic Church” [n. 11]. *Apostolicam Actuositatem* makes the same point: “The mission of being the primary vital cell of society has been given to the family by God Himself, [which is to] present itself as a domestic sanctuary of the Church” [n. 11]. It is a fundamental truth of Catholic social thought that “parents. . . have a primary and inalienable duty and right in regard to the education of their children” [*Gravissimum Educationis*, n. 6]; nevertheless, the family “requires the help of society as a whole” [*Gravissimum Educationis*, n. 3]. This assistance comes in a variety of forms, one of the most recognized being the educational.

Taking these two positions in tandem, the Code of Canon Law asserts: “Because they have given life to their children, parents have a most serious obligation and enjoy the right to educate them” [c. 226.2]. For this very same reason, the Second Vatican Council taught that parents . . . have the right to decide in accord with their own religious beliefs the form of religious upbringing which is to be given to their children. The civil authority must therefore recognize the right of parents to choose with genuine freedom schools or other means of education. Parents should not be subjected directly or indirectly to unjust burdens because of this freedom of choice” [*Dignitatis Humanae*, n. 5].

Furthermore, the Code of Canon Law urges: “It is necessary that parents enjoy true freedom in selecting schools; the Christian faithful must therefore be concerned that civil society acknowledge this freedom for parents and also safeguard it with its resources in accord with distributive justice” [c. 797].

One of the first recognitions of these truths in the political sphere came very early in the twentieth century in a decision of the Supreme Court of the United States:

The fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the State to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public school teachers only. The child is not the mere creature of the State; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right coupled with the high duty, to recognize, and prepare him for additional duties.<sup>3</sup>

So consonant with both natural law and Catholic social teaching was this judicial enunciation that Pope Pius XI cited it in *Divini Illius Magistri* [hereafter, DIM] as an example of proper legal analysis. Similarly, Article 26 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of the United Nations Charter holds that education is a basic right of every person; that it should be free and compulsory, at least at the elementary level; and that “parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.”

We must note with regret, however, that these lofty principles are given no more than lip-service in all too many instances. As a result, the freedom to choose schools in keeping with parental values is limited, de facto, to those who have the ability to pay for the right. But as has been observed, “a civil right penalized is a civil right suppressed.”<sup>4</sup>

## **I. The Importance of Catholic Schools to the Catholic Community and Beyond**

It is no secret that the Catholic Church considers her educational institutions as crucial to her identity as *Mater et Magistra*, for in them young people are introduced to the truth of the Gospel and experience Christian virtues in a vibrant manner. Hence, we are taught that “Catholic parents are reminded of their duty to send their children to Catholic schools wherever this is possible. . .” [Gravissimum Educationis, n. 9], and St. John Paul II often referred to Catholic schools as “the heart of the Church.”<sup>5</sup> The Church obviously regards Catholic education as a serious responsibility of the whole Church in general and of Catholic parents in particular (see c. 800.2).

The success of Catholic schools in handing on the Faith to succeeding generations has led many other religious bodies to see the worth of religiously inspired and oriented educational institutions. The Catholic Church rejoices in this fact and desires to cooperate with them in ecumenical and inter-faith activities which can aid in the development of all human education, but especially those forms which aim at the cultivation of a spiritual dimension in the human person.

Catholic education, however, does not benefit only Catholics. Indeed, in many places large numbers of non-Catholics use the Church’s schools because they see in them institutions of academic excellence and sound moral formation. In all such situations, Catholic schools are places of social, racial and civic harmony, as well they should be. Pope Pius XI [DIM] saw this

clearly when he wrote: “Indeed a good Catholic, precisely because of his Catholic principles, makes the better citizen, attached to his country, and loyally submissive to constituted civil authority in every legitimate form of government.” At times, it appears that this point is not sufficiently recognized or appreciated.

Catholic schools, then, fulfill a dual purpose – educating students for citizenship in the present world, as well as for citizenship in the world to come.

## **II. The Significance of a Plurality of Educational Forms for Pluralistic Societies**

Concern for the common good has grown immeasurably in our time. “The common good embraces the sum total of all those conditions of social life by which individuals, families, and organizations can achieve more thoroughly their own fulfillment,” noted the Fathers of Vatican II [*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 75]. The common good is expanded when all the publics which make up the commonwealth are adequately taken into account and their full flourishing is seen as a positive goal for society as a whole.

It is surely satisfying to see so many provisions being made within educational settings for those with special needs: children classified as normal, gifted and talented; physically, emotionally or intellectually handicapped; culturally or linguistically disadvantaged. This would logically seem to be the appropriate moment for all societies likewise to take cognizance of the spiritual needs of children. A variety of educational forms is necessary to reflect and serve the variety of publics which comprise any given society since it is difficult to imagine how a unitary school system can give adequate attention to the multiplicity of values represented in most contemporary nations, which are so heterogeneous.

If all schools perform a public purpose, then justice indicates that all schools merit public support. Failure on the part of the State to do so can only be understood in the light of a defective comprehension of either individual freedom or the nature of the common good. In our nation, opposition to aid for parents who choose alternate educational institutions is rooted in attitudes which are anti-Catholic, as finally acknowledged by the majority opinion in *Espinoza* – an anti-Catholicism which is a most unfortunate remnant of what should be a by-gone era of misunderstanding between Church and State or of a time when the unity of a citizen’s life was not properly acknowledged and was seen as divisible into separate and even conflicting allegiances.

Some observers have commented that a “no aid” position is required to ensure religious freedom in a modern secular state. The Catholic Church has always argued to the contrary for several reasons: a) First, because as long as no coercion is involved in attendance at religiously oriented schools and as long as these schools serve a public purpose, personal freedom and the legitimate goals of the State can co-exist. b) The refusal to provide assistance to parents who judge religious schools to be essential to their children’s education is a negative pressure, unduly restricting parental rights and religious freedom rights at one and the same time. Government neutrality toward religion should never devolve into an adversarial position. c) The testimony of countless nations which offer government aid in various ways to parents of children in religious

schools demonstrates how the many contending values can be safeguarded and fostered harmoniously.<sup>6</sup>

In times of economic hardship, it would be worth noting that government policies which favor the continued existence of alternative forms of education could turn out to be much more cost-effective than would the need to absorb the populations of non-governmental schools. In many instances, it has also been discovered that governmental encouragement of many competing educational systems actually aids in higher academic standards and achievement, with all children being the beneficiaries, as well as society.<sup>7</sup>

The public policy question, then, revolves around the desire of a nation to promote genuine pluralism in education and genuine freedom for parents to select those educational forms which best reflect their values and those they want transmitted to their children. Failure to do so puts a nation at risk of appearing to restrict in unnecessary and improper ways the rights and duties of parents who are inspired by religious convictions to fulfill their responsibilities to their children and their God.<sup>8</sup>

### **III. Recognition of the Government's Role in Fostering Educational Pluralism**

In the first place it pertains to the State, in view of the common good, to promote in various ways the education and instruction of youth. It should begin by encouraging and assisting, of its own accord, the initiative and activity of the Church and the family, whose successes in this field have been clearly demonstrated by history and experience. It should moreover supplement their work whenever this falls short of what is necessary. . . . For the State more than any other society is provided with the means put at its disposal for the needs of all, and it is only right that it use these means to the advantage of those who have contributed to them.

So wrote Pope Pius XI in DIM at the beginning of the twentieth century. And his teaching has been followed in a direct trajectory by all subsequent ecclesiastical reflections on this matter.<sup>9</sup> In writing to the signatory nations of the Helsinki Accords, John Paul II called for “freedom for families to choose the schools or other means which provides this sort [religious] of education for their children without having to sustain directly or indirectly extra charges which would in fact deny them this freedom.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, he wrote in *Familiaris Consortio* that “the right of parents to choose an education in conformity with their religious faith must be absolutely guaranteed” [n. 40].

That freedom cannot be guaranteed, let alone fostered, unless it is subsidized by the civil authority. Hence, we read in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*:

Public authorities must see to it that “public subsidies are so allocated that parents are truly free to exercise this right without incurring unjust burdens. Parents should not have to sustain, directly or indirectly, extra charges which would deny or unjustly limit the exercise of this freedom.” The refusal to provide public economic support to non-public schools that need assistance and that render a service to civil society is to be considered an injustice. “Whenever the State lays claim to an educational monopoly, it oversteps its rights and offends justice. . . . The State cannot without injustice merely tolerate so-called private schools. Such schools render a public service and therefore have a right to financial assistance.” [n. 241]

John Stuart Mill argued for this precise role for government in the educational sphere: “It might leave to parents to obtain the education where and how they pleased, and content itself with helping to pay the school fees of the poorer classes of children.”<sup>11</sup>

#### **IV. The Responsibility of Catholics to Secure Parental Freedom of Choice**

The primary task of the Church vis-a-vis civil society is to propose norms of justice. Once that is done, it remains for committed Catholics and others of good will to determine how that goal can best be reached within the political sphere. In the present case, the Church deems it her responsibility to be twofold: a) to advance the cause of parental freedom of choice in education; b) to inspire Catholics to work for the establishment of programs which allow that principle to function.

It is often said that potential aid programs are not enacted because of misconceptions or misinformation regarding the nature, purpose and effects of Catholic schools. If that is so, Catholic school parents and teachers should engage in public relations programs that put forth accurate data. The Catholic school community at every level should be committed to the dissemination of the full and positive picture of contemporary Catholic education, dispelling myths and challenging others to be open to correct information and a corresponding change in attitude and practice.

One such myth is that faith-based schools are divisive, a charge leveled by President Barack Obama during his 2013 visit to Northern Ireland and a charge previously refuted by Pope Benedict XVI to the Scottish bishops: “You can be proud of the contribution made by Scotland’s Catholic schools in overcoming sectarianism and building good relations between communities. Faith schools are a powerful force for social cohesion, and when the occasion arises, you do well to underline this point.”<sup>12</sup> In Pope Benedict’s address to Catholic educators in Washington on 17 April 2008, he linked the right to a religiously grounded education to the welfare of the State: “No child should be denied his or her right to an education in faith, which in turn nurtures the soul of a nation.” Likewise, Pope Francis (himself a former high school teacher) praised the contribution made “with the foundation and running of Catholic schools in contexts of accentuated cultural and religious pluralism.”<sup>13</sup>

Once reliable information is available, Catholics need to band together with other like-minded citizens to secure their legitimate desires.<sup>14</sup> Some may quickly object that such activity is improper. Pius XI was swift to argue that this is “not mixing in party politics.” On the contrary, it is involvement “in a religious enterprise demanded by conscience” [DIM]. Furthermore, it is of great importance, especially in a pluralistic society, to work out a proper vision of the relationship between the political community and the Church, and to distinguish clearly between the activities of Christians, acting individually or collectively, in their own name as citizens guided by the dictates of a Christian conscience, and their activity in communion with their pastors in the name of the Church. [*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 76]

*Apostolicam Actuositatem* highlights the very heart of the lay vocation:

... laymen ought to take on themselves as their distinctive task this renewal of the temporal order. Guided by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church, promoted by Christian love,

they should act in this domain in a direct way and in their own specific manner. . . . Among the tasks of this apostolate [of the laity] Christian social action is preeminent. [n. 7][15](#)

Even more pointedly, St. John Paul II teaches: “. . . the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in ‘public life’, that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good” [*Christifideles Laici*, n. 42].

Just what is intended here is spelled out in some detail by the same Holy Father when he urges Catholic families to engage in “political intervention,” serving as “protagonists of what is known as ‘family politics’” [*Familiaris Consortio*, n. 44]. Solidarity on behalf of worthwhile political goals calls for the involvement of individuals and groups; indeed, it “concerns the active and responsible participation of all in public life, from individual citizens to various groups, from labor unions to political parties” [*Christifideles Laici*, n. 42].

The Church would urge one serious caution in the drive to bring about full justice for parents in education and that is the necessity of ensuring that, should aid programs be forthcoming, they not be fashioned in such a way as to invite or make possible governmental intrusion into the life of Catholic educational institutions.[16](#) To be sure, the State has valid concerns and objectives for all schools, but institutional autonomy is essential if Catholic schools are to be truly free to maintain their unique identity and purpose. That is why many who have studied this issue are careful to advocate governmental assistance which flows from the State to parents, and then from parents to schools; this procedure also has the advantage of showing that parents are the primary educators of their children and that it is a function of government to aid them in the discharge of their sacred duties.

Inevitably, a very subtle but real anti-Catholicism will surface frequently in objections to programs of parental choice. Archbishop Thomas Wenski, acting chairman of the bishops’ committee on religious liberty, has wisely dubbed such responses as reflective of a “religious animus” and a “soft despotism.”[17](#) These will need to be brought into the full light, so that the bigotry becomes clear. With many other faith communities now committed to religious schools, the anti-Catholic card will be harder to play today than fifty years ago.

Not a few legislators will blithely declare their intense desire to help faith-based schools but go on to assert that their state constitutions do not allow for this (that is, Blaine Amendments). They must be reminded that Espinoza has rendered those obstacles unconstitutional; the fig leaf of such legislators has been definitively removed.

Finally, in President Trump’s [teleconference](#) with Catholic educators this past April 25, he repeatedly proclaimed his determination to aid Catholic schools; we shall have to give him firm encouragement to keep his promises to us. And it is not partisan politics to remind all that his presumed opponent (and his party) are solidly in the pocket of the public school teachers’ unions.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

To summarize the thought of the Church in this area, the words of Pope John Paul II to UNESCO officials in Paris are germane: “Allow me to claim in this place for Catholic families the right which belongs to all families to educate their children in schools which correspond to their view of the world. . . .”<sup>18</sup> In like manner, Pope Pius XI observed that “where this fundamental liberty is thwarted or interfered with, Catholics will never feel, whatever may have been the sacrifices already made, that they have done enough, for the support and defense of their schools and for the securing of laws that will do them justice” [DIM].

Parental freedom of choice in education is a sacred right, upheld in philosophy, theology and law; yet it is a meaningless commodity to millions because they lack the financial wherewithal to exercise that right for themselves and their children. Parental rights are basic human rights and the single thread that is, in many ways, responsible for keeping the whole fabric of liberty of one piece.<sup>19</sup>

Sacred Scripture often speaks of certain times as a *chairos*, that is, particularly opportune moments for action. I believe this is just such a *chairos* moment, on which Archbishop Hughes must be smiling from eternity.

Rev. Peter M.J. Stravinskas

***Endnotes:***

<sup>1</sup>[“TMC Trustee Helps Score Landmark Victory Over Anti-Catholic Laws”](#) by Michael C. Gilleran

<sup>2</sup>Jacques Maritain, *The Rights of Man and Natural Law* (New York: Scribner’s, 1947), 82.

<sup>3</sup>*Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 535 (1925).

<sup>4</sup>Virgil C. Blum, *Freedom in Education* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965), 56.

<sup>5</sup>“Pope: Schools Are Heart of Church,” *Catholic Standard and Times*, 26 November 1981, 12.

<sup>6</sup>Again, Pius XI in DIM is instructive in this regard: “. . . giving them [Church and families] such assistance as justice demands. . . can be done to the full satisfaction of families, and to the advantage of education and of public peace and tranquillity, [which] is clear from the actual experience of some countries comprising different religious denominations. There the school legislation respects the rights of the family, and Catholics are free to follow their own system of teaching in schools that are entirely Catholic.”

<sup>7</sup>The civil libertarian, John Stuart Mill, was a vocal opponent of State-run schools. However, he conceded their necessity on a limited basis for a most interesting reason: “An education established and controlled by the State should only exist, if it exists at all, as one among many competing experiments, carried on for the purpose of example and stimulus, to keep the others up to a certain standard of excellence.” [*On Liberty* (New York: Henry Holt & Company Publishers, 1898), 184]

8Thus DIM: “Accordingly, unjust and unlawful is any monopoly, educational or scholastic, which, physically or morally, forces families to make use of government schools, contrary to the dictate of their Christian conscience, or contrary even to their legitimate preferences.”

9Perhaps the strongest statement on this topic since comes from the Holy See’s Charter of the Rights of the Family, Article 5, 22 October 1983: “Parents have the right to choose freely schools or other means necessary to educate their children in keeping with their convictions. Public authorities must ensure that public subsidies are so allocated that parents are truly free to exercise this right without incurring unjust burdens. Parents should not have to sustain, directly or indirectly, extra charges which would deny or unjustly limit the exercise of this freedom.”

10“Man’s Entire Humanity Is Expressed in Culture,” *l’Osservatore Romano*, 19 January 1981, 13.

11Mill, 187.

12Address to the bishops of Scotland during their ad limina visit on 10 February 2010.

13Address to the Congregation for Catholic Education, 13 February 2014.

14In this connection, the following is helpful: “Some situations call for “concerted action. Organizations created for group apostolate afford support to their members, train them for the apostolate, carefully assign and direct their apostolic activities; and as a result, a much richer harvest can be hoped for from them than if each were to act on his own.” [*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, n. 18]

15Subsequently, Pope John Paul II reflected on this vocation in this way: It is “felt today as a pressing responsibility – the lay faithful must bear witness to those human and gospel values that are intimately connected with political activity itself, such as liberty and justice, solidarity. . . , and a preferential love for the poor and the least. This demands that the lay faithful always be more animated by a real participation in the life of the Church and enlightened by her social doctrine. In this they can be supported and helped by the nearness of the Christian community and their pastors.” [*Christifideles Laici*, n. 42]

16A prime, unhappy example of this can be found in Canada.

17 [“‘Soft despotism’ of anti-Catholicism on the rise, USCCB religious liberty chair warns”](#) (July 1, 2020).

18“Man’s Entire Humanity Is Expressed in Culture,” France: Message of Peace, Trust, Love and Faith (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1980), 202.

19For a more thorough-going treatment of this critically important and complex matter, I would suggest obtaining an abbreviated edition of my doctoral dissertation on this issue (*Constitutional Rights and Religious Prejudice: Catholic Education as the Battleground*). Go to [the website of](#)

[Newman House Press](#) to order; indicate that you saw notice of the book here and receive a 50% discount.

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## Countercultural Manhood: Advice to Boys Approaching Confirmation

*What it means to be a Catholic man today.*

I was asked to give a brief talk this past weekend to a group of about 30 boys at our parish receiving their Confirmation. The topic was what it means to be a Catholic man. Here is a summary of what I told them.

The phrase “toxic masculinity” is thrown around a lot in our culture; it suggests a manhood that is all about aggression, domination, self-reliance, and exclusion. And there’s something to this. These things can turn into abuse, corruption, egotism, and hatred.

So, what’s the alternative? The culture tends to flip to the other extreme: instead of being aggressive, we should be frail; instead of dominating, we should be lazy; instead of being self-reliant, we should be self-destructive; and instead of excluding everybody, we should be tolerant of everything.

We see these two paths everywhere in the culture. But they’re both dead ends. They both end in disaster for us as men. Why? Because they fail to deal with our deepest identity. One sees us as animals; the other sees us as ghosts. But we’re not animals, and we’re not ghosts; we’re men.

There is a third path—one found not in the culture but in our Catholic faith. It is authentic masculinity, which is a moral and spiritual masculinity. I’d like to present this vision of manhood using “Four S’s”: Self-sacrifice, Silence, Study, and the Sacraments. And as we go through these, we’ll see just how countercultural this path is.

***Self-Sacrifice: Your life is not about you***

Sacrifice is not a word that we hear a lot today. We talk about being happy, having fun—not sacrifice. But as men, we understand the logic of sacrifice. If you’ve ever been serious about sports or music, you know that, to get better, you have to train and practice constantly; you have to discipline your body and mind; you can’t always be going out with your girlfriend or hanging out with your friends. This kind of sacrifice is built into our DNA.

But here’s the thing: your life is not about you. Your DNA of sacrifice is ultimately, with God’s grace, meant to become a sacrifice of your own selfishness: first, by loving God, and second, by loving others. This is what will make you truly happy and fulfilled. As Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI said: “The world offers you comfort. But you were not made for comfort. You were made for greatness.” And true greatness comes through self-sacrifice.

But how? Primarily through vocation. Every man in this room is called to one day be one of three things: married, single, or a priest or religious brother. And each vocation involves self-sacrifice. Getting married and having three kids is the most wonderful, beautiful thing I’ve ever done, and I mean that sincerely. But does that mean it’s easy? No; it can be very difficult. As a husband and father, you are called to be faithful to your wife, to be open to children, and to provide for, protect, and lead your family. It requires a daily sacrifice of selfishness. The same goes for priests and single men, who sacrifice for their communities and families, and of course sacrifice sexual intimacy, which is a gift given by God uniquely for marriage.

But even now, as young people, you are called to self-sacrifice. This includes guarding yourself against temptations—to bullying and violence, to pornography (a scourge that destroys lives) and premarital sex, to drug and alcohol abuse.

None of this is easy. But we're not alone in the battle. We have the help of the ultimate role model: Christ himself. God sent his only Son into our messed-up world; he healed, taught, and served others; and then, at the end of his life, he gave himself away in the ultimate sacrifice to save us from sin and death: the cross.

How do we respond? He told us: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

### ***Silence: Do not be afraid of silence***

Cardinal Sarah said this about noise: "Noise is a whirlwind that avoids facing itself...But this noise is a dangerous, deceptive medicine, a diabolic lie that helps man avoid confronting himself in his interior emptiness. The awakening will necessarily be brutal."

Interior emptiness: this is what is behind all of the noise. And as men, we get caught up in that culture. We feel like to be somebody, we have to make a lot of noise; to be wise, we have to absorb a lot of noise. But the opposite is true! We are truly somebody and truly wise when we're silent, because in silence we encounter God.

Now, this doesn't mean we never talk or stand up for what's right. It just means that our speech flows out of silence. And this means getting rid of distractions. Lent is a great time to put the phone down—to take a

break from constantly sending and receiving noise and spend more time in silence.

But at its core, silence is about keeping God in the center of your mind and heart, and not getting caught up in the "noise" of a million different things. It means being centered on God, watching and listening for his promptings, and then acting on them. Cardinal Sarah adds: "Interior rest and harmony can flow only from silence. Without it, life does not exist. The greatest mysteries of the world are born and unfold in silence."

We can again look to Christ—whose silence, Cardinal Sarah says, is a silence of "self-sacrifice." But we also have the example St. Joseph, my own confirmation saint. Why? Because the Bible does not record him saying a single word. Not one. But it's not because Joseph doesn't care or is a coward. He is a man of faith and "a righteous man" (Matt. 1:19). He is a carpenter—a man of strength and discipline. And he is a man of action and purpose. He hears and acts on God's promptings in his life, getting up in the middle of the night to protect his wife and his child from danger. And he raises his son with faith. Look to his example, and ask for his prayers.

### ***Study: Take up and read!***

Our culture tends to treat studying as something you do in school, and just because you have to. You learn what you have to learn to move to the next step, and then, when you leave school, you stop learning. For men especially, learning is treated as either learning something that should be practical and technical, or something that we shouldn't do at all.

But you can be a man's man and also a man of letters. Authentic masculinity means

always learning—outside of and beyond school.

First and foremost, we must learn from Scripture. St. Jerome said, “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.” So to know, love, and serve God, we have to open our minds to his word.

But we also have to learn from literature, especially the literature of the Church. As Bishop Barron said: “Baptized prophets should exercise their brains by studying philosophy, theology, spirituality, Church history, and the lives of the saints. And they can’t be satisfied with reading superficial tracts designed for children.” You are not children anymore; it’s time to challenge yourself in your reading.

This is easier with recommendations, and role models. So I’m recommending six books to you to have on your shelves in the years to come. I consider them gold standards for teaching the faith, and their authors demonstrate this virtue of study: St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, C.S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*, G.K. Chesterton’s *Orthodoxy*, Robert Barron’s *Catholicism*, Peter Kreeft’s *Christianity for Modern Pagans*, and Brandon Vogt’s *Why I Am Catholic*.

### ***Sacraments: An invitation to spiritual warfare***

Our culture tends to have two basic views of the world. The first is physical: what’s real is matter, and there’s no spiritual realm beyond it. The second is spiritual: what’s real is spiritual, and the material world is just a kind of a mistake or illusion.

As Catholics, we have a third view, which is sacramental. We believe that physical realities are the sign and cause of spiritual

realities. And the peak of this is in the seven sacraments of the Church.

You are preparing for Confirmation, a beautiful sacrament of strengthening to help you defend the faith. But I’m sure you’ve heard a lot about it, and also, it happens just one time in your life. Instead, I want to emphasize two other sacraments that are offered most frequently in our lives: Confession and Communion.

Why is Confession important? Because as men, we’re going to fail. We’re going to make the wrong choices. In short, we’re going to sin. But real men admit their mistakes; they seek God’s word of forgiveness; and, importantly, they commit themselves to getting back up and trying again. This is what the sacrament of Confession is all about. My friend Jared Zimmerer [put it this way](#):

“I think for men in particular [Confession is] a sacrament of grit...No matter how many times you have to confess the same thing over and over you just keep going, keep going, keep going ... Men are called to fight ... What the sacraments do is invite you into the spiritual warfare that Christ accomplished on the cross.”

This takes us to the most important sacrament: the Eucharist. The Eucharist is three things: a sacred meal, the Real Presence of Christ, and a sacrifice. Most people today get the meal part; but they don’t get the last two. A recent poll even found that nearly 70 percent of Catholics don’t believe in the Real Presence. But when you go to Mass, God himself, made flesh in Jesus Christ, is really present on the altar under the appearances of bread and wine. And his sacrifice on the cross is present too. The Catechism teaches: “The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes

present) the sacrifice of the cross.” This is a powerful, sacred moment.

We also read in the Catechism: “The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church.” This brings us full circle, back to self-sacrifice—because we are part of the Church. As men, we’re called to sacrifice ourselves—and this is not easy. But when we unite that self-sacrifice to the sacrifice of the Mass, we are gathered up into the perfect

Matthew Becklo

<https://aleteia.org/2020/03/12/countercultural-manhood-advice-to-boys-approaching-confirmation>

offering, and grace pours back out into our lives to help us to fight. Remember: sacrifice is in our DNA. And therefore, the sacrifice of the Mass is something we need often—and not just on Easter and Christmas. We’re obligated to go on Holy Days and Sundays; but even this is the bare minimum.

Be men of the sacraments; go to Mass often.

I hope to see you there.

## Pro-Life Nebraska Group Educates With Ultrasound in School

Heart of a Child Ministries is spearheading an effort to instill respect for human development in Nebraska's youth.

Students at many Nebraska schools are getting an up-close view of the miracle of life, as a pro-life organization is revolutionizing human development education. The group, [Heart of a Child Ministries](#), brings portable ultrasound machines to schools and performs the non-invasive procedure on real pregnant women to give the children a live look at babies in the womb.

Heart of a Child Ministries has been reaching both public and private schools since 2016. Their work teaches about the development of babies prior to birth, as well as touching upon the importance of adoption. [Their director, Nikki Schaefer, told CNA in an interview:](#)

“It’s an experience of the Lord speaking to a child, and then that child feeling compelled to come home and talk to his parents about it.”

Schaefer explained that they tailor their presentations to specific age groups, so that the children can get the most out of the encounter. The group has performed ultrasounds for kids from primary school through high school and they’ve even begun an adult program, in order to show parents what they will be learning.

The adult program is new, having arisen from parental concerns that their children might be exposed to graphic pictures of

abortions, or be taught about the sexual aspects of reproduction too soon. Schaefer, however, makes it clear that their goal is not sex or abortion education, but rather to teach children to view unborn babies with human dignity.

Schaefer told CNA that the first question she asks students when the ultrasound is over is: “What did you see that tells you that that is a human being?”

She noted that the responses from the children are usually positive. One pregnant woman who sat for a class explained that she had decided to give the baby up for adoption. To her surprise, at the end of class a girl came up to her and thanked her for sharing. The girl, adopted herself, explained that it gave her great insight into her own birth mother’s decision to give her up.

Heart of a Child is performing an invaluable service in their work, which seems to be the first of its kind. Instilling a respect for human life at its most fragile state and providing them with a reference experience could very well change the way many of the students will view abortion as they mature into adults. There are currently no plans to take the project out of Nebraska, but with their successes, we expect to see similar programs arise across the nation.

J-P Mauro

<https://aleteia.org/2020/03/14/pro-life-nebraska-group-educates-with-ultrasound-in-school>

## Italian Nun Channels ‘Mr. Rogers’ as Coronavirus Restrictions Extend

When Italy’s COVID-19 coronavirus lockdown first began, people saturated social media with videos of singing, neighborhood flash mobs and musical numbers, but the tone of late is significantly bleaker as the country’s death count continues to climb, prompting an extension of a tight nationwide lockdown.

However, one Italian nun has sought to break the somber atmosphere by offering children – and their parents – a smile through a series of lighthearted puppet shows livestreamed on her convent’s Facebook page.

“Sister Sandra” – reports *Avvenire*, the official newspaper for the Italian bishops’ conference – is a former elementary school teacher who entered the convent in 2010. She is offering her own version of the famous 31-season television series “Mister Rogers Neighborhood,” using puppets, character voices and colorful screen animation to tell nursery rhymes and stories.

There are some other similarities: In real life, Fred Rogers was an ordained Presbyterian minister; Sister Sandra is an Augustinian cloistered nun. She is one of four cloistered sisters who live at the Santa Cristiana monastery in the small city of Santa Croce sull’Arno, near Florence.

The monastery was founded by Blessed Christine of Santa Croce, an Augustinian nun also known as Oringa Menabuoi, who was born in Santa Croce sull’Arno around 1240 and died in 1310.

Since 2013 the sisters have published videos on their social media channels, most of which focused on daily Mass with a reflection afterwards on the thoughts of St.

Augustine. However, the children’s videos are a novelty.

Sister Sandra began uploading the videos in mid-March, with the first one being livestreamed March 16. Titled, “The Stories of Sister Sandra,” the show is primarily directed at children, but also offers a message for adults who want to tune in.

Each video is livestreamed at 6 p.m. local time and runs about seven to 15 minutes long, and includes puppets such as an angel, a piece of pizza and a dog wearing a surgical face mask to help explain to children why so many people are wearing them during the lockdown.

Most of the stories the nun tells were either written or inspired by Gianni Rodari, an Italian author known for his children’s books. This year marks the centenary of his birth and the 40th anniversary of his death.

Sister Sandra’s first episode focuses on the emergency related to the COVID-19 coronavirus. In the brief, 5-minute video, she uses an angel puppet to help her explain to children what a virus is, using a poem written by Italian poet Roberto Piumini on the virus.

Piumini, who wanted to explain to children what the virus is clearly but without causing fear, said in the poem that the coronavirus is “a virus that wears a crown, but it is certainly not a king, and neither is it a person; so, what is it? It is a small little guy, so small that just to see it up close, you need a microscope.”

“It’s a poisonous little guy, who never stands still: He’s intrusive and spiteful, he wants to go here and there,” the poem reads,

calling the coronavirus a “microscopic warrior” who wants “to get into people.”

“I can, and you can too, leave that rascal out,” Piumini writes, telling children in the poem that, “If a sneeze escapes you, sneeze into your arm: stop the flight of that brute: you do it, and I do it too.”

“When you go out, as soon as you get back, go to wash your hands: every time, every day, not just today, also tomorrow. Wash with soap, wash for a long time, and with care, and so, if there is, the rascal will go down with the rinse,” he said, also telling children to avoid touching their mouth, nose and fingers.

“I, you and all people, with prudence are care, will certainly beat the unpleasant prankster. And maybe when we have overcome this test together we will learn a wise and new life,” the poem concludes.

At the end of each video, Sister Sandra tells children that, “A smile a day makes the virus go away!”

In other videos, the nun focuses on different stories and tries to teach children a lesson, urging them to think about little things they do, which might seem unimportant, but can make a big difference.

Speaking to *Avvenire*, Sister Sandra noted that as a contemplative order, the sisters are not “forced to stay at home because of the coronavirus.” But with people unable to visit

them, “we are still trying to be close to the people of Santa Croce. First of all, with prayer. And then also with these small videos,” she said, noting that the videos were conceived with the help of the monastery’s priest, Father Donato Agostinelli.

“Since I made these videos,” Sister Sandra said, “I have been receiving WhatsApp messages from people who thank me because even with these simple stories they feel more relieved, they feel our closeness.”

Comments on the videos show just how much people appreciate the lighthearted stories in a time of anxiety.

One viewer described the show as “always very fun and joyful,” while another thanked Sister Sandra, saying the videos “will help us with our children with distance learning.”

“Sister Sandra awes us every day giving us a smile in our sad days,” one commenter said, with another insisting that the joy the videos provide “do a lot of good,” especially as worries grow.

A proposal was also made to give Sister Sandra and the sisters a full-time television show, so she can “entertain all children so gracefully.”

One comment that the sisters will likely especially appreciate is from one viewer who thanked God for the videos, which she said, “Show us His face.”

Elise Ann Allen

<https://cruxnow.com/church-in-europe/2020/04/italian-nun-channels-mr-rogers-as-coronavirus-restrictions-extend/>

## Keeping the ‘Catholic’ in Catholic Distance Learning

Distance learning can be truly Catholic and preserve the unparalleled advantages of Catholic education.

Faithful Catholic schools are far better for Catholics than public schools. But how do they maintain their distinctive advantage when students are forced to stay home?

In important ways, Catholic schools are doing just that with the help of students’ parents. And in this time of anxiety and isolation, the special character of Catholic schools is more important than ever.

“For Catholic educators, this trying experience can serve as a time to recall what Catholic schools do both differently and do well,” [write](#) Dr. Denise Donohue and Dr. Dan Guernsey of The Cardinal Newman Society in “Maintaining Catholic Identity in Distance Learning Instruction.” “We are good at community, prayer, integral formation, and creating a Catholic worldview.”

Those [four characteristics](#) are repeatedly cited in Vatican documents as essential to Catholic education, and they suggest a good framework for ensuring that the “Catholic” of Catholic education remains strong, even when it is done remotely.

### *Community Life under Quarantine*

In a crisis, families need community like never before. And even with social distancing—or perhaps especially because of social distancing—Catholics need each other for support and sanity.

For many families, a good Catholic school is a center of Christian fellowship with school leaders, teachers and other families. That’s

because Catholic schools teach students how to build authentic human relationships, and since witness is a powerful teacher, they model Christian communion in every classroom and activity.

“It is through the community that students receive ‘a systematic and critical assimilation of culture’ which passes along our Catholic traditions, values and beliefs,” note Donohue and Guernsey. “In Catholic education, the community itself is considered a formative and educative means of student formation and development, where students learn Christian values by being exposed to Christian values—primarily through the witness of adults and others with whom they interact daily.”

This community remains vital to Catholic distance learning, and teachers especially can be present to students and parents in their online classes, communications and prayers together.

“How much more important now is the presence of the teacher in these unsettling times, when coming together is difficult and ‘social distancing’ is the norm,” ask Donohue and Guernsey.

Teachers can make a special effort to write handwritten letters to students, make phone calls and send video clips—always communicating through the parents, of course. In addition to giving lessons online, teachers should be “speaking from the heart and saying and doing human things to lighten the load and let students know you miss them but are in good humor.” Most importantly, teachers and families should be praying for each other and with each other, whenever possible.

### *Prayer and Sacrament*

At faithful Catholic schools, students experience reverent Mass, Confession, frequent prayer and Eucharistic adoration. But confined to home without physical access to churches, Catholic school students may be feeling as much of a loss as adults.

Still, this “does not mean that our hearts and minds should be allowed to go on a spiritual vacation,” warn Donohue and Guernsey. Teachers should begin every online class with prayer, just as in the classroom. And parents should be encouraged to continue school practices such as morning prayer and the Angelus at Noon.

Involving parents and siblings in the school’s daily prayer life can be a positive outcome of schooling at home. “Helping families start these family rituals now can have a lasting effect on children’s faith development for years to come. In some cases, families may be relying on us to pray with and form their students, and now is an opportunity to fully engage the domestic Church and leverage fuller participation moving forward.”

Parents should be encouraged to mimic the physical arrangement of the school—not only designated work spaces and well-lit, quiet rooms for online coursework, but also the distinctive Catholic imagery and prayer spaces found in a Catholic school. If a home does not already have a substantial amount of Catholic artwork and a dedicated prayer corner (with crucifix, Bible, prayer cards, etc.), that can be easily remedied.

### ***Forming Mind, Body, Spirit***

A faithful Catholic school is not only concerned about academics. It looks to form the student to be physically healthy and strong, morally clean and virtuous, and spiritually on the path to sainthood.

“Specifically tying subject-area materials to lessons on virtue or the faith can help make connections between course subjects such as history or English,” suggest Donohue and Guernsey. “Identifying virtues and essential questions will help parents enter into the teaching, exemplifying concepts through discussion and example.”

The loss of school athletics will be keenly felt by students, and they are likely to get less exercise at home, especially if they have access to computer games and television. Educators can encourage walking and bike riding, as well as physical activities like arts and crafts or playing instruments.

A Catholic school teacher, concerned as much for the student’s welfare as for the ease of using computers for teaching and communication, will also recognize the dangers of forcing students to sit at a screen for much of the day.

“Whenever possible, break up discussion with individual work that students can do with pencil and paper or reading from a physical text,” advise Donohue and Guernsey. “Teacher teams may want to quantify, coordinate, and ration screen time as a ‘corporal work of mercy’ to our poor students!”

### ***Teaching a Catholic Worldview***

“...Catholic education does not just teach secular subjects like other schools but also imparts a Christian vision of the world, of life, of culture, and of history, ordering the whole of human culture to the news of salvation,” write Donohue and Guernsey.

This integrated approach with God the Creator as the foundation of every study requires some effort within distance learning. Teachers will be tempted to water

down courses to facts that are easiest to teach remotely, but good Catholic school teachers will not neglect the importance of group discussion and opportunities to highlight truths that are evident in math, science, history, literature and more.

Ultimately, “a Catholic school can never go wrong with a good supply of literature to recommend.” Allowing more time for students to read classic works at home does not detract from a Catholic education—it enhances it.

Overall, the COVID pandemic is making it very tough for Catholic schools to pay employees and plan for the future, but students can still be given an excellent Catholic education. If Catholic educators work to develop “thoughtful and

comprehensive strategies to try to compensate for the suspension of in-person instruction,” argue Donohue and Guernsey, then they can continue to exhibit the strengths of Catholic schools.

The greatest of these strengths is love. Educators can show “comfort and mercy” to “stressed and overwhelmed” students and be true partners to parents, who may be trying to work from home while ensuring that students’ education continues without interruption.

When this time of “stay at home” and social distancing is over, teachers and students will be eager to return to their schools. In the meantime, distance learning can be truly Catholic and preserve the unparalleled advantages of Catholic education.

Patrick Reilly

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/reilly/keeping-the-catholic-in-distance-learning>

## Catholic Students 3D-Print Mask Tensioners to Help Medical Workers

*Even in isolation, Catholic students are making a difference.*

For medical professionals working on the front lines to care for those infected by COVID-19, face masks are a double-edged sword. They protect workers from contamination, but depending on the size and shape of the worker's heads the masks can either be hard to keep on or painful to wear so tight. [CBS showed pictures of nurses getting off shift](#), and the bruises on their faces are not what these selfless workers deserve.

In order to help in any small way they can, the Robotichauns — a tech club from Knoxville Catholic High School — came up with a wonderful idea. Utilizing the school's 3D printers, the students designed medical mask tensioners, which are like straps that rest behind the head to hook the straps of medical masks, so that the pressure doesn't rest on the ears.

[Noxville's WVLT 8 reports](#) that the idea came from Senior Tony Spezi, who worked on the project with the club's supervising teacher Doug Parris. The two agreed a design they liked and began printing them en masse to send to hospitals in their area. In a video interview with WVLT, Spezi explained that they even went so far as to modify the design to meet the needs of hospital staffs.

J-P Mauro

<https://aleteia.org/2020/04/18/catholic-students-3d-print-mask-tensioners-to-help-medical-workers>

“Some of the surgeons and nurses at the hospital said ‘Hey our heads are a little bit too small, is there any way you can get an extra rung on there?’” Spezi said. “I was able to copy the design from [the previous] rung and just shift it down enough to make it easier for the straps to hold.”

Tony further modified the design to bear the letters KCHS to signify that they were printed by Knoxville Catholic High School, and they sent their first batch to East Tennessee Children's Hospital and the University of Tennessee's Cancer Institute, where they were a hit with medical workers.

The team has produced over 150 of these tensioners, but they've already been contacted by Blount Memorial Hospital for more. With many states closed until May, their efforts are sure to continue to be in demand for at least a month.

If you are a medical professional, first responder, or on a hospital staff and are interested in receiving mask tensioners, contact the Robotichauns at [douglas.parris@knoxvillecatholic.com](mailto:douglas.parris@knoxvillecatholic.com). You can also contact them if you would like to learn more about how to print these tensioners for your own local hospital, or if you just want to send them some valuable words of support for their good works.

## Take a Virtual Pilgrimage to California's Historic Catholic Missions

The pilgrimage with author Christian Clifford takes viewers across 585 miles of California landscape to visit 21 mission churches.

[Click here to launch the slideshow](#)

With orders for isolation and social distancing holding strong, virtual tours have become a popular way to “get out” without ever leaving one’s home. Many museums and even the Vatican have digitized their collections, offering 360-degree views of their most famous artworks and rooms. Internet users can surf further than ever before, but these are limited in scope and they don’t let the viewer explore any further than what’s in front of them.

Now, author and teacher Christian Clifford is raising the bar on virtual religious experiences, as he has created a virtual pilgrimage, taking users across the Californian landscape to visit the state’s 21 historic mission churches. They are located on or near what is now Highway 101, built along the old Camino Real (“Royal Road”), so named to honor the Spanish Crown, which financed the expenses of expanding the Spanish Empire up the Pacific Coast of what is now the United States. In a press release he explained:

Last summer marked the 250th anniversary of the founding of the first California mission at San Diego by Saint Junípero Serra (1713-1784), so Christian Clifford, author of books and articles about Spanish-Mexican history in California, began a quest to visit all twenty-one California missions, on foot!

[Clifford explained on his website](#) that he is part of a group called California Mission

Walkers, composed of Catholic history buffs who enjoy visiting California’s many and storied mission churches. He has already visited these sites several times by car, but on foot was a much different experience. The first 18 missions he visited had him walking 585 miles, over 222 hours.

Those who take his virtual pilgrimage can follow in his footsteps [thanks to a journal that he kept](#), which is interspersed with photographs he took along the way. Each passage covers a day or two of the journey and keeps track of how far he traveled, what he saw, what prayer intentions he was focused on that day, and a little historical background for each mission he visits.

The journal page tends to show the personal aspects of his pilgrimage, but Clifford took more professional photos of the mission grounds, too. [These shots can be found on Clifford’s Flickr page](#), where he organized them into mission-specific folders.

Clifford also uses his Facebook page to offer [a tribute to St. Junípero Serra](#), who founded nine missions himself. Here, Clifford has assembled one of the largest troves of St. Serra images, with artworks coming from Spain, Mexico, and the United States.

The press release noted:

His hope is that both sites can inspire during these difficult times and assure one that Saint Junípero Serra is always on call and that the California missions will be there when we return to normalcy.

Take a look at our slide show to see some of the wonderful pictures that Clifford took during his month-long walking pilgrimage.

If you'd like to take the full virtual pilgrimage, [visit his website here](#), or check

out his collections of images [on Flickr](#) and [Facebook](#).

J-P Mauro

<https://aleteia.org/2020/04/24/take-a-virtual-pilgrimage-to-californias-historic-catholic-missions>

## Making the Grade in Ethiopia

In the Spring 2020 edition of ONE, Maria Gerth-Niculescu wrote of how men and women religious are having [a powerful impact on young students in Ethiopia](#). She offers some additional reflections below.

The city of Dessie welcomes you with scenic mountains and a blazing sun. It's a fast-growing city, but where most neighborhoods still feel like a small friendly town. The Catholic school is located on a quiet cobble-stone street, behind a big brown gate.

Abba Matthewos greeted us with a friendly smile. From the very first minutes, it was clear: this is a busy man. Running a church as well as a school of more than a thousand students is no light task, and Abba Matthewos takes it very seriously. Every morning, he celebrates Mass in the round Kidane Mehret church, after which he manages the school, solving problems and holding meetings in his large office.

As he introduced us to the school staff and children, I felt that this compound is a happy place. The classrooms are overcrowded, and there's no place to eat lunch, but here the children have adapted. One girl even told me that she likes being with so many friends in one classroom, despite the adverse effects this has on her progress. Teachers I spoke with are less nuanced; they stress the difficulty of teaching 60 students at once. But for now, funding is insufficient to build more facilities.

The schoolyard is surrounded by a multitude of trees, and the classroom buildings are nicely painted in blue, beige and yellow. In the morning sun, this scenery — combined with hundreds of kids in blue and green uniforms arriving in a joyful chatter — is

something beautiful to witness. Then there is the morning routine of singing the Ethiopian national anthem: a spectacle of discipline and unity.

We spent several hours in the school, visiting classrooms and observing teachers while trying not to distract the students — a difficult task, as they seemed to love having visitors around.

Visiting the homes of students was another experience. We focused on students who are sponsored by the Catholic Association, and it became clear what a help attending this school would be for their future. With very little income, some parents could never have afforded this level of education for their daughters and sons. The school has a 100 percent admission rate to university, a number almost double the public school rate. This opportunity to climb the social ladder is something extraordinary, and it seems those families benefitting from the program are well aware of this. “I would have never gotten this chance with sponsorship,” said the mother of one high school girl.

From first grade onwards, students at Kidane Mehret have ambitious plans for the future. “Doctor,” “engineer” and “pilot” were the words that burst out when we asked girls and boys what they want to become. It makes one want to hope for them, and for the future of a country still plagued by poverty and unemployment. The school staff is well aware of the challenges ahead, and have expressed their worries, mentioning that some former students are still unable to find jobs. But they pray for the economy and overall political situation to deliver a brighter future. They remain endlessly optimistic.

“You must learn to live in this world,” one teacher told me. “So we will keep teaching, as students will keep learning.”

Maria Gerth-Niculescu

<https://cnewa.org/making-the-grade-in-ethiopia/>

Read more about teaching [Lessons in Success](#) in the Spring edition of ONE.

## Lose Hours Exploring This Richly Detailed, Hand-Drawn Map of the Met's Exhibits

*It took years of drawing and countless visits to the Met to produce this work of art.*

When isolation orders caused the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to close down, art enthusiasts were left with naught but digital archives to fill the gap. Much of their vast catalogue has been digitized, [with photographs of each work open to peruse](#), and they also offer [The Met 360° Project](#), which allows a more interactive glimpse of the grounds through virtual technology.

These resources, however, are largely directionless rabbit holes that can get one just as lost as if they decided to explore the real Met grounds without a solid plan in mind. What we really need is one image that shows all the best and most popular exhibits, no aimless wanderings needed. Preferably, it should have a certain retro quality to it, so as to attract the eye of those hipsters in the younger generations.

[Open Culture reports](#) that this is exactly the sort of image that John Kerschbaum was commissioned to draw back in 2004. Dubbed [The Family Map](#), this hand-drawn feat of artistic determination is a prize piece of the Met, although it doesn't hang on a wall. Instead they distribute it freely to anyone who wants a kid-friendly directory that also doubles as a sort of Where's Waldo-style puzzle. Along with hundreds of illustrations of the Met's permanent installations, there are brief challenges inscribed upon the borders, directing the reader to find certain landmarks among the kaleidoscope of images.

The massive undertaking to draw such a detailed map across an 18-by-24-inch page took Kerschbaum years and countless visits

to complete. [Kerschbaum explained to Claire Voon](#), of Atlas Obscura, that each department directed him towards about 50 of their most permanent works as reference points for the artist to use as the basis for the map. He said:

“I'd have a floor plan of the museum and a clipboard, and I'd make notes of where each item was, either by name or a quick sketch.”

It has always been a challenge for art lovers to view all the pieces that The Met has to offer in one visit, but thanks to Kerschbaum's fine work, all one has to do is view the Family Map to see it all! While it was intended to entertain and help instill art appreciation in their younger visitors, it has become an invaluable resource in this time of isolation. Whereas many children might not have the attention span to sit still during hours of clicking through images of historical artworks, the Family Map turns the activity into a lighthearted romp through a series of colorful cartoons.

One reason that the Family Map may resonate with kids so much is that Kerschbaum drew it in the presence of his daughter. In a short explanation video [from Open Culture](#), featured below, Kerschbaum says his process was “To draw and draw and draw,” at which point his daughter interrupts, with a certain amount of exacerbation, “And erase.”

[Click here to view the full, vivid Family Map](#) of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and if you're still looking for more, [click here to visit their digital archive.](#)

J-P Mauro

<https://aleteia.org/2020/05/02/lose-hours-exploring-this-richly-detailed-hand-drawn-map-of-the-mets-exhibits/>

## 'Historic Declines' in US Math and Reading Scores Since Common Core Implementation: Study

Supporters of the Common Core education system will not be pleased with the findings of a new study.

U.S. reading and math scores on multiple assessments have all seen “historic declines since most states implemented national Common Core English and math curriculum standards six years ago,” according to a Monday [news release](#) from the Pioneer Institute, which published the study.

In the conclusion of the study, titled “The Common Core Debacle,” author Theodor Rebarber slammed Common Core’s failings.

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According to the Common Core [website](#), the Common Core State Standards were supposed to ensure students of all ages gain the knowledge and life skills necessary to succeed in college and their careers.

The website also [claims](#) the idea that “adopting common standards means bringing all states’ standards down to the lowest common denominator” is a myth.

“The standards are designed to build upon the most advanced current thinking about preparing all students for success in college, career, and life. This will result in moving even the best state standards to the next level.”

But the evidence brought forward by the Pioneer Institute’s study suggests that has not been the case.

The [Pioneer Institute](#) is an independent, privately funded research organization based in Massachusetts.

The group conducted the study by comparing fourth- and eighth-grade student achievement scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress after the implementation of [Common Core](#) to their scores before Common Core’s implementation.

“From 2003 to 2013, national fourth- and eighth-grade reading scores were increasing at an average of about half of a point each year,” the news release pointed out.

According to the study, widespread implementation of Common Core standards in most states occurred in 2014.

“Since 2013, fourth-grade reading scores have been falling by less than half of a point each year, while eighth-grade scores have dropped by nearly a full point a year,” the news release added.

The study also found that on average, national [math](#) scores for fourth- and eighth-grade students were rising before Common Core.

“Post-Common Core, scores at both grades have fallen, eighth grade at nearly the same rate as it was previously increasing,” the news release said.

Common Core removed the fundamental competitive nature of educational reforms, Rebarber said.

“Before Common Core and before the earlier Congressional mandate on curriculum standards, states competed to design the best [education reforms](#), including the best policies on curriculum and standards and local control,” he explained in the study.

Michael Austin

<https://www.westernjournal.com/historic-declines-us-math-reading-scores-since-common-core-implementation-study/>

“It was an entrepreneurial and vibrant atmosphere, some states did a better job in some areas, and other states picked up ideas from them. We also avoided a nation-wide debacle like Common Core.”

Overall, the study indicated that [kids](#) from different states and communities have different needs.

“With a more bottom-up approach, more school systems will have the opportunity to choose curricula consistent with our international competitors and many decades of research on effective classroom teaching,” Rebarber said.

## Homeschooling in the Age of COVID

As American parents have learned in the last two months, it doesn't matter what we think of home-schooling, we're all doing it, especially for those in my home, Fairfax County, Virginia, where our nationally renowned public school system delayed and then egregiously fumbled its move to virtual classes. Thankfully, there are libraries-worth of free information on the internet on home-schooling, as well as annals of advice articles from home-schooling pros. My wife and I, who have a first-grader at our parish Catholic school, are grateful for resources that complement her virtual schoolwork. The experience also reminds me of what is discomfiting about Catholic parenting perspectives on grade school education—it's excessive dogmatism.

My K-12 education experience was all public. My evangelical parents had attended Catholic elementary schools and then public high schools in the South. As far as I knew, public schools could be good or bad, but one couldn't expect much sympathy there for Christianity or conservatism. Catholic schools, as far as I knew, were similar in quality to public schools, except there was that explicitly "Catholic" part of the pedagogy. It wasn't until I was out of college, and working jobs as a public school teacher and a tennis instructor, that I discovered how controversial education could be, even among like-minded conservative Christians.

As a tennis instructor, I met kids receiving all manner of education: public school, Catholic school, private evangelical school, Montessori school, and home-school. My fellow instructors and I made various generalizations about these differing educational experiences, which, of course, were generalizations and could not be

applied universally. Nevertheless, public school kids were typically the most cynical and rude, home-schooled kids were the most mature, Montessori kids were the most independent, and private school kids seemed the most snooty. Kids from religious backgrounds, regardless of where they were educated, were the best behaved.

In meeting so many home-schooling families, I became a big home-schooling advocate. Then I got married and had kids. By the time our eldest daughter was three, both my wife and I concluded that home-schooling would be a bad fit. She was far too independent, resistant to my wife's instruction, and very, very eager for social interaction with kids her own age. And, indeed, that first day I dropped her off for kindergarten at Catholic school, with tears welling up in my eyes, my daughter jumped out of her car seat and didn't even bother to say "goodbye, Dad!"

Private Catholic school has been great for my daughter—she loves all the activities, she loves the socializing, and she loves the Christian faith. But I also recognize it may not be a great fit for every Catholic kid, and perhaps not even a great fit for every kid in our family. We'll see. Unfortunately, I have read enough Catholic education literature, and have been exposed to enough education-fanatic parents, to recognize such an opinion is itself controversial. Some parents believe that home-schooling is not just the best option, but the only option. Other parents feel the same way about Montessori education. Why do parents, especially Christian and Catholic parents, feel the need to be so rigid and doctrinaire regarding the teaching of children?

I think part of the answer has to do with the nature of Christianity itself, which exhorts us to be fanatical in our devotion to Christ, who put it bluntly when He said: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 24: 24-25). In Revelation, moreover, John cites the angel of the church of Laodicea, who warns: “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.” Christians, in their desire to be fully committed to Christ, then take this militant approach to everything in their life: marriage, work, leisure, and educating children.

And certainly there’s nothing wrong with being zealous about education. Yet in the same way that we zealously guard the truths of the Christian faith, and attack those heresies that threaten the Church, many approach education with a comparable aggressive dogmatism. This is especially problematic when we associate one educational methodology with what is “true,” “orthodox” Christian education. Thus home-schooling, Montessori, or parochial Catholic schools can become the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic form of education. And all other methods, whatever their merits, become evil heresies to be condemned. My wife and I have been on the receiving end of attacks by such educational purists, and it is most unpleasant.

Another part of the answer is the fact that the majority of the people making day-to-day decisions about children’s education are women raised in an assertively feminist age. These women have been encouraged to aggressively pursue professional careers. For a variety of reasons, however, they have

deferred or rejected those careers in favor of a more traditional stay-at-home mom lifestyle. Yet they retain a professionalist urge that exhorts them to make everything, including their kids’ education, into a clearly-defined, highly-structured profession—with lots of career “benchmarks” to be achieved. And in the amorphous, complex realm of child pedagogy and psychology, applying such professionalism to kids can be suffocating.

Every form of education has its good and bad side. Many public schools are full of aggressive anti-Catholic ideology, but present kids with an opportunity to speak for themselves, as it did for me. Catholic schools, even when orthodox and professional, can be, in practice, public schools with some Jesus on the side. Home-schooling can alienate children from the wider world—which limits exposure to sin and lies, but can inhibit socialization and limit athletic or other extra-curricular options. Montessori classrooms, with their emphasis on cognitive development at the expense of sensorimotor development, can result in children who have serious delays in their functional fine-motor development, a problem some of them never fully overcome.

My family’s own “home-schooling” experience thus far has had its challenges, though my wife and I are grateful for the more immediate impact we get to have on our daughter’s development. For those parents facing a similar situation and wondering if covid-19 necessitates a change for the 2020–2021 school year, consider what’s most important. It’s not finding the “perfect” educational methodology. It’s helping kids to be saints. It’s helping them to love learning and reading, to develop social skills, and to mature. Our many varied saints remind us that these qualities can be

inculcated in any environment. Loving each child as an individual, and determining what

works best for him or her is the best way to get them to that holy finish line.

Casey Chalk

<https://www.crisismagazine.com/2020/homeschooling-in-the-age-of-covid>

## Putting the ‘Loco’ In Loco Parentis

*In loco parentis* means “in the place of the parents.” It is an old legal concept that once had a venerable place in Western law.

The doctrine of *in loco parentis* was invoked when people or institutions had to act in the place of parents. Schools, for example, were deemed to share in a parent’s tutelary and disciplinary roles. When a child was injured and taken to a hospital requiring emergency treatment, care was provided *in loco parentis*. The hospital first made every reasonable effort to contact the parents and ascertain their instructions, but, when push came to emergency room shove, it was a natural and logical assumption that a parent would want his child to get life-saving care in life-threatening circumstances. Likewise, back in the quaint old times when even college dormitories were sexually segregated, the justification for it was that the university was acting *in loco parentis*: if mom and dad didn’t let their daughter have a boy in her room all night, neither should her college.

Behind the notion of *in loco parentis* stood certain, self-evident assumptions: that the person with primary care, concern, and responsibility for a child was the child’s parent; that the parent-child bond was primary and unique; and that those who acted *in loco parentis* did so on behalf of parents, whose primacy was just that—primary. Others did not have an inherent right to intrude or substitute their judgment for the parents’ judgment.

Also underlying the classical notion of *in loco parentis* was natural law. The assumptions of what a parent would want (or not want) were consistent with the primacy of the parental role because of the unique relationship of parent and child as

well as the understanding that parents’ choices occurred against the backdrop of an objective moral order. In other words, parents wanted “what was best for their child” when “best” had a content and was not made up by every parent at whim. That is why, even in extreme cases like child neglect or abuse, parental rights had first to be suspended before the state could swoop in.

Ah, but I reminiscence. As we recently learned from Harvard Law Professor Elizabeth Bartholet, we’re in a brave new world.

The immediate source of controversy was an article Bartholet wrote for the *Arizona Law Review*, part of the recommended readings for a June Harvard conference on homeschooling. Bartholet attacks homeschooling as a “danger” that puts children “at risk.” After throwing out various strawmen—domestic abuse, parents who cannot teach their children—she finally comes to the nub of her position why the American legal default ought to prohibit homeschooling: homeschooling might deny a child’s “right to exposure to alternate views.”

*National Review* writer John Hirschauer rightly exposed what’s irritating Bartholet. Would she demand, in the name of a child’s “right to exposure to alternate views,” that a kid being raised by absolutely secular parents and being sent to secular schools would have to spend six months in some monastery school somewhere to gain “exposure to alternate views”? The answer is obvious.

Hirschauer rightly argues that what Bartholet et al. claim is not even a “right”

but an “obligation” for exposure to secular viewpoints. Bartholet and company are advancing an audacious claim: not only does society have an obligation to be value neutral (itself an arguable claim) but that every child must be “exposed” to that same dictatorship of relativism, and that mothers and fathers who fail to do so are negligent parents for whom society must act in loco parentis to prevent asserted harms to the child.

Except that here *in loco parentis* does not mean in place of the parents as the primary guardians of the child, but in lieu of them.

To justify this unprecedented power grab, Bartholet brands as “dangerous” the notion that “parents should have monopoly control over children’s lives, development, and experience. That parents who are committed to beliefs and values counter to those of the larger society are entitled to bring their children up in isolation, so as to help ensure that they will replicate the parents’ views and lifestyle choices.” Fellow anti-homeschooling panelist James Dwyer, Professor of Law at William and Mary, goes further, appearing to assert that the “reason parent-child relationships exist is because the State confers legal parenthood.”

Well, Professor Bartholet, nobody is asserting that parents have a “monopoly” over their children’s lives, and in the modern world that is well-nigh impossible. On the other hand, be honest that you are asserting a right to subvert “parents’ views and lifestyle choices.” As a law professor, you know that the courts have generally protected them (see, for example, *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, nullifying Wisconsin compulsory school laws vis-à-vis Amish who did not want to enroll their children in high school). You know that these are long-established precedents. So, you admit that it’s okay

when a couple of Amish in Pennsylvania or Wisconsin go off on their own, but you will not tolerate Christians in general walking out on post-Christian society. And, Professor Dwyer, you are utterly wrong: parenthood is not merely a legal construct, and parents will rightly fight any attempt by you to reduce it to only or primarily that.

The Sexual Revolution is obviously percolating behind all this. Don’t be surprised that Dwyer believes that parenthood is essentially a legal construct. When, in the wake of *Roe et al. v. Wade*, Missouri sought to create some balance by insisting that the father of an unborn child had a say concerning abortion, the Supreme Court in 1976 struck that law down. What intrigues me was the majority’s assertion that a father’s consent could not be demanded because *Roe* had established that states had no “veto power” over abortion and so could not “delegate” it to fathers (428 US 69). Do you get that, dad? Your interest in your child is “delegated” by your state.

Abortion is elsewhere behind the erosion of parental rights, in light of the fact that parents have essentially been stripped of a consent role vis-à-vis a minor’s abortion and, in many places, they are even deprived of notification—i.e., being told—about a minor’s abortion.

Bartholet, Dwyer, et al. are very much on the cusp of a new push against parental rights, also driven by the Sexual Revolution. When the Supreme Court ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that homosexual “marriage” was constitutionally guaranteed, it had to address the claim of states that sexual differentiation was essential to marriage because marriage could be procreative. The Court got around that objection by asserting that marriage and

parenthood were two completely separate things.

Now, however, naturally sterile homosexual “spouses” are claiming a right to children, on the grounds that Obergefell assures them of the rights and privileges of married life, including procreation. In order to advance that claim, the law must be blind to biology as a factor in parenthood, and the most cursory review of bioethics literature shows very much a trend in that direction. Biology alone should mean nothing. Paradoxically, just as in ancient Rome a child was not a father’s until he “adopted” it (allowing for discard with impunity of females and handicapped children), so the theory of “parenthood” percolating

John M. Grondelski

<https://www.crisismagazine.com/2020/putting-the-loco-in-loco-parentis>

underneath the homeschooling issue is really that “every child is your child by an act of will and social consent.” Now it not only “takes a village to raise a child,” but apparently you need the village elders’ consent.

The controversy over homeschooling is merely the tip of an iceberg. What’s under the water is far more interesting—and dangerous to parental rights—than the immediate controversy. Catholics clearly have a stake in this new *in loco parentis* because it’s really a warmed-over version of the old *patria potestas*, except that now Caesar is the ultimate father.

## Education for Darkness

Pity today's college teachers, especially those at the rank of assistant professor. After years of graduate study, they were fortunate enough to find a college teaching job. Soon, however, they discovered that the subjects and courses they love to teach must be made "user-friendly."

This means emphasis, primarily, upon getting good student evaluations. One usually receives such evaluations if he or she assigns very light and "engaging" (preferably funny, and certainly not intellectually challenging) readings, uses a great deal of audio-visual material and "social media," seasons lectures with multiple jokes, and, naturally, gives very high grades. On this view, there are, of course, no failing students—only failing teachers.

But suppose Assistant Professor Jones is unwilling to play the role of academic charlatan. Suppose Assistant Professor Jones loves his discipline and his students so much that he wants them genuinely to learn and, further, that he recognizes that the students who do not sow will not reap. Consequently, he assigns substantial serious reading, dares to quiz the students, has demanding standards, holds the students to those standards, and—gasp!—fails the students who, well, fail.

What will become of Jones? First, his colleagues will shun him. Doesn't Jones recognize that, unless he's teaching at an opulent college, the place which pays his salary (and the salaries of his colleagues) may go out of business unless students are kept there (and never, well, hardly ever, flunked out)? That rascal Jones is taking the bread out of the mouths of his colleagues.

Grade inflation is a thing of the past. The "gentleman's C" of yesteryear is long gone. The grade of A minus is tantamount to the C or D grade of two generations ago. The student who "earns" a B+ (a terribly low grade, after all) will complain bitterly that he or she has been grievously mistreated (and now may not get into law school, leading to a ruined life—all because of Jones).

I was once censured by a colleague in Vermont who instructed me that grading is fascist, an anachronistic power ploy by oppressors (that would be "teachers" in my antediluvian vocabulary) to dominate free-thinking students. By the way, the best short readings I know about in connection to this are by Steven M. Cahn, *The Eclipse of Excellence and Saints and Scamps: Ethics in Academia*.

Some of the students will wage a vendetta against Jones. Jones's student evaluations will be just plain awful. These unflattering, if not odious and manifestly unfair, critiques (often available to the world on-line) will, in turn, give the department leader and the dean ammunition for denying Jones promotion and tenure.

It won't matter too much, though, for the number of students who enroll in Jones's courses will be shrinking dramatically. Jones will be dismissed as an elitist with a very small group of student fanatics who take his courses.

Gresham's *Law of Economics* holds that bad money drives out good. It has a parallel in academic life: incompetent, uncaring, and lazy professors who despise teaching students tend to drive out the devoted, disciplined, and energetic professors who love teaching students.

What does the bachelor of arts degree mean today? Does it signify many hundreds of hours of lucubration in which students pored over classic texts; wrote scores of critically reviewed papers; participated in dozens of lively and stimulating seminars, exploring the great and perennial ideas; enjoyed numerous “bull sessions” with friends, examining the point and purpose of life; attended many campus lectures; and visited art galleries and historical museums whenever feasible?

Imagine all this being done on a beautiful campus where reverence and piety are much more than punchlines for off-color jokes. And again, imagine that the faculty and staff at this institution actually understand two things: First, that contemporary college education must be a disinfectant for the intellectual and moral plague around us. Second, that an education which denies, denigrates, or disparages God is not just shallow but is, in fact, a moral abattoir.

What matters, I think, far more than what the student will study (excuse the old-fashioned notion that college is about studying serious subjects in a serious way) is where he or she will study. Parents who would never permit their children to consume poison will imprudently (the kindest adverb I can use here) pack off their sons and daughters to colleges which offer, in effect, toxic teaching, leading to the moral corruption of the young men and women for whom genuine education should be spiritually as well as academically inspiring.

When colleges re-open after the coronavirus closings, many college administrators will seize upon the recent experience to suggest even more internet teaching in the future. Why, they will ask, have so many faculty members? Why have so many small classes? Why have such concern for professor-

student classroom interaction when the internet permits and encourages economies of such gargantuan scale, ludicrously lauded as “personal contact”?

Electronic “education” will become practically irresistible, and any Professor Jones who is so archaic as to express doubt about the brave new world of education by electrons will not long endure on campus. It was President James Garfield who once defined the good college as “Mark Hopkins [the great 19th century American educator] on one end of a log and a student on the other.” Log, not web.

I refer to “Gresham’s Law of Modern Education”—that morally an academically defective “education” drives out reverential and substantial learning. This signifies corruption in the higher learning, a corruption which has surely affected every aspect of life in our country. There will be no restoration of virtue until we educate for light, by which I mean, à la Plato, calling students (our future doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, mechanics, merchants, and even entertainers) out of the ethical darkness—the filth—which surrounds us and to which we have become accustomed.

The only hope of enlightenment we have is a handful of small Catholic colleges intent upon the preservation of the Faith during these times of barbarism and pervasive evil. Thus the adjuration of the Catechism, in which we read that “the education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings” (1783).

We are effectively “educating” today for darkness and not for light; we are not creating men and women of vision and

virtue (for we no longer have any consensus at all about those desiderata); and, as Matthew tells us, “if your eyes are no good, your body will be in darkness. So if then the light in you is darkness, how terribly dark it will be!” (Mt 6:23)

We pray and hope for a good and great society. But our “eyes are no good”: we no longer see truth and beauty and goodness. We disdain them, for we deny their Creator. Scripture is clear that repudiation of God has consequences which devastatingly ripple through our personal, political, and public lives. The heart of all education is the First Commandment. Get that wrong, and all else collapses into moral miasma.

We churn out thousands of graduates, however, who do not know that they do not know, whose knowledge is both deficient and defective, and whose learning cannot help them to differentiate between good and evil, between virtue and vice, or between what is sacred and what is profane. With

Deacon James H. Toner

<https://www.crisismagazine.com/2020/education-for-darkness>

leaders such as these—given to our society by an academic world now utterly desacralized—we are failing but think ourselves flourishing; we are wicked but think ourselves worthy; we are reprobate but think ourselves redeemed.

We are too stupefied by the Huxleyan soma of modern education to understand that we are again building the Tower of Babel, thinking of ourselves as brilliant architectural innovators.

It’s all right, though. Rumor has it that Professor Jones has been fired. Silly man! He actually believed that when we “think for ourselves” we should form our judgments by the best that has been thought and said, that conscience means both substantial information and wise formation; and that genuine education is about knowing and applying the permanent things which transcend the moment and the emotion. That moth-eaten Jones was never cut out for teaching, was he?

## **Many Causes to Recent Decline in American Religiosity; But U.S. More Religious Now Than at Founding**

While American religiosity may be in rapid decline, a new study reveals that the United States remains more religious than many other countries and is presently more religious than at many other times in its own history.

Further, the study posits that the social, political, and legal environment in the country has become less hospitable to all religions over the last 75 years and argues that decreased religiosity can be attributed to more secularized education and a decline in marriage.

The study, [“Promise and Peril: The History of American Religiosity and its Recent Decline”](#) was released on April 30 by the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and is authored by Lyman Stone, an AEI adjunct fellow and a research fellow at the Institute for Family Studies.

Stone says that America’s decline in religiosity is not evidence of a change in personal preferences, but rather a number of specific policy choices.

In the realm of education, he notes that the rise of the Blaine Amendments in the 19th century, which prohibited direct government aid to religious educational institutions, greatly contributed to widespread loss of religious influence through schools.

Blaine Amendments, which began as an effort by Protestants to limit Catholic influence on society, specifically through education, “began as discrimination ended as secularization,” writes Stone.

“Today, they are used as catchall tools for the government at many levels to ensure the

secular character of public education,” he writes.

“Research is highly supportive of the idea that more years of education in a religious environment strengthens associated religious commitment, especially for children whose parents are also connected to the same religious body,” Stone told Crux.

In the study he notes that this is especially true for Jewish and Catholic families, and that “Catholic schools have been clearly shown to at least boost religious observance among Catholic youth until their 20s.”

Today, the study argues that the generations that attended public schools after the 1940’s “spent much of their life in schools that were far more secularized, and these are the generations during which religiosity has declined.”

As for marriage and family life, the study posits that marriage itself leads to greater religiosity, as does having children — yet Stone links education to a decline in marriage, noting that education takes much longer to complete today, leading to a delay in marriage.

“Increasingly secularized education serves to directly reduce religiosity as schools provide a different set of values and life orientations than parents might,” he writes. “Secondly, as educational enrollment represents an ever-expanding share of young American’s lives, marriage is increasingly postponed.”

As marriage is delayed, he writes, Americans are forming non-religious habits and fewer attend church services.

Prior to World War II, more than 90 percent of Americans identified with one particular religion or another; now it is closer to half. Stone also chronicles a decline in church attendance from 50 percent in the 1960's to about 35 percent.

Yet despite declines over the last fifty years, which he says is “striking in its speed and uniformity across different measures of religiosity,” he contrasts that with the historical record of the 1780's at the start of the American experiment where “probably just a third of Americans were members in any religious body, and just a fifth could be found at church on a given Sunday,” arguing that by those standards, America is more religious today than at its founding. Further, in terms of actually attending worship services in developed nations, Stone shows that only in Israel, Italy, and South

Africa are rates of attendance at weekend services comparable to the United States.

Looking ahead, Stone says religious leaders in the United States are at a “crossroads” with shrinking religious attendance and cultural and social headwinds in a climate where “religious interest groups have made political enemies fighting costly battles around issues of sexual identity in particular.”

While Stone says that programs such as school vouchers, changes in tax laws that penalize marriage, and policies that support child rearing could help possibly strengthen attachments to religion, but whether alterations in the policy choices of the past can help reverse the decline of religiosity, remains uncertain.

Christopher White

<https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-usa/2020/05/many-causes-to-recent-decline-in-american-religiosity-but-u-s-more-religious-now-than-at-founding/>

## Quarantine and Zoom lessons Have Taught Me The Value of In-Person Catholic Schools

My children's parochial school is about as low-tech as it is presently possible for an institution to be. That has actually been a good thing in an era of "[distance learning](#)." It was obvious from the start of the [coronavirus pandemic](#) that the students could not be expected to attend a battery of Zoom classes or watch online lectures for hours. Some families probably have more students than internet devices in their homes, so our school kept things simple. Materials have been provided, but deadlines have been few and lenient. Teachers have been available but not nagging. Parents have been trusted to make decisions about what their children most need.

The new routine is stressful for me, but my kids seem fine. They miss their friends, but they are not despondent or wracked with anxiety. I am especially grateful at this time to have five sons who can keep one another company as they fish, build models and play backyard baseball. Things could be so much worse. For many, they are.

What we miss are the people. There is an energy, optimism and sense of purpose to our school community that seems to keep life moving forward.

Having said that, I will be thrilled when the school reopens. It's not that the boys' education is running aground. We are keeping up, more or less, with the curricula. What we miss are the people. There is an energy, optimism and sense of purpose to our school community that seems to keep life moving forward. In the mid-afternoon, I glance at the clock and feel sad that it is not necessary to drive over and pick up the boys. The school is our village, and we are incomplete without it.

Distance learning is kind of a drag for me, especially because it forces me to push important tasks to evenings and weekends, when I would like to be enjoying my kids. Our time together goes to grammar and spelling instead of hikes and board games. That's a bad trade, but at least I can teach them to diagram sentences. I cannot single-handedly create a Christian community where my sons receive personal attention from many different adults, each with their own strengths and insights. I cannot supply dozens of playmates from a range of different backgrounds. I can tell them that they are members of the body of Christ, but I can't help them to experience this in the way that they do in Catholic school.

I can tell them that they are members of the body of Christ, but I can't help them to experience this in the way that they do in Catholic school.

Catholic schools across the nation have been closing for some years now, for reasons that are too easy to understand. They can be expensive, and families can't always justify the cost. Public schools and homeschooling present more affordable options, which may enable parents to save something for college or for summer camp, music lessons or an art class. Parishes, too, must consider their priorities, with some concluding that they do not have enough children left to justify the cost of a school.

Financial realities are what they are, but we must understand what we are losing if we allow the church to ease quietly out of education. One way or another, most Catholic kids will probably still learn their ABCs. But they may not learn what it means

to be a valued, contributing member of a Christian community.

Catholic schools can pay rich dividends when young people are leaving the church in large numbers. These schools support families and preserve our Catholic tradition while also giving us reason to look forward with hope. When we invest in our schools, we invest in the future of our church.

Sometimes school closures are inevitable, but that is not always the case. Just over a decade ago, our own school was wrestling with dwindling enrollment and an uncertain future. The transformation of St. Agnes is something of [a Cinderella story](#), involving a visionary pastor, generous local philanthropists and a robust alliance with the [Institute for Catholic Liberal Education](#). Our school was undeniably blessed, and

Rachel Lu

<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/05/06/catholic-education-school-quarantine-zoom-online-coronavirus>

others may find it difficult to spy such a bright future for themselves, especially when so many people are struggling to meet basic needs. It may be, though, that now is precisely the time to protect our educational institutions as the best means of preparing our young people for the daunting challenges ahead.

The coronavirus has thrown both schools and parents into a new situation. Some of the challenges are temporary. Others will persist. As we think about reopening, rebuilding and perhaps reforming our post-lockdown world, we should try to remember the lessons the pandemic has taught us about what we can do as parents and what we cannot. Home is where the heart is, but sometimes it takes a Catholic school to raise Catholic child.

## Distance Education: It's a Long Way from Real Education

*Education has as much to do with communicating a style of life we share with others as it does the communication of bare "information."*

Some people ask me what I think about teaching online. I ask them how they like watching Mass online. "Really, that bad?" they reply. "No, actually, if you can believe it," I tell them, "it is even worse."

If nothing else, one thing this lockdown should have taught us is that the promises people made (and are still making) about online "distance education" were always bogus. Yes, we've all gone online now, but that was never the question. We always knew that technically, we could deliver class material online. And of course there are some things we already do deliver online. I make a course web site for each class. I post review questions there and links to important readings or interesting web sites. I assign them to watch interesting movies or documentaries I know are available online. I am pleased to use whatever technology will help me teach my students better.

So let's be clear: Can technology be a boon to education? Certainly. But is online education a good replacement for in-person classes? There isn't a student left in my university who suffers from that delusion any longer. It isn't so much that I'm feeling replaced or that my job is in danger. The problem is that my students hate getting their education online and not in-person. And there is no true teacher I know who doesn't hate it too.

You may have read a host of articles about how priests are missing their congregations. It is at least equally true of teachers. Teachers didn't choose this vocation to do Zoom meetings or post videos online. We

chose teaching because we love and enjoy students.

### *Intellectual Development*

But there is something more at stake than merely teachers feeling lonely. No, what is at stake is the quality of your son or daughter's education. And to clarify the point, I will make use of a famous, now-classic discussion of the levels of intellectual development.

In 1956, University of Chicago educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom published his famous hierarchy of six levels of cognitive skill in learning. He did a subsequent study on the "affective domain" — the domain related to the passions and emotions, which are equally important for learning — but we'll leave that aside for the moment. The six levels in what is often referred to as "Bloom's Taxonomy" are these.

1. Remembering
2. Understanding
3. Applying
4. Analyzing
5. Synthesizing
6. Evaluating

Now we needn't linger over whether Prof. Bloom's specific taxonomy is entirely adequate (it's not, because even Prof. Bloom realized the affective dimension of education — getting students to care about the material — is missing from the taxonomy) or whether there is a cognitive hierarchy of the sort he envisions, with remembering at the bottom and evaluating at the top. Clearly you can't

apply, analyze, or evaluate information if you can't remember, recognize, or locate it. And to the argument over whether "creating" is really a more sophisticated cognitive act than, say, "evaluating," I can only say: maybe, maybe not.

But let's put all those questions aside for the moment. Consider how many of those key educational goals can be accomplished virtually? Most online education is done asynchronously. The professor "records" something or puts something online, and the students do it when they have time — "at their own pace," as is sometimes said, or "at their leisure." One result, not sufficiently discussed, is that many students who start such "distance" courses never finish them. They have no motivation to do the work day-in and day-out. For that, you need teachers and fellow students "connecting" us to the class and holding us accountable.

But another problem is this: You can get a computer to grade multiple choice tests and quizzes, but little more. Can a computer gauge whether a student has properly analyzed evidence or applied principles to specific cases or contrasted one case accurately with an entirely different one? Can a computer argue, assess, defend, estimate, judge, rate, support, value, or evaluate? If not, then it cannot teach a student to do so either, nor can it judge whether a student has done so wisely or not. Does anyone think you can coach a winning high school football team or baseball team virtually, online? Or does excellence in these areas require a coach to be present to watch, correct, and coach, which is something more than merely giving information about the game? To the degree that teaching is more than just another type of "information delivery system," to the extent that it requires coaching,

encouragement, judgment, wisdom, and experience, it cannot be done by an asynchronous "system."

If you want your son or daughter to think clearly and gain something other than a rudimentary knowledge of an area, he or she will need to be taught by an actual human being and, for the most part, that teaching will need to be done in person.

Why "in person" rather than "online" in a chat room or over a Zoom connection? Well, for much the same reason you would not ask a woman for her hand in marriage or tell a spouse her husband has died in a chat room or on a Zoom channel. Because human beings are fundamentally embodied beings, and tele-presence diminishes elements crucial to the kinds of human communication needed for important human relations.

Indeed, for the best refutation of the pretensions of internet "distance" education I know in a short eminently readable book, allow me to recommend the late Hubert Dreyfus's *On the Internet*.

### ***Embodied Education versus Virtual Tele-Presence***

"At every stage of skill acquisition beyond the first," argues Dreyfus, "involvement and mattering are essential." If students don't care, if the topic does not matter to them (which is usually something they "catch" from the teacher's love and devotion to the subject), then they will not learn. "Only emotional, involved, embodied human beings can become proficient and expert," writes Dreyfus. "So, while they are teaching specific skills, teachers must also be incarnating and encouraging involvement." Education has as much to do with communicating a style of life we share

with others as it does the communication of bare “information.”

Another thing lost in “distance” learning is shared risk. When “the teacher and the class are present together,” writes Dreyfus, “both assume a risk that is not there why they are not interacting — the student risks being called on to demonstrate his knowledge of the subject of the lecture, and the teacher risks being asked a question he cannot answer.” Every good teacher knows that he learns as much or more from the students as the students learn from him. A “good” university, it is said, is one that has teachers and learners, but a “great” university has only learners. Remove the students from the classroom, and you remove one of the most important experiences that makes teaching interesting and helps teachers improve their teaching. They learn which approaches work and which don’t, what questions need to be asked in particular situations, what looks suggests students are puzzled as opposed to merely processing the information.

Dreyfus shares the report of a friend whose observations are borne out by my own experiences and, I imagine, those of thousands of other teachers now forced to try to “educate” online.

“When a student asks a question,” reports this professor, “I can see, peripherally, other students nodding their heads in agreement with the question. This would indicate that the student’s question is important to the rest of the class so I will take more care in answering it fully. At the other end of the attention spectrum, I can often see, again, peripherally, when students are bored or sleeping or chatting amongst themselves. This means I may have to pick up the pace of the lecture and try to regain their attention. In teaching students at a distance, I can’t control where the camera points and

what it zooms in on, the way I control what attracts my experienced attention when the class is in front of me.

Finally, much of my sense of the immediate presence of the students in a class comes from my ability to make eye contact with them. My experience with ... computers is that you cannot make eye contact over a visual channel.... To look into another person’s eyes, I would have to see the eyes of the other person since, to do that, I would have to turn from the camera to the student’s image on the screen. You can look into the camera or look at the screen, but you can’t do both.

I would add to this observation the additional problem of trying to “see” all my students when they are little more than little individual heads in a Brady Bunch set of blocks on a screen. Some students don’t even turn on their video, in which case they are simply a white name on a black screen. Are they even listening behind that black curtain? Have they simply turned on the computer and walked away? Who can tell? There is no way we can, so it is easy to stop caring about them as individuals. And that is just depressing.

“What is also lost, even in an interactive video, is a sense of the context.” says the professor, “In teaching, the context is the mood in the room. In general, mood governs how people make sense of what they are experiencing. Our body is what enables us to be attuned to the mood. If you were a tele-spectator at a party, would you be able to share the mood? Whereas ... if you are present at a party, it is hard to resist sharing the elation or depression of the occasion. Likewise, there is always some shared mood in the classroom and it determines what matters — what is experienced as exciting or boring, salient or

marginal, relevant or irrelevant. The right mood keeps the students involved by giving them a sense of what is important.”

What is lost is the possibility of seeing my students and controlling my perspective of them — watching, listening, and feeling their mood — so as to get a clear sense of whether they are engaged and grasping the material or not. There are good reasons why nearly every school in the country has gone to Pass/Fail. No one expects students to do as well or learn as much from online education as they do from actual education. And the continual reports of widespread depression among students should be a cold slap in the face to those who think education can simply go online.

So, yes, you can learn to fix your blender or patch a hole in your drywall from a video. But you cannot learn how to deal with all the complexities that arise if your blender is not exactly like the one in the video or if behind that wall you find things the makers of the video did not expect. You can learn to bind books from a video, but you cannot learn to read Plato or Cicero or Jane Austen from a video.

Can you get some “tips” and useful “rules-of-thumb” from videos, illustrated visually? Sure. Can you learn how to apply those rules-of-thumb” to particular situations and figure out when to throw those rules out and start afresh when an entirely unexpected situation occurs? No. For more on this, I recommend Matthew Crawford’s *Shop Class as Soulcraft* or the discussion of practical reasoning in James C. Scott’s *Seeing Like a State*.

You can learn to use a fire hose from a video, but you cannot learn to be a firefighter from a video. You can learn to shoot foul shots from a video, but you

cannot learn to be a great basketball player from a video. You can learn to fill a beaker with liquid from a video, but you cannot learn to be a discerning, creative scientist from a video. Nor can you learn how to analyze bad arguments in contemporary politics from a video or how to make good arguments and express them clearly in writing from a video.

### ***Dubious Goals***

Allow me a final caveat. There is no need to write and ask whether “teaching” three hundred students in a large lecture hall is much better. I would argue for various reasons that it is somewhat better, but not much better. Should it be done? In my opinion, no. But once an institution has bloated itself with expensive mid-level managers who do no actual teaching, and with expensive “research professors” who want to do as little teaching as possible because publishing (no matter how empty or useless), or joining the ever-expanding ranks of “the administration,” where salaries are five or six time higher than those of even the highest paid faculty members, are the sole roads to advancement in the modern academy, then institutions will have little or no money left to hire more actual teaching faculty members and little motivation to do so because it will do nothing to increase their “prestige,” which is what their customers seem to want more than anything else and will pay ludicrous amounts of money to get.

So, yes, there are arguments for putting 300 students in a classroom for an “intro” course, just as there are arguments for doing courses “online.” But they all come down to this: once an institution has squandered its heritage and sold its soul for a mess of pottage — once it has lost its vision of what an educational institution is supposed to

be for — then the arguments over “second best” and over “what we need to do now,” all based on the presumption that actual person-to-person education is now no more than a mere “ideal,” will lead to all manner of bizarre suggestions, many oddly expensive, even though the purported goal is to save money. All you really need for a first-rate education is first-rate teachers with some interested students and a pile of first-rate books and some basic laboratory equipment. Everything else is increasingly expensive icing on an increasingly less nutritious and insubstantial bit of sponge cake. But no administrator asks the faculty’s views on such matters any more.

How many educational institutions do you imagine are having faculty members make educational videos of dubious quality for their university to market and monetize in the coming months and years for use by their ever-expanding pool of adjunct and part-time faculty? Watch for it. If the advertisement says preeminent Prof. X teaches a course, be sure that Prof. X is the one who shows up when your son or daughter has a question. If not, Prof. X is not teaching the course. He or she is no

Dr. Randall B. Smith

<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2020/05/12/distance-education-its-a-long-way-from-real-education/>

more “teaching” your son or daughter than the actors in a movie are “informing” them of anything. So, as much as many administrators may be licking their chops, eager to continue down the road of “distance education,” just remember: this desire has everything to do with their budget concerns and nothing whatsoever to do with your convenience or giving a quality education to your son or daughter.

Once the pandemic has subsided and it is safe to go back into the classroom, here would be my advice: Look for a college or university where your son or daughter will be taught in their entry-level classes (lecture, discussion, and labs) by a full-time tenured or tenure-track professor. If you wouldn’t allow your child to be treated by a part-time, “adjunct” physician, I have no idea why you would entrust his or her heart, mind, and soul to a part-time, “adjunct” doctor of theology, philosophy, or science. Colleges and universities won’t reform unless concerned parents force them to do so. Don’t let them sell you a Gremlin, or a video of a happy family driving a Gremlin, when what you’re paying for should be enough to get you an actual BMW.

## Msgr. Farrell Students Holding Virtual Visits With Nursing Home Residents

Nikolas Greenberg learned a common interest helps to close a generation gap between a high school teenager and nursing home resident.

Greenberg, 17, is the founder of Msgr. Farrell High School's Visiting Brother Society whose mission is to establish and build friendships with residents of Eger Health Care and Rehabilitation Center on Staten Island.

"I learned he liked to travel, and I like to travel," Greenberg told CNY of Dominic, the Eger resident with whom he's paired.

"We had a shared interest and it helped close the generation gap."

Speaking of the Msgr. Farrell student, Dominic said, "It's been a great pleasure to meet someone at 17 years old who has filled my spirits. It is gracious of him to befriend me."

Greenberg came up with the idea after participating with other students on Staten Island in a project for the Order of Malta in which students visited residents at Eger in 2018.

This was his original plan for the Visiting Brother Society, but the coronavirus pandemic changed this and students now have virtual visits with residents twice weekly.

There were 10 Msgr. Farrell students and 10 Eger residents enjoying virtual visits through FaceTime and Skype. Greenberg said three more students at the boys' high school have joined the society and were waiting to be paired up with residents.

The students and residents discuss a range of topics such as current events like the coronavirus pandemic, how the students are continuing their studies at home, daily activities, family and common interests.

"It's nice to see them face to face," Greenberg said. "It's like a real meeting."

"It's something that was needed and is needed."

Greenberg said his faith, family and Catholic school education inspired him to start the society.

"It had a huge impact," he said. "You learn a lot about Jesus (at Msgr. Farrell) and the things He did. It inspires me to do things for others. I see Him in everyone."

Stephanie Berman, director of therapeutic recreation at Eger, said the staff at Eger would ask residents beforehand if they'd like to be paired up with a student. During the pandemic, visitors are not permitted into nursing homes, but can have virtual visits with family and friends.

"The residents love it," said Miss Berman of the Visiting Brother Society. "It's someone to talk to. They really enjoy it. They have smiles on their faces."

Father Jeff Pomeisl teaches religion to freshmen and sophomores at Msgr. Farrell, where he's also school chaplain. He serves as the moderator for the society.

"The amazing thing is that the society doesn't stand out that much," Father Pomeisl said. "To outsiders it is pretty special to hear about teenage boys doing this stuff, but for us it's just what we do at Farrell. One of our school mottos is a

paraphrase of Christ's words: do the right thing simply because it's the right thing to do.

“One thing I enjoy is that I don't have to do that much! Which means that I trust my boys to get it done—and they do.”

Lou Tobacco, president and CEO of Msgr. Farrell, added, “It is our mission at Monsignor Farrell to develop the whole man, a person aware of his own God-given talents, confident in his abilities, and oriented to the service of others. We educate them to be a Faithful Man, *Vir Fidelis*. The Visiting Brother Society is true faith in action, selfless service to others. I am so proud of this student-led and run initiative.”

Dan Pietrafesa

<http://cny.org/stories/msgr-farrell-students-holding-virtual-visits-with-nursing-home-residents,20973?>

Greenberg is graduating from Msgr. Farrell this year and plans to study biomedical engineering at Rowan University in New Jersey.

Greenberg, Father Pomeisl and Miss Berman believe the Visiting Brother Society will continue in the 2020-2021 school year. One day, they hope the students will visit the Eger residents in person when the pandemic ends.

“Seeing how everyone responded and their enthusiasm, I think it will continue and I want to help it continue to grow,” Greenberg said. “I don't want the relationship with the resident to go away and I feel it will continue.”

## Pierce Brosnan Credits His Catholicism for Help with Trials of Life

*James Bond actor reiterates his love for the faith.*

Pierce Brosnan might be the best-known James Bond, having portrayed the British spy in four films between 1995 and 2002. He's also known as someone in Hollywood who's not afraid to proclaim his Catholic faith.

His latest profession came the other day on Ireland's Late Late Show, when he told host Ryan Tubridy that his Catholic faith has kept him in "good stead" throughout several difficult times in his life.

Brosnan turns 67 on May 16.

The actor-turned-activist recalled growing up in County Meath, where he attended Catholic schools.

"I was brought up an Irish Catholic, which has kept me in good stead throughout the trials and tribulations of my life," he said, on the RTÉ broadcast.

The former 007 was discussing an Irish charity, Pieta House, which helps people who are tempted by suicide. Brosnan advised those going through

emotional trials to "stay in contact with friends, reach out to people and if you have faith, some prayers in your heart, God in your heart and entrust God in yourself."

He also discussed the key to having a long and happy marriage.

"It's constant work, supporting and loving each other," he said. He and his wife, Keely, recently celebrated their 26th anniversary.

"We have been blessed with a good friendship in life but always solving problems because there is always going to be problems, so you have to know how to solve them and get on with it," he said.

Brosnan's comments echoed comments he made in 2014, when asked what helped him through the deaths of his first wife, Cassandra Harris, in 1991 and his adopted daughter, Charlotte, in 2013, both from ovarian cancer.

"I would say faith, being Irish, being Catholic, it's ingrained in my DNA," he [said](#).

John Burger

<https://aleteia.org/2020/05/15/pierce-brosnan-credits-his-catholicism-for-help-with-trials-of-life/>

## May You Live In Interesting Times

There is an old Chinese curse that goes, “May you live in interesting times.” Well, we are cursed indeed. Though many have suffered grievously from this virus, you, graduating seniors, whether from high school or college, make up your own category of sufferers. Who could have imagined it would end this way? Some of you are perhaps nineteen years old, the age St. Joan of Arc was when she “graduated” from prison in the month of May. After fighting hard for the glory of God and country, she probably didn’t expect her adventure to end the way it did either—as the victim of a world gone mad. “Interesting” is probably not the word that comes to mind.

You have my sincere sympathy. I know how important and profound a graduation can be. I graduated from small, Catholic schools with vibrant communities. I remember graduating from high school, feeling as though the world was over, as I gripped the shoulders of my classmates—some of my best friends to this day—and sang “The Parting Glass.” It was a moment that had a deep impact on me. After four wonderful years at college, I packed up my ragged books feeling dead inside and, interestingly enough, spent a night with my parents at the nearby house of a distant relative who had just died. I remember trying to sleep on a couch in that dark house and seeing the old woman’s body, glowing like the moon on a cold night, in the room across from me where my mother kept vigil. I felt deeply sad—not for her, but for me, of course. My sense of loss was weirdly augmented in that house of death, but at least it was accompanied by a sense of accomplishment. You may not have that same mixed sense of accomplishment and loss—you may only have loss—a harder lesson, but no less

valuable, perhaps even more valuable, all things considered.

Make no bones about it, you seniors have suffered a sudden tragedy, with friends and endeavors that seemingly vanished overnight with a “zoom.” Your graduation is here, and yet you don’t have what you wanted, whereas, what you do have is, perhaps, more of a life-changing experience than most graduations offer. At least it is more lifelike. And that is where it gets a little interesting. If your graduation should signalize or cement anything, it is your readiness for life with all its twists and turns. Many of you may feel your graduation motto is *de profundis clamavi*, crying out from the depths, instead of the classic motto of *duc in altum*, put out into the deep. What can you do? Sharpen your sense of humor. It is the best defense against the inevitable sadness in life. As Æneas said to his men after their shipwreck, “Call up your courage again. Dismiss your grief and fear. A joy it will be one day, perhaps, to remember even this.” An interesting thought to bear in mind.

I would like to share a little story with you that may give you something to consider as you accept the hard reality of not being able to be with your friends and classmates to celebrate a joyful conclusion and culmination of your education. This story tells of an exchange I had with an old friend of mine, who died a sudden death shortly afterwards. It was at a rugby game, close to graduation at the high school his son attended and where I teach. We were standing on the windswept sideline together as we watched the match and he mused about the future, as he would do. Towards the end of the game, he said, “I have to head to my daughter’s beauty pageant now.” I said, “You’re going from a rugby match to a

beauty pageant? That's quite a transition." "There's really not much difference," he said. "One just has more lipstick." Then he said something to this effect, "Life is tough, like rugby, and strange, like a pageant, but, as Plato or someone said somewhere, if you're not happy with what you have, you won't be happy with what you want." He shook my hand and walked away. I never spoke with him again. But I will never forget his last words to me.

They are words that resonate with a real education—and your education is being put to the test with a particular immediacy and intensity. This may not seem very interesting given the pain you are experiencing, but part of the challenge is to see what is interesting in this painful experience. To find philosophical happiness in even this is a mark of wisdom and holiness. Such happiness cannot be taught but it can be the result of good teaching—as Oscar Wilde said, "nothing that is worth knowing can be taught."

St. Augustine wrote in his *Confessions*: "The happy life is this—to rejoice to thee, in thee, and for thee." Rejoice and be glad. Strive to be happy even today, even now. Even this may one day, perhaps, be a joy to remember. St. Thomas Aquinas called happiness the end of life; still, there are ends in life. Again, from Æneas to his comrades: "Even here, the world is a world of tears and the burdens of mortality touch the heart." Though loss is inescapable, there is also a sense in which things do not change or even diminish—in the heart of Christ, all things are made new. "Dismiss your fears," Æneas concludes, and so should we.

May 26 is the feast of St. Philip Neri, a man of excellent humor who used to say, "Let me get through today, and I shall not fear tomorrow." If you're not happy with what

you have, you won't be happy with what you want. You went to school to learn how to become saints. And it has ended not with a bang, but a whimper. You are the forgotten class, the class of plague and circumstance, the class that graduated without a graduation. But in losing those worldly trappings you have the opportunity to become small enough to give Christ room to dwell in you.

Embrace your littleness, your Covid obscurity, and let Christ do good things with you. If He was bold enough to become so little to accomplish great things, we must do likewise. Live your life and be happy with what you have. Get up in the morning. Say your prayers. Go to work and to class and to Mass. Be merry, but not flashy. Be joyful, but not wild. Be polite, but not prudish. Put your lamps on lamp stands, remembering always Psalm 115, "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to thy name give glory."

Lift up your hearts, my friends. Be happy with what you have. And know that your efforts to be good in a world gone mad—to go to college, to get a job, to make friends, to fall in love, to get married, to raise a family, to do any such ordinary thing—may make you another St. Joan or St. Philip. You have not had the recognition and the celebration you deserved, but that loss taken well will be a strong sign of the quality of your education as you strike out into the wasteland to build in the chaff and ruin of the times, daring to be normal when all is abnormal, unafraid to be good when it is dangerous to be so, and proud to be and do what God intended you to be and do.

Congratulations on the occasion of your interesting graduation.

*Forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit.*

Sean Fitzpatrick

<https://www.crisismagazine.com/2020/may-you-live-in-interesting-times>

## The Fate of the First Amendment Will Be Decided By These Nine Cases

This month the Little Sisters of the Poor returned to the U.S. Supreme Court, once again defending their right to practice the Catholic Faith by refusing to provide for contraceptives in their health insurance plan.

This is a stark reminder that even years later the Obama administration's assault on religious freedom continues to impact religious organizations. And other serious threats have since emerged.

Catholic educators especially are nervously awaiting court rulings that could have a severe impact on schools and colleges. That's scary, but it's also true that each case presents a new opportunity to re-establish the rights of religious educators under the First Amendment, should judges be so inclined.

Now is a great time for your prayers!

This month the Supreme Court heard arguments regarding the "ministerial exception," a legal principle which prevents courts from interfering with the selection and removal of religious leaders or "ministers." Catholic elementary schools in California are at the center of two cases under review: *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru* and *St. James Catholic School v. Biel*.

Effectively, the ministerial exception means that churches and religious organizations can set their own criteria for choosing, hiring, and firing certain employees with clear religious duties. It is essential that the Catholic Church be permitted, for example, to ordain only men without being sued for sex discrimination, or remove a missionary from a region without the threat of costly litigation.

Any religious organization needs the freedom to apply whatever criteria it deems necessary when choosing people to represent and teach its beliefs. The decision is fundamentally a religious one, and so it cannot be scrutinized by a court without risking government interference in religion and thereby violating the First Amendment.

Nevertheless, the Supreme Court has been cautious about applying the principle. It means that an employee designated a "minister" has no ability to file a discrimination claim, and so there are good reasons to be careful in defining the exception.

In 2012, the Court ruled in *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC* that the ministerial exception could be applied to a teacher who engaged in substantial secular duties but also taught religion and was formally deemed a "minister" by her church. The two new cases concern catechists at Catholic schools.

Under consideration is whether anyone who teaches religion—lay, religious, or clergy—should be under the ministerial exception, regardless of their job title or any formal religious certification as a "minister." A broader question is whether teachers of other academic subjects should fall under the exception because, at least in a Catholic school, all teachers should be teaching the insights of the Catholic Faith as they relate to their subject. Teachers should also be witnessing to the Faith in both word and action, and they should be leading students in prayer.

An amicus brief to the Court prepared by Alliance Defending Freedom—and joined by the Association of Classical Christian Educators, the Association for Biblical

Higher Education, and The Cardinal Newman Society—proposes a simple test for the Court to apply the ministerial exception: identify evidence that an employee of a religious organization substantially engages in religious functions, which are defined by the religious organization in a “good faith” effort to uphold its religious beliefs.

Another case to watch is *InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA v. University of Iowa*, which is now before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit. At issue is the University’s refusal to register a Christian organization, because it would require its leaders to adhere to its religious beliefs.

The case revolves around the ministerial exception, which is of concern to Catholic educators. The Becket Fund is defending the students, and a brief supporting them was filed in March by The Cardinal Newman Society, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

The Supreme Court is expected to rule very soon on whether federal law against sex discrimination can be used to prohibit religious organizations from upholding moral standards on homosexuality and gender. At issue is Title VII, which concerns employment, but educators are nervous because the education laws under Title IX are based upon Title VII’s nondiscrimination language.

The Obama administration tried to force schools and colleges under Title IX to admit “transgender” students to single-sex bathrooms, locker rooms, and sports teams under the guise of preventing sex discrimination. Faithful Catholic educators

have consistently maintained that “sex” means male and female, as each person is created naturally, and laws against sex discrimination have always been rooted in the same understanding.

Now the Supreme Court is being asked to redefine “sex” in three cases: *Altitude Express Inc. v. Zarda*, *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia*, and *R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes Inc. v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*. The latter case concerns whether sex discrimination laws protect “gender identity,” and the others address “sexual orientation.”

Prior to the Court’s combined hearing of the cases in October, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) weighed in with two strong amicus briefs defending religious organizations. Joining the briefs were The Cardinal Newman Society, the Catholic Bar Association, the Anglican Church, Southern Baptists, and Christian Schools International.

Both USCCB briefs highlighted the importance of upholding Catholic teaching on gender and sexuality in Catholic education:

To carry out their religious mission, faith-based schools must be able to hire and retain employees who agree with, and abide by the tenets of, the faith that it is the school’s purpose to impart. Few things undermine a faith-based school’s religious message as much as speech or conduct on the part of school administrators and teachers that contradict, reject, or distort that message.

The USCCB also explained the danger to Catholic schools, should the Supreme Court re-interpret the meaning of “sex” in Title VII and, by implication, Title IX. The Court could “imperil the ability of the school to

effectively teach its faith” by requiring schools to employ people “who, by their speech and conduct, violate the religious teaching, including teaching on sexual ethics, that is a constitutive part of the school’s professed faith.”

Numerous other lawsuits have challenged the crucial role of mission-fit teachers and staff in Catholic schools. Although canon law requires that in Catholic schools “teachers are to be outstanding in correct doctrine and integrity of life,” some want schools to yield to gender ideology and the pro-choice mentality.

In Indiana, a trial court recently refused to dismiss a case brought against the Archdiocese of Indianapolis by a teacher who had been fired after entering a same-sex marriage. In *Payne-Elliott v. Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Indianapolis*, a teacher is suing the Archdiocese after he was fired from Cathedral High School for entering into a same-sex marriage.

The decision is especially disconcerting, because the Indiana court displayed an appalling lack of understanding of the Catholic Church. Cathedral is legally independent from the Archdiocese, but as a Catholic school it is under the bishop’s authority according to canon law. Thus the Archdiocese was fully justified in demanding that Cathedral uphold its standards for Catholic school teachers.

The Archdiocese was also right to insist that the Indiana court is interfering in a religious matter by allowing the teacher’s lawsuit to go forward. But the judge decided that the Archdiocese may not have final authority over Catholic education in its boundaries, and so the case cannot be dismissed on the basis of religious freedom.

This strange decision rests on false assumptions arising from another local dispute. Last year, Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School appealed to the Vatican for permission to retain its own teacher in a same-sex marriage. Although the Archdiocese has insisted that Brebeuf uphold Catholic principles, the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education temporarily suspended sanctions against the school until the Vatican rules on the appeal, which is still pending nine months later. The trial judge took advantage of the situation to ignore the obvious religious authority of the Archdiocese.

There’s also a situation developing in Dayton, Ohio. Alumni of Archbishop Alter High School have launched an outrageous campaign to demand that the Archdiocese of Cincinnati remove the “morality clause” from its teacher employment contract. They are responding to the school’s decision not to renew the contract of an English teacher who entered into a same-sex marriage.

Morality clauses ensure that employees are clearly informed of the Church’s moral standards and expectations. Such a clause is an act of charity and justice toward anyone signing an employment contract, in that they know upfront what could cause them to be disciplined or fired.

But in this case, alumni want the moral standards eliminated altogether. They have appealed not only to the Archdiocese, but to state and federal legislators. This is the dangerous nonsense that Catholic education must confront in today’s increasingly secular culture.

More than ever, Catholic educators need to protect schools and colleges from legal threats to their Catholic identity. One of the most important protections is to adopt clear,

consistent, and legally sound policies for every aspect of operations, uphold Catholic

identity, and explain why certain standards are necessary to faithful Catholic education.

Patrick J. Reilly

<https://www.crisismagazine.com/2020/the-fate-of-the-first-amendment-will-be-decided-by-these-nine-cases>

## **Philip Rivers Set to Fulfill Childhood Dream By Coaching at a Catholic High School**

Lucky students at St. Michael Catholic High School will get to be coached by the NFL champion.

At 38 years of age, Phil Rivers already has his retirement from football all laid out. Having just signed up in the off-season with the Indianapolis Colts, the football quarterback is set to impart his football skills with students at St. Michael Catholic High school in Fairhope, Alabama.

When signing up as head coach-in-waiting at the school in Alabama, Rivers shared with [Angelus News](#) that he was able to fulfill his second childhood dream.

“It’s a special day for me and my family. I will probably get a little emotional,” said Rivers. “I (had) two childhood dreams. One was playing in the NFL. I still love that. The other was to be a high school football coach as my dad was.” (The quarterback’s dad, Steve, was actually a head coach for many years and is in the Alabama High School Sports Hall of Fame.)

Rivers is thrilled with the plan, saying, “Wow, how blessed am I to be able to live both of those out?”

It is not entirely sure how long it will be before the devout Catholic joins St. Michael. The school’s athletic director, Paul

Knapstein, is lined up as interim head coach for the 2020 season, so maybe Rivers will join the school not long after, once he retires from professional playing.

The dad of nine seems the perfect choice for the school.

Principal Faustin Weber explained: “I believe he’s going to be a tremendous influence on the lives of our young men here and their faith life. He brings an infectious optimism and enthusiasm to whatever he does and I think he’s going to really advance our culture here and be a tremendous influence for good.” He added, “Our mission is to build scholars, leaders and disciples of Jesus Christ and I really believe he’s going to help us advance our mission.”

Rivers first developed a relationship with St. Michael through a friend from the area, leading him to run two summer football camps at the school. He believes that God had a part to play in creating this perfect fit between the school and Rivers’ own faith and football skills.

Although he won’t be joining the school right away, Rivers has shared his plans for the varsity team: “Our program will be faith, family and football.” Rivers said. “It will be built on faith, and family will be very important, and we’ll work like crazy at the football part.”

Cerith Gardiner

<https://aleteia.org/2020/05/20/philip-rivers-set-to-fulfill-childhood-dream-by-coaching-at-a-catholic-high-school>

## What the Supreme Court Needed to Hear About Catholic Institutions

*COMMENTARY: It is possible to envision a 5-4 decision in favor of the Catholic schools, but all the same, the arguments missed a crucial point.*

The Supreme Court heard oral arguments Monday in two consolidated cases concerning the right of Catholic elementary schools to decide who can teach there: *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Berru*, and *St. James School v. Biel*. Arguing on behalf of the schools was an attorney with the Becket law firm — a prominent religious liberty firm in Washington, D.C. — and also an assistant to the U.S. solicitor general, Morgan Ratner, who had obtained permission from the Court to speak in favor of the schools.

It is possible to envision a 5-4 decision along the usual divisions on the Court in favor of the Catholic schools, but all the same, the argument was disappointing. Here I should disclose my prior assumptions — as a mother who sent her children to Catholic schools, and as an amateur theologian but professional religion clauses scholar.

I didn't have time to write an amicus brief (I was too busy with brief on the [Little Sisters' case argued last week](#)), but if I had, I would have argued that Catholic institutions — schools especially but not exclusively — are groups whose primary mission is to witness to Christ. Virtually every employee is responsible to transmit this in their work, as well as in their interactions with clients and other employees. Yes, each Catholic institution is channeling this witness toward particular services: education, health care and social services mainly. They are responsible to deliver what the law requires and customers expect in the way of expert services. But their common motivation, their goal and their mission-charge, is to transmit Christ.

It is unthinkable to me that the state, as distinguished from the religion, would have the final word on who the religious institution hires to witness to Christ. Yet this is what the lawyers for the fired employees argued.

A brief background is necessary on the seminal case that held that church employees may not successfully pursue employment discrimination lawsuits against their employers if they are held to be “ministers” of the faith. In the 2012 [Hosanna Tabor](#) case, the Supreme Court unanimously held that those persons employed by religious institutions to “communicat[e] the faith,” “serve as the very embodiment of its message” and “express those views ... that it intends to express,” are “ministers,” and as such, may not claim “employment discrimination” by their employers when they are fired. It is not necessary to be ordained to be a minister, according to the Hosanna Tabor opinion. Instead, persons are ministers if they play a role in transmitting the faith.

Hosanna Tabor is a piece of a larger federal constitutional area called “church autonomy” doctrine. It holds that, as a matter of both the Free Exercise and Establishment clauses of the U.S. Constitution, the state has no business meddling in a religion's affairs. Hosanna Tabor was an application of this broader doctrine to the particular situation of employees who function as “ministers” within their faith traditions.

In the cases at issue Monday, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals had previously

ruled that neither of the Catholic elementary school teachers were “ministers,” according to *Hosanna Tabor*. That court went out of its way to minimize the religious character of the duties of teachers who taught religion every day, led students in prayer, accompanied them regularly to Mass, and promised in their teacher contracts to infuse Christ in their daily work and to model the faith to students. Instead, the court of appeals focused on the teachers’ titles (“teacher” vs. “minister”) and their lay versus clerical status. It characterized their teaching and praying as reciting words crafted by others, and not as faith transmission.

During oral arguments, Justices Clarence Thomas, Brett Kavanaugh, Neil Gorsuch and Samuel Alito appeared to make stronger arguments on behalf of the schools’ rights, than were made by either of the lawyers for the schools. They worried that the tests those attorneys proposed to distinguish ministerial from non-ministerial employees invited the Court to substitute its judgment for religions’ judgments about which employees were responsible for transmitting the faith. And they indicated that allowing judges to make such religious decisions amounted to, at best, excess “entanglement” of church and state, and at worst, a state establishment of religion.

On their part, again and again, the schools’ attorneys suggested that only those employees with (court-adjudicated) “important religious functions” or “more than de minimis” religious functions could qualify as ministers. They seemed willing to label most (but not all) teachers as “ministers.” But they appeared to exclude the math teacher who brought religion into a discussion of math, or the soup kitchen employee who leads grace, or the cook

working to ensure religion-compliant meals in the school cafeteria.

Counsel for the fired teachers sensed the unworkability of these line-drawing exercises, and exploited it in his arguments before the Court. So he sought to offer the Court an easy way out: limit the category of “ministers” to a narrow group of persons, ideally in his view, employees who were just like the Lutheran teacher (Cheryl Perich) held to be a minister in the *Hosanna Tabor* case.

Counsel therefore insisted that ministers have to be able to show extensive training, and nearly or totally exclusively religious duties. He pressed the Court to hold that title was important: “minister.” Kavanaugh and others pushed back on this narrow view with questions about the vast number of religions in the United States, with their very different views and practices regarding who passes on the faith.

Counsel for the teachers also pressed a theme seen in last week’s *Little Sisters of the Poor* litigation: They characterized religious institutions’ demands for final say over employees as a request to hurt people with legal impunity. Again and again, the fired employees’ attorney referred to the “hundreds of thousands” of lay teachers who would presumably be subjected to any harm the religious institution wished to dole out, without any recourse to the law.

It appeared that Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sonia Sotomayor, especially, and — to a lesser extent — Elena Kagan, were susceptible to this argument. They offered their own parade of horrors. And they appeared to suggest that judges should be permitted a deep dive investigation into the hiring and firing of the vast majority of employees at religious institutions, to

discover the religious employers’ “real reasons” for decisions involving now-disgruntled employees. This would require every religious employer to make a theological case about why such and such a disgruntled employee was or was not hired or retained; and judges would evaluate the plausibility of their arguments.

But of course, this is precisely what the Establishment Clause prohibits: the state making religious determinations about which persons religious institutions employ to transmit the faith.

If I had the time to write an amicus brief in this case, I would have made a robust showing about the inescapably communal character of every Catholic institution, as a believing community whose members are called to witness to the living Christ to one another and all onlookers. I would have quoted Pope Francis’ [ringing advice](#) from his first homily after his election about Catholic institutions: “If we do not confess to Christ, what would we be? We would end

up a compassionate [nongovernmental organization].”

I would have quoted Pope Benedict XVI’s [advice](#) in *Deus Caritas Est* about personnel in Catholic institutions: They must “want to work with the Church and therefore with the Bishop, so that the love of God can spread throughout the world.” And I would have pointed to the vast sociology-of-religion literature demonstrating that faith is so often transmitted by deed and not by word.

Monday’s oral argument lacked these necessary points. While the two Catholic schools in California merit and will likely obtain a (possibly narrow) victory, the written decision could well lack the more convincing — and even inspiring — arguments in favor of a robust, and theologically true and necessary, ministerial exemption. The decision might not bode well for future cases involving religious institutions’ employees other than religion teachers.

Helen Alvaré

<https://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/what-the-supreme-court-needed-to-hear-about-catholic-institutions>

## Catholic Schools and the Common Good

A minor kerfuffle erupted earlier this month when Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York made the unforgivable mistake of saying complimentary things about the president of the United States. The occasion for this crime was [a group phone call](#) between several hundred Catholic leaders and educators, and members of the Trump administration, including the president.

The purpose of that call was to highlight the financial plight of Catholic schools, which, like so many other institutions, face immense challenges in the wake of the pandemic and economic disruption. The president, for his part, took the opportunity to boast about his pro-life credentials, calling himself the “best [president] in the history of the Catholic Church,” and reminding people on the call about the importance of “November 3.”

Rather than chastising the president for his many and various failings, the Catholic prelates on the call (Cardinal Dolan, but also Boston Cardinal Sean O’Malley, L.A. Archbishop Jose Gomez, and others) spoke about the importance of Catholic schools – including their importance to non-Catholics and especially to low-income and minority communities. The bishops urged the president to take action to help struggling schools beyond the immediate crisis and thanked him for his promises to do so.

This was all deeply upsetting to some people. Mostly, it seems, it was upsetting to the same sort of people who, in 2009, could not fathom how anyone could be so uncivil as to object to a Catholic university like Notre Dame bestowing honors on a champion of abortion rights such as President Obama.

I mention Obama at Notre Dame, not as a tu quoque defense of Dolan (or Trump, for that matter) but to emphasize the chasm that exists between many American Catholics when it comes to politics and the conception of public goods. It’s not just that different Catholics have different criteria as to what makes a politician or policy utterly unacceptable; it’s that each side’s criteria are morally incomprehensible to the other.

That problem – the intransigence of our political divisions, even between and among Catholics – is actually a pretty good place to begin thinking about the importance of truly Catholic education for both the Church and the nation.

To see why this is, we can turn, briefly, to Aristotle. “Education ought to be adapted to the particular form of constitution,” Aristotle wrote, “since the particular character belonging to each constitution both guards the constitution generally and originally establishes it.”

Put another way: we ought to educate our young people to be good citizens of the kind of country we hope for them to inherit. Educating them in this way both preserves what is already good in our country, and brings into being what is good, but lacking. In America, we mostly educate for materialism.

Most Americans are educated in schools that aim – with wildly varying degrees of success – to give students the best chance to accumulate the best credentials possible so that they can enter into the workplace in the most productive (and lucrative) way. Students are taught, implicitly and explicitly, that the purpose of education is to advance your material well-being. The

measure of an education, both in its ends and its means, is practical materialism.

Most American students are also steeped in what Pope Francis has called “the technocratic paradigm,” which teaches students to see both persons and objects as so much raw material ready for manipulation. The natural order is rejected in the name of utility and efficiency, while the meaning of Creation is erased in the name of self-expression. Sometimes this is taught explicitly, most often it is taught implicitly. But it is taught and learned, this practical materialism.

A society of citizens educated in this way cannot but be divided, because it is a society that has abandoned the only ground upon which reason and reconciliation are possible: truth. A society that is educated for materialism is not formed for freedom or democracy or peace, because “it does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one’s own ego and desires.” That, you may recall, is exactly how Joseph Ratzinger once described the dictatorship of relativism.

At their best, Catholic schools teach young people to see the world in the light of the greatest mysteries of the faith, and those mysteries suffuse every aspect of their education. At its best a Catholic education, reveals to us our own humanity by revealing to us the God who made us, loves us, became like us, and redeems us. We come to know who we are by coming to know the

Stephen P. White

<https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2020/05/28/catholic-schools-and-the-common-good>

One for whom we are. That experience transforms the entire horizon of human experience.

Our Catholic schools are not immune from the problems facing public education in America. Too often, Catholic education is indistinguishable from any other kind of education, except for the religion class a few times a week. But Catholic schools still represent one of the last viable alternatives to an education system that is overwhelmingly forming our young people, not for true freedom or true flourishing, but for the opposite.

Bishops who take seriously their mandate to teach, would do well to prioritize Catholic education; it is hard to instruct a flock in the faith when the flock has been inoculated against truth. Bishops must encourage parents to take seriously their role as primary educators, which may mean reminding parents that their obligation is much more than ensuring that Junior gets into a good school.

And bishops ought to be willing to look for help when and where it is available. There are innumerable reasons to be wary of feeding at the government trough. Money almost always comes with strings attached. But the survival of our Catholic schools is critical to the common good of our country. Saving and renewing Catholic education is an important step toward healing a divided nation, and a divided Church.

## Mexican State Passes Pro-Life Education Law

The Mexican state legislature of Nuevo Leon passed an education reform bill May 21 to foster a “respect for life from conception to natural death” in students.

The law reflects the state constitution, which affirms that “the state recognizes, protects and defends the right to life that every human being has. From the moment of conception that life comes under the protection of the Law and is considered as having been born with regards to all corresponding legal effects until its natural death.”

The new bill also calls for the “inclusion, through the development of special training, programs for the employment of people with some kind of disability.”

Speaking with ACI Prensa, CNA’s Spanish languages news partner, state legislator Juan Carlos Leal, who introduced the education reform bill, said the law will “definitely have a big impact especially on the values of Mexican citizens.”

“We want to create a new generation of students that have values and respect, which unfortunately in Mexico, we have seen is being lost,” he explained.

The director of the ConParticipación platform, Marcial Padilla, stressed the importance of incorporating pro-life principles into constitutions and laws, including the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights or the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights. “The initiative to recognize the right to life in education will help young people, adolescents and children learn to appreciate human life,” Padilla said.

The pro-life leader said he is hopeful the reform bill will “help reduce suicide rates, reduce addictions and will also help young people understand that abortion is not an option.”

Above all, students “will be able to know that abortion is always an attack on human life,” he said.

Fr. José Manuel Suazo Reyes, director of the communications office of the Archdiocese of Xalapa, welcomed the passage of the law in a May 24 letter on behalf of the archdiocese.

In the letter, titled The Culture of Life Advances, Suazo said that “Mexico continues to cry out that it loves and wants life” and that “abortion is not the solution” for distressed mothers, and that it is essential that the government support the a broader culture of life in the country.

“It’s important for the state to protect life, but it is also essential that it form citizens in respect and care for life,” the letter said. “This reform creates awareness in students of the dignity that every human life has, thus contributing to the reduction of discriminatory, aggressive and even criminal behavior, as is the case with abortion.”

The priest called the law “a very important step in the culture of life,” while noting that “thousands of children are aborted year after year in Mexico City, where killing babies up to 12 weeks gestation is permitted.”

While government officials “want to promote abortion on demand,” he said, wider efforts to promote the dignity of all human life were gaining support, including the recent ninth annual March for Life in the country on May 23 – held online this year

due to the coronavirus – which, he said, attracted more than 500,000 participants on Facebook alone.

“These manifestations of the culture of life seek to put a stop to all these criminal

initiatives throughout the country to promote abortion,” said Suazo. “Today more than ever life is threatened. We must protect ourselves from those anti-life mentalities that despise the lives of others.”

CNA Staff

<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2020/05/26/mexican-state-passes-pro-life-education-law/>

## How Catholic Schools Can Overcome the Coronavirus Threat

We do a lot of worrying these trying days. We're anxious about our own health, and the well-being of those whom we cherish. Preoccupation about when we'll "get back to normal," and if life will ever be "normal" as before, abounds. We toss and turn about jobs, bills, and openings of stores and businesses. For us believers, we're fretting, rightly so, about when Mass and the sacraments will be available again for us.

Yes...we all do a lot of worrying these days.

One challenge I especially anguish over is our beloved Catholic schools. No one, even those who are hardly fans of our schools, questions their effectiveness. Political leaders often whisper in my ear, "Your schools do twice-as-good a job of educating our kids at half-the-price," and then ask me not to quote them by name lest they get in trouble with the potent lobbyists for the government monopoly schools.

The education in a Catholic school is splendid, and holistic: Our schools form minds, hearts, bodies, souls, and character. We tell our parents that a school without God is seriously deficient. Virtue, accountability, and discipline are part of the curriculum.

And the data shows their success year-after-year, as 98 percent of our students graduate high school, and 96 percent enter college.

Professionals tell us that our Catholic schools, especially for families struggling below the poverty line—more than 40 percent of our families—provide the best way for our youth to improve and prosper.

So, why am I so worried about them?  
Because they're now under severe threat!

Problems are hardly novel to our schools.

Since their start here in the United States over two centuries ago, our schools have had to scrape for every penny. No huge checks for them from government. I'm convinced this is actually part of the grit and determination of our schools.

We've survived the decimation of orders of teaching sisters, priests, and brothers, whose selfless devotion kept our schools so vibrant.

We got through the move of our families out of the urban neighborhoods where parishes and their schools were the anchor of the area.

We persevered through the ever-escalating costs of salaries, programs, and buildings. We kept at it while critics asked if our schools were worth it, as the data consistently demonstrated our schools were the best thing we got going for us...

But—and here's my worry—can we survive the coronavirus?

Oh, it's not that the line of parents so eager for their children to be in our schools has gotten shorter, not at all.

It's that the line of parents unable to afford the tuition is getting longer!

Right now, they are ever so hoping they can sign up or re-register their kids for September. In the best of times, to send their sons and daughters to a Catholic school requires a lot of scrimping, saving, and sacrifice, plus a hope that our renowned scholarship programs will come through with help.

But, so many of these parents are now out of work, and wonder if and when their jobs will return. The rent, the bills pile up. Can they send their kids to the schools of their dreams?

And, of course, if our enrollment plummets, some of our treasured schools will not be able to reopen.

What can we do to help?

For one, continue to support our schools, please. Our celebrated Inner-City Scholarship Fund ([scholarshipsinfo@innercitynyc.org](mailto:scholarshipsinfo@innercitynyc.org)) is so efficient in assisting parents in every school enroll and keep their kids with us.

Two, lobby our government officials to use this crisis to make sure our parents and children benefit from the valuable sustenance package—as, through the CARES Act, thanks to efforts here by Senator Schumer and President Trump, they have so far (although, sadly, such justice is not extended in the House version of the proposed “Heroes Act”)—and that much longed for reform in educational justice takes place, allowing our parents to use their

Cardinal Timothy Dolan

<https://www.cny.org/stories/how-catholic-schools-can-overcome-the-coronavirus-threat,21035>

tax money to subsidize the education of their children in the school of their choice.

No surprise, our city’s newspaper, which has always looked down its nose on our schools, warns that our children in our schools cannot and should not expect or get any aid, even in this crisis.

We’re talking about all our kids! Whatever the address of their school, public or non-governmental, like ours, these kids merit help now.

If more Catholic schools go under, all of society suffers. We’ll look back and say, why did we let them go?

For way too long, our government has sadly dodged its duty to our parents and kids. Reform now—as we “open up” after this coronavirus crisis, through educational scholarship microgrants to our parents—will stop us all from worrying.

If the legendary generosity of our donors continues, and if long-awaited education reform comes through, all our schools could find themselves even stronger in September. Otherwise, we could pay a dear price.

## Why This Spokane Catholic School Is Going Classical

St. Charles Catholic School in Spokane, Washington adds its name to a growing list of Catholic schools across the country that hope to find a renewal through an embrace of a classical liberal arts educational model.

St. Charles sits in a part of the Spokane metro area that is thick with Catholic schools. Four other parochial schools are within a ten minute drive from St. Charles. With so many Catholic schools in the area, the question for each school is, “what sets us apart?”

St. Charles’ decision to embrace a classical liberal arts model follows a track record of schools making the same transition. In Denver, Colorado, Our Lady of Lourdes School had only 104 students enrolled when it decided to switch to a classical curriculum. The following year, enrollment increased to 180 and the growth has continued. In the fall of 2018, Lourdes opened a second campus.

St. Charles’ move to classical was not a forgone conclusion; the school has had several changes of leadership over the last few years. In 2019, the school welcomed a new pastor and principal, Fr. Esteban Soler and principal Heather Schlaich. As school leaders looked at the future of the school, they hoped to bring stability and growth to the school.

Soler said he “has a heart” for classical liberal education and for the humanities. Growing up in Argentina, the priest was classically educated from 6th grade through high school. For Schlaich, the appeal of a classical liberal arts curriculum was multifaceted.

“In doing our research, we found it is an idea that is spreading nationwide,” she said. The emphasis on the arts also impressed Schlaich, whose background is music education.

“Knowing that we needed something new and exciting in our community, and knowing that there is a need to fill because there isn’t a Catholic elementary school that is classical in Spokane, we felt this is a niche we could fill,” she added.

The decision to fill a niche role with a classical curriculum is expected to help neighboring Catholic schools. Rather than competing for the same pool of students, St. Charles hopes to bring new families into the Catholic school system.

“I’m hoping we meet that need and get more kids into Catholic school,” Schlaich said. For those who are not familiar with it, the idea of classical education can seem mysterious. But Schlaich said there is a simple way to define the underlying principle of classical liberal arts education: “I would describe it as an integration of subjects with the faith.”

Explaining further, Soler stressed the unity of the curriculum, all subjects are rooted in faith and in the Catholic vision that all truth comes from God.

“The curriculum is oriented to help the kids to grow in a coherent base, where everything is understood as a whole, before they can go to different specifications.”

A classical education can seem old-fashioned to many, and in a way, it is. The roots of classical curriculum go right back to ancient Greece. The educational model

continued to develop in Mediterranean and European countries. The curriculum is not stuck in the past though; technology is incorporated into the classroom on an as-needed basis and the curriculum meets current educational standards, school leaders told *CNA*.

What about Latin? The students at St. Charles will learn Latin, starting in kindergarten. The study of one or more of the classical languages, Greek or Latin, is a hallmark of classical schools. Soler will teach the students Latin himself, having an extensive background in Latin himself, studying the language for 10 years both in Argentina and in Rome.

Schlaich said that compared to a typical secular, modern school, the focus of a classical school is on “cultivating wisdom and virtue.” The school does this by “teaching the students Latin, exposing them to high quality literature, and focusing on appreciation of beauty, goodness, and truth.”

After the change was announced in the spring of 2020, those in the school community had many questions.

“I have had a lot of positive feedback, [but] there is anxiety in some people, I would say, because it is a change, and there is anxiety with any change,” Soler noted.

Priest and principal met with families to explain the changes, and while many families are supportive, some have decided to move to neighboring schools.

CNA Daily News Briefs

<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2020/06/03/why-this-spokane-catholic-school-is-going-classical/>

Heather Morrisson, a parent of St. Charles’ students said she is excited for the change in curriculum. “I love that we are integrating religion into every aspect of the curriculum and I like that we are encouraging critical thinking in the students.”

Schlaich said the response from teachers has also been enthusiastic.

“Our teachers are very loyal,” she said. “They are excited we are going to be digging deeper, looking at deeper meanings.”

Soler said he is looking forward to the adventure of undertaking this change.

“We will be the only Catholic school in the area – not in the state because we have St. Monica on Mercer Island, and there are other schools in the Seattle area looking to make the change – but we will be the only one in the area to make the change.”

Looking to the future, both Soler and Schlaich are hopeful about the transition.

“We are excited,” Fr. Soler said. “It is a challenge, but overall, I think it will be good. I think it will attract families who are not served by Catholic schools now. The school is part of the life of the parish. The mission of the parish, like every Catholic parish, is to evangelize. I hope the school will help bring the students to a deeper knowledge of Christ.”

## Through a Child's Eyes

An angry lynch mob emerges from the evening shadows at the Maycomb County Jail, in Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, demanding the inmate Tom Robinson. Armed with a floor lamp, a book, and his integrity, lawyer Atticus Finch defends Tom against the mob's seething anger. Tempers are fraying into violence when a small voice steps out of the shadows and identifies a neighbor through the faceless mob.

"Hey, Mr. Cunningham," pipes up Scout Finch, six-year-old daughter of Atticus.

"I said, 'Hey,' Mr. Cunningham. . . I go to school with your boy. . . Tell him 'hey' for me, won't you?"

Scout's words remove Mr. Cunningham from the anonymity of the mob and replace him squarely back in Maycomb County, a poor farmer with a life-story, children, and connections of his own. Chastened back to personhood by the clear-eyed sight of a child, Mr. Cunningham returns Scout's greeting, and signals the end of the mob's intent. "I'll tell my boy you said, 'hey,'" he promises, as the mob drifts slowly away into the darkness.

In the history of the Church, when the Lord has wanted to impart a particular message to His people, especially through His Mother, He has chosen children as His couriers.

From Jacinta, Francisco, and Lucia of Fatima, to Bernadette Soubirous of Lourdes, Dominic Savio and Maria Goretti of Italy, and contemporary Carlo Acutis of Milan, the Lord reveals His wisdom to the little ones. He Himself came to us as a little Child, as the English poet William Blake reminds us, "He is meek, and He is mild,/ He became a little Child."

There is something about the gaze of a child that pierces through adult lies and confusion to the truth. We have all, no doubt, experienced a moment of profound veracity spoken to us through the directness of a child. Children don't flatter, and children don't pander; children exist in the transparent now.

They can be tempted and can do wrong, but their honest guilt is usually quite evident. They may, at the moment, bristle, when they are corrected, but they are soon deeply grateful for the love of which discipline is an essential expression. They tell you what they are thinking; they love without shame.

Children forgive and forget, and are unfailingly faithful. They don't hold grudges, and they start afresh each day. They believe in the good, and they wait through the bad. They have been heroically patient as we have asked them to forge a way through a new, daunting and contradictory reality in recent times. They have not changed, and they remind us of what is real.

Children also lack the defensive shield from reality, which we adults pull around ourselves as needed. Dante Alighieri speaks in *Inferno* of the betrayal of the trust of children as particularly grievous, because their trust is so freely given. The veil of reason, or even self-defense, with which we rationalize, protect, and cut down to size problems and people and situations that we find overwhelming, is not a tool children are capable of wielding. Reality presents itself to them in all of its raw force.

In all of this lies a sacred trust. Robert Royal wrote a compelling column last year titled "[In Search of Young People](#)," asking

whether lovable, responsible, faith-filled young people were getting what they really need from the Church, even when Church leaders are desperately trying to “reach out” to them. That question would best be answered by an inquiry aimed at “Finding Real Adults.” A child responds to the adult who believes in him, who sets boundaries for him, and who provides a way forward in growth and maturity.

One such adult who understood this formative role was Pope St. John Paul II, who spent a significant part of his papacy calling young people to give their lives fearlessly for Christ. On his deathbed, this Pope of Youth was reportedly informed that just outside his papal windows, in St. Peter’s Square, throngs of young people were keeping candlelight vigil with him. He responded, with gratitude and conviction, “I have looked for you, and you have come to me, and I thank you.”

The heart of a child receives the stimulus of its surroundings with openness. Exposure to these influences, positive or otherwise, profoundly impacts a child’s soul in its formative years. If the environment is one of faith, and trust, and high ideals, the child will respond with open joy and loving acceptance. When children feel secure, they are filled with peace. They become the young people, and then the adults, that

Elizabeth A. Mitchell

<https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2020/06/06/through-a-childs-eyes>

someone has taken the care and the time to believe they can become.

A child’s eyes see truth, and so often, if we just look, there is a person in their eyes we ourselves should reflect. They see reality as it should be, and they remind us of what they know. They see Mr. Cunningham when we have sold out in fear, they see Our Lady when we see a muddy stream, and they see mother, father, teacher, and guardian, every time we speak and act and love. Our children are watching us, listening to us. They are watching us to see what kind of people they should become. They are listening to hear us speak life into their souls, to pour blessing and purpose upon their hearts. The words of a parent and, in particular, of a father, profoundly call forth life and identity within them. “This is my beloved Son,” the Father speaks, identifying Christ by His essence.

Let’s be worthy of the eyes of our children, and the truth they see. Let’s remember Our Lord’s call to become as children ourselves, in order to come to Him, and receive His love, and know His grace. Through a child’s eyes, we are strengthened to become the noble, trustworthy, self-sacrificing men and women we have been called to become, and as we are known by our own loving Father.

## Lebanon's Catholic Schools Risk Closure

About 80% of Catholic schools, which provide education to approximately two-thirds of students in Lebanon's private institutions, will close for the 2020-2021 school year, due to the lack of government aid.

Lebanon's long-running economic crisis is taking a heavy toll on the country's prestigious private education sector.

### *State neglecting private schools*

Father Boutros Azar, who heads the General Secretariat of Catholic schools, raised the alarm in an open letter June 4 to Lebanese President Michel Aoun. The priest blamed the problem on "state negligence" of the nation's crucial private education sector, which includes Catholic schools.

According to Fr. Azar, "What emerges today from the Federation of Private Schools of Lebanon and from the General Secretariat of Catholic Schools confirms that we are facing a general challenge for the private education sector, which provides schooling to over two-thirds of pupils in Lebanon (710 thousand students, compared to 260 thousand in public education)."

He said the closure is "a major national loss" which exacerbates the country's ailing situation.

Speaking to Lebanon's French-language daily newspaper, L'Orient-Le Jour (LOJ), Fr. Azar explained "state negligence" referring to law 46/2018, which revised the salary scale of the public sector employees, depriving private educational institutions, even the largest ones.

For the past 5 years, the government has not paid the partially subsidised schools. For

medium and small-sized schools, he said, there is no choice left except to close or make drastic cuts in teachers' salaries.

### *Nearly half of Lebanon's people below poverty line*

Even before Covid-19, Lebanon was going through the worst economic crisis in its history, which triggered large-scale anti-government protests last year.

Today, nearly half the country's six million people are living below the poverty line. In April, protesters torched a string of banks. The country's banking system is seen as complicit in what many regard as the plunder of the country by their own political elite.

Some are warning that the scale of the catastrophe may be more devastating than the 15-year civil war, which raged from 1975 to 1990.

Fr. Azar said he cannot understand state bias against private schools, saying they are doing a service to the public for which they should be subsidized.

Lebanon's currency has lost nearly 60% of its value against the dollar, and, in a country that relies on imports, that has led to rampant inflation. Hundreds, if not thousands of businesses, have gone bust, and more than a third of the population is unemployed.

Fr. Azar said that the closure of schools following demonstrations in October is now followed by the coronavirus closure.

Parents have asked for a reduction in school fees in proportion to the number of closed

days, which is approximately 40% of the school year.

### ***Catholic schools under pressure***

In his letter, Fr. Azar pointed out that with this forced closure, hundreds of thousands of students of private schools will seek a place in public schools. Tens of thousands of teachers, employees and workers will lose their jobs, adding to growing unemployment and poverty in the country.

Some institutes - such as those headed by the Marists - continued to pay their wages in full to their employees, while others halved the salaries of their teaching and non-teaching staff.

Even the prestigious Jesuit-run Notre Dame de Jamhour College, regarded as a premium institution not just in Lebanon but also in the entire Middle East, has fallen a victim of

Robin Gomes

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2020-06/lebanon-catholic-private-education-schools-risk-closure.html>

this situation. It has taken the extreme measure of writing to its former pupils in the US, Europe and in the Middle East, appealing for support.

### ***Pope's solidarity***

In May, Pope Francis sent a donation of USD 200,000 to support 400 scholarships for students in Lebanese Catholic schools.

According to Archbishop Joseph Spiteri, Apostolic Nuncio to Lebanon, through whom the scholarships were channelled, the country has always had a “fantastic educational system that inspired the whole Middle Eastern region”.

Unfortunately, he pointed out, because of political and social crises, the educational sector is suffering a lot, with young people paying a heavy price.

## Amid Pandemic, Scores of US Catholic Schools Face Closure

Catholic schools have faced tough times for years, but the pace of closures is accelerating dramatically amid economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic, sparking heartbreak and anger in scores of affected communities.

“It’s not a pretty picture right now,” said Sister Dale McDonald, public policy director of the National Catholic Educational Association, which says about 100 schools have announced in recent weeks that they won’t reopen this fall. McDonald fears that number could more than double in the coming months.

Most of the closures are occurring at the elementary level, but also on the list are a number of venerable and beloved high schools including some that produced some famous alumni.

The Institute of Notre Dame, a girls’ school in Baltimore founded in 1847, is due to close on June 30, to the dismay of alumnae like House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Immaculate Conception Cathedral School of Memphis, Tennessee, another girls’ institution, is also shutting down after 98 years; it’s where Priscilla Beaulieu finished her senior year while dating husband-to-be Elvis Presley.

Closures in New Jersey include Hammonton’s St. Joseph High School, which has won more than 20 state football championships, and Cristo Rey high school in Newark, which was highly praised for its work helping students from low-income families go to college. Founded in 2007, Cristo Rey says every one of its graduates from the last 10 years had been accepted at colleges.

This year’s closures will reduce the number of Catholic K-12 schools in the United States to about 6,000, down from more than 11,000 in 1970, according to the Catholic education association. Overall enrollment has plummeted from more than 5 million in the 1960s to about 1.7 million now.

“The loss of Catholic schools is a loss to America,” said Mary Pat Donoghue, executive director of the Catholic Education office of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

She said the impact would be particularly severe in low-income inner city neighborhoods, generally populated mostly by blacks and Hispanics, “No one in the non-public school sector has done better there than Catholic schools,” she said.

The long-term enrollment decline has resulted from demographic changes, parents’ difficulty affording tuition and competition from public and other private schools.

Factors related to the pandemic have only aggravated the problems.

Donoghue said many families have recently lost jobs and feel they can no longer pay tuitions averaging nearly \$5,000 for elementary schools and more than \$11,000 for high schools. Meanwhile, parishes that operate many of the schools lost much of their weekly collections after in-person services were halted.

Another factor: Spring is the prime season for school fundraisers, and many of those events had to be canceled.

McDonald, of the National Catholic Education Association, said uncertainty is now a huge problem. School officials are unsure what social-distancing requirements and financial circumstances they will face in the fall, while parents don't know if their school will still be afloat.

"Superintendents want to know what they're getting into," McDonald said. "Parents don't want to commit to what they don't know. It's a huge mess."

Several of the recent closure announcements sparked community campaigns to try to save the schools.

In Hammonton, where the regional diocese ordered Saint Joseph and the parish's elementary school shuttered, after both suffered large drops in enrollment in recent years, a coalition of alumni and community members stepped in.

They offered to buy the elementary school building and the high school sports fields and operate a private school independently of the diocese, but that was rejected.

In Baltimore, the May 5 announcement about the Institute of Notre Dame came without warning, angering students, parents and alumni, and forcing the 161 freshmen, sophomores and juniors currently enrolled to scramble to find spots elsewhere.

Dubbing itself Saving IND, an alumni-led group obtained hundreds of signatures on an online petition supporting efforts to keep the school open. School officials have discouraged the campaign, saying the closure plans are final to declining enrollment and the need for millions of dollars for building repairs and other costs.

According to the school's official history, it provided shelter to black people escaping slavery along the Underground Railroad and served as a medical facility during the Civil War and the 1918 flu pandemic.

"It taught us what we needed to learn academically, and it taught us values," said Pelosi, whose mother also attended the school, in an interview with C-SPAN after the closure was announced by the School Sisters of Notre Dame. "Hot chocolate after Mass, that was a thing I remember with great joy."

Another casualty is Quigley Catholic High School, which has served the Pittsburgh suburbs of Beaver County since opening in Baden in 1967 with an enrollment of 440. It distinguished itself with a public speaking curriculum that led to seven state titles at an annual mock trial competition.

But the Pittsburgh diocese had projected an enrollment of just 93 students for the next school year, meaning it was time to shut the doors for good.

On Quigley's website, members of the school community were asked to share their memories "before Quigley Catholic fades into the sunset."

More than 80 alumni and parents responded, recalling athletic triumphs and favorite teachers. One alumnus told of drinking his first beer in the parking lot.

Quigley's guidance counselor, Sister Bridget Reilly, and her assistant, Marge Berckmiller, were at their office this week working to send the transcripts of students to other high schools they hope to attend in the fall.

Each worked at Quigley for about 35 years, and they made no effort to hide their sadness.

“It’s going to leave an empty spot in all of our hearts,” said Berckmiller, who met her husband when they both attended Quigley.

David Crary

*Associated Press video journalist Jessie Wardarski in Baden, Pennsylvania, contributed to this report.*

<https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-usa/2020/06/amid-pandemic-scores-of-us-catholic-schools-face-closure>

Reilly recalled learning about the closure in a Zoom meeting with school officials.

“We turned our videos off,” she said. “I’m so happy I did, because I just broke down.”

## NH Lawmaker Says Education Choice Is Only for ‘Well-Educated’ Parents

A state senator in New Hampshire has drawn criticism for saying that working-class parents should not have the same freedom to make educational choices for their children as college-educated parents.

“This idea of parental choice, that’s great if the parent is well-educated. There are some families that’s perfect for. But to make it available to everyone? No. I think you’re asking for a huge amount of trouble,” said Sen. Jeanne Dietsch (D-Peterborough) on Tuesday, June 9. Her comments were reported by [InsideSources](#).

Dietsch was speaking at an education committee hearing in favor of a bill that would repeal a statewide alternative schooling program, called Learn Everywhere.

Learn Everywhere is a program that permits students to earn course credit “through hands-on, real-world experience” including jobs and apprenticeships outside of a classroom.

The bill SB 514, which is sponsored by Dietsch, would require the state’s board of education “to establish a process for the approval of vendors offering alternative, extended learning, and work-based programs which may be accepted for credit by a local school board.”

Dietsch explained that as her father had not graduated from high school, it was important to him that she attend college, and that he would not have been helpful in picking out coursework. “When it gets into the details, would my father have known what courses I should be taking? I don’t think so,” she said.

Dietsch explained that she did not think some parents were qualified to make decisions for their children that extended beyond their own level of attainment.

“If the dad’s a carpenter, and you want to become a carpenter,” she said “then yes — listen to your dad.”

“In a democracy, and particularly in the United States, public education has been the means for people to move up to greater opportunities, for each generation to be able to succeed more than their parents have,” said Dietsch.

George D’Orazio, a senior board member of Catholics United For Home Education-New Hampshire, told *CNA* that the educational status of a parent does not factor when making medical or financial decisions for a child, and it should not matter in educational decisions either.

“CUHE utterly rejects the concept that only certain parents should have choice in education,” said D’Orazio.

D’Orazio said that he believed Dietsch’s party affiliation shaped her comments on Tuesday, and that New Hampshire as a whole has typically been very friendly to homeschooling and alternative schooling choices.

“The current governor, who is a Republican, has worked hard to try to increase educational choices available to parents,” he said. “The current education commissioner (in the state of New Hampshire) has worked very hard to increase parental choice in education,” he said.

“And they’re being criticized, thoroughly criticized (...) by the leaders of the Democratic Party for this.”

Other experts and commentators in favor of school choice and parental rights were similarly critical of the senator’s comments.

“Parents have the right, and duty, to make decisions about their child’s education – simply because they are parents,” Mary Rice Hasson, director of the Catholic Women’s Forum, told *CNA*.

“The Church teaches that parents are the primary educators of their children—regardless of the parents’ education level. There’s no asterisk that says a college degree or PhD is required. Parents fulfill this responsibility out of love, with an eye towards the deepest needs of the child, spiritual as well as intellectual formation,” she added.

“Opposition to educational freedom is often rooted in the paternalistic belief that disadvantaged families aren’t capable of

*CNA*

<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2020/06/12/nh-lawmaker-says-education-choice-is-only-for-well-educated-parents/>

making good choices for their own children,” Corey DeAngelis, the director of school choice at Reason Foundation, told *CNA*.

“But that’s wrong—families are more likely to know what’s best for their own children than bureaucrats,” he added.

Dietsch’s chosen example of carpenters as professionals unable to make informed choices for their children’s education also drew a backlash from local business owners.

“With all due respect to the senator, I am a carpenter, and the idea that she, or any other government official, knows what’s best for me or any member of my family is preposterous,” Tim Hawes, owner of Perfection In Restoration in Candia, New Hampshire told *NHJournal*.

“I may not have a degree, but I can guarantee that when it comes to decisions regarding my family’s interest I am far more educated and capable than any government official will ever be,” Hawes said.

## **‘God Chose to Call Us’: The Story of Two Brothers Ordained Catholic Priests on the Same Day**

Despite the occasional competitiveness and squabbles that many brothers experience growing up, they’ve always been best buds.

“We’re closer than best friends,” Connor, 25, told *CNA*.

As young men— in grade school, high school, college— much of their lives centered around the things you might expect: academics, extracurriculars, friends, girlfriends, and sports.

There are many paths the two young men could have chosen for their lives, but ultimately, last month, they arrived at the same place— lying face down in front of the altar, giving their lives over in service to God and the Catholic Church.

The brothers were both ordained to the priesthood May 30 at Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception in Mobile— in a private Mass, because of the pandemic.

“For whatever reason, God chose to call us and he did. And we were just fortunate enough to have had the foundations from both our parents and our education to hear it and then to say yes,” Peyton told *CNA*.

Peyton, 27, says he is most excited to begin helping out with Catholic schools and education, and also to begin hearing confessions.

“You spend so much time in seminary preparing to be effective one day. You spend so much time in seminary talking about plans and dreams and hopes and stuff that you’ll do one day in this hypothetical future...now it’s here. And so I can’t wait to begin.”

### **‘Natural virtues’**

In Southern Louisiana, where the Plessala brothers’ parents grew up, you’re Catholic unless you declare otherwise, Peyton said.

Both Plessala parents are medical doctors. The family moved to Alabama when Connor and Peyton were very young.

Though the family was always Catholic – and raised Peyton, Connor, and their younger sister and brother in the faith – the brothers said they weren’t ever a “pray the rosary around the kitchen table” kind of family.

Apart from taking the family to Mass every Sunday, the Plessalas taught their children what Peyton calls “natural virtues”— how to be good, decent people; the importance of choosing their friends wisely; and the value of education.

The brothers’ consistent involvement in team sports, encouraged by their parents, also helped to school them in those natural virtues.

Playing soccer, basketball, football, and baseball over the years taught them the values of hard work, camaraderie, and setting an example for others.

“They taught us to remember that when you go and play sports, and you have the Plessala name on the back of your jersey, that represents a whole family,” Peyton said.

### **‘I could do this’**

Peyton told *CNA* that despite going to Catholic schools and getting the “vocation

talk” every year, neither of them had ever really considered the priesthood as an option for their lives.

That is, until early in 2011, when the brothers took a trip with their classmates to Washington, D.C. for the March for Life, the nation’s largest annual pro-life gathering in the U.S.

The chaperone for their group from McGill-Toolen Catholic High School was a new priest, fresh out of seminary, whose enthusiasm and joy made an impression on the brothers.

The witness of their chaperone, and of other priests they encountered on that trip, moved Connor to begin considering entering the seminary straight out of high school.

In the fall of 2012, Connor started his studies at St. Joseph Seminary College in Covington, Louisiana.

Peyton also felt the call to the priesthood on that trip, thanks to the example of their chaperone— but his path to the seminary was not quite as direct as his younger brother’s.

“I realized for the first time: ‘Man, I could do this. [This priest] is so at peace with himself and so joyful and having so much fun. I could do this. This is a life that I could actually do,’” he said.

Despite a tug toward the seminary, Peyton decided he would pursue his original plan to study pre-med at Louisiana State University. He would go on to spend three years there in total, dating a girl he met at LSU for two of those years.

His junior year of college, Peyton returned to his high school to chaperone that year’s trip to the March for Life— the same trip

that had started the tug toward the priesthood several years earlier.

At one point in the trip, during adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Peyton perceived God’s voice: “Do you really want to be a doctor?”

The answer, as it turned out, was no.

“And the moment I heard that, my heart felt more at peace than it had in... Maybe ever in my life. I just knew. In that moment, I was like, ‘I’m going to go to seminary,’” Peyton said.

“For a moment, I had a life’s purpose. I had a direction and a goal. I just knew who I was.”

This newfound clarity came at a price, however— Peyton knew he would have to break up with his girlfriend. Which he did.

Connor remembers the phone call from Peyton, telling him he had decided to come to seminary.

“I was shocked. I was excited. I was extremely excited because we were going to be back together again,” Connor said.

In the fall of 2014, Peyton joined his younger brother at St. Joseph Seminary.

### ***‘We can rely on each other’***

Though Connor and Peyton had always been friends, their relationship changed— for the better— when Peyton joined Connor at the seminary.

For most of their life, Peyton had blazed a trail for Connor, encouraging him and giving him advice when he got to high school, after Peyton had been learning the ropes there for a year.

Now, for the first time, Connor felt in some ways like the “older brother”— being more experienced in seminary life.

At the same time, although the brothers were now pursuing the same path, they still approached seminary life in their own way, with their own ideas, and approaching challenges in different ways, he said.

The experience of taking on the challenge of becoming priests helped their relationship to mature.

“Peyton's always done his own thing because he was the first. He was the oldest. And so, he didn't have an example to go follow then, whereas I did,” Connor said.

“And so, the idea of breaking from: ‘We're going to be the same,’ was tougher for me, I think...But I think in that, in the growing pains of that, we were able to grow and really realize each other's gifts and each other's weaknesses and then rely on each other more...now I know Peyton's gifts a lot better, and he knows my gifts, and so we can rely on each other.”

Because of the way his college credits transferred from LSU, Connor and Peyton ended up in the same ordination class, despite Connor's two year “head start.”

### ***‘Getting out of the way of the Holy Spirit’***

Now that they're ordained, Peyton said their parents are constantly bombarded with the question: "What did y'all do to have half of your children enter the priesthood?"

For Peyton, there were two key factors in their upbringing that helped him and his siblings grow up as committed Catholics.

First, he said, he and his siblings attended Catholic schools— schools with a strong faith identity.

But there was something within the Plessala's family life that, for Peyton, was even more important.

“We ate dinner every single night as a family, regardless of the logistics required to make that work,” he said.

“Whether we had to eat at 4 p.m. because one of us had a game that night that we were all going to go, to or whether we had to eat at 9:30 p.m., because I was getting home from soccer practice late in high school, whatever it was. We always made it an effort to eat together, and we would pray before that meal.”

The experience of gathering every night as a family, praying and spending time together, helped the family cohere and support each member's endeavors, the brothers said.

When the brothers told their parents that they were entering the seminary, their parents were extremely supportive— even if the brothers suspected their mother might be sad that she would likely end up having fewer grandchildren.

One thing Connor has heard his mother say several times when people ask what the parents did right is that she “got out of the way of the Holy Spirit.”

The brothers said they are extremely grateful that their parents always supported their vocations. Peyton said he and Connor occasionally encountered men at the seminary who ended up leaving because their parents did not support their decision to enter.

“Yeah, parents know best, but when it comes to your children's vocations, God's the one who knows, because God's the one calling,” Connor commented.

***‘If you want to find an answer, you have to ask the question’***

Neither Connor nor Peyton ever expected to become priests. Neither, they said, did their parents or siblings expect or predict that they might be called that way.

In their words, they were just “normal guys” who practiced their faith, dated throughout high school, and had a lot of varied interests.

Peyton said the fact that they both felt an initial tug to the priesthood is not all that surprising.

“I think every young guy who really practices their faith has probably thought about it at least once, just because they've known a priest and the priest probably said, ‘Hey, you should think about this,’” he said.

Many of Peyton's devout Catholic friends are married now, and he's asked them if they ever considered the priesthood at some point before discerning marriage. Almost all, he said, told him yes; they thought about it for a week or two, but it never stuck.

What was different for him and Connor was that the idea of the priesthood didn't go away.

“It stuck with me and then it stayed with me for three years. And then finally God was like, ‘It's time, man. It's time to do it,’” he said.

“I would just encourage guys, if it really has been a while and it just sticks with you, the only way you'll ever figure that out is to actually go to seminary.”

Meeting and getting to know priests, and seeing how they lived and why, was helpful to both Peyton and Connor.

“The lives of priests are the most helpful things in getting other men to consider priesthood,” Peyton said.

Connor agreed. For him, taking the plunge and going to seminary when he was still discerning was the best way for him to decide whether God was really calling him to be a priest.

“If you want to find an answer, you have to ask the question. And the only way to ask and answer that question of priesthood is to go to the seminary,” he said.

“Go to the seminary. You will not be worse off for it. I mean, you're starting to live a life of dedicating prayer, of formation, diving into yourself, learning who you are, learning your strengths and weaknesses, learning more about the faith. All those are good things.”

The seminary is not a permanent commitment. If a young man goes to seminary and realizes the priesthood is not for him, he won't be worse off, Connor said.

“You've been formed into a better man, a better version of yourself, you've prayed a whole lot more than you would have if you were not in seminary.”

Like many people their age, Peyton and Connor's paths to their ultimate vocation was a winding one.

“The great pain of millennials is sitting there and trying to think of what you want to do with your life for so long that your life just passes you by,” Peyton said.

“And so, one of the things I like to encourage young people to do if you're

discerning, do something about it.”

CNA

<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2020/06/11/god-chose-to-call-us-the-story-of-two-brothers-ordained-catholic-priests-on-the-same-day/>

## COVID-19 Relief and Saving Catholic Schools

Catholic schools, along with other faith-based schools, are a vital gift to the families they serve and to our country. America's COVID-19 relief efforts should support the educational choices of all families and work to save Catholic schools.

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown have significantly disrupted the education of every schoolchild in America. Students, families, and schools are scrambling to envision what “back to school” might look like, especially in communities ravaged by sudden economic collapse. For these communities, the practical problems—figuring out masks, sanitizing classrooms, and delivering flexible instruction using online technology—are not their most pressing concerns. Funding is. This is especially true for the [10 percent](#) of American schoolchildren whose schools are not funded by the government, including those who attend Catholic schools.

Pause for a moment to consider the numbers. There are [nearly 6 million](#) American children of elementary and high school age who are not enrolled in government schools. Roughly 2 million of these students are in Catholic schools. Put differently, the number of children educated in Catholic schools is larger than the population of Phoenix (1.7 million) or Philadelphia (1.5 million). There are more children in Catholic schools nationwide than the populations of Washington, D.C. and Denver, Colorado, combined. None of us would ignore a crisis affecting the populations of any one of those cities. But today, an educational crisis is looming that will affect even greater numbers, as the viability of Catholic schools is seriously threatened.

Take a moment as well to appreciate why it is so vital to assist families whose children are educated outside the government school system. Catholic schools are a consistent success story in the often mediocre “big picture” of American education. Catholics, of course, find the deepest benefit in the religious aspect of Catholic education, as our children are nurtured in faith, and love for God and the Church. The intellectual and moral discipline developed through studying the faith and putting it into practice lay the foundation for a lifetime of faithful citizenship and service.

For over seventy years, Catholic schools have played an essential role in our country's educational “supply chain,” delivering on the promise to provide all enrolled students—Catholic and non-Catholic alike—with a sound formation in character and virtue, as well as excellent academics. Catholic schools continue to deliver for America, as children educated in Catholic schools consistently [outperform](#) their public school peers. In addition, Catholic schools have an outstanding record of serving America's urban poor, providing the most disadvantaged students with a ladder out of poverty and a springboard to success. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Catholic schools have navigated [distance learning](#) remarkably well, fostering community while addressing practical difficulties including access to laptops and internet for students of all socioeconomic backgrounds. It is a remarkable success story, but the next chapter depends on all of these students', Catholic and non-Catholic, being able to continue their educations uninterrupted, in the schools of their choice, including Catholic schools.

That prospect is becoming rapidly less certain by the day. Most Catholic schools depend on the tuitions paid by the parents of enrolled children, backstopped by generous donors, scholarships, and limited parish or diocesan reserves. Those dollars are drying up like water in the desert.

On May 15, the Archdiocese of St. Louis [announced](#) it would be closing three Catholic elementary schools because of “financial losses from the coronavirus pandemic.” Catholic schools in [Houston, Texas](#), [Camden, New Jersey](#), and [Fall River, Massachusetts](#), are closing as well, for similar reasons. Even Catholic schools that began the year in the black are at risk, with out-of-work families unable to pay tuition and parishes facing their own financial crisis, after being shut for two months with no weekly collections. The pandemic’s economic crisis is now an education crisis, threatening the educational futures of millions of schoolchildren and the survival of Catholic schools.

The coronavirus shutdown delivered a sledgehammer blow to local economies, throwing over [36 million](#) people out of work nationwide, decimating state budgets, and reducing state and local tax revenues (essential means of support for government-run schools) to a trickle. No school—whether taxpayer-funded or independent—can run without money to pay teachers and keep the lights on. The education lobby knows this. It is in a full-court press to score billions in federal funding for government schools and related pet projects. Their concerns, however, seem to extend only to the children [enrolled](#) in government schools. But the same lockdown that created the budget shortfalls for government-run schools has destroyed the livelihoods and financial reserves of many parents whose kids were thriving in faith-based, tuition-

dependent schools. Their hard-earned salaries, once adequate to cover monthly tuition payments to Catholic schools, are in jeopardy, if not gone already.

Families who pay twice for education—first through their taxes, which underwrite government schools for other families who choose that option and, second, through the tuition they pay to the faith-based schools they’ve chosen as the best option for their own children—have no powerful lobby to go to bat for them. The NEA, in contrast, has begun a \$1.6 million ad campaign pressuring Congress to turn the spigot on and keep federal funds flowing, but only to government schools. No matter that students in faith-based schools have had their school year turned completely upside down by the virus. No matter that many of their families are suddenly in serious financial difficulty. No matter that their families’ tax dollars are funding other people’s educations in government schools. No matter that the students enrolled in Catholic schools save the government [\\$24 billion](#) a year in costs (and they gain a better education). No matter that government schools could never effectively absorb all the kids being educated in non-public schools, if those non-public schools disappeared.

So where is the federal funding to help these children stay in school and to help their families sustain their children’s education? (Only [35 percent](#) of Catholic schools received funding through the Payment Protection Plan, according to the *Catholic News Service*, but even those funds cannot sustain the schools into the new year.)

The same day the Archdiocese of St. Louis announced the school closures, the US House of Representatives passed the HEROES Act, a \$3 trillion dollar stimulus that includes, according to EdWeek, “[\\$100](#)

[billion](#) for K–12 and higher education, \$915 billion in state and local aid that could be used to help schools, and \$1.5 billion to expand student access to the internet.” Back in St. Louis, the school closures came as a terrible blow to the families at Most Holy Trinity, a Catholic school with a 160-year history of serving St. Louis students. The school serves a predominantly low-income, minority community, whose families were grateful for the chance to enroll their children in Catholic school. Evie Moore, a mother interviewed by the [St. Louis Post-Dispatch](#), described Most Holy Trinity as “a light.” She worries that “they’re about to displace these students. In the middle of a pandemic, we have to figure out where to send our children to school. If you stay in this neighborhood, you’re not going to have many options.”

It turns out the HEROES Act is rather heartless towards parents like Evie Moore (and her daughters) who depend on Catholic schools. The school superintendents’ lobby ([ASSA](#)) boasts that the HEROES Act includes specific language “[reigning in](#) [sic]” the Department of Education’s efforts to extend some limited assistance to students in non-public schools. Yes, even as the progressive education establishment is [seeking](#) billions and billions of dollars in federal funds for government schools, they are doubling down in their opposition

towards giving any aid to families outside their monopolistic control. Surely Americans can come together and prioritize federal aid to assist all schoolchildren. Surely we can come together to ensure that all children have the support they need to get back to the business of learning, with the teachers they love, and in the schools where they flourish. Surely Congress would support the administration in extending that financial lifeline to stabilize the independent educational “supply chain,” not just the state-run supply chain, because both provide an essential service—education—for America’s students.

Whether through grants to state education agencies to fund government schools or grants directly to parents whose children rely on faith-based or independent schools, the objective is the same: to ensure that the vital mission of educating the next generation continues. Catholic schools are an irreplaceable part of that mission. That was the message that Cardinal Dolan, Cardinal O’Malley, Bishop Barber, and others sought to emphasize to [President Trump](#) in a call with him and other Catholic education leaders on April 25. Catholic schools, along with other faith-based schools, are a vital gift to the families they serve and to our country. It’s time to support the educational choices of all families, and to save Catholic schools.

Mary Rice Hasson and Theresa Farnan

<https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/05/63769/>

## The Idea of the Catholic School

One needn't be a Hegelian to think that ideas have consequences. We tend to focus on the negative effects of bad ideas, heresies, metaphysical errors. But true ideas are also powerful, and never more than when they are lived well and justly supported by the commonwealth. The idea of the Catholic school is a case in point.

Consider the extraordinary history of Catholic schools in America. In eighteenth-century New Orleans, Ursuline Sisters educated both free and enslaved black girls. In the nineteenth century, when anti-Catholic sentiment ran high, parochial schools boomed as the country surged with Catholic immigrants. These schools provided a sound education for the poor that didn't contradict their Catholic faith.

Yet true ideas, especially when they move and live and have real effects, often face resistance. As Catholic schools expanded, powerful forces impeded their progress through legal means. State after state passed Blaine Amendments to deny public funding to any "sectarian institution"—which meant, almost invariably, Catholic parochial schools. The Blaine Amendments functioned then (and now) as a kind of anti-Catholic tax. They required Catholic families to pay for schools that weren't hostile to their faith, and for the so-called "public" system of education (which often was hostile to their faith). These state-level attempts at raising the "wall of separation" even higher than the Constitution required were discriminatory attempts to handicap the very idea of Catholic schools.

Yet Catholics cheerfully took up their cross, and they made great sacrifices. They built an educational system that delivered a quality education to both rich and poor. Pope Leo

XIII made the idea of the Catholic school a cornerstone of his social teaching partly in recognition of the success of the Catholic school system in this country.

In 1885 Leo wrote to encourage the American bishops in an encyclical called [Longinqua](#). He began, "We highly esteem and love exceedingly the young and vigorous American nation, in which We plainly discern latent forces for the advancement alike of civilization and of Christianity." He observed that "the prosperous condition of Catholicity must be ascribed, first indeed, to the virtue, the ability, and the prudence of the bishops and clergy" as well as "to the faith and generosity of the Catholic laity." What did he have in mind? "Schools for the instruction of youth, colleges for the higher branches, homes for the poor, hospitals for the sick, and convents and monasteries." These were the "latent forces" that he knew advanced both civilization and the Church—but it was the idea of the Catholic school he stressed most.

Pope Leo wrote that religious liberty is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the "prosperous growth" of the Catholic Church. The Church could bring forth the greatest blessings if "in addition to liberty, she enjoyed the favor of the laws and the patronage of the public authority"—precisely what the Blaine Amendments were intended to forestall.

Catholics had led the nation in founding not only parochial schools, but also high schools, colleges, and universities. "Catholics ought to be not followers but leaders," Leo argued. Only a few years after Longinqua he would found The Catholic University of America in the

nation's capital as an anchor for the idea of the Catholic school as a latent force of flourishing. In many states, the discriminatory Blaine Amendments still stand. Bishops and laity had to overcome them in practice through extraordinary sacrifices. Spurred on by Catholic social teaching, parochial schools expanded at an exponential rate despite every obstacle.

But then internal obstacles arose. The vast exodus of religious sisters and priests in the 1970s left Catholic schools without one of their greatest assets: well-formed teachers who knew their faith and their subjects. To meet this challenge, bishops had no choice but to look to the model of the public school system. Suddenly, the idea of the Catholic school had new problems, which Catholics handled in both good and bad ways.

Today, Catholic schools—both weak and strong—have a challenge that dwarfs every obstacle of the last three centuries. Having become just as tuition-dependent as “private schools,” the parochial educational system is now under threat of utter collapse. The nationwide pandemic and the consequent economic shutdown may do what the dastardly Blaine Amendments failed to do and shut down Catholic schools, to the detriment of millions of families, and hundreds of communities. More than 600 of the nation's Catholic schools may have to permanently close because of this pandemic's economic fallout. Family wages are dropping due to widespread furloughs and unemployment. The tuition payments, difficult for families to bear before, have become burdens that are simply impossible for many families to carry. For American children who rely on Catholic schools, our health crisis has become an economic crisis,

and our economic crisis has become an education crisis that wounds the family, the nation, and the church.

Catholic schools serve the common good of Catholics but also the nation as a whole. Our schools [provide](#) over \$24 billion in annual savings to the American taxpayer, and educate children at less than half the cost of state schools. Catholics schools have a 99 percent high school graduation rate. If a black or Latino child attends a Catholic school, he is 42 percent more likely to graduate from high school and more than twice as likely to graduate college. A 2010 study showed that social cohesion decreases, and disorder increases, following the closure of a Catholic elementary school. These are mere white paper statistics, but they confirm the Leonine idea that Catholic schools are a powerful force for civilization.

As I write, congressional staffers are preparing a multi-billion-dollar assistance package for public schools nationwide, to keep them open despite expected shortfalls in state education budgets. This is necessary and important aid, but it should not mimic the unconstitutional and discriminatory Blaine Amendments by leaving out Catholic schools.

Catholic schools also educate America's children and are no less deserving of scholarship funds that would help Catholic parents pay for tuition costs this fall. Like nations themselves, Catholic schools stand or fall by the grace of God. But right now, Catholic schools are in desperate need of both the prayers of Pope Leo and the intervention of our nation in this great moment of shared economic hardship.

C. C. Pecknold

<https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2020/05/the-idea-of-the-catholic-school>

## Some Private Schools Are Struggling, Too. Let's Not Forget Them.

Schools with high tuition and deep endowments are not the norm in K-12 education.

Private elementary and secondary schools are taking it on the chin. Since the COVID-19 pandemic shut down schools across the land, more than two dozen schools have closed for good. While thousands of other scrappy, beloved community institutions are scrambling to hold on, private schools are also under the microscope. Earlier this month, it was reported that elite prep schools like Saint Andrew's (which President Trump's youngest son attends) had received Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans. The backlash was justifiably swift (even from [within the administration](#)).

The PPP brouhaha is just one of the recent events complicating efforts to support struggling private schools (for another example, [see here](#)). After all, no one should be making the case to bail out deep-pocketed, elite private schools (with tuitions nearing \$50,000 and endowments in the tens of millions). But contrary to public misperception, such schools are only a tiny sliver of the nation's 35,000 private schools. Indeed, thousands of private schools are a tuition cycle away from dire financial straits—or closure.

Bellwether Education has reported that, in 2011-12 (the most recent year with nationwide data), 60 percent of private schools [charged less than \\$6,000](#) a year in tuition. In diocesan Catholic schools, which comprise the [largest share](#) of private schools, the average K-8 parish school [charged tuition](#) of \$4,841 in 2017-18 (and enrolled about 240 students). Such costs are dwarfed by annual outlays on the nation's public schools, which collect an

average of \$13,000 to \$14,000 a year per pupil—with the amount higher still in urban centers like New York and Chicago.

Not only are most private schools relatively inexpensive, but the evidence suggests that they're putting those dollars to good use. Dating back to James Coleman's [seminal research](#) from decades ago, the evidence suggests that students who choose to attend private schools reap significant benefits from doing so. More recent research continues and extends Coleman's findings. As *EdChoice* has [reported](#) in a summary of the research on private-school choice programs, 11 out of 17 gold-standard studies on academic performance found positive outcomes, four out of six empirical analyses on education attainment were positive, and 28 out of 30 studies showed increased parental satisfaction.

If these schools close, the negative impacts extend beyond the students and families that attended those schools. If a sizable share of the 5 million students who attend private K-12 schools suddenly flood into local public schools, the costs would be significant. *EdChoice*'s Robert Enlow has [calculated](#) that if only 10 percent of private school students return to the public system, the combined state and local cost would be \$6.7 billion a year. If 30 percent of private school students were suddenly to enroll in public schools, the cost would be \$20 billion a year.

Then there's the seismic impact of losing vital community institutions. As Notre Dame scholars Nicole Garnett and Margaret Brinig studied the closure of Catholic schools across the dioceses of Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Chicago in their 2014 book [Lost Classroom, Lost Community](#) and

found that the loss of these schools led a significant loss of social capital and an overall decline in community cohesion. Garnett and Brinig found that, between 1999 and 2005, the presence of an open Catholic school in a police beat was consistently associated with a statistically significant decrease in crime (the crime rate in police beats with Catholic schools was, on average, at least 33 percent lower than in police beats without them).

Congress rightly stepped up to help preserve all manner of small enterprises across the land, from hamburger stands to hair salons. Federal aid during a pandemic is less a bailout than life support provided in response to a purposeful shutdown of the economy. Schools were shuttered in the service of public health. That's fine. Public schools are facing budget shortfalls and will continue to need additional assistance, but they also have known they would continue to receive revenues throughout the crisis, and that they'll come back to new revenues in the fall. Tuition-dependent private schools know no such thing. Their survival is entirely dependent on whether and when they're allowed to open.

In the meantime, as Congress seeks to bolster state governments and local school systems in the next round of aid, it should take care to ensure that private schools don't get left behind. While they were eligible for PPP loans, private schools are not used to collecting federal funds. Unlike big nonprofits, they don't have in-house lawyers or grant writers and financial advisors. Thus, they generally weren't equipped to take advantage of PPP loans for private small businesses. And, unlike local districts, they can't be sure that they'll still be around whenever things start to return to normal. Thousands of private schools are in mortal peril through no fault of their own, and it

would be a grave loss to the nation if they were to vanish. Congress should act accordingly.

In the HEROES Act, the House Democrats' opening bid [included almost \\$60 billion in K-12 funding](#) and [\\$900 billion more for state and local government](#). Given that more than a quarter of state revenue [flows into K-12 schools](#), that would earmark another \$200 billion-plus for public school systems. In short, the House proposal envisions more than \$250 billion for public schools (though a final deal is likely to be for significantly less). Whatever the numbers turn out to be, Congress would do well to set forth a modest, additional pool of funds to support hand-to-mouth private schools.

About 10 percent of all students—and about 5 percent of low-income students—attend private schools. Let's work from the lower of those figures. If another aid bill passes, Congress should include a provision that allocates an amount of aid for private K-12 schools that is the equivalent to 5 percent of the aid set aside for public schools. If combined aid for public schools winds up at around half the House's projected level, say \$120 billion, that would suggest investing about \$6 billion in a preservation fund for private schools. These funds should not come at the expense of support for public K-12 schools—they should accompany it.

Now, concerns about federal funds subsidizing ritzy private schools are certainly fair. So, two criteria should be required of schools seeking aid. First, a school's 2019-20 tuition should be no higher than local public school per pupil spending. Second, schools with any kind of sizable endowment should be ineligible. For those worried about church-state issues, there's no need to wade into complicated discussions of Trinity Lutheran; religious institutions

were eligible for PPP loans, that template should apply here.

School districts will need federal support, but they can also count on a guaranteed stream of tax dollars going forward—

Frederick M. Hess

<https://www.aei.org/op-eds/some-private-schools-are-struggling-too-lets-not-forget-them/>

regardless of when they open their doors. Thousands of small, irreplaceable private schools will not have that backstop. It's time for Congress to do what it can to provide one.

## National Review: It's Time for a Federal Voucher Program

*A battle over COVID-19 relief money  
highlights just what is broken about how we fund education.*

As part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, Congress allocated \$30 billion to assist educational institutions in handling the economic fallout from COVID-19. About half of that funding was designated for higher education and \$13.5 billion for K–12 schools, with the remainder left to state governments.

The bill gave the Department of Education discretion to craft guidelines for disbursing the money, and earlier this month, Secretary Betsy DeVos came under fire after she directed school districts to increase the amount of the money spent on students who attend private schools. Most of the funds will be allocated on the basis of need, with more going to areas that have higher numbers of low-income students. But the new guidance requires districts to allocate part of their shares to private-school students, on the basis of what percentage of all students in their jurisdictions attend private schools, rather than what percentage of low-income students do.

Angering opponents of school choice, DeVos has also used about \$180 million of the CARES Act funding to incentivize states to create microgrants, which would allow parents of grade-school or high-school children to pay for a variety of educational options, including private schools.

DeVos's critics, including several Democratic congressmen, argue that her guidance violates the intention of the law because it requires districts to use emergency funding, allocated based on poverty rates, to support all local students, including supposedly wealthy ones who

attend private schools. According to [Chalkbeat](#), public-school advocates say the guidance “will funnel precious resources to wealthy private schools while districts struggle to provide computers and free meals.”

Supporters of the department's guidance, meanwhile, say it is consistent with the intention of the CARES Act, which aims to assist all schools and students in recovering from the economic crisis caused by the pandemic.

It is worth noting that DeVos's efforts to assist private-school children involve a tiny percentage of the overall CARES Act funding designated for schools. Moreover, there is no reason why governments should, for instance, privilege a local public school's efforts to provide computers over assisting parents who want to keep their children in private schools. Arguments to the contrary are simply a retread of common anti-school-choice talking points, which insist that any government help for parents who opt out of public school — whether in the form of vouchers, education-savings accounts, or tax-credit-scholarship programs — disadvantages those who remain in the public-school system.

One might quibble with the specifics of how DeVos sought to include private schools and their students in the distribution of CARES Act funds, but her reasons for doing so are sensible. Though the stimulus bill dispensed funding to educational institutions, Congress failed to acknowledge that millions of Americans choose not to send their children to public schools and thus are receiving no

assistance to continue making the best educational choices they can during this crisis.

Private schools typically receive far less direct financial assistance from the government than public schools. In the case of religious schools, such assistance has, in most cases, been deemed a violation of the First Amendment's establishment clause. While public schools are the beneficiaries of a steady stream of funding from the local, state, and federal governments, underwritten by taxpayers, the majority of private schools rely almost entirely on tuition money and donations. Absent aid, these schools will be the first to close when families face coronavirus-related financial hardship, and our country will be worse off for it.

To take just one example, close to 2 million American children attend Catholic schools in the U.S., and nearly 20 percent of those students are minorities. According to one study, a Hispanic or African-American student who attends Catholic school is 42 percent more likely to graduate from high school and 2.5 times more likely to graduate from college than one who doesn't.

Meanwhile, the National Catholic Educational Association estimates that Catholic schools save the U.S. about \$24 billion each year. The mean cost per student at a Catholic school is \$5,847, and \$12,608 at a public school. Yet because of the pandemic, more than 600 Catholic schools in the U.S. are at risk of shutting down.

Alexandra Desanctis

<https://www.nationalreview.com/2020/05/coronavirus-relief-education-federal-voucher-program/>

DeVos's guidance is merely one small way of attempting to level the playing field in the absence of efforts to directly help private schools and the families they serve. It would be even better for Congress to offset tuition costs by earmarking funding in the next coronavirus-relief package for parents who send their children to non-public K-12 schools. A targeted voucher program, created specifically to respond to the economic devastation of the COVID-19 outbreak, would help parents to continue sending their children to the schools that are best for them.

In the long term, though, the best solution of all would be for Congress to finally create a federal program providing vouchers, tax-credit scholarships, or education-savings accounts to families. The debate over government relief and DeVos's guidance illustrates precisely what is broken about education funding in the U.S. There is no reason why a financial crisis should spur the federal government to pour billions of dollars into public schools while ignoring the millions of parents who believe a private education is best for their children. Yet that is what it has done, because that is what it is in the habit of doing during more "normal" times.

American families deserve better now, and they'll deserve better going forward. Congress must act to give them as many options as possible.

## At Least 100 Catholic Schools Across the Country May Not Reopen This Fall

*Catholic schools from New Jersey to California are permanently closing their doors.*

Things were looking bright for All Saints Catholic School in Wilmington, Delaware. Even as enrollment in Catholic schools was dropping nationwide, its student population had grown 6% this year. Its finances were looking up too: Fundraising increased 368% in the past four years.

Then the unexpected happened: a pandemic hit.

The school's finances were suddenly in shambles. The foundations it relied on for financial support refocused their spending on serving families' immediate needs, like hunger. The school's meticulous plan for growth and sustainability unraveled.

In late April, All Saints announced that it wouldn't be able to reopen next year, forcing its approximately 200 students to find other schools.

COVID-19 has thrown pre-K, K-12, and higher education into a state of financial disarray. The pandemic has been particularly catastrophic for private Catholic schools: At least 100 across the country are expected not to reopen in the fall, according to the National Catholic Education Association.

"There simply isn't money," Kathy Mears, interim president and CEO of the group, told *HuffPost*.

The reasons for the devastation are threefold: Families who have lost jobs are unenrolling, for fear that they won't be able to afford tuition; schools have had to cancel spring fundraisers that help keep the institutions afloat; and without in-person

services, churches' offertory collections — which typically provide a major source of education funding — have taken a hit.

Foundations that help Catholic schools are also shifting their spending priorities amid widespread unemployment and financial devastation.

Like so much of the impact of COVID-19, the effects of these school closures will be stratified by class.

At All Saints, tuition only covered 52% of the school's expenses this year, while tuition covers about 80% of a typical Catholic school's expenses, according to Louis P. DeAngelo, the Wilmington Diocese superintendent of schools. About 50% of students receive financial assistance at All Saints, where the student body has a substantial immigrant population. Tuition is \$6,400 a year for first through eighth graders, and \$6,100 for students in kindergarten and preschool.

"The Catholic schools that serve wealthier clientele will probably be fine, but the ones that serve the working class and the poor, it will be difficult," said Mears. "If this trend continues, I worry there won't be Catholic school options, especially for the middle class and poor."

Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos has worked to give private schools a bigger share of coronavirus relief funding, but [public school groups](#) say her action violates the intent of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act and directly takes funding away from low-income students in

public schools. While private schools around the country say they're struggling, public schools — which serve 90% of the nation's children — [also anticipate having to lay off](#) hundreds of thousands of teachers.

The Catholic school closures announced so far are taking place all over the country, from St. Louis to Houston to Red Bluff, California. The Diocese of Camden, New Jersey, has announced that five of its schools will not be reopening. The oldest all-girls Catholic school in Maryland, which boasts notable alumnae like [House Speaker Nancy Pelosi](#), also announced that it would be closing its doors.

In a call with Catholic leaders last month, President Donald Trump promised to help these schools, calling himself the “best [president] in the history of the Catholic Church,” according to [the Catholic news website Crux](#).

But so far, Mears estimated that the closures will impact at least 50,000 students.

“I know we're important to the country,” said Mears, noting that a majority of sitting Supreme Court justices attended Catholic or Jesuit schools as children, as did Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. “We hope some schools will reopen, but history tells us most will not.”

Enrollment in Catholic schools has been on a steep decline for decades. In 1965, there were around 13,000 Catholic schools around the country, Mears said. Now the number sits just over 6,000.

The closure of All Saints is symptomatic of larger issues. The Wilmington Diocese had already announced the closure of two other schools before the pandemic hit. All Saints

itself opened after three schools in the area had to merge. In recent years, the school seemed to have turned a corner, steadily getting enrollment rates on an upward trajectory.

When the school building closed on March 13 and teachers and families shifted to remote learning, they had no expectation they would never be able to return. Mary Elizabeth Muir, the school's principal, said she expected only a two-week break.

But it became apparent as the state stay-at-home order turned into weeks and the weeks turned into months that the school was no longer sustainable. The boards and leaders that oversee the school came to a painful conclusion.

“We weren't able to create a budget for next year, not one that was viable,” said Muir. Having to explain the situation to teachers and families over video chat, rather than in person, felt like salt in an already painful wound. Many parents in the school community had lost their jobs and were facing personal and financial upheaval. This only caused more tumult.

“We couldn't be together. We haven't been together. So I think it's very raw,” said Muir over the phone, choking back tears. “We're never going to do school again together. We're never going to be together in the way that we were called to be together.”

Jessica Dzielak is being impacted by the closure of All Saints in two ways: She's been a preschool teacher there for two years, and her daughter is also one of the preschool's students. She told HuffPost that she was in a “fog” after she learned of the closure on a Zoom call. Her children could sense her

unhappiness, and would discuss how mommy had to find a new job. “The staff is the best staff I’ve ever worked with,” said Dzielak, who has already found a new position at another local Catholic school, which her daughter will also attend. “It was devastating.”

Around half of the schools’ approximately 200 students have already been placed in other nearby Catholic schools. While the students’ new schools are making efforts to make sure they will be able to receive the same amount of financial assistance, it’s not guaranteed, said DeAngelo. All Saints’ current students will be finishing the academic year remotely.

Around the country, it’s a similar story in different locations, with a sense that the worst may be yet to come.

“The real concern is the people who say they’re coming next year, who registered for the schools. Are they actually going to be able to come is the big unknown,” said

Rebecca Klein

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/catholic-schools-closed-coronavirus-pandemic\\_n\\_5ec2e0a3c5b684c3d6072475](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/catholic-schools-closed-coronavirus-pandemic_n_5ec2e0a3c5b684c3d6072475)

Steven Cheeseman, superintendent of schools for the diocese in Bridgeport, Connecticut, which announced in April that it won’t be able to reopen one of its schools, after the pandemic hindered its ability to recruit students.

One school in Allentown, Pennsylvania, had already been suffering from declining enrollment and sustaining the school was increasingly cutting into its parish’s savings. Then the coronavirus hit, and “weekly collections over the past eight weeks have been far less than could support the school,” Matt Kerr, secretary for external affairs for the Diocese of Allentown, said in an e-mail. The diocese announced the closure in April.

Mears speculated that 100 closed schools is likely an underestimate, and that the number of permanent closures will grow in coming months.

“I would hate for our country to lose a great source of education,” she said.

## Newsweek: I'm an Evangelical Fighting for the Catholic School System

As an evangelical Christian, I am not the person most would guess to be standing at the front of the march holding a sign in support of Catholic schools. After all, dating back to the [Reformation](#), the Protestants and the Catholics have had more than a few substantive theological differences like, for example, indulgences, Church authority, the composition of the priesthood, sacraments and even eternal justification.

And yet, while we might disagree over things like the [literal presence](#) or [salvation](#), we are totally unified when it comes to the important role of Catholic education in both America's past and future.

Right now, that rich and important role is facing ominous dueling threats that imperil its future: the Chinese coronavirus and radical liberal elected officials across the country.

Catholic Schools are the backbone of school choice for those wanting to opt-out of dysfunctional public institutions. As far back as March, the New York [Daily News](#) was already writing about the challenges that these schools were facing because forced lockdowns—and the millions of layoffs that followed—have made it incredibly difficult, perhaps impossible, for many struggling families to pay tuition. Now, almost two months later, the problem is only more severe.

With the balance of the 2019-20 school year clearly gone, attention turns toward fall and the upcoming 2020-21 academic year. How will families with unemployed parents be able to send their children to a parochial education when it means having to pay tuition for two successive school years without any income? The answer is that

many won't be able to do so. They will be forced to return their children to failing public schools. This is especially true in inner cities, where minority communities and other marginalized groups are disproportionately impacted.

The sad truth is that, as this process plays out again and again across the country, many Catholic schools themselves are going to end up shuttered.

[Catholic education](#) in America is actually older than America herself, with the first such school having been established by the Spaniards in St. Augustine, Florida back in 1606. After the Constitution was ratified, growth of Catholic schools started in Maryland—the early Catholic stronghold in the U.S.—and branched out from there. By the 1960s, the high point of Catholic education in our country, there were 4.5 million elementary students enrolled in Catholic elementary schools, and over one million students enrolled in their high school counterparts.

Today there are approximately 1.8 million students enrolled in the Catholic system. The decline over time reflects both our nation's gradual movement toward a more secular culture, as well as the greatly increased cost of attending the school, in part because of ever-increasing property taxes (and other taxes)—the most common funding mechanism for public schools. Secular culture and the higher taxes are both rooted in collectivism, which is much more interested in ethical variations of [Rousseau's "civil religion"](#) than in the Christian virtues—which problematically espouse personal accountability, freedom and God's truth over that of the state's.

Now, the state-mandated lockdowns, many of which will continue to stretch on into the summer months, threaten to finish what the secular statist has started. Without some sort of relief for tuition-paying families, we are going to lose Catholic schools by the time football season (hopefully) rolls around, and still more the next year. Opening back up a shuttered institution is not like opening up a summer home after a long winter. It's a difficult, almost impossible process. You can tear down the Catholic school system overnight, but it will take years to bring it back from the brink.

Religious people of all faiths and denominations have a vested stake in the health of these institutions. We must be unified in our appeal to state governors and large city mayors to provide forms of financial relief and subsidy to families who

Charlie Kirk

<https://www.newsweek.com/im-evangelical-fighting-catholic-school-system-opinion-1502989>

want to continue to send their children to private Catholic and other religious schools. In many locations, these schools provide the only viable alternative to the anti-religious, public education system.

Blue states and blue cities are the ones most hostile to private, religious education. That isn't a coincidence. As I have been warning, and will continue to warn, during this pandemic lockdown, people in power who are intent on controlling every aspect of our daily lives are using this crisis as a means to "take out" the remaining strongholds fighting against their secular hegemony. Religious schools are part of that Maginot Line holding back that secular dominance. We must stand together unified, no matter our own unique faith traditions or denominations, to help preserve their vital role in traditional American life.

## Catholic Schools Are at Risk and So Are the Students

It was an unusual call, but, then, these are unusual times. [President Trump](#) met recently — virtually, of course — with top leaders of the Catholic Church in the United States to discuss the survival of Catholic schools. Catholic schools make up the largest system of private schools in this country and they are facing massive closures due to the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. I had the privilege of being a fly on the wall during that conversation and can report that the discussion acknowledged some good news, but also pointed to a pressing need. And a way to meet that pressing need.

First, much appreciation was expressed for the Trump administration's inclusion of faith-based institutions in the CARES Act's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). This has allowed many Catholic schools to keep its teachers, bus-drivers, and other staff on the payroll (for now). This was a huge victory for people of all faiths — to be treated as equal partners in America's public square, as the Supreme Court affirmed is proper in [Trinity Lutheran v. Comer](#). When it came to the PPP, the Trump administration made clear that we're all in this together.

While the PPP helped schools survive in the short-term, many will soon again be on the brink of closure, and the cardinals on the phone call were sounding the alarm bells. The most vulnerable Catholic schools are those in urban areas that serve the most vulnerable children. Public schools in these neighborhoods will chug along with government support. Catholic schools, however, rely on the charitable support of the community and the ability of parents to be able to scrape together the tuition. They're at risk. So are their students.

Why should the president — or other non-Catholics for that matter — care about the fate of Catholic schools? The answer to this question clearly caught President Trump's attention on the call: [Catholic schools save the taxpayers \\$24 billion a year](#). Yes, \$24 billion.

The math is simple. The average per-pupil cost of a public-school education is about \$12,000 annually. (The average per-pupil cost at Catholic schools is [\\$5,847](#)). Two million children educated in Catholic schools, [two million children the public does not pay to educate](#). That's a whopping \$24 billion savings every year for taxpayers.

More importantly, the students at these less costly schools [perform far better](#) than their public-school counterparts. While many Catholic schools serve underprivileged areas with failing public schools, they have a staggering [99 percent graduation rate](#) and 86 percent of their graduates go to college. A full 20 percent are minority students, and almost 20 percent are not even Catholic. But the faith component is key to this successful model. A recent [Harvard study](#) showed kids who are raised with faith are happier and healthier, with lower rates of depression, drug and alcohol abuse. Catholic schools include a dose of character education — and an even stronger dose of love. Children are better able to thrive and reach their potential with this wind in their sails.

One former Catholic schoolgirl at Blessed Sacrament in the Bronx, Justice [Sonia Sotomayor](#) of the Supreme Court, has offered strong testimony about the importance of these schools. As [she told the New York Times](#), “You know how important those eight years were? ....what it

means for all our families, like my mother, who were dirt-poor. She watched what happened to my cousins in public school and worried if we went there, we might not get out. So she scrimped and saved. It was a road of opportunity for kids with no other alternative.” Justice Sotomayor’s experience is not unique.

On the call, President Trump seemed genuinely impressed with the Catholic school model and bowled over by the \$24-billion figure. He returned to the impressive statistics at the end of the conference call: Better outcomes for children at half the cost!

Maureen Ferguson

<https://thehill.com/opinion/education/496409-catholic-schools-are-at-risk-and-so-are-the-students>

And tremendous taxpayer savings to boot. A pretty good deal.

The CARES Act has certainly provided short-term help, but more is needed in the wake of the virus’s economic devastation. The Administration has proposed “[The Education Freedom Scholarship](#)” tax-credit program to help parents like Justice Sotomayor’s mother have a choice in the education of her child. This would be a lifeline to families who cannot otherwise afford to pay tuition and at a savings to taxpayers. Squandering this opportunity would be a tragedy for the future Sonias out there.

## Christopher Columbus Name Won't Be Changed At Wisconsin Catholic High School

A Catholic high school in Wisconsin will not change its name from “Columbus Catholic High School” after a petition from alumni and other members of the community requested the change. But with Columbus statues coming down in cities across the country, one expert says the explorer has been mischaracterized.

The Wisconsin petition, which was started by three recent graduates of the high school, demands that the name of the school be changed and that a statue of Christopher Columbus be removed from the front of the school.

The petition charged that Columbus “acted in deeply racist ways,” mistreated and enslaved indigenous people, and “represents racism and hatred.”

But David Eaton, the president of Columbus Catholic Schools, explained in a letter several reasons why the schools would not be changing their name. Eaton’s letter was initially published on a Facebook page for alumni of the school, and was subsequently re-published in local media. Columbus Catholic Schools includes two schools—Columbus Catholic High School and Columbus Catholic Middle School—both named after Christopher Columbus.

The reason the schools were named, Eaton explained, was not out of blind admiration for the 15th-century Italian explorer. Rather, it was done to honor the people who funded the construction of the school — local Knights of Columbus.

“Like all histories, the history of Columbus Catholic Schools is long and somewhat complicated,” Eaton began his letter. He

explained that in 1882, the first Catholic church in the town of Marshfield, Wisconsin was completed, with the city’s first Catholic school coming six years later.

In 1915, the Knights of Columbus chartered a council in the town, and the area’s Catholic population grew until it became clear there was a need for a new high school.

“Which brings us back to the Knights of Columbus,” Eaton wrote. “The KCs played a role in funding the construction of the new school. While each parish, and private donors, also made significant contributions to Columbus High School, the support of the Knights of Columbus was critical.”

As a sign of the school’s history and ties with the Knights of Columbus, the school’s mascot was at some point changed to the “Don”—a term which refers to a Spanish or Italian noble.

“The mascot, therefore, is quite literally a “Knight of Columbus,” said Eaton.

“Those who chose the name likely did so more to honor the help and legacy of the Knights of Columbus than to honor Columbus the man. Like Father McGivney, they hoped to provide a place for Catholics to escape from the prejudices they faced in secular society even at that time,” he said.

While Eaton acknowledged that Columbus is not today universally regarded as a positive role model, one expert on the explorer has written that Columbus is frequently mischaracterized or misunderstood.

Columbus, cultural anthropologist Carol Delaney told *CNA* in 2017, has been “terribly maligned.”

“I think a lot of people don’t know anything much, really about Columbus,” said Delaney, an anthropology professor emerita at Stanford University and the author of the 2011 book “Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem.”

In 1492, the explorer, as American schoolchildren are taught, sailed the ocean blue.

But contrary to popular belief, Delaney said Columbus had a favorable impression of many of the Native Americans he met, and instructed the men under his command not to abuse them, but to trade with them. At one point Columbus hung some of his own men who had committed crimes against native people.

Columbus was not hell-bent on genocide, slavery, and rape of the native population he encountered in his travels, Delaney told the Knights of Columbus in 2017. In fact, the explorer was deeply religious, and hoped to evangelize the indigenous people in America, by teaching the Catholic faith.

“His relations with the natives tended to be benign. He liked the natives and found them to be very intelligent,” she said.

“He also described them as ‘natural Christians’ because they had no other ‘sect,’ or false faith, and believed that they could easily become Christians if they had instruction.”

“When I read his own writings and the documents of those who knew him, he seemed to be very much on the side of the Indians,” Delaney added in a 2017 interview with *CNA*.

“They’re blaming Columbus for the things he didn’t do. It was mostly the people who came after, the settlers,” she added.

The call to rename Columbus Catholic High School comes at a time when statues of many historical figures—including Columbus—have been taken down by protestors and rioters.

One statue of Columbus was removed from the grounds of the Minnesota Capitol in St. Paul. The statue, which was created by an Italian-American and was intended as a show of support for the Italian immigrant population of Minnesota, was toppled on June 10.

No charges have been filed against the people who brought down the statue.

Jason Adkins, executive director of the Minnesota Catholic Conference, told *CNA* that the statue’s fall is a sign of “negligent failure by public officials.”

“We cannot allow persons or activists of politically favored groups to destroy property, public or private, simply because an object or building causes offense,” Adkins said in a statement to *CNA*.

“The celebration by many in the community of the statue’s lawless removal also shows the prevalence of fake history. Columbus is not a canonized saint, but he is not a villain, either. As described by Pope Leo XIII, his motives were exemplary, and it was an extraordinary achievement to connect the peoples of two hemispheres. To say Columbus was a perpetrator of genocide makes a mockery of the term,” he added.

Adkins said that he had “made inquiries” for a transparent process on restoring the statue to its previous location.

“The statue should be restored to public view,” he said.

CNA

<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2020/06/18/christopher-columbus-name-wont-be-changed-at-wisconsin-catholic-high-school/>

## Cardinal Asks Catholics To Help Pandemic-Hit Families and Schools in the Holy Land

A cardinal has urged Catholics worldwide to support a fund helping families and schools in the Holy Land affected by the coronavirus crisis.

Cardinal Fernando Filoni told *EWTN News* June 22 that the pandemic is “creating a lot of preoccupation” in the region.

The Grand Master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre noted that the organization created a [COVID-19 humanitarian support fund](#) in May.

The order, which dates back to at least the 14th century, has an estimated 30,000 members in 40 countries.

Filoni said: “It is an act of generosity, an act of charity to the families which have no other income, and we know that Christian families sometimes are poorer, so answering to them is a question also of sharing with them their concerns and taking on our shoulders also a little bit of their heavy situation.”

The cardinal, who was appointed Grand Master in December 2019, explained that the money raised would help not only families, but also students at Church-run schools.

“We have almost 40 schools, secondary schools and universities too. In these schools, of course, everything was closed, blocked, but you have to pay the teachers and those who are linked to the schools,” he said.

According to a May 14 [article](#) on the website of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the new fund will enable 38 institutions in the Palestinian territories and Jordan, with more than 1,300 staff and 15,000 students, to keep operating.

Filoni, a veteran Vatican diplomat who led the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples from 2011 to 2019, said the fund benefited not only Christians, but also other religious groups.

“So, in some way we have also an open vision, not only for the Catholics — especially for them but not only — and we are glad to share with them, in this difficult moment, to share with them our generosity,” he said.

The cardinal told *EWTN News* that the coronavirus had prompted the ancient order to increase its use of new technology such as online meetings.

“In some way we had to try to adapt ourselves to the new technologies, thanking the new technologies too,” he said.

Filoni noted that the pandemic had brought pilgrimages to the Holy Land to a halt, with severe consequences for local families and businesses.

But he expressed hope that the region would avoid a devastating second wave of COVID-19 and that pilgrimages would resume.

“So, we hope that the authorities will be able to stop it and as soon as possible to restart pilgrimages and the people’s (interest to go to visit the Holy Land),” he said.

<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2020/06/23/cardinal-asks-catholics-to-help-pandemic-hit-families-and-schools-in-the-holy-land/>

## Longtime Catholic Schools Leader to Head Seattle Archdiocese Task Force

Leading education expert Father Ronald Nuzzi will head a task force for Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Seattle, with a special focus on the “ministerial covenant” that helps Catholic teachers witness to and pass on the Catholic faith.

“Catholic schools are rooted in the Catholic faith. It’s what makes them different from other private schools,” Nuzzi told *CNA*. “Therefore, our educators are asked to teach from this faith-based foundation.”

“At the core of the faith are the great mysteries, which root both parishes and schools in the Incarnation, the Trinity, the Paschal Mystery, and the Eucharist,” he said.

Nuzzi is a priest of the Diocese of Youngstown in Ohio and professor emeritus of the University of Notre Dame. He is senior director emeritus at the university’s Alliance for Catholic Education, which aims to support, improve and expand Catholic K-12 schools, especially schools lacking resources.

“Catholic schools had their origin in the immigrant Church, providing a safe and faith-filled place where newcomers to this country could learn, grow, and prosper,” Nuzzi said. “They served a vital social and religious purpose, providing waves of immigrants the opportunities to fully participate in American society. Today, Catholics are part of the mainstream, but schools are still providing a counter-cultural witness, addressing the secularization, consumerism, relativism, racism, and hyper-individualism that are so common today.”

“In some ways, a Catholic school education, rooted in Gospel values and the example of

Jesus, are even more important today than they once were,” he continued.

Nuzzi’s task force is set up to secure three key goals. These include a review and study of Church documents about Catholic teaching and tradition, especially the formation of conscience, free will, and human social and sexual development. The task force will assess, analyze and summarize the convictions, beliefs and opinions of archdiocesan stakeholders about the ministerial covenant and its use in employment decisions.

They will make a recommendation based on “an informed and thoughtful approach” to renewal of the ministerial covenant in a way that respects both of the previous goals and “embraces the fullness of church teaching while honoring and appreciating the sense of the faithful,” the Seattle archdiocese said.

The archdiocese did not respond to *CNA*’s questions about the meaning of “the sense of the faithful,” or what would happen if public opinion conflicted with Church teaching.

“The Ministerial Covenant ensures that our 73 Catholic schools reflect our Catholic faith. How it is applied across our Catholic schools is of great interest not only to me, but to all our principals, teachers, parents and students,” Archbishop Paul Etienne of Seattle said in a June 16 statement from the Seattle archdiocese.

He voiced gratitude for Nuzzi’s leadership in “this important body of work.”

“He is a well-known leader in Catholic school administration and has a wealth of experience as well as a great passion for the faith and Catholic schools,” Etienne said.

Nuzzi will review nominees for task force membership. Nominees include principals, pastors, parents of children in Catholic schools, Catholic school teachers and members of the archdiocese's Office for Catholic Schools. The nominees will be announced in July.

“The ministerial covenant is signed by all employees of the Archdiocese of Seattle. It hasn't been updated in several years, so this taskforce will review its language and how it is applied at Catholic schools across the archdiocese,” Nuzzi told *CNA*. “What is important about the title ‘ministerial covenant’ is that every Catholic school in the country, including all in the Archdiocese of Seattle, considers teachers to be ministers of the Gospel and witnesses to the faith.”

Ministerial language is not intended to “clericalize” lay teachers or obscure the lay state, he said.

“Lay leaders not only help run our Catholic schools, they help run our entire archdiocese,” Nuzzi said. “This taskforce is focused on Catholic teaching and the Catholic faith – not on clericalization. In calling our teachers ministers, we are saying they are public, contractually committed, inspired examples, worthy of emulation, not clerics.”

The task force will meet 12 times from August 2020 to June 2021. Members are asked to maintain confidentiality about all deliberations.

In a statement from the archdiocese, Nuzzi described Catholic schools as a “vital part” of the Church's mission. He said he was “enthusiastic” about the task force and “its potential to help shape a brighter future for youth, children, and families.”

The Seattle archdiocese covers the territory of western Washington State. Almost 580,000 Catholics are registered with a parish and make up over 15% of the area's population.

The people of Washington state tend to be more secular than other Americans. Those without religious affiliation make up the largest group, about 32%, if small sections of atheists and agnostics are grouped with 22% who self-identify as “nothing-in-particular.” However, 61% self-identify as Christian. Evangelical Christians make up about 25% of Washingtonians, 17% identify as Catholic, and 13% as mainline Protestant, the Pew Research Center reported in 2019. The task force was announced in February after the Seattle archdiocese saw a controversy in which the facts are disputed.

Two teachers at Kennedy Catholic High School in Burien, Washington either resigned voluntarily in order to contract same-sex civil marriages with different partners, or were forced out of their positions.

Michael Prato, president of Kennedy Catholic, said in a February statement that the two teachers approached him in November 2019 to share their desire to civilly marry their same-sex partners. The teachers had voluntarily signed a covenant agreement to “live and model the Catholic faith in accord with Church teaching,” Prato said. In light of the agreement they signed, both chose to resign, he said. The school worked out a transition plan and financial package for the teachers. “I hired these teachers and I care about them very much. I still do,” Prato said. “I wanted to make sure they felt supported, and so we discussed several options including the possibility of finishing out the school year.”

Groups of students staged protests in support of the teachers. Students, as well as parents and alumni of the school, also staged a protest outside the diocesan chancery in Seattle.

The two teachers' attorney, Shannon McMinimee, said the teachers were forced out. She said they "were hoping to have a dialogue with the school about their desire to be their authentic selves and not hide that they were engaged and not hide who they were engaged to."

"And that — what they thought would be a conversation with their principal turned into being called into the presidents' office and being told that the superintendent of the archdiocese school system wanted their keys the minute they found out they were gay and engaged," McMinimee said, according to KING 5 News Feb. 21.

Archbishop Etienne addressed the situation in a Feb. 19 statement.

"Pastors and church leaders need to be clear about the church's teaching, while at the same time refraining from making judgments, taking into consideration the complexity of people's lived situations," he said, stressing that the end goal of accompanying people in faith is "to help people embrace the fullness of the Gospel message and integrate the faith more deeply into their lives."

"Those who teach in our schools are required to uphold our teaching in the classroom and to model it in their personal lives," he said. "We recognize and support the right of each individual to make choices. We also understand that some choices have particular consequences for those who represent the church in an official capacity."

The Catholic Church teaches that while homosexual inclinations are not sinful, homosexual acts "are contrary to the natural law... under no circumstances can they be approved."

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* goes on to say that people with these inclinations should be "accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided."

In 2003, the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith said that "in those situations where homosexual unions have been legally recognized or have been given the legal status and rights belonging to marriage, clear and emphatic opposition is a duty." It said Catholics must refrain from any kind of formal cooperation with such laws and, insofar as possible, any material cooperation.

"In this area, everyone can exercise the right to conscientious objection," the CDF said. In the United States, various Catholic schools and dioceses have faced lawsuits from employees who have been fired after contracting civil same-sex marriages in violation of the diocesan or school policy.

Despite strong social pressure, the legal freedom of primary and secondary Catholic schools appears secure at present. In the 2012 U.S. Supreme Court case *Hosanna Lutheran Church and School v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*, the court unanimously ruled that religious organizations do not need to follow federal anti-discrimination laws in what was characterized as a "ministerial exception."

At the same time, religious freedom has become a target by some LGBT advocacy groups and politicians who say it wrongfully

protects actions they consider

discriminatory.

CNA

<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2020/06/22/longtime-catholic-schools-leader-to-head-seattle-archdiocese-task-force/>

## What Is a Labradoodle Doing in This Catholic School Yearbook?

*A 7-year-old and her service dog were featured side by side in the yearbook of St. Patrick Catholic School in Louisville, Kentucky, highlighting a message of kindness and inclusion.*

A [sweet story](#) recently got my attention — maybe you saw it, too: A 7-year-old and her service dog were featured side by side in the yearbook of St. Patrick Catholic School in Louisville, Kentucky.

I spoke this week with Hadley Jo Lange’s mother, Heather, about the special bond her daughter has with her faithful labradoodle, Ariel, who has assisted Hadley, who has epilepsy, for the past four years.

Ariel is always on guard to alert Heather and the Lange family when Hadley experiences a seizure.

Heather says she is “beyond grateful” for the presence of Ariel in their family. “She really does save my daughter’s life,” aptly describing her as “my daughter’s lifeline.”

Stress is often a trigger for Hadley’s seizures. That’s when Ariel responds and “alerts,” Heather explained. The service dog moves around, shows anxiety and barks to convey a message of “Help me” in order to help Hadley, who sometimes has several seizures a day; other times, her seizures may be spaced out by weeks at a time.

Ariel is always happily by Hadley’s side, even amid medical ordeals.

“How do I ever thank this dog?” Heather told me. “Ariel has a unique bond with Hadley Jo that she doesn’t have with anyone else.”

Ariel, who is the only service dog at a Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Louisville, provides ample support for

Hadley by watching over her, giving her parents peace of mind.

Heather worked with a service-dog training organization, Ultimate Canine, to make sure that the dog was well trained to be in the classroom to assist Hadley, with the blessing of the school principal and assistance of school staff.

“This dog is so highly trained; with special areas in the classroom, no one knows she’s there,” Heather said, adding that it means so much that people will listen and accommodate a need like this. “The more people understand, the more willing they are to help you.”

Heather is committed to educating others, especially families, about the vital need specially trained service dogs provide and showing them that if it has worked well for their family, it can work for others, too.

The need for a service dog for Hadley became apparent when a stranger’s service dog alerted the Lange family to a seizure when Hadley was just 2 years old.

Afterward, Heather, a nurse practitioner, looked into the possibility of a service dog for Hadley. “I was a desperate mother desperate for answers,” she explained of her quest that involved much research.

Labradoodles like Ariel are known to gravitate toward children; they are also known for being friendly and approachable. In addition, they are non-shedding and hypoallergenic.

Heather attributes her family's story to the workings of the Holy Spirit and feels blessed to share their story.

"I really do believe this was God's plan: that he gave us this disease to do something good with it."

Now, Hadley Jo and Ariel are ambassadors of goodness, highlighting a message of inclusiveness.

"I love the message of inclusiveness. Not everyone looks the same, learns the same," Heather explained. "Our school has chosen to allow my daughter to bring her dog to school — to be part of the class, the school — and made efforts to include her in St. Patrick's family."

Inclusiveness is a "big, powerful word. My message is: Look at this school — the inclusion, kindness and compassion. Other schools can do this, too."

"As a person of faith, the Catholic faith and values are important to my husband and me; we were raised in the faith and Catholic schools, and we want that for our children."

She continued, "Faith has given me a sense of security and hope. When you do experience a crisis, you're not alone. You

Amy Smith

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/amy-smith/of-compassion-canines-and-catholic-schools-a-sweet-story-for-these-times>

may feel alone, but you're not alone. God is there."

Heather said the world has a need for good messages right now and recognizes that this story has been "so comforting to so many people," adding that it's a "time for good news." She is grateful it is striking a chord globally on so many levels, "not just 'How cute?' — it's a message that needs to be shared."

She emphasized, "The yearbook photo is a sign of God's love, compassion and inclusion: a simple act of kindness — how beautiful is that?"

For Hadley Jo, her "youthful heart" is apparent, too, according to her mom. Once, when seeing their story featured on TV, Hadley looked at Ariel and said, "Look at this: You're famous."

Ever a constant companion, Ariel continues to be by Hadley's side. Since home schooling amid the pandemic, Ariel has been "right there with her," Heather related. Like always.

Most of all, despite her medical concerns, Hadley Jo is "the happiest kid," her mom says, "who brings so much joy to us."

## The Catholic Difference

*Will Nancy Pelosi take a page from her father's playbook?*

In 1918, Mayor James Preston presented a 264-piece silver service to Cardinal James Gibbons on behalf of Baltimore and its citizens – a municipal tribute to the city’s beloved archbishop on the 50th anniversary of his episcopal consecration. Funded by public subscription, the cutlery, plates, tea pots and coffee pots, serving bowls, trays, and platters of the “Gibbons silver” featured a unique decorative pattern, the cardinal’s monogram, and his coat-of-arms. For decades, much of the jubilee silver service was displayed in the dining room of the residence of the archbishops of Baltimore, located just behind Benjamin Latrobe’s magnificent Cathedral of the Assumption.

Then disaster seemed to strike.

One morning in the 1950s, the cathedral rector came downstairs to find that the Gibbons silver was gone: stealthy burglars had entered the residence during the night and made off with it. The rector called the police. The police called City Hall. And Mayor Thomas J. D’Alesandro, Jr., suspecting who might have been responsible for this caper, put the word out: If that silver isn’t returned in 48 hours, somebody’s gonna be in a world of hurt.

The next day, the telephone rang in the rectory of Our Lady of Fatima parish, several miles east of Baltimore’s downtown. The caller, declining to identify himself, simply said, “Look in your trash cans.” The pastor did. And there, in plastic bags, was the Gibbons silver service.

Thus Mayor Tommy D’Alesandro: paragon of efficient local government.

Another theft of something far more consequential than silver is on the near-term horizon – the theft, by COVID-19, of the Catholic school education on which tens of thousands of poor children and their parents rely as preparation for a life beyond poverty. And another D’Alesandro – Tommy’s daughter, more familiarly known as Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives – can and should emulate her father’s example and do something about it.

Many Catholic schools in the United States are in serious trouble because of COVID-19. The trouble is not educational; across the country these past four months, Catholic schools showed themselves far more supple in responding to the pandemic than the state schools, as Catholic schools implemented online learning far more quickly and efficiently. The trouble is financial: too many parents, unemployed or under grave financial stress because of the shutdown of the economy, face the prospect of not being able to afford tuition at the Catholic schools they’ve freely chosen for their children’s education and formation.

If inner-city and other low- and middle-income Catholic schools are emptied because of unbearable financial pressures on parents, there will be multiple victims. The first victims of this education-theft will be those Catholic schools’ former students. The second victim will be state school systems, overwhelmed by an influx of thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of new students they cannot handle – especially under the restrictions that will likely be necessary to avoid an autumnal spike in COVID-19 cases.

Speaker Pelosi has publicly lamented the recently-announced closing of her Baltimore alma mater, the financially strapped Institute of Notre Dame: a venerable secondary school for young women whose first graduating class had heard the rumble of Civil War cannon from their classrooms. Many of my elementary school classmates attended IND and I share the Speaker's sense of loss. But what are we to say, and do, about the virtual certainty that many, many Catholic elementary schools across the country, especially those serving low- and middle-income children, will be decimated by COVID-19 economic distress?

The chief obstacle to emergency financial aid for the low- and middle-income parents who still wish to choose Catholic schools for their children is resistance to such aid in the

George Weigel

<https://aleteia.org/2020/06/25/the-oldest-catholic-high-school-in-the-united-states-is-in-new-orleans>

Democratic caucus of the U.S. House of Representatives. Speaker Pelosi rules that caucus with a firm hand. Might she adapt a page from her father's playbook? Might she put the word out that anyone acquiescing in education-theft, by blocking financial aid to the low- and middle-income parents who choose Catholic schools for their children, is going to be in trouble as they seek campaign dollars and plum committee assignments?

The long-term question of federal funds for independent schools can be debated and settled later. This is an emergency: a crisis for Catholic schools and state schools, for children and parents. Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the most powerful woman in American political history, can help resolve that crisis by being her father's daughter.

## Send Coronavirus Relief to All Schools — Not Just Public Ones

With a second round of CARES Act funding on the line, it's time for Sens. Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, as well as New York's 27 House members, to step up for the [state's schoolchildren](#) — including those attending private and religious schools. Otherwise, all schoolchildren across the Empire State will suffer.

In the next few weeks, Congress will deliberate over a [new round of COVID-19 relief](#) funding for the nation's schools. Considering the negative effect shutdowns have had on the economy, the need is urgent. All schools — public, private and religious — face extreme financial challenges. Public schools face decreased revenue streams as tax receipts plummeted. In the private sector, families will struggle to pay tuition. Without tuition, private schools will close en masse — and public schools will face an influx of enrollment when they're already under immense pressure to accommodate social-distancing requirements with limited amounts of space.

While revenues have been dropping, schools also face rising costs due to the demands that hybrid learning will introduce. Unless both the revenue and spending challenges can be met, the learning decline that began this March will continue unchecked. Schoolchildren can't afford that trend.

The normal flow of partisan politics pits the needs of private and public schools against one another. That zero-sum philosophy is always flawed, as effective schools in both sectors provide public benefit to all. But it's even more flawed in times of crisis.

All schools were caught off-guard by this spring's shutdowns; the federal aid under consideration is a needed response to an

extraordinary set of circumstances that all schools — public, private and religious — face. To leave one group out of the relief package would be to the detriment of all.

New York's elected officials should be particularly attuned to this reality. Across the state, more than 440,000 students are enrolled in private or religious schools, 14 percent of the total K-12 student population. In Gotham, that share is 19 percent.

But the need is statewide. In addition to the 257,000 students in private and religious schools in the Big Apple, there are 76,000 such students in the suburban counties north of the city (Westchester, Orange and Rockland), 44,000 in Long Island and 36,000 in the upstate counties encompassing Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Albany.

Religious schools form the bulk of non-public schools; Jewish schools enroll 170,000 students, and Catholic schools 149,000.

To some, the notion of public funding funneled to religious institutions is anathema, but New York has long embraced aspects of educational pluralism, providing books and transportation to religious schools as well as federally funded remediation services. We must share extraordinary COVID-19 funding with families of private and religious schools, because the health and economic impacts of the virus know no boundaries; students in all schools are affected.

Nationwide, about 90 percent of all students attend public schools, so it is right that those schools receive the bulk of the federal aid. Whatever amount is approved, another 10

percent must be added to address the needs of private and religious schools.

That money could be allocated to the states based on enrollment shares of public and non-public schools in each state. Money allocated for private and religious schools could come in the form of federal tax credits for contributions to tuition-scholarship programs to avoid entangling church and state.

Contrary to misconceptions, private and religious schools aren't the sole domain of the wealthy. In New York City, 70 percent of private-school students come from Census tracts with median income below

\$100,000; outside the city, 59 percent come from districts with median income below \$100,000. Federal aid to these schools will benefit the working class.

Congress faces a choice. It can treat the needs of children as yet another political football in a partisan election year, or it can rise above political games and take critical action to stem the learning losses that children have already suffered. Given the significant role that private and religious schools play in New York, it is critical that our senators and representatives do what is best for all students and direct support to schools across all sectors.

Ray Domanico

<https://nypost.com/2020/06/25/send-coronavirus-relief-to-all-schools-not-just-public-ones/>

## Betsy DeVos Issues Rule Steering More Coronavirus Aid to Private Schools

The Trump administration on Thursday moved forward with a policy ordering [public schools](#) across the US to share [coronavirus](#) relief funding with private schools at a higher rate than federal law typically requires.

Under a new rule issued by Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, school districts are ordered to set aside a portion of their aid for private schools using a formula based on the total number of private school students in the district.

The policy has been contested by [public school officials](#) who say the funding should be shared based on the number of low-income students at local private schools rather than their total enrollments. That's how funding is shared with private schools under other federal rules that Congress referenced in the legislation creating the relief aid.

But DeVos on Thursday said the funding is separate from other federal aid and was meant to support all students.

“There is nothing in the law Congress passed that would allow districts to discriminate against children and teachers based on private school attendance and employment,” DeVos said in a call with reporters.

The difference between the two formulas amounts to tens of millions of dollars. In Louisiana, for example, private schools are estimated to get at least 267% more under DeVos' formula. In the state's Orleans Parish, at least 77% of its relief allotment would end up going to private schools. The Education Department issued the rule through a process that's typically used in

emergencies and immediately gives the policy the force of law. DeVos said urgent action was needed after dozens of private schools permanently closed as a result of the pandemic. She called it a “looming crisis” for the nation.

DeVos is a longtime backer of private schools and has championed school choice through her career. Since last year, she's been pushing a plan to provide tax credits for scholarships sending students to private schools or other education options. She and Vice President Mike Pence promoted the plan Tuesday at a school choice event in Wisconsin, but the measure has yet to gain traction in Congress.

The new rule largely mirrors guidance DeVos issued in April telling districts to share relief aid based on the total number of private school students in their areas. The new rule provides one exception, though: Public schools can use the low-income formula if their own relief aid is used entirely on the district's low-income students.

Money that's set aside for private schools must be used to provide “equitable services” to their students, which can include busing, counseling, tutoring and summer programs.

Any private school can request support from its local district, but the new rule urges wealthier schools to reject it. The policy says taxpayer funding shouldn't go to “boarding and day schools with tuition and fees comparable to those charged by the most highly selective postsecondary institutions.”

Democrats and public school officials condemned the rule, saying it gives private

schools a disproportionate share of the aid. Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., chairman of the House education committee, urged DeVos to withdraw it and “follow the law that Congress enacted.”

“The department should be providing clear leadership and guidance to help students, parents and school districts cope with the impact of the pandemic. Instead, it has issued another confusing directive that will undermine efforts to maintain access to education during this pandemic,” Scott said.

DeVos previously vowed to pursue a federal rule on the issue after some states said they would ignore her guidance. Indiana’s education chief said the guidance was no more than a recommendation and decided to divide the funding “according to Congressional intent and a plain reading of the law.”

The dispute centers around a single passage in the federal relief bill that allotted \$13 billion for the nation’s schools. The legislation said public schools should set aside funding to provide services to private schools “in the same manner as” they do under Title I, a federal funding program for low-income schools.

Associated Press

<https://nypost.com/2020/06/25/devos-issues-rule-steering-more-virus-aid-to-private-schools/>

Public school officials say Congress clearly meant to carry over the low-income distribution formula from the Title I program. Democrats have said that was their intent, and Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., chairman of the Senate education committee, has said that’s what most of Congress expected.

But top Education Department officials have questioned the meaning of the phrase “in the same manner as,” arguing that if Congress wanted to replicate the Title I formula, it would have used the phrase “according to.”

Although the rule takes effect immediately, the Education Department will be opening it for 30 days of public comment to gather feedback.

DeVos has been accused of bending the formula to benefit the private schools she has championed. On Thursday, the School Superintendents Association said the rule represents “an opportunistic money grab, using the pandemic environment to advance the privatization agenda.”

But DeVos argued that all types of schools have been hit by the pandemic and deserve relief.

“Now is the time to focus on doing what’s right for all students,” DeVos said.

## Dead language? Latin Is a Hit at This Bronx Charter School

*A dead language is bringing these Bronx kids to life.*

Students at Classical Charter Schools are all taught Latin – and more than a quarter of the network’s kids scored at the highest tier on a recent national exam on the ancient tongue.

“When we were founded nearly 15 years ago, we set out to offer children in the South Bronx something they never had before,” said the network’s founder Lester Long.

“We wanted to offer Latin, giving them a world-class education rooted in the classics. As these exceptional national scores show, we are accomplishing that goal.”

Results from the National Latin Exam, released in May, showed that 34 out of the 120 Bronx Classical students in the 6th, 7th and 8th grade who took the test were recognized for having received a top score.

Eleven in the 6th and 7th grade got a certificate of outstanding achievement, for receiving a score of 36 to 40 out of a possible 40.

In addition to Latin, Bronx Classical kids – who number 1,000 across four schools – are also immersed in subjects that are quickly vanishing from American education, including debate, philosophy, and rhetoric.

While they initially question the devotion of time to a bygone language, network teachers said students soon become absorbed in the distant worlds of Aristotle and Plato.

Teacher Chris Perednia said kids – especially Spanish speakers – are stunned to recognize the direct connection of their

native tongue to the time of gladiators and the Roman Coliseum.

“At first we introduce the stories and adventures of the gods, and that gets them interested, hearing about Zeus and Hera,” he said. “And then they start to see how their own world connects back to that time. They become invested in it.”

Students are fascinated to discover the Latin origins of much of modern day language and quickly sense a newfound power in their deepened linguistic comprehension.

Parent Hikma Umar of The Bronx said her 7th grade son would suddenly begin identifying the Latin roots of words at the dinner table after a few years at Bronx Classical.

“He just really loves language and reading,” she said. “When the rest of us are watching TV he’ll be in his room reading. He’s more interested in that.”

While many children become increasingly emoji-dependent, Long said Bronx Classical students — about 90 percent of whom get free or reduced price lunch, a common poverty marker — strive to command the floor with a perfected phrase or impenetrable argument.

The only bullying allowed must take place within the bounds of rhetoric and reason.

“There is something beautiful, something powerful in strong communication skills,” Long said. “These kids sense that and they take off on their own.”

Remote learning is difficult enough in English, but Long said his schools successfully made the transition after the coronavirus crisis shuttered the network's K-8 schools.

To cap their experience, Bronx Classical 8th graders normally board a plane to Rome to see the subjects of their specialized study up close.

Selim Algar

<https://nypost.com/2020/06/28/bronx-charter-school-has-kids-embracing-lost-language/>

This year's graduating class was unable to make the journey due to the coronavirus but are considering a reunion trip there in the future.

"That brings it all together," Perednia said. "There's a pretty special moment when they finally see the thing that they've been reading and studying for years like the Coliseum. That has an impact that I think stays with them for a long time."

## The Supreme Court Delivers a Huge Win for Kids — And Against Bigotry

Tuesday's Supreme Court ruling in *Espinoza v. Montana* [was a huge win for American families](#) and supporters of school choice. The decision paves the way for granting students the freedom to attend religious schools using a state's tax-credit scholarship funding.

Back in 2018, the Montana Supreme Court ruled that the state's only private-school choice program was unconstitutional, - because families could use tax-credit scholarship dollars to send their children to religious schools. The Supremes reversed that decision in a 5-4 ruling.

The Montana ruling, they held, unconstitutionally prevented families from using program funding to choose religious schools for their kids — a violation of the Free Exercise clause of the First Amendment. Excluding families from using program funding at religious schools, the majority argued, is discrimination by the government on the basis of religion.

The ruling built on precedent. In a 2002 case, the Supremes had held that voucher programs can be legally used to pay for religious schools. That's because the funding goes to families, which can then choose to send their kids to religious or nonreligious private schools. It's the same reason why publicly funded Pell Grants can be used at private universities with religious affiliations without violating the Establishment Clause.

Then, too, Montana's private-school choice program is privately funded: Tax-credit scholarship funding never ends up in the tax collector's hands — which means the money headed to religious organizations never

crossed the government's palm in the first place.

So much for the (sound) reasoning. Today's decision means that private-school choice programs are forbidden from discriminating against religious families by [excluding religious schools from participation](#). This has a few important implications.

First, Montana's tax-credit scholarship program will resume operation. This also means that states like Maine and New Hampshire — which have private-school choice programs that prohibit families from using funding at religious institutions — will now have to allow participating families the choice of sending their children to religious private schools.

This decision also strikes a blow to the discriminatory “Blaine Amendments” found in 37 state constitutions. These amendments, which have often blocked families from using school-choice program funding to send their children to private schools, are rooted in the anti-immigrant and specifically anti-Catholic bigotry of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

As education scholar Matthew Ladner recently pointed out, “public schools in those days were pervasively religious, but ‘non-sectarian,’ meaning vaguely Protestant.” The Blaine Amendments were therefore used to favor the majority religious group, Protestants, over religious minorities such as Catholics (and Jews), by barring funding to their “sectarian” schools.

Some of American history's most odious groups, including the Know-Nothings and the Ku Klux Klan, warned of a “Catholic Menace” and even fought to outlaw private

schooling altogether in states like Oregon. The Klan, says Ladner, “approved of the curriculum in the public schools and wanted to make sure those Catholic kids became ‘real Americans,’ or in any case, what early 20th-century Klansmen viewed as ‘real Americans.’”

Although these groups succeeded in banning private schooling in 1922 in Oregon, the US Supreme Court thankfully struck down that discriminatory law in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* in 1925, when Associate Justice

Corey DeAngelis

<https://nypost.com/2020/06/30/the-supreme-court-delivers-a-huge-win-for-kids-and-against-bigotry/>

James McReynolds famously stated that “the child is not the mere creature of the state.”

The US Supreme Court’s decision in the Montana case marks another step toward erasing the stain of anti-Catholic hatred written into the laws of many states. Religious liberty, parental rights and educational freedom all won at the court.

But the real winners are America’s children.

## Supreme Court: Montana Can't Exclude Religious Schools From Scholarship Program

In a major victory for what advocates call the school choice movement, the U.S. Supreme Court effectively killed state constitutional provisions in as many as 38 states that bar taxpayer aid to parochial schools. The vote was 5-4, with Chief Justice John Roberts writing the decision for the court's conservative justices.

The court's decision is the latest in a series of recent rulings that have lowered the traditional wall separating church and state by requiring government entities to treat religious and nonreligious institutions more equally, even when that means sending public money to religious institutions. Tuesday's case began in 2015 when the Montana Legislature passed a bill providing a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for individuals who donate to organizations that provide scholarship money to students in private schools. An organization called Big Sky began raising money to fund these scholarships, using the tax credit as an incentive. Of the 13 schools that got scholarship money from Big Sky, 12 were religious schools. Indeed, 70% of all private schools in Montana are religiously affiliated.

Ultimately, the Montana Supreme Court struck down the entire tax credit program for all private schools, religious and nonreligious alike. It said the tax credit conflicted with the state Constitution, which bars all state aid for religious education, whether direct or indirect, including tax subsidies such as this one.

But in Tuesday's opinion, Roberts said the state court had it backward.

"A state need not subsidize private education, but once it decides to do so it

cannot disqualify some private schools because they are religious," he wrote. Thus the tax credit created by the Montana Legislature to benefit students attending qualifying private schools, including religious ones, must stand as originally designed.

In dissent, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg rebutted Roberts' argument. She said that because the Montana Supreme Court invalidated the program entirely, it did not discriminate against students attending religious schools at all. Because the state court's "judgment put all private school parents in the same boat—this Court had no occasion to address the matter," Ginsburg wrote.

In a separate dissent, Justices Stephen Breyer asked: "What are the limits of the Court's holding?" He feared that the court's logic could lead to extreme consequences in the future, perhaps even a decision requiring states to fund private religious schools even if they would rather use their money to fund public schools exclusively.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor, also writing separately, called the decision "perverse" for throwing the U.S. Constitution's religion clauses out of balance.

As for the conservative wing of the court, all of its members signed on to the Roberts opinion, but several of them wrote separately to express their own views on the subject. Justice Clarence Thomas reiterated his view that the Constitution's ban on the establishment of religion does not apply to the states, except in cases of coercion.

Justice Neil Gorsuch urged the court to go further to protect the free exercise of religion. While the majority said that Montana had impermissibly discriminated on the basis of the schools' religious status, Gorsuch said the state, discriminated on the basis of religious activity as well.

As an example, he pointed to the lead plaintiff's testimony that "she would like to use scholarship funds to enable her daughters to be taught in school the 'same Christian values' they are taught at home. The court, said Gorsuch, should make it clear that both types of discrimination are unconstitutional.

Justice Samuel Alito used his concurrence to recount the troubled history of the so-called "baby Blaine amendments," no-aid provisions in the state constitutions of 38 states that, like the Montana Constitution, prohibit public funds from benefiting religious schools.

Such provisions are named after James G. Blaine, who proposed a similar amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1875. While the original amendment failed to pass, variations of it were adopted in most states. Many scholars today view the adoption of these amendments, mostly in the late 1800s, as a bigoted reaction to the mass immigration of Catholics into the U.S., a narrative that Alito embraced wholeheartedly.

But many states in modern times have, by referenda, refused to abandon the no-religious aid concept. And Montana's no-aid provision is no relic of the past. The state constitution was completely rewritten in 1972.

Mae Nan Ellingson, one of the delegates to the 1972 constitutional convention, said that ultimately the convention adopted the no-aid

amendment in part "to protect religious liberty" and that the no-aid provision was "never even a threshold issue."

Regardless of their origins, experts on both sides of the issue agreed that the practical effect of Tuesday's decision is to neuter these state constitutional provisions, which until now have limited state aid to religious schools to one degree or another.

Francisco Negron, chief legal officer for the National School Boards Association, said that these provisions are "near death."

And so-called "school choice" advocates celebrated the victory.

Dick Komer, a senior attorney at the Institute for Justice, which brought Tuesday's case on behalf of several parents with children in religious schools in Montana, called on state legislators to capitalize on the moment to create programs that allow state funds to benefit private religious schools.

"The legal impediments to effective school choice programs are now removed, and it's up to state legislatures now to move forward," Komer said after the decision was announced.

Publicly funded voucher and tax credit programs currently provide aid to private schools in 26 states, according to John Schilling, president of one of the country's leading school choice advocacy organizations, the American Federation for Children.

"What we would like to see is state policymakers really step up to the plate here and expand ... school choice programs, and to enact it in the 24 states that don't have these programs," Schilling said.

Stanford Law School professor Michael McConnell said he saw the decision as good for education all around.

"When you have a state where ... a significant minority of parents are using private schools, they're going to be voting against increasing taxes for public education," he said. "But if they are able to share in the education pot, they may move to supporters of greater aid to education." Until now, these aid programs, which mainly benefit private religious schools, have amounted to a relatively small \$2.6 billion in aid out of more than \$700 billion spent on public education each year, according to Schilling. But school choice advocates, including U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, have pushed hard to increase the funding for what she calls faith-based education.

If the state is going to funnel more money to private education, said Negron, the National School Boards Association lawyer, that will likely provoke more litigation.

He said some states might look at Tuesday's decision and say, "If you're going to take state money," then "you can't discriminate against students on the basis of sexual orientation." Or states may condition public funds on satisfying public health requirements, "which means that all children have to [be] vaccinated."

Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser, who filed a brief on behalf of nine states in the Montana case, said that funding private schools can have unexpected political consequences. He noted that when the school board in Douglas County, a suburb south of Denver, adopted a program that threatened to siphon public money from public schools, "there was a huge backlash,"

and "the school board that pushed the program got voted out as well."

That said, Tuesday's ruling was a personal victory for the parents who challenged the Montana ban on aid to religious schools.

Kendra Espinoza, the lead plaintiff, was elated. Earlier this year, the office manager explained why she worked extra jobs so that her two daughters could attend the Stillwater Christian School in Kalispell, Mont. "At home we are a Christian family and I want those values taught at school," she said.

Among those cheering Tuesday's ruling was the Trump administration, which supported Espinoza's case in the Supreme Court. At the White House, press secretary Kayleigh McEnany issued a statement saying: "The Trump administration believes that school choice is a civil rights issue, and that no parent should be forced to send their child to a failing school."

Andrea Picciotti-Bayer, legal adviser for the Catholic Association, called it "a welcome victory for religious freedom and countless American families," adding it will give "low-income students a chance to attend religious schools of their choice using state-endorsed private school scholarship funds."

But Lily Eskelsen García, the head of the country's largest teachers union, called the decision "shameful and unacceptable." [In a statement](#), she said: "At a time when public schools nationwide already are grappling with protecting and providing for students despite a pandemic and mounting budget shortfalls, the court has made things even worse opening the door for further attacks on state decisions not to fund religious schools."

Though a sweeping victory for school choice advocates, the court's opinion still leaves some questions unanswered.

David Strauss, a law professor at the University of Chicago, observed that the two religion clauses of the First Amendment are often in tension.

Nina Totenberg  
Brian Naylor

*Emmett Witkovsky-Eldred contributed to this report.*

<https://www.npr.org/2020/06/30/883074890/supreme-court-montana-cant-exclude-religious-schools-from-scholarship-program>

"We want a principle that says the government shouldn't be paying the salaries of members of the clergy," he said. "But on the other hand, if a fire breaks out in a church, you don't want the fire department saying, 'Oh wait a second, it's a church; we can't put out the fire.'"