

BISHOP SOTO ANNOUNCES THE RESTRUCTURING OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN THE DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO

In the Acts of the Apostles, Simon Peter brought together the early Christian community to choose someone who would assume the place of Judas and share in the work of giving witness to the Lord Jesus. Simon Peter made clear the qualifications for taking up this task. It was to be someone “who accompanied us the whole time the Lord Jesus came and went among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day on which he was taken up from us.” (Acts 1.21-22) To be a true witness of Jesus and His gospel it was important to know Jesus, to know him personally. This someone was to have walked with the Lord, talked with him, served with him, and dined with him.



St. John, in his first letter, made that claim regarding his own testimony. He said, “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life -- for the life was made visible; we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was made visible to us.” (1Jn. 1.1-2)

One Purpose

All of Catholic faith formation has to serve this one purpose, to help a person come to know, love, and serve the Lord Jesus. This knowledge is intellectual but it is more importantly personal. The Holy Father, Benedict XVI, said this most emphatically at the very beginning of his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” Knowing the Lord Jesus, walking with Him, studying with Him, serving with Christ, and sharing the table of the Lord Jesus is what prepares a person to be His witness to the world.

This is the proper expectation of all Catholic faith formation, whether it is religious instruction after school, pre-baptismal catechesis, marriage preparation classes, or a simple Bible study among friends. All of these pastoral occasions are wonderful moments to meet the Lord, hear His voice, and grow in His love. This is especially true about Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Sacramento, both our elementary as well as secondary schools. They are fundamentally schools of discipleship.

Catholic schools draw their inspiration from the marvelous mystery of the Incarnation, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth.” (Jn. 1.14) Catholic education forms the whole person with the grace and truth of the Lord Jesus. Young women and men are given the opportunity to develop their talents, skills, and knowledge so that they can reach their full stature as faithful followers of the Lord Jesus, who came to serve and not to be served. (Matt. 20.28) There is no other

ambition more worthy of the human spirit than this.

The Diocese of Sacramento has a proud legacy of Catholic education

that has prepared men and women devoted to following the Lord Jesus. They are serving today in many of our parishes and schools. Even more importantly, they are working in various walks of life serving as the leaven of the Kingdom in society.

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Answering the Challenges

In recent years, this legacy has come under a cloud of uncertainty. The increased costs of offering a quality Catholic education, shifting demographics in our communities, dwindling enrollments in many of our schools, and strong anti-evangelical currents in our society – all these have caused many clergy, religious and laity to question the efficacy of Catholic schools. Despite these daunting challenges there is still the conviction that comes from our long experience: Few other pedagogical approaches better develop committed Catholic men and women ready to follow Jesus than Catholic schools.

After lengthy study, consultation, and prayer, I have decided to implement a new governance structure for our Catholic schools. This new structure will help me as the pastor of the diocese and help us together as the Catholic community to manage our spiritual and temporal resources as we respond to the challenges before us.

This new governance structure will enable the laity to exercise a greater role in managing the Catholic mission, resources, and academic program of the schools in a close collaboration with the bishop and the clergy. This will enable the schools to be a place where students of diverse cultural and economic backgrounds can meet the Lord Jesus, grow in knowledge, develop their talents, and imitate Christ in prayer, speech, and charity.

RESTRUCTURE VISION

All Catholic schools will eventually be managed by a fiduciary board of directors made up of the Catholic laity under the governance of the Diocesan Bishop of Sacramento. In those cases where there is evident and urgent need, the transition to this new model of governance will take place over the course of the next three years. In the remaining cases, the change will take place when most opportune. The number of boards and the span of schools under their management will be determined as the plan is implemented, based on what is most effective and efficient.



Role of the Bishop and Pastor

The Bishop of Sacramento and the pastor of the parish continue to hold the ownership of the school. They will entrust the school to be managed by a board of directors for the good of the Church. The bishop and the pastor will approve the annual budget for the school. By consensus, the bishop and pastor will also have the authority to appoint or remove members of the board of directors at their discretion. The pastor will be the spiritual leader and maintain a pastoral presence for the school, i.e., visiting the classrooms, celebrating school Masses and ensuring continuity between the parish, school, parents and parishioners.

Role of the Board of Directors

The board of directors will provide the schools with the necessary leadership, communication, fiscal and development resources to implement a quality Catholic education, accessible to the local parish communities. The board of directors will be responsible for all aspects of school governance, excluding those matters reserved to the diocesan bishop and pastors. Those aspects for which the Board is responsible will include educational, religious, and temporal matters. Board members will be leaders from the Catholic community with experience in many areas, such as management, finances, personnel, recruitment, education. Parents with children enrolled in a Catholic school will not be eligible to serve on the board managing the same school.

Role of the Catholic Schools Dept.

The restructured Catholic Schools Department will be led by a Director of Catholic schools. Under his/her leadership, the department will develop and implement system-wide strategies to:

- sustain a vibrant Catholic environment where children and young people can encounter Christ
- provide consistent quality programs and curriculum
- ensure academic excellence
- provide effective and efficient marketing, communications and community relations
- encourage active participation in the Church by school families
- facilitate accessibility
- support and develop the administration, faculty, and staff of the Catholic school
- support the development and management of financial resources

The Catholic Schools Department will establish itself as an expert, imaginative, and trusted provider of day-to-day services and resources to those pastors and lay boards tasked with

governing our Catholic schools. The department will bring an entrepreneurial spirit to the task of renewing and growing the Catholic school system in the current complex economic and social environment. The department will join with other Catholic institutions and leaders in the efforts to improve the quality and sustainability of Catholic schools statewide and nationally.

The Restructure Process

Over the next three years, there will be a re-organization process to implement this new model of governance for our Catholic schools. The system-wide restructure will involve the following steps:

A new Director of Catholic education will be hired in April, 2011.

The current Diocesan School Board (DSB) will be retired in June, 2011. Ad-hoc committees will provide continuity for the on-going tasks of the DSB committees (i.e., Latino Outreach, Catholic Identity, Curriculum Development) as needed.

The staffing for the restructured Catholic Schools Department will be completed by November 2011.

By January 2012, an interim management governance plan for each school will be presented:

- North State schools and the Succeed Academy will remain under their respective boards.
- All other schools will be reviewed to determine what interim model of governance is required. Options are:
 - (A) The school continues under the traditional management of the local pastor.
 - (B) The school will be managed directly by the Catholic Schools Department. The pastor will continue to have responsibility for providing sacramental and pastoral services to the school. The parish will continue to provide financial support to the school.

Schools that are financially secure, well managed, and have strong enrollment will most likely continue under option (A). Those schools where these are an issue will most likely transition to the interim management under option (B).

By July 2012, the number of boards and the span of schools under their management will be determined. It is anticipated that the majority of these boards will be regional.

By July 2013, those schools under the interim management of the Catholic Schools Department will begin to be transferred to a board of directors.

By July of 2013, the governance plans and timeline for the transition of the remaining schools to an existing or newly formed board of directors will be finalized.



Conclusion

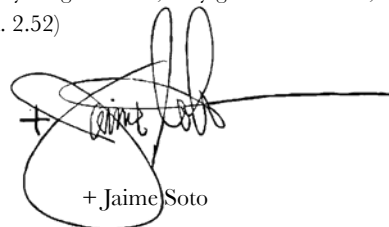
In the three years since coming to the Diocese of Sacramento, I have enjoyed the opportunities to visit schools and speak with the students. I have admired the dedication with which principals and teachers have cared for our Catholic school students. All of our efforts and resources dedicated to Catholic schools through the years have produced an environment where students and teachers can develop a relationship of learning and discovery that nurtures not only academic excellence but also

Christian holiness. This is the abiding mission of Catholic schools that requires an unwavering commitment to do the good we can. As St. Paul told the Galatians, “Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up. So then, while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all, but especially to those who belong to the family of the faith.” (Gal. 6.9-10)

Walking through the hallways, classrooms, and gymnasiums of our Catholic schools, one can hear the echo of past generations of zealous religious women and men, diligent pastors, and legions of loyal lay teachers. They instructed, encouraged, disciplined, persuaded, inspired and prayed on our campuses. Through their efforts and God’s grace, countless children and young people grew to know, love and serve the Lord Jesus.

With the strategic plan, I hope to sustain and grow this rich inheritance by employing a new, dynamic model of governance. Our teachers, principals, administrators and pastors today can make each of our schools a new Nazareth where the image of the Lord Jesus, nascent in each of our young children, may grow in wisdom, age and grace before God and all His people. (Lk. 2.52)

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+ Jaime Soto
Bishop of Sacramento