



Catholic Schools Celebrate Service
Catholic Schools Week 2009
(Bishops Congratulate Students and Parents, Teachers and Administrators)

As we join in celebrating national Catholic Schools Week, January 25 – 31, 2009, we take this opportunity to express our true admiration and sincere thanks to Catholic school students and their parents, and to Catholic school administrators and teachers, for their dedication, sacrifice and commitment to Catholic education in our state. We also recognize our pastors for the important role they play in the ministry of Catholic education and faith formation of our children.

This year's theme, "Catholic Schools Celebrate Service," is linked to Pope Benedict XVI's 2008 visit to the United States, when students pledged volunteer service hours in honor of the Pope's 81st birthday. As one of the key components of the fourfold mission of Catholic education, service is joined with message, community and worship. The gift of *service* to those most in need, to those socially or economically disadvantaged, is a part of every Catholic school *community*, a part of our most basic *message* and always contemplated in our *worship*.

We wish especially to express our gratitude to the parents who have entrusted the education of their children to our Catholic schools. We have confidence that this investment will allow their children to make important contributions as responsible citizens and leaders in our Church. The financial sacrifices made by these parents in paying taxes to support public schools, while at the same time paying tuition, results in a huge savings for our state. Considering the \$7,000 average yearly cost to educate a child in Florida's public schools, the 88,000 students in Florida's Catholic schools save the state \$600 million annually. This considerable savings is realized even after adjusting for the more than 4,200 Catholic school students participating in State funded scholarship programs. We are proud of the valuable social contribution our schools make to the education of the residents of our state.

Catholic school education in the third millennium is a gift of the service from past generations of Catholics and Catholic school educators. The dedicated women and men who preceded us and gifted our Church with Catholic schools established a solid foundation for future educators. Today, the women and men who respond to Christ's invitation to teach build upon that foundation with a renewal dedication and commitment. We are grateful to each of them for sharing not only their academic expertise with today's youth, but also their faith by word and action, thus giving witness that the Catholic faith can be a lived reality in the world today. Theirs is truly a vocation of service to the Church. Like parents, they have made many sacrifices to teach in our schools.

Pope Benedict XVI has acknowledged that throughout the history of our country, Catholic schools have played a pivotal role in shaping American society. The Holy Father has stated that Catholic schools are as important today as they were to the immigrant Catholic population several centuries ago. We are especially proud that Catholic schools today are reaching out to more than 4,200 at-risk students who participate in one of three state-wide school choice programs.

Catholic schools play a vital role in the formation of future leaders in the Church, future priests and religious as well as an educated laity. In 1990 and 2005, we joined the United States bishops in statements of support of Catholic elementary and secondary schools. The burden of supporting Catholic schools cannot be met solely by those parishes with schools and parents who pay tuition. As generations for the past 200 years have done, we urge the entire Catholic community to continue to support our schools. We need all Catholics to focus on the spirituality of stewardship.

Catholic schools are a blessing to our state. They are a light to the nation and a rich resource to the Church. We celebrate their high standards of excellence and the quality of education available in Catholic elementary, secondary and special education schools, and give thanks for their many accomplishments and achievements. Truly, our Catholic schools are "the good news in education."

Archbishop John C. Favalora
Archdiocese of Miami

Bishop Victor Galeone
Diocese of St. Augustine

Bishop Robert N. Lynch
Diocese of St. Petersburg

Bishop Thomas G. Wenski
Diocese of Orlando

Bishop John H. Ricard, SSJ
Diocese of Pensacola/Tallahassee

Bishop Gerald M. Barbarito, JCL
Diocese of Palm Beach

Bishop Frank J. Dewane
Diocese of Venice

Auxiliary Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
Archdiocese of Miami

Auxiliary Bishop John G. Noonan
Archdiocese of Miami

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