

Leading the FLOCK

BY BISHOP DANIEL E. THOMAS



Good News for all Parents

Have you heard the good news? In July, Ohio joined several other states across the country that have adopted a universal parental choice scholarship program. This new law allows for every Ohio family to be eligible for a scholarship for each child, which may be used at any private school of their choosing. Students in kindergarten through senior year of high school are eligible for a full or partial scholarship based on the family's household income. This is indeed good news for parents whose vocation includes choosing the best possible means of educating their children. Now parents who choose to send their children to private schools will justly, by means of the state's financial support, be on comparable footing with parents who choose other options for the education of their children.

For example, a family of four that makes \$135,000 or less annually is eligible for a scholarship of \$6,165 for students in grades K-8 and \$8,407 for students in grades 9-12. The scholarship award amounts decrease as a family's income increases; however, all families who apply receive a scholarship.

From a Catholic perspective, this good news allows for the Good News to be proclaimed more widely! It is a momentous occasion to celebrate the recognition of parental rights and a new opportunity to help form thousands of young people through the gift of Catholic education! The Church has long taught that parents have the

primary and inalienable right to educate their children in concert with their moral convictions and religious beliefs. As a result of this principle, the Church has advocated for systems of educational pluralism to ensure parents have choices as opposed to an educational monopoly with few or no options. Today in Ohio, parents have more educational options than ever.

Catholic schools are at the heart of the Church and are now a much more viable and affordable option for many families. The then Congregation for Catholic Education, in a 1997 document, taught that "the Catholic school participates in the evangelizing mission of the Church and is the privileged environment in which Christian education is carried out."¹ Another way to consider this metaphor is that Catholic schools are the main muscle through which new life circulates throughout the body, the Church. Until this summer, the financial weight of a Catholic education was a cost-prohibitive endeavor for many families. With the universal parental choice scholarship program, it becomes all the more possible for parents to consider sending their children to a Catholic school.

As parents evaluate what is best for their children, it is my sincere hope and prayer that our Catholic schools will stand out as good partners for all parents. If you are or know a new parent who has a younger child just beginning their formal education, I encourage you to reach out to your

parish or local Catholic school to learn about the education offered in the preschool or primary grades. If you are or know a homeschool parent, I encourage you to reach out to your parish or local Catholic school to learn about what options, programs, and courses may most benefit your child. If you are or know a parent who has never considered a Catholic school as an



option, I encourage you to engage with your parish or local Catholic school to understand how this partnership may work. Or if you are or know a current Catholic school parent, I encourage you to take advantage of and tell your family members, friends, co-workers, colleagues, and neighbors about this new opportunity for all. As a product of Catholic schools myself, I can assure you that Catholic education provides what secular options cannot, a faith based education which strives to form the whole person in body, mind, and spirit. I am forever grateful for the Catholic education I was so blessed to receive.

The philosophy of Catholic education is what allows our schools to perform extraordinarily well as compared with other educational options. While college and career readiness are good and noble endeavors, necessary for a productive society, Catholic schools are inspired by a supernatural vision which goes beyond by preparing good citizens for the world and good citizens for heaven, the next generation of saints! Catholic schools create strong, familial communities that recognize each student as made in the image of God. They build character and instill in each student the desire to live a life of virtue. They witness to those first and

¹Congregation for Catholic Education. (1997). *The Catholic School on the Threshold on the Third Millennium*. The Holy See. Paragraph 11. vatican.va

fundamental commandments: to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love your neighbor as yourself. They exist to make Jesus Christ known, loved, and served, by teaching truth, beauty, and goodness across all disciplines. This unwavering commitment to the Truth in Catholic schools is becoming

all the more valuable and necessary as we witness around us the collapse of our culture.

Our parishes and local Catholic schools have worked this summer to assist families with applying for the parental choice scholarship. The application is just one page and only takes a few minutes to complete. Our administrators and staff stand ready to facilitate the admissions process and answer your questions. Most of all I ask you to spread the good news far and wide that our Catholic schools stand ready to encourage current families to take advantage of this new opportunity, to welcome new families to our schools, so that the Good News may continue to be announced, proclaimed and lived here in our nineteen counties! How powerful are the words which appear on signs that grace the entrances of many of our Catholic schools: "Let it be known to all who enter here that Jesus Christ is the reason for this school, the unseen but ever-present teacher in all its classes, the model of its faculty, and the inspiration for its students." Good news indeed!

+ Daniel E. Thomas

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