



From hospice to hope: Thoughts on Catholic Schools Week

In September 2010, one of the great supporters of American Catholic education, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, issued a memorable call to action for our school leaders. It still has force today. In an article entitled “The Catholic Schools We Need” (*America Magazine*), he wrote: *“It is time to recover our nerve and promote our schools for the 21st century. The current hospice mentality — watching our schools slowly die — must give way to a renewed confidence.”*

That single line invites us all to take a harder look at our approach to Catholic education. Philadelphia is the diocese where St. John Neumann founded parochial Catholic schools, and the future of our Catholic schools depends on more than just the professional skills we have as leaders. It also and even more urgently depends on the spirit and mindset we bring to the people we lead.

For decades, Catholic dioceses have spent countless hours (and dollars) training our leaders in skills. One consultant showed us *how* to better manage enrollment. Another showed us *how to* better manage our finances. Another showed us *what skills* were key to being a successful leader.

These things are clearly important. But one of the basic needs we sometimes missed was that no one came along and taught us how to transform our thinking in a way that produced results. No one taught us how to move from an unstated but powerful “hospice mentality” to a credible growth mentality.

Catholic schools have been in crisis since the 1970s. We’ve done a decent job managing a frustrating decline. But we need to realize that our problems aren’t finally about skills; they’re about winning back the faith of our people with strong academic content and even stronger confidence in Jesus Christ.

There’s no “out of the box” solution to our predicament. We need educators with nimble, creative minds, in it for the long haul and un-



impressed by all the reasons Catholic education “must” shrink. If we assume we’re in decline, then we’ll decline — guaranteed. If we go forward with a bit more audacity, then good things are possible. So that’s what we’re trying to do here in Philadelphia.

In my 2014 pastoral letter on Catholic education, *Equipping Saints*, I wrote: *“Today we continue the great witness begun many decades ago by the fourth bishop of Philadelphia, St. John Neumann. His energy and vision encouraged parishes to open the first Catholic elementary schools, and his success became a model for Church-sponsored education in our country.”*

John Neumann had no professional consultants. He had a modest bag of skills. But he had tireless energy, vision and confidence in God’s help — and that’s what we need to emulate. He was never stymied by what Catholics “couldn’t” do. He moved forward believing in what could be done and seeing what no one else could see.

It’s a busy time here as we celebrate our Catholic schools across the United States this week (January 31-February 6). As we work to move from hospice to hope, as we equip saints for life in this world and in the next, one thing is certain: This is a time to celebrate not just the great heritage of our Catholic schools — nostalgia is beautiful, but it’s no substitute for action — but also our schools’ vital mission *for the future*.

We need to shout out the great gift they are to our nation and to the whole Philadelphia region — because that’s what they are. And with God’s help and yours, that’s what they always will be.

Archbishop Chaput’s pastoral letter on Catholic education and parish faith formation can be found at <http://archphila.org/press%20releases/pr002462.php>

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Catholic Charities Appeal expands to aid more ministries

Archbishop Charles Chaput kicked off the start of the 2016 Catholic Charities Appeal Jan. 28 at St. Katherine Day School in Wynnewood.

The appeal's theme this year is "A New Vision," and the archbishop announced a new goal of \$15 million for the appeal, a 50 percent increase from \$10 million in recent previous years.

The first \$10 million raised will continue to go toward serving the poor of the region, an activity the archbishop identified as being essential to Christian life. Any amount over that, anticipated to be an additional \$5 million, will fund other ministries in the archdiocese and parishes.

The expanded appeal is a recognition that archdiocesan belt tightening over the past four years has limited the services and outreach the archdiocese is able to provide in the region, and makes the case for new donations from the Catholic faithful.

When Archbishop Chaput came to Philadelphia in 2011, the archdiocese was carrying a \$17 million operating deficit. By last year that had been reduced to a \$700,000 deficit, but it stubbornly remains red ink and prohibits the archdiocese from offering evangelization and other programs or growing staff and resources to church offices.

The hope is that money gathered from a diocese-wide collection as part of the Catholic Charities Appeal could eliminate ongoing deficits and help grow the church's support ministries.

The appeal altogether will serve more than 200,000 people in the region regardless of religion or background.

Nearly 180 agencies, programs and of-

fices across five categories are beneficiaries: four schools of special education; dozens of Catholic Social Services agencies and Nutritional Development Services; needs of retired clergy and seminarians; a group of 16 "mission parishes" in need of assistance in disadvantaged areas; and support of evangelization, parish and spiritual life throughout the archdiocese.

Parishes have received Catholic Charities Appeal brochures and other materials including a video and announcements to be read from the pulpit.

The biggest source of donations to the appeal comes from responses to its packet mailed to every registered household in the archdiocese. Online donations can be made at the website www.CatholicCharitiesAppeal.org, where more information about the appeal is available.

Five parishes to reorganize in Port Richmond

Five parishes in Philadelphia's Port Richmond section will reorganize in a plan that calls for merging and partnering, a new model whereby most of the parishes' identities will remain.

Of the six parishes in Pastoral Planning Area (PPA) 570 in Port Richmond, five are affected by the initiative and will be reorganized in two phases.

The first calls for Our Lady Help of Christians Parish, founded in 1885 for German Catholics in the area, to merge with Nativity B.V.M. Parish, and for Mother of Divine Grace Parish to partner with St. George Parish. The phase is to be completed by June of this year.

Phase two of the initiative will be completed by June 2017 in which the new Nativity Parish partners with Mother of Divine Grace and St. George.

An archdiocesan statement described a parish partnership as one in which the parish churches remain open and each parish retains its own finances and finance council.

But to better manage resources, one priest pastor, one pastoral council and one parish staff serve the needs of all the parishes in the partnership.

St. Adalbert Parish, which had joined in the planning process with the other parishes in Port Richmond, will remain a free-standing parish with its own pastor, staff, councils and finances.

St. Anne Parish was not involved with PPA 570's planning and remains unaffected.

Port Richmond typifies some of the most difficult challenges pastors and parishioners engaged in the archdiocesan-wide Pastoral Planning Process face when trying to decide how to manage large physical plants and dwindling resources in the decades since the parishes' founding.

One of the most critical needs is staffing parishes with a declining number of available priests today and in the future.

Many factors such as large, underutilized churches and other buildings, shrinking congregations and diminishing financial resources were studied by the Port Richmond parishes beginning in October 2014.

After a year of discussion parish leaders and parishioners failed to come to an agreement on a path forward, so last October they met again to consider the partnership option.

They eventually settled on it and recommended it to the Council of Priests and to Archbishop Charles Chaput, who accepted the plan.

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