



Anthony Ruggiero Lecture Series



This annual lecture is held in memory of **Anthony J. Ruggiero**, a faculty member in the Education department of what was then Allentown College of St. Francis de Sales, and to honor the legacy of **St. Leonie de Sales Aviat** (1844-1914) and the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales ([link](#)). The series enlists experts who address contemporary topics in the world of Catholic education (elementary, secondary, or post-secondary). The copyrighted text that follows is provided for personal enrichment and is not intended as a commercial or professional publication.

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MYTHS, REALITIES, AND DREAMS ABOUT CATHOLIC EDUCATION:

From a Passionate Practitioner's View

15 September 2003

Introduction (Rev. Thomas F. Dailey, OSFS – Director, Salesian Center for Faith & Culture)

Good evening and welcome to the second annual St. Leonie de Sales Aviat Lecture on Catholic Education. This lecture series honors the life and work of Mother Aviat, the foundress of the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales and a champion for the evangelization of young ladies.

We are especially honored, this evening, to have in our midst six of her spiritual daughters, Oblate sisters who today teach in Childs (MD) and Drexel Hill (PA). Thank you, Sisters, for joining us this evening. I would also like to thank the Wills Hall community of Oblates here at DeSales University, many of whom are here this evening; together with the Oblate sisters, they initiated the endowment that supports this annual lecture series.

The talk around campus these days is of the impending hurricane, due to hit Pennsylvania later this week! As the weather looms large on the horizon, we have this evening a bit of a whirlwind of our own. Its been gathering strength now for over 150 years and has already touched down in our area with great force! I speak, of course, of the power of education brought to us by the Sisters, Servants of the

Immaculate Heart of Mary. In the business of Catholic education and related ministries, these Sisters have been in the Reading and Philadelphia areas since the 1850's. Perhaps you were taught by them; I was (though I won't say how long ago!). Now numbering approximately 1100 strong, they continue to teach in 82 elementary schools, 25 high schools, 3 special learning centers, and also at nearby Immaculata University.

Our Aviat Lecturer this evening has the auspicious task of leading this religious congregation as their General Superior. Having taught in Catholic schools for over 30 years, she also has extensive experience as an academic administrator. And just last month she celebrated the forty-sixth anniversary of her own religious profession.

But there is another power at work this evening. Beyond the rich educational legacy of the IHM nuns, and the life-long teaching history of our lecturer, there are two other reasons that convince me we chose the right person for the task this evening. In the biography which she sent me, she listed among the six significant facts of her life that she has been a Philadelphia Phillies fan since 1945 and a Notre Dame football fan since 1947. Sister, you should feel right at home here!

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the 2003 Aviat Lecturer in Catholic Education ... **Sr. Rose Marie De Carlo, I.H.M.**

LECTURE

Good evening and thank you for the invitation to share with you some thoughts about what is a passion for me, Catholic Education. When Father Thomas Dailey extended this opportunity to me, my first reaction was to decline the invitation. Not because I did not believe in the topic, but because, as I explained to Father on the phone, I am a practitioner rather than a theorist on the field of Catholic education. One of my IHM sisters, upon hearing me say that to Father, had an appropriate rejoinder: "Then you are a true daughter of St. Alphonsus, since he challenged his first followers, the early Redemptorists, to practice the virtue of the love of God, not write treatises on it." Therefore, I will share with you what I have gleaned from over forty years of involvement in both teaching and administering in Catholic education at the elementary and secondary levels in Catholic schools and in parish religious education.

Currently, I enjoy a sabbatical of sorts from teaching, as I serve the IHM Community as General Superior. For our Congregation, Catholic education remains the corporate apostolate and main ministry, beginning with our foundation in 1845 until the present day. The needs of the Church have led us to widen our understanding and definition of Catholic education, as we strive to deal with the

demands of the New Evangelization enunciated by Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II in their encyclicals. At this point in our IHM history, we minister primarily in Catholic educational institutions on elementary, secondary and university levels. However, following the Church's lead, some of our sisters serve now as Directors of Religious Education in parishes; others, as Parish Directors of Adult Education, Campus Ministers, Retreat Directors, Parish or Hospital Ministers, Parish Liturgical Musicians, Directors of Parish-based Centers for the Poor and even Diocesan Administrators in various Secretariats. Thus, I bring to these reflections my personal experiences as well as the diverse experiences of the sisters whom I serve during this time in leadership. Forgive me, if I cite examples to emphasize a point that refers to something that I know well. In no way would I want you to think that I am not aware of the good work of so many lay colleagues, men and women of other religious congregations and our brothers who are ordained ministers of the Church. Together, clergy, religious and laity form that one body in Christ that has been given the task to bring about the reign of God on earth by cooperating in the mission of Jesus, Son of God.

As I read about St. Leonie Aviat and Father Brisson, I found many parallels between the wonderful story of the foundation of the Sisters, Oblates of St. Francis de Sales and that of our own IHM community. Our founder was a Redemptorist, Father Louis Florent Gillet. Missioned on the frontier of Monroe, Michigan in the mid-nineteenth century, Father Gillet was a contemporary of Father Brisson. One priest in the United States and one priest in France, two zealous disciples of the Lord, who observed and addressed the need for catechesis among young women and girls. Both priests turned to women who desired to give themselves to God in lives of consecration and who accepted the call to meet the need and provide Catholic schooling for these women and young girls. Mother Theresa Maxis, our first IHM sister and St. Leonie Aviat, known as Sister Frances de Sales, were contemporaries, albeit a continent apart. They were courageous and generous daughters of the Church and servants of God. We reap the benefits of their selflessness and wisdom in their legacies to Catholic education. We IHMs feel a part of the Salesian family, since one of the miracles that gave testimony to the holiness of St. Leonie's life was the healing of the niece of our IHM Sister, Sister Marianne Evans. We celebrate with the entire Salesian family St. Aviat's extraordinary life of holiness and zeal that was inspired by that gentle man of God, St. Francis de Sales. We share priceless, holy heritages. We who follow these charisms given by the Holy Spirit as gifts to the Church are committed to continue and to strengthen these legacies. The initial gifts given to St. Leonie Aviat, Father Brisson and all holy founders and foundresses live on in the members of the congregations and in the people of God who are attracted to these charisms. By this following, we are obeying the Gospel mandate, "Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

If we accept that Catholic education is a continuation of the teaching mission of Jesus Christ that was entrusted to the Church, it follows that each one of us as a member of that Church is responsible to find ways in every age to proclaim the Good News and to face the challenges involved in the application of Christ's teachings. This present time is no different. Whether it is partial-birth abortion or homelessness, violence or war, poverty or same-sex marriages, drug addictions or corporate greed, our faith and its teachings call us to live what we believe. As Chesterton once observed, "It is not that Christianity has been tried and failed. The problem is that it has not been tried." Some may have contrary opinions, but as we view more than 2000 years of Christianity, we have to admit to some truth in his observation. As science, technology, medicine and psychology march forward, we are faced with questions that are fundamental to what we believe about the very dignity of human life. No voice in the public square has been more courageous in defending the dignity of the human person than our present Holy Father. His words encourage each believer to "launch out into the deep," just as the Lord bid the Apostles to do when it appeared that their entire night of fishing was fruitless. The fearful but believing Apostles did what Jesus asked and the catch was more than they could imagine. Our faith, bolstered by knowing the teachings of Jesus Christ and our rich Catholic tradition, is essential if we are to "Live Jesus" in the modern society where we exist today. Thus, Catholic education is not a luxury or just another option for each of us who are called to make a difference in our world. Called to be "salt and light," we must, in the words of Cardinal Maida of Detroit, "provide a solid foundation from which a faithful, free and credible response can be given by the disciples of Jesus to the challenges presented by contemporary society."
[\(1\)](#)

In this new millennium, it is my conviction that all the baptized must embrace the concept elucidated so clearly by Bishop Grahmann of Dallas-Fort Worth in a pastoral written in 1995 entitled *Total Catholic Education*. In the beginning of this visionary strategic plan, Bishop Grahmann states his case with these words: "An elementary education in the faith establishes the root, but it is a root that is meaningless without the suffixes that connect it to a long life."[\(2\)](#) He explains, "by total Catholic education we should have in mind an all-encompassing process of growth in the faith, from the tutelage of the very young to guidance for the adolescent, to adult faith formation, to nursing home ministries of the Word."[\(3\)](#) I would call it a "womb-to-tomb" plan for Catholic education. Synod documents from a variety of dioceses across the United States, the statements issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education in Rome, and the Conference of Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Plans addressing the urgent need for Catholic education in its variety of expressions, echo the necessity of such a vision. At the current time, the NCEA has a committee working on this concept of total Catholic education. As the principal organization for every dimension of Catholic education in the United States, the NCEA mainly seeks to unify each educational pathway in the Church in an attempt to provide for faith formation from youth to old age. Nonetheless, the Catholic school stands as the most significant linchpin in such an all-embracing

vision of faith formation. As history in this country reveals, no other means of communicating the faith has been as fruitful and efficient. In his pastoral, Bishop Grahmann acknowledged this when he “stipulated that any new parish in the diocese would have a school.”⁽⁴⁾ The Bishop’s assessment of the realities regarding faith formation in his diocese and the nation motivated him as well as Cardinal Maida of Detroit who wrote a similar pastoral in 1991 entitled *One in Faith and Knowledge ... Growing to Full Maturity in Christ* that presented his visionary plan for total Catholic education.⁽⁵⁾

I would like at this point to explore what I term some myths about Catholic education, particularly Catholic schools. Linked to the myths, I will present some realities that may dispel or at least modify those myths. Finally, from my own perspective, I will engage in some dreaming about the future of Catholic education in this nation. Please understand that my perception of these as being myths results from my conversations about the topic of Catholic education with people in and out of the Church. Newspapers, books and magazines -- both inside and outside the Church -- often carry stories based on my described myths. You may be familiar with them or you may disagree with the few myths that I will cite. However, I use them to convey certain realities about Catholic education that I know well.

Myth number one is that there is room in Catholic schools for every Catholic child. Myth number two is that Catholic schools are only for those who can afford them. Myth number three is that Catholic schools should be for Catholics exclusively. Myth number four is that Catholic schools are dying off. Myth number five is that religious education classes or CCD, as it used to be called, provide all that is necessary for faith formation. Myth number six purports that further Catholic education is not needed after the reception of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Reconciliation and Eucharist.

To dispel the first three myths, let me recall some history for you from the famous plenary councils held in Baltimore during the last half of the nineteenth century. I will focus on the resolutions that pertained to Catholic education. In 1852, at the First Plenary Council of Baltimore, the Bishops were “exhorted to have a Catholic school in every parish and the teachers should be paid from parochial funds.” Fourteen years later, in 1866, the Second Plenary Council reiterated the previous declaration, but added that the children who had to attend public schools should receive catechism classes. The establishment of industrial schools and reformatories in large cities was also suggested, together with a strong recommendation to establish a Catholic university in the United States. Finally, in 1884, at the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore, three very significant decisions were reached relative to the education of youth. First, the Baltimore Catechism was “born” of this council. Secondly, every child of Catholic parents was to attend a Catholic school or have permission from the Bishop to the contrary. Thirdly, every

pastor was to provide a parish school. Thus was born the Catholic School System in the United States. These were bold measures, but the preservation of the faith and the development of good citizens were necessary goals set by the Bishops for the faithful.[\(6\)](#)

In an essay commemorating the NCEA's Centennial, Thomas Groome of Boston College observes that originally the Bishops "favored a truly 'public' school system free of undue Protestant influence. This was also the intent of such educational reformers as Horace Mann who advocated a non-sectarian school system supported by the public purse." However, what became evident in the public schools was that the children were being "proselytized into a Protestant ethos."[\(7\)](#) So, the Bishops directed the construction of what Groome describes as "the largest independent school system in the history of the world."[\(8\)](#) Since some private schools received public funding at this time, the Bishops initially requested state funding for the Catholic schools. Unfortunately, the rising tide of anti-Catholic sentiment prevented the possibility of public funding. However, this attitude did not deter the unprecedented growth of Catholic schools, a growth that peaked in the 1960's with over four and a half million children in grade schools and another million in secondary schools. Catholic colleges and universities also thrived, while seminaries and novitiates were filled to overflowing. The future of Catholic education was bright with promise!

It was the ten years prior to this enrollment peak, in what the NCEA's historical overview in *Momentum* called "the years of burdens and blessings, 1950-1960,"[\(9\)](#) that we see the reality regarding the desire of every Catholic child in a Catholic school. Florence Cohalen, historian of that era, chronicles the frustration of New York's Cardinal Spellman, reporting that although the Cardinal built 200 elementary schools in this decade, by 1960 in New York there was one child in parochial school for every two children in public school. I believe that the ideal of every Catholic child in a Catholic school will always be a myth because of the reality of funding and the Church's firm teaching on the primary right of the parents to choose the school for their child. However, I also believe that we could come closer to the ideal, if Catholic parents would see their obligation to educate their child in a Catholic school in the light of the school's primary purpose, faith formation.

Let me turn to the reality of funding, since this is most often cited as the reason parents cannot choose a Catholic school for their child. This reality should be treated in a lecture of its own because it has so many facets. But let me give a few examples of successful alternate ways of funding that open the possibility for each Catholic child to attend a Catholic school, both elementary and secondary. In an article, "Becoming Rooted in the Stewardship Way of Life," the Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese of Wichita, Kansas relates the conviction that "the Church needed to stop encouraging families from being purchasers and consumers and teach them to be stewards."[\(10\)](#) The diocese built on the experience of one parish that began this journey of stewardship in 1968. Their efforts were quite successful

and inspired Bishop Eugene Gerber who in 1985, after a two-year study, committed the entire diocese to what he termed “United Catholic Stewardship.”⁽¹¹⁾ All parish services are provided without cost because all parishioners are requested to be active stewards in the parish. A foundational truth of stewardship is that all parishioners are responsible for Catholic education, not just parents. Another is that Catholic schools should be available for all Catholic families, regardless of income, cultural background, ability or disability.⁽¹²⁾ This model is not without its flaws, but, according to the article, it sounds as if it is working well and approaching the ideal of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore to have every Catholic child in a Catholic school. It also implements the recommendations of Bishop Grahmann’s “total Catholic education” plan: the Catholic school as the strong foundation of professional religious education programs for Catholic children, youth and adults of all ages.

Interestingly enough, some dioceses place the topic of compensation for all Church employees, including Catholic school personnel, within this stewardship “way of life.” At present, attracting not only competent but also committed persons who are practicing Catholics is a high priority among Catholic school administrators and pastors. In dealing with compensation issues, these employers must abide by the teaching of the Church that is succinctly quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “A just wage is a legitimate fruit of work. To refuse or withhold it can be a grave injustice.” We need to do what we must to provide just and equitable compensation for those who work for the Church. Again, this is a fact we must confront that is directly connected to funding for Catholic education. The documents of Vatican II have fostered the renewal of the Church, especially restoring the laity to their rightful place as full partners with the clergy and religious in the life of the Church. Again, we are all one body, but have different roles to play in proclaiming the Good News. As more and more lay people become involved in various roles of service in the Church, it is important that Church employers and administrators are attentive to a just compensation that allows these dedicated men and women to meet their responsibilities, especially to their families.

Linked to this stewardship model is a system that I have witnessed first hand in an elementary and secondary school during the six years I spent in Miami, Florida. Tuition is paid on a sliding scale, commensurate with the parents’ ability to pay. In the parish elementary school and the high school, there are several levels of income among parents; this allows the pastor and principal to provide for parents of modest means or those at the poverty level. This is done in strictest confidentiality. Individual parent interviews by the pastor and/or the principal plus the submission of financial forms assist in determining what the tuition will be and who receives tuition aid. Work-study programs as well as involved mentors from outside the school community who provide tuition assistance enable parents of modest means or poverty-level income to choose Catholic schools. Some parents donate work time in

lieu of fees and/or tuition. Such avenues make Catholic education available to all, not just those who can afford it. Such measures also encourage a sense of ownership for the entire project on the part of every member of the school and parish community. In addition, these schools in Miami have had an active endowment and development program in place for over thirty-five years.

My last funding story involves one of our own parish schools in West Philadelphia, appropriately named St. Francis de Sales School. In former days, the numerous Catholics in West Philadelphia proudly boasted of being from de Sales. The superb school prepared its charges for this world and the next. Its graduates went on to become civic leaders, priests, religious brothers and sisters, professionals in such fields as medicine and law. Through the years, St. Francis de Sales School provided a nurturing environment for boys and girls to become ordinary good citizens whose extraordinary daily lives still testify to the power of the Gospel. Fifteen years ago, this once outstanding elementary school faced its demise. The demographics of the neighborhood changed, producing a multi-cultural population of diverse but lower economic status. People were poorer and the Catholic population drifted to the suburbs. Rather than permitting the school to die, the spirited Principal and the eighth-grade Sister — I am proud to say that both are IHMs — created a development plan. As the Principal told me at that time, “In this zip code, we have the highest homicide rate in the city of Philadelphia. Someone has to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ here or it will only become worse.”

Grounded in the Church’s social teachings, Sister’s motivation would find a resonance in these words from the 1998 document of the Congregation for Catholic Education in Rome, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*:

To these new poor, the Catholic school turns in a spirit of love. Spurred on by the aim of offering to all, especially to the poor and marginalized, the opportunity of an education, of training for a job, of human and Christian formation, it can and must find that ardor and dedication which is the manifestation of Christ’s love for the poor, the humble, the masses seeking for truth.[\(13\)](#)

The document also states unequivocally that the Catholic School is at the service of society and “is not reserved to Catholics only, but is open to all those who appreciate and share its qualified educational project.”[\(14\)](#)

Today, St. Francis de Sales School not only exists, but also is expanding in enrollment, making significant improvements in curriculum, establishing an art and music program. In addition, the school takes great pride in having fostered and developed a nationally recognized Peace Program that teaches peacemaking to kindergarten through eighth grade. Children from over thirty-seven different ethnic groups represent diverse cultural, racial and religious roots; yet, they learn to live

as God's children in a school that is Catholic in every dimension of its identity. Over 60% of the parents have combined incomes at or below the poverty level. Because of the generosity and sacrifices of past graduates, interested friends, admiring donors and foundations, de Sales School exists and grows. The giving by alumni has blossomed into an annual summer gathering where old friends remember gratefully all that they received at de Sales in the years when there was no tuition. Their generous giving provides the school with the financial support to assist parents who otherwise would have no choice but public school for their children. It offers the children "a chance" — a Catholic education where they can become persons of dignity and self-worth, formed by the Gospel values of Jesus Christ, no matter what their individual practice of religion might be. In fact, de Sales is an example of the point made by Harvard researcher Anthony Bryk in his book *Catholic Schools and The Common Good*, published in 1993: "... the very school system founded and funded to serve the common good often does so poorly. Meanwhile, the Catholic School system, refused funding on the grounds that it would be inimical to the common good, serves it with great distinction."[\(15\)](#)

I know that across this nation there are many similar success stories of Catholic schools, resurrected by the sacrifices and dedication of those who believe in the value of Catholic education. This is evangelization in a time when the Church and Holy Father repeatedly ask us to make a preferential option for the poor. Someone once said that mission is more important than money, but no money, no mission. The de Sales School story says, "If you believe in the mission, you will find the money."

Myth number four states that Catholic schools are gradually disappearing because of a lack of interest and funding. Besides the previous examples of funding ventures, the reality challenging this attitude can be found in these facts taken from the NCEA's Website, and I quote:

According to a report issued by the NCEA, 47 new Catholic schools opened during the past school year, while 140 schools were consolidated or closed. Although enrollment in Catholic schools has declined by 2.4 percent during the past school year, 40 percent of all Catholic schools nationwide have waiting lists for admission. "The demand is clearly there," said Michael Guerra, NCEA President. "More than 300 Catholic schools have opened during the past decade."[\(16\)](#)

The challenge to all of us is to find ways to meet the demand for Catholic schools. As the Catholic population diminishes in urban centers and increases in former rural areas, the desire for Catholic schools grows. Yet, as we well know, many Catholic school buildings remain in the cities. How do we address this fact and the clamor for new schools in this down economy time? The Supreme Court's

decision on the Cleveland vouchers system opens the door to hope that school choice will become a reality for some wanting a Catholic school education. Tax credits or vouchers to middle-income parents would dramatically increase their choice of Catholic schools. The NCEA encourages us to get politically active and lobby our elected officials. The Bishops and NCEA have been actively supporting these efforts across the nation, but need us to express our political rights at the local level.

And now, to myth number five, which proposes that if one is not able to attend Catholic school, the parish religious education programs will do just fine in forming the faith of the young person, while myth number six declares that after the reception of Baptism, Confirmation, First Penance and Eucharist, your faith formation has maxed out. I even have a problem voicing these statements because anyone in this room who is involved in religious education or adult faith formation knows that these myths are so far from being true. The very best religious education programs, including sacramental programs, are limited and cannot replace the daily environment and practice of Catholic faith that a Catholic school provides. Having the opportunity of Catholic schooling does not guarantee that the recipient will be a practicing Catholic, but I want to believe that the odds for producing a true believer and faithful witness of the Gospel are more favorable in a Catholic school.

One hundred years ago, the original Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, CCD, was inaugurated in this country in the Archdiocese of New York. Begun by two laywomen, Marion Gurney and Ellen B. Burke in 1902, the program was based on methods used in England under the leadership of Cardinal Henry Vaughan. Originally intended for the catechesis of all ages, it soon became limited to the classroom instruction of children. Using materials from the Cardinal, these two pioneers trained catechists who were volunteers. Their intensive training and formal commissioning emphasized their professionalism. In this manner, the women "by inviting people of all ages to play a role in the handing on of the faith and by emphasizing the spiritual benefits enjoyed by everyone involved ... made religious instruction a responsibility and a right for all."[\(17\)](#)

This vision was both liberal and forward-thinking. However, the exigencies of the day demanded also the teaching of children who attended public schools. Thus, the vision became limited and narrowed. Being a product of CCD for my first six years of schooling, I must admit that the combination of released time once a week, morning Sunday classes and six weeks of summer religious school whetted my appetite for going to our parish school. My parents were immigrants living in the Protestant part of our small town. Opening a grocery store just before Al Smith ran for the presidency, they were cautious about offending their Wasp neighbors and eventual customers. Moreover, their own lack of schooling and immigrant status made them trusting of those who offered them a welcome. These friends guided them to enroll their children in the local public school. That is what "good American

citizens should do.” My mother was a very devout Catholic, as was my paternal grandmother. Despite the great distance, they often walked to our parish church for weekday Mass. Through their piety, we children learned our prayers and a great deal about who God is and why the Church is called our Mother. These two women saw to it that all five of us attended catechism classes, as they were called, and practiced the faith, as they understood it. Such a combination of home and parish faith formation instilled in us the love of God and of the Church.

Unfortunately, especially today, one or both of the vital ingredients needed for faith formation, namely good parenting and excellent religious education, may be lacking in a child’s life. Where the choice of a Catholic school is impossible either financially or geographically, the faith formation of the very young is precarious and that of the adolescent almost non-existent. On the other hand, where the two ingredients are present, faith formation has a chance and usually flourishes. There is nothing impossible for God! Yet, I suspect that a few recent findings about the practices of American Catholics by James Davidson and Dean Hodge of the Catholic University of America reflect on a weak faith formation for children and adolescents and the absence of any catechesis once the sacraments have been received. Given that over 80% of school age Catholic children attend public or non-Catholic private schools, we should not be surprised by some of their findings:

- The number of Catholic children receiving no formal religious education is estimated to be greater than the number attending Catholic school or parish religious education programs.
- One third of all Catholics are not registered in any parish.
- Nearly one-third of all marriages between two Catholics take place outside a Catholic church.
- Fewer than half of Catholic high school students attend Mass every Sunday.
- More and more Catholic school students come from families in the top income quartile; fewer and fewer come from the bottom quartile.
- Less than one-third of the average Catholic school’s income comes from a parish.
- While Catholics have become the nation’s elite in terms of education and income, they annually contribute about one percent of their income to the Church.[\(18\)](#)

These and some of their other findings should raise our concern about the future of our faith and our Church in this country. How do we stem the tide of the trends observed by Davidson and Hoge? Other researchers find Americans to be religious people. Some Catholic Church researchers see the American Church as one of the most faithful and strongest in the world. Will the Catholic Church here follow the decline witnessed in some countries in Europe? Only the Lord knows that answer. However, I can dream and I can pray and I can listen to the voices of

modern-day prophets such as Cardinal Maida of Detroit and Bishop Grahmann of Dallas-Fort Worth. Their pastoral plans and my dream envision total Catholic education. In his pastoral mentioned previously, Bishop Grahmann refers to the *General Catechetical Directory*, as he sets the stage for understanding what total Catholic education encompasses. Bear with me as I read this long quote:

Those who are called to build up the Church through the ministry of the Word cannot be shallow spokespeople or readers by rote of sacred text or mouthpieces of the Beatitudes. In order to be credible teachers, we must be authentic witnesses. If we are called to integrate the words of our faith with actions inspired by the Word, we must be practicing service in our daily lives. This integration of word and action demands an active faith, which belongs to the dynamic of the world in which we find ourselves.

Our combined ministries must both reflect this integration and acknowledge differences as well. If the ministry of the Word is one mission with many dynamic activities of word and deed, those separate manifestations need to be recognized. Evangelization, catechesis, liturgy, theology and mission must be kept distinct since they are governed by their own laws. Nevertheless, in the concrete reality of pastoral ministry, they are closely bound together. This reality is clearly evident in both the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults as well as in all sacramental preparations. The journey that the faith community takes with all those being prepared for the sacraments and sacramental life and that flows from such celebrations surely involves evangelization, catechesis, worship, theology and liturgy.

Therefore, moving toward a new paradigm that integrates educational ministries, it is desirable that we reflect on the unique intimacy of relationships, and work to create conditions under which each form of ministry of the Word will thrive and bear fruit. Because this integrated approach is the desire of the Church, diocesan structures must demonstrate this one mission with many dynamic activities. This unity, which will result in the improvement of all ministries of formal catechesis, is the purpose of this pastoral letter.[\(19\)](#)

Can this dream become a reality? I firmly believe it can. If parishes in dioceses such as Wichita or Dallas Fort Worth can do it, why can't every parish in every diocese do it? We are one Body, one Church, one Faith and every person counts when we are disciples on mission. Let us recall that the Bishops in 1884 placed their vision before a poor, immigrant people of God and the wonderful fruitful response from them was the Catholic School system, as we know it today in this country. Can we in the Third Millennium do less? We Catholics have so much more in terms of financial, social and political capital. Do we have a poor or uninformed sense of the teaching mission of the Church to which we belong? Of the God in whom we profess belief? The dream can dispel the myths and become the reality, if we follow the lead of prophets like Bishop Grahmann and Cardinal Maida, listen to the voices of Catholic educators not unlike the Wichita Superintendent of Schools or the NCEA President, and dedicate ourselves with the same tenacity of faith as the two sisters at St. Francis de Sales School. Recently, I was present at a liturgy where Father Clarence Williams from Detroit made this observation, "The bend in the road is not the end of the road unless you fail to change direction." This dream of total Catholic education is a turn in the road for American Catholics because it calls for across-the-board moral and financial support for the on-going transmission of the faith, beginning with Catholic schools that are bonded with the parish religious education programs. It necessitates either inter or individual parish cooperation in the on-going religious education of youth, young adults and adults, especially parents and seniors. Lastly and most importantly, it requires that Catholics of all ages understand their own personal need for continual, on-going faith formation. This entails a major change of attitude on the part of most Catholics today. In an editorial, Michael Guerra, President of the NCEA, draws on the image of the Amish who call on the entire community when constructing a barn. Well, to me, the dream of total Catholic education is similar to building a new barn. "...like the Amish, we need everyone in the community to build a faith-filled future in which Catholic education (a total Catholic education) will make a world of difference."[\(20\)](#)

NOTES

¹ Adam J. Maida, "One Faith and Knowledge...Grow to Full Maturity in Christ. A Vision Statement for Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of Detroit," (1991), 3.

² Charles Grahamm, "Total Catholic Education," *Origins* 25 (14 Sept. 1995), 207.

³ Grahamm, "Total Catholic Education," 209.

⁴ Grahamm, "Total Catholic Education," 207.

⁵ See first note for reference.

⁶ Thomas H. Groome, "American Catholic Schools and the Common Good," *Momentum* (April/May 2003), 27-28.

⁷ Groome, "American Catholic Schools and the Common Good," 27.

⁸ Groome, "American Catholic Schools and the Common Good," 28.

⁹ Timothy Walch, "Contours of American Catholic Educational Leadership," *Momentum* (April/May 2003), 32.

¹⁰ Bob Voboril, "Becoming Rooted in the Stewardship Way of Life," *Momentum* (Feb/March 2003), 15.

¹¹ Voboril, "Becoming Rooted in the Stewardship Way of Life," 15.

¹² Voboril, "Becoming Rooted in the Stewardship Way of Life," 16.

¹³ Congregation for Catholic Education, "The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium," (1997), 16.

¹⁴ Congregation for Catholic Education, "The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium," 17.

¹⁵ as quoted in Groome, "American Catholic Schools and the Common Good," 28.

¹⁶ "Catholic Educators Report 47 New Schools Opened," NCEA Press Release, 18 July 2003, Accessed 13 September 2003 <<http://www.ncea.org/newinfo/mediareleases>>

¹⁷ Joan Curtin, CND and Teresita Morse, RJM and Maureen McKee, "Confraternity of Christian Doctrine Observes 100 Years: Ready to Transform Parish Life for Another Century," *Momentum* (April/May 2003), 65.

¹⁸ as quoted in Voboril, "Becoming Rooted in the Stewardship Way of Life," 14.

¹⁹ Grahamm, "Total Catholic Education," 206-207.

²⁰ Michael J. Guerra, "A Faithful Past, a Faith-Filled Future," *Momentum* (April/May 2003), 6.
