



ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE + ARCHDIOCESE OF WASHINGTON + DIOCESE OF WILMINGTON

An Outstanding Apostolate of Hope: Maryland's Catholic Schools

A Statement from the Bishops of Maryland September 2008

“Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature”ⁱ was Christ’s departing command to His apostles. Education is the primary vehicle through which the Church carries out this fundamental duty to evangelize. As such, it is not merely another work of the Church. As Pope Benedict XVI noted during his recent trip to the United States, “education is integral to the mission of the Church” and rightly “involves the entire Christian community.”ⁱⁱ

In the United States, this mission has taken its most concrete form in Catholic schools, which have historic roots in Maryland and have served our state’s families for 200 years. Catholic schools provide not only an excellent academic education, but formation of the whole human person – physically, intellectually, and spiritually. They “share responsibility for the social and cultural development of the different communities and people to which [they] belong.”ⁱⁱⁱ In return for this gift, all of us – including those without children or those who attend parishes without a school – are called to contribute to their success.

The greatest and most unique contribution that a Catholic school offers is a Christ-centered learning environment. Yet our schools also share a commitment to academic excellence and community service that have resulted in extraordinarily high graduation and college attendance rates and a proven ability to close the “achievement gap” through service to underprivileged families. Perhaps that is why our Holy Father calls Catholic schools “an outstanding apostolate of hope.”^{iv}

Like every worthy work, sustaining this outstanding apostolate is not without its challenges. For Catholic schools, there is particular hardship in the areas of finances and enrollment. There are a dozen fewer Catholic schools in Maryland than there were five years ago. Enrollment fell from more than 64,600 students statewide to about 60,800 students statewide – a six percent drop – between the 2001-2002 and 2006-2007 school years. Those numbers mirror national trends.

The root causes of these challenges are not unknown. Catholic schools must shoulder rapidly-increasing costs to maintain and upgrade facilities, meet diverse learning needs (including special education and English language proficiency for new immigrants), and adequately compensate teachers. Over the past 50 years, the schools have gone from a teaching staff that was 95 percent religious sisters, brothers, or priests who worked for a stipend to a teaching staff that is 95 percent lay women and men who work for salaries. All of this adds up to higher costs and rising tuition, and – despite efforts to keep schools affordable – a loss of students.

Here in our Maryland-serving dioceses, we have in numerous ways renewed our abiding and ardent commitment to this apostolate of hope. The Archdiocese of Baltimore has identified ten factors of viability for its Catholic schools and is working with schools to implement them. The Archdiocese of Washington has undertaken long-term planning, is implementing standards of excellence for all facets of education and is proactively building tuition assistance. The Diocese of Wilmington announced the Vision for the Future campaign in May to raise \$6 million in tuition assistance and is developing strategic plans for each of its

schools. Our dioceses, and three others, have formed the Mid-Atlantic Catholic Schools Consortium to leverage our collective strength to comprehensively address challenges.

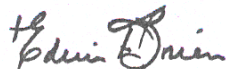
It is important to recognize that the challenges facing Catholic schools affect not only our own community, but also our state and our nation. Catholic schools have long provided a necessary public service through their outstanding education, while also saving the public millions of tax dollars every year. Organizations such as The Philanthropy Roundtable, the Fordham Institute, and even the White House have recognized these contributions and the public service Catholic schools provide nationally and, as a result, have supported efforts to strengthen these schools. Catholic schools in Maryland save taxpayers more than \$650 million annually in per-pupil public school costs. Simple justice requires that state tax dollars benefit all students, regardless of where they attend school, and simple economics endorses the same.

In Maryland, an innovative legislative proposal that would create a partnership among education, business, and government – and benefit *all* students and teachers – is under consideration by the General Assembly. The program, called the BOAST Maryland Tax Credit (Building Opportunities for All Students and Teachers), grants businesses a state income tax credit for donations made to scholarship organizations for Catholic and other nonpublic school students, for enrichment programs for public school students, and to provide grants for teachers in both nonpublic and public schools to assist them in achieving “highly qualified” status. By working with businesses, BOAST will help students from lower- and middle-income families remain in Catholic schools. That, in turn, will help stabilize enrollment and tuition and ensure the future of the schools that contribute so much to our communities.

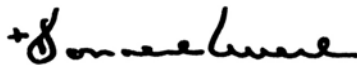
BOAST complements our many diocesan efforts to help families and secure the viability of their Catholic schools. The entire Catholic community must partner with educational, business, and government leaders to enact the BOAST legislation. You can get involved by:

- Joining the Maryland Catholic Conference's Legislative Action Center (www.mdccathcon.org). This online network provides updates on the BOAST bill and puts users in easy, effective e-mail contact with legislators.
- Participating in advocacy e-mail campaigns, trainings and gatherings with legislators organized through the Maryland Alliance of Catholic School Families and Teachers, a grassroots organization with parent and faculty representatives in every Catholic school.
- Gathering with families from across Maryland for the annual Lobby Night, sponsored by the Maryland Catholic Conference, on February 16, 2009 (President's Day), and at the Nonpublic Schools Legislative Reception, slated for early March.

As Pope Benedict XVI said during his April 2008 visit to our region, “everything possible must be done, in cooperation with the wider community, to ensure that they [Catholic schools] are accessible to people of all social and economic strata.”^v We urge every Catholic to consider today the part he or she can play in building a bright future for Maryland's Catholic schools by sustaining this “outstanding apostolate of hope” for generations to come.



Most Rev. Edwin F. O'Brien
Archbishop of Baltimore



Most Rev. Donald W. Wuerl
Archbishop of Washington



Most Rev. W. Francis Malooly
Bishop of Wilmington

ⁱ Mark 16:15

ⁱⁱ Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Catholic Educators, 17 April 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱ Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, p. 5, 1997.

^{iv} Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Catholic Educators, 17 April 2008.

^v Ibid.