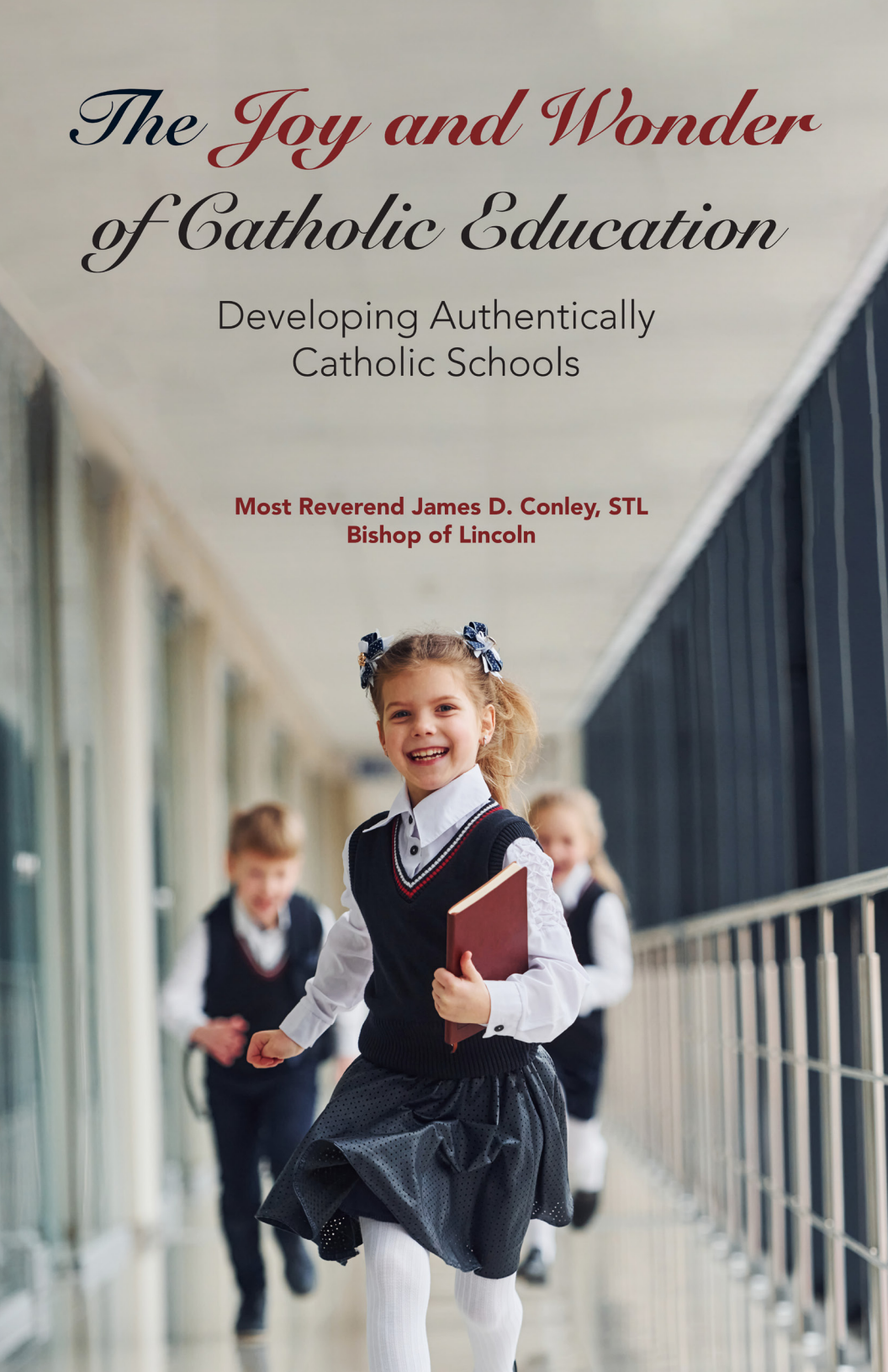


The Joy and Wonder of Catholic Education

Developing Authentically
Catholic Schools

Most Reverend James D. Conley, STL
Bishop of Lincoln



In the second century, St. Irenaeus coined one of the most famous phrases in Christianity: “The glory of God is man, fully alive!”

But becoming “fully alive” does not come naturally to us. Because we have each suffered the effects of sin, we do not easily choose or even recognize the true, the good, and the beautiful—the universal attributes of being. We do not always choose and live as we should. We do not, left to our own devices, exercise the full potential of the gifts that God has given us. This is precisely why education—and Catholic education especially—is so important.

“Education” is related to the Latin *educere*, which means to lead out of or to lead through. It can be understood as the activity by which we are led out of our ignorance, out of our fallen condition, toward something greater.

Education is the process of shaping us to fulfill the purpose of our lives; to know the happiness that comes from living in accord with our dignity and our nature. Education is the work of drawing out, developing, and learning to use our intellects, our memories, our wills, and our imaginations, to the fullness of their potential. Since education is the formation of human hearts, minds, and wills for the glory of their Creator, it has always been a priority within Catholicism.

A Centuries-Old Focus on Education

While the Civil War raged in the early 1860s, a small brick Catholic schoolhouse named St. Benedict School went up in Nebraska City. Its students were boys *and* girls, Catholic *and* non-Catholic, largely the children of immigrants and pioneers. Those students received the gift of Catholic education from the Benedictine nuns who taught them, but first from their parents and community who built the school. This education was paid for in sacrifice—through the donated labor and earnings of the community—to form the children in faith, character, and knowledge.

Since the first brick was laid for St. Benedict’s School more than 150 years ago, Catholics in southern Nebraska have made countless sacrifices to mold young people into disciples of Jesus Christ. Many of the great blessings in our diocese can be attributed to those sacrifices which, coupled with the grace of God, have sustained and strengthened the mission of Catholic schools. Through the efforts of parents, teachers, pastors, religious and bishops, our schools have done extraordinary work for the glory of God. In this, Nebraska mirrors the history of our country, whose first Catholic school was founded in 1606 by a religious order (the Franciscan Friars) and built mostly by the hands of the town’s citizens.

Being Reborn in Wonder

I am not one of the millions of children who received a Catholic education in this great country. Nor was I Catholic when I showed up as a freshman at the University

of Kansas in the early 1970's. My main interests at the time were basketball and the Grateful Dead, and KU had them both! But God had other designs, and in my first year I providentially enrolled in the Integrated Humanities Program. By the middle of my junior year, I was baptized and received into the Catholic Church. If I were to distill what converted me down to one thing (beyond the power of supernatural grace), it was a "great books" liberal arts education. "Liberal arts" has become a controversial term, but it simply denotes an education meant to free the student for truth (liberal coming from the Latin word *liber*, which means free).

My liberal arts education lived up to its name, immersing students in truth, goodness, and beauty through poetry, history, music, philosophy, theology, art, architecture, and dance. This spurring of my imagination ultimately led to my conversion to the Catholic Church, which was hastened through my classmates' friendship and our mutual love and desire for these three transcendentals. The words of Saint John Henry Cardinal Newman ring true in my experience:

The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description. Persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us. Many a man will live and die upon a dogma: no man will be a martyr for a conclusion. (Tamworth Reading Room Letters to Sir Robert Peel)

When I discovered truth, goodness, and beauty in the great books, described by Matthew Arnold as "the best which has been thought and said," wonder took hold within me. This was not a happy accident. The three KU professors who founded the Integrated Humanities Program firmly believed that a true education should engender "a birth of the human spirit, an entry into a new world that excites interest because it is seen in the light of wonder" (Dennis Quinn, "Essay on the Muses as Pedagogues of the Liberal Arts"). "Wonder is the beginning of knowledge," said Professor John Senior (another co-founder), "the reverent fear that beauty strikes within us." The idea was so central that they chose the Latin phrase *Nascantur in Admirazione* ("Let Them Be Born in Wonder") as the program's motto. As I was reborn in wonder my heart began to sing for joy. St. Augustine wrote, *only the lover sings*, and ultimately, I discovered love Himself through the joy and wonder suffused throughout my liberal arts program.

Although the Integrated Humanities Program was not Catholic, it led to around 300 conversions in the decade or so that it lasted. Such is the power of truth, goodness, and beauty, which have always been at the heart of our faith. If an explicitly secular program could be so powerful, imagine the impact of a Catholic education! But this raises the question: what makes an education genuinely Catholic?

The Five Essential Marks of Catholic Education

Archbishop J. Michael Miller, CSB, the former Secretary for the Congregation for Catholic Education at the Vatican, examined numerous papal and Vatican documents

and enumerated five characteristics essential to Catholic education. If a school is to be authentically Catholic, it must be: 1) inspired by a supernatural vision, 2) founded on Christian anthropology, 3) animated by communion and community, 4) imbued with a Catholic worldview throughout its curriculum, and 5) sustained by gospel witness. As the Archbishop explains, “These benchmarks help to answer the critical question: *Is this a Catholic school according to the mind of the Church?*” (*The Holy See’s Teaching on Catholic Schools*, 17.) These elements must be thoroughly understood and fully implemented, so let’s explore them.

1. Inspired by a Supernatural Vision

A truly Catholic education is concerned with the formation of the whole person: intellectually, morally, socially, and spiritually. The ancient Greeks said that education makes us free—freeing us from error, falsehood, and slavery so as to live the fullness of human life, in virtue and excellence. As a liberal education seeks to unshackle students to be independent thinkers, a Catholic liberal education seeks to free the students to live the truth of being made in the image and likeness of God. This understanding serves as the foundation of each person’s inalienable dignity, which is so under assault in today’s culture. A supernatural vision teaches students that happiness comes from living in accord with our dignity and our nature, placing God’s will first.

A Catholic education also teaches baptized students to live in the glorious freedom of the children of God (see Romans 8:21). As students come to understand the immense privilege of baptism, they learn what it means to be temples of the Holy Spirit, partake in divine life, and embrace their vocation through their sacrificial efforts to bring people to God (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1241). It also highlights the power of grace to potentially love as God Himself loves. Naturally, such an education must be faithful to the Gospel and to the teachings of the Church, emphasizing them as the true path to human flourishing and fulfillment. This supernatural vision also helps even unbaptized students recognize they are unfathomably loved by God and that He desires their adoption as sons and daughters through Christ.

This formation does far more than prepare students for a job. It frees them to know, love, and live fully the joy and wonder of the Christian life. It provides meaning, shaping students to fulfill the purpose of their lives and giving them a vision of life by which they can fully integrate its disparate-seeming aspects.

2. Founded on a Christian Anthropology

All Catholic educators share directly in the mission of Jesus Christ, the Teacher. In fact, the most common title for Jesus in the ancient world was *Rabboni*, which means “teacher” in Hebrew. There are few professions today that can claim to be so directly connected and grounded in the mission of Jesus Christ.

As such, an authentically Catholic education is centered on the person of Jesus Christ. Catholic schools are not merely information delivery systems focused on secular

success, but rather are about transformation in Christ. Our educational mission goes far beyond conveying factual knowledge of history, science, literature, or even of the faith; it begins and ends with students' potential for holiness.

Every student is made for holiness, made to become a saint. A Catholic education, again, draws out of students a sense of their own call to holiness, helping them experience the grace that renews their minds (see Romans 12:2) and frees them from sin and death (see Romans 8:2). An authentically Catholic school teaches students that through Jesus they can become the people God calls them to be. Instead of a myopic emphasis on what students can do, a Catholic education cultivates their inner potential on natural and supernatural planes, thereby also preparing them for any kind of work the future holds.

“Our educational mission begins and ends with students’ potential for holiness”

For teachers, principals, pastors, and administrators, this means that Catholic schools must be focused always on salvation. As Pope Pius XI said, a Catholic education must “aim at securing the Supreme Good, that is, God, for the souls of those who are being educated, and the maximum of well-being possible here below for human society” (*Divini Illius Magistri*, 8). Here the Incarnation is indispensable, grounding students in a Christian anthropology and providing a clear roadmap in life. When students learn that God took on and retains a human nature, they discover the goodness of materiality—especially the human body—as well as the privileges and responsibilities that accompany it. They learn that happiness comes through living in accord with our God-given human nature, not from ignoring or manipulating it. A Catholic education also stresses that it is only Christ who “fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22), teaching students not to seek answers in lesser goods. By following Christ’s example of doing the will of His Father, students learn that this is the path to God’s peace, which surpasses all understanding (see Philippians 4:7).

Since grace builds on nature, a Catholic school’s emphasis on the supernatural integrates seamlessly with the natural plane. As Pope Benedict XVI explained, “knowing the truth leads us to discover the good” (Address to Catholic Educators at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., April 17, 2008). In that process of learning, from delight, to joy, to wonder, to wisdom, students learn to order their emotions. They learn what to love and what not to love. They learn what is good, true, and beautiful while, at the same time, they learn what is bad, false, and ugly. St. Augustine called this the ordering of the emotions or passions, *ordo amoris*. At young ages students should learn that they are loved and created good. This formation of the entire person teaches students how to lead a life ordered through Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to God the Father—a life ordered to true and everlasting happiness.

3. *Animated by Communion and Community*

“The Holy See describes the school as a community in four areas: the teamwork among all those involved; the cooperation between educators and bishops; the interaction of students with teachers; and the school’s physical environment” (*The Holy See’s Teaching on Catholic Schools*, 29). Teamwork between teachers, staff, and principal is obviously essential to a well-run school. Teachers in a school must become a “faculty of friends,” mutually encouraging one another in their common mission of helping to transform their students into saints.

Catholic schools must also prioritize cooperation between the staff and the students’ families, especially parents, who “have the first responsibility for the education of their children” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2223). This promotes the mutual exchanges of gifts, to the benefit of students and the school’s mission.

Healthy cooperation between educators and bishops also helps further an authentically Catholic education. As a bishop, I have the responsibility of overseeing Catholic schools in my diocese, ensuring they “are outstanding in correct doctrine, the witness of a Christian life, and teaching skill” (*Code of Canon Law*, 804 §2). But I can’t lead effectively without the trust of my teachers. By respectful listening, honoring each other’s gifts, and understanding our complementary roles and responsibilities, we have been able to come together to address the pressing challenges of Catholic education in our own time. As I understand it, this is an expression of true “synodality” that Pope Francis desires for the local church, walking together toward a common goal.

The challenges are many. In the Diocese of Lincoln, our schools face continual financial struggles as the cost of education increases. We also face the difficulty of forming teachers and administrators as disciples of Jesus Christ, the challenge of responding to changing demographics in rural and urban communities, and the strain of increased regulatory obligations. There is also a particular need to respond to an increasingly secular culture with ever-more authentically Catholic formation, which includes developing curricula reflective of truth, goodness, and beauty, and assessing and adapting our methods and approaches as needed. Our history tells us that we can face these challenges and handle them successfully. Doing so requires docility to the Holy Spirit, trust in the Providence of God, and mutual cooperation.

Just as Catholic schools require a good rapport between bishops and educators to thrive, they also need reciprocity between teachers and students. True Catholic formation demands a personal relationship, one in which students are known and loved as individuals. Coupled with healthy boundaries, authentic relationships promote a learning atmosphere. When educators maintain a healthy level of personal involvement with their students, they can accompany their charges along the road of intellectual, spiritual, religious, emotional, and social growth.

A school’s physical environment also plays a key role in generating community. A Catholic school is not meant to look like an institution but instead be a welcoming

place of beauty—with windows, plants, rugs, and excellent secular art. It should reflect our faith, which is both spiritual and material (like us!). The physical can make visible the invisible, and so a school's environment should include crucifixes, statues, images, and objects of devotion that reinforce the incarnational aspects of Catholicism.

Music, both sacred and profane, also builds up the community of a school. Singing in common, particularly in choirs, is an expression of communion. This is especially true with regard to the sacred liturgy. Just as the Eucharist “is the source and summit of the Christian life” (*Lumen Gentium*, 11), so the Eucharist must be the heart of every school. The opportunity for daily Mass and frequent confession should be part of the rhythm of life in a Catholic school.

Communal prayer outside of the Mass also helps foster community, teaching students to pray with and for each other in joys and sorrows. Eucharistic processions through the hallways of the school and opportunities for silent Eucharistic adoration should also be a part of the liturgical life of every school.

“Catholic schools have been proven to be one of the best ways to bring families and whole communities out of poverty”

Lastly, I would add that Catholic schools should be apostolates of the entire community, supported by all parishes and Catholics in the diocese. Even Catholics who don't have children, or whose children are grown, have a vested interest in educating the youth. First, it is our duty as Catholics to evangelize, and a genuinely Catholic education directs young souls to Christ. Catholic schools offer the best opportunity for evangelization, both of non-Catholics as well as of Catholics who are not fully living their faith. Second, Catholic schools have been proven to be one of the best ways to bring families and whole communities out of poverty (see *Lost Classroom, Lost Community: Catholic Schools' Importance in Urban America* by Nicole Stelle Garnett and Margaret Brinig). So it's always a tragedy when schools have to close in inner cities because they're not sustainable. Third, education serves the common good, and Catholic education does so even more by forming not only good citizens, but ambassadors of Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:20) who work to make present the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Imagine the change within our country if even a fraction of today's students were on fire with the love of God, seeking to share that love and working for the common good of all!

Of course, education is primarily about the good of the students, and because Catholic education is so transformational, Catholic schools should be affordable. In the Lincoln diocese, we have some of the lowest elementary and high school tuition rates in the country, largely due to Bishop Glennon Patrick Flavin's prioritization of

Catholic education. By having enough priests to utilize some in Catholic education and thanks to the sacrifices of lay teachers, we have been able to keep tuition down. Additionally, it is our goal that no child should be turned away because of an inability to pay. All Christians “have a right to a Christian education” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 2), and charity demands we ensure Catholic education is not a privilege reserved only for those who can afford it. Catholics within the Lincoln diocese have risen to this call, with parishioners taking ownership of their parish schools and contributing a substantial part of what it costs to educate each student. Their generosity has helped keep Catholic education accessible and affordable.

Catholics within the community should also lobby elected officials to help families offset the cost of education by supporting parental choice in the form of vouchers, tax credit scholarships, or educational savings accounts. As the Second Vatican Council noted, the government is “bound according to the principles of distributive justice to ensure that public subsidies to schools are so allocated that parents are truly free to select schools for their children in accordance with their conscience” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 6). This principle of parental choice in the education of their children is an important piece in the mosaic of social justice—especially because such programs typically have income caps and therefore disproportionately benefit low-income households. Still, more reform is needed to include middle-income families—especially those with multiple children, who are embracing the pro-life teaching of the Catholic Church. Efforts to empower all parents to choose educational opportunities that best suit their children’s needs have been stymied for too long but they’re now slowly making progress in select state legislatures. More needs to be done on this front and it is incumbent upon the Catholic faithful to make their views known to public officials.

4. Imbued with a Catholic Worldview throughout the Curriculum

To effectively help students develop toward the fullness of their potential, Christ and His teachings must animate all the school’s efforts. Therefore, a truly catholic (or universal) curriculum is integrated, interdisciplinary, historically aligned, and aimed at developing the whole person.

We can have the very best religion classes in the world, and still lose the students if faith is not woven through the entire curriculum. Faith cannot be added on as a stand-alone subject; it must be integrated into every class, subject, and activity in a school, like yeast that causes everything to rise. To simply tack on faith would be as unfair as giving students a ten-thousand-piece jigsaw puzzle, without providing a picture on the box showing how all the pieces fit together to make a whole.

A Catholic education should offer so much more to students because we see the world through a sacramental lens—a lens that sees connections, integrates knowledge, discerns the ultimate meaning, destiny, and purpose of the human person,

and understands how we fit into the big picture. When students awaken to truth, goodness, and beauty, their lives are changed.

Math and science and the other STEM subjects are privileged gateways into the divine order of things. Every subject bears the fingerprints of God, pointing to the beauty, joy, and wonder behind all reality. Whether that be the marvel of number, equation, order and sequence in mathematics, or salvation history, all reality is “charged with the grandeur of God.” It is filled with meaning and purpose and should provide the answer to the “whys” behind everything. As Bishop Robert Barron wrote recently, “education should be in the meaning business!” (*Evangelization and Culture: The Journal of the Word on Fire Institute*, issue #17: Education). Young people want to know the “why” behind everything.

*“When students awaken to truth, goodness,
and beauty, their lives are changed”*

Another hallmark of a Catholic worldview is that it fosters joy and wonder, natural happiness, confidence, virtue, and an eagerness to learn. Forming a sacramental imagination fosters a love for learning because it associates learning with the experience of delight. Students can become creators of beauty: singing, painting, performing on stage, entering into the great stories, reciting poems, and writing creatively. They should rhyme with Mother Goose, adventure into Narnia and Middle Earth, lift their spirits with Bach and Mozart, explore the complexities of life with Shakespeare, and soar into the sacramental vision of Michelangelo. Students should be encouraged to embrace their natural creativity, discovering that, in the words of Pope St. John Paul II, “the human craftsman mirrors the image of God as Creator” (Letter to Artists, 1).

The liberal arts are especially potent for teaching humility, openness, and an appreciation for mystery. As St. John Henry Cardinal Newman noted, the poetic suggests that “we should not put ourselves above” the objects of our study, “but at their feet; that we should feel them to be above and beyond us, that we should look up to them... instead of fancying that we can comprehend them.” This implies a universe filled with wonder, “vast, immeasurable, impenetrable, inscrutable, mysterious; so that at best we are only forming conjectures about them, not conclusions, for the phenomena which they present admit of many explanations, and we cannot know the true one” (*A Benedictine Education*, 20).

The poetic and the scientific are both important, but only the former can stave off scientific reductionism. For, as Newman continued, “Poetry does not address the reason, but the imagination and affections; it leads to admiration, enthusiasm, devotion, love.” He might’ve said it leads to joy and wonder!

Education can be work for children, but it also ought to be fun! Catholic schools, forming children for the delight of eternal life with the Lord, should foster joy. I would submit to you that one reason students find so little joy in learning today is that they're not taught the meaning of things. They are not learning how everything fits together as a whole nor how God gives meaning and purpose to reality and, ultimately, their lives. Technology can also sap students' imaginations of their natural creativity and curiosity, leaving them anxiety-ridden, flat souled, and unmoored in a culture of joylessness. There is a disturbing rise in mental health issues among young people today connected to smart phones and social media (see *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt).

Today, in a particular way, we must understand that we live in the age of the image, the virtual, and the synthetic. All of us have been influenced by technology, and our students have been especially harmed by too much of it. Their entire lives have been lived in the age of the digital and the screen. To be sure, technology can help us to do great things, but there is a kind of unreality about our time when we are too immersed in its virtual reality.

*“To mold saints, we must form vivid
and joyful Christian imaginations”*

In times past, real experiences have formed our imaginations, as did the experience of envisioning fairy tales, novels, songs, and poems. Today, as images are ubiquitous, many students' imaginations have become passive or, worse, started withering. Because of this crisis of the imagination, Catholic education in our time must nurture the imaginations of children, especially in their early years, helping them to prepare for a life of inspiration and hope. To mold saints, we must form vivid and joyful Christian imaginations. Deliberately introducing the arts will awaken the imagination of students, moving them from technology-induced passivity to the attentiveness needed to appreciate and reproduce the great works of the Catholic tradition.

We aspire to greatness more easily when our imaginations point us to something beyond our own experiences. Our imaginations motivate us to strive for happiness, excellence, purpose, and joy. They give us hope or cause us discouragement. They can even lead us down the pathway to despondency and despair. The imagination proposes possibilities and proposals that lie in the future, a future with hope. When well formed, it leads us to the true, the good, and the beautiful. We aspire to be holy, in part, because our imaginations inspire us to greater hope, faith, and charity than we have experienced, or than we even believe possible. A Catholic worldview therefore demands the fostering of the imagination, and its integration into the whole curriculum.

5. Sustained by Gospel Witness

Education is a form of friendship. In a genuinely Catholic school, teachers and administrators foster friendship through the hard work of love. They inspire, form, and lead students out of the virtual into the world of what's real—to the true, good, and beautiful—where they can encounter and glorify the Lord. Our call is to help students experience the joy of being alive, the wonder of God's creation, a love of learning, and a hunger for faith. To do so, we must live these ourselves.

In other words, teachers give testimony to a Catholic worldview and the faith through their lives. Nothing sours students to religion faster than hypocrisy, so it is crucial to hire faithful Catholics whenever possible. This should be a top priority for principals for, as Pope Paul VI famously wrote, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (Address to the Members of the Consilium de Laicis, October 2, 1974).

Additionally, students discover themselves and the faith more readily when teachers can share their life experiences. Teachers should feel confident to “teach themselves,” allowing students to know them on a personal level (for instance, favorite hobbies, the number of children they have, the story of their conversion or what made them first start taking the faith seriously, etc.). Such details can be shared while maintaining the hierarchical structure of the classroom, and help students connect on a relational level.

A final important part of Gospel witness is ensuring priests and religious play a central role in the education of students and the leadership of Catholic schools. In the Lincoln diocese we are blessed to have 63 diocesan priests and 29 religious sisters as teachers or administrators in our schools. Their presence witnesses to a life consecrated to Christ and encourages young people to consider religious and priestly vocations. Their service in our schools is a grace that enriches the vitality and health of our entire diocese.

Today's Challenges

As our students grow and mature, we must prepare them to confront directly the challenges of our time. Since reason continues to erode from the public square, our schools must prioritize the great philosophical treasures of the Church and western civilization. As technocracy replaces morality, our schools should develop new uses and approaches to technology in a manner consistent with Christian anthropology and human dignity. The more individualized society becomes, the greater the crisis of loneliness, and the more our schools must prioritize friendship and Christian civility. As we face an ugly, crude, and banal culture, our schools should use literature, song, poetry, and art to form a true and beautiful Christian culture. In a virtual age, Catholic education must offer real experiences, with real things, preparing our students for the countercultural experience of a holy and joyful Christian life. Ultimately, the

way our schools can address reductive, utilitarian, and functionalist worldviews is to foster wonder, joy, and hope with Jesus at the center.

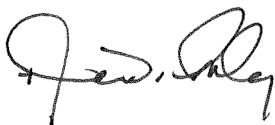
The Catholic tradition of education can overcome the challenges we face. Building upon this tradition, I would like to make some suggestions for our schools:

- To be disciples our children must not only learn about the faith but have opportunities to live out what they are learning. To increase our efforts to form disciples, therefore, we must teach our children how to pray so they can foster their relationship with Jesus. We can do this by helping them to enter into dialogue with God through *lectio divina*. We can also provide opportunities for them to serve. Service to the poor and others in need is transformative and essential to the Christian life.
- We must be deliberate in our use of technology so that it does not dominate our classrooms. It should be used as a tool to assist the life of the mind, not replace it. Children need time away from screens, which have become omnipresent, in order to think clearly and use their imaginations.
- We must strengthen our focus on forming the whole person: the mind in the truth, the will in the good by forming virtue, and the imagination with beauty. We should lead with beauty—via classic works of literature, poetry, theater, and the fine arts—to inspire our children with a love of learning. Pope Francis underscores this forcefully in his 2024 letter “On the Role of Literature in Formation.” Even more crucially, as Pope Francis wrote, “Every expression of true beauty can thus be acknowledged as a path leading to an encounter with the Lord Jesus” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 167). In our highly secularized and relativistic culture, truth and goodness often have a diminished ability to move minds and hearts. But the *via pulchritudinis* (way of beauty) still has the power to capture the imagination and win souls.
- We should emphasize the liberal arts, particularly the use of primary sources, classroom discussion, critical and logical thinking, discovering the legacy of the Western and Catholic traditions, and effective oral and written communication. The classroom can provide opportunities to experience the wonder of reality, engage all of the senses in a process of discovery, and form the dispositions needed to recognize and defend the truth amid opposition.
- We must continue to provide an academic program of the highest excellence, as we remember that our schools do much more than prepare for success in standardized tests and future careers. As we prioritize ordering minds and hearts rightly, we will prepare our graduates for future success, but more importantly to live a good and happy life and respond to their vocations.
- We should provide opportunities for extracurricular activities such as sports, drama, or a host of other activities that help form the student in his or her

social, physical, and emotional development. A balanced formation is life-giving for the student.

Of course, there is not a singular path along which all our schools will develop. Instead, the Lord is inviting us to commit to the principles that build authentically Catholic schools. In so doing, we answer His call to be good, courageous, and creative stewards.

In the years to come, we must all continue to discern how to form our children, sustainably and responsibly, in the midst of changing times and changing circumstances. We may be called to try new models or approaches and be invited to new kinds of sacrifice. We must seek wisdom from the Lord, generously responding to the movement of the Holy Spirit, and consult and collaborate with one another. Our call is to trust in the Lord, who has made us in His image to know and love Him. Let us ask Mary, Our Lady Seat of Wisdom and Spouse of the Holy Spirit, to make us docile to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And may Jesus, the master teacher, form all of us for the freedom of holiness.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James D. Conley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

+James D. Conley
Bishop of Lincoln
September 3, 2024
Feast of St. Gregory the Great

Resources

Magisterial Documents

Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) #22 and 24 – Vatican II

Gravissimus Educationis (Declaration on Christian Education) – Vatican II

Code of Canon Law – canons 793-821

The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue – Congregation for Catholic Education

Address to Catholic Educators at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., April 17, 2008 – Pope Benedict XVI

Divini Illius Magistri (Encyclical on Christian Education) – Pope Pius XI

Evangelii Gaudium #167 – Pope Francis

Letter on the Role of Literature in Formation – Pope Francis

Letter to Artists – Pope John Paul II

Online Resources

Institute for Catholic Liberal Education: Inspires and equips Catholic educators via formation, events, and resources (<https://catholicliberaleducation.org>)

Chesterton Schools Network: Provides a turnkey academic and operational model to help create more affordable, classical, joyfully Catholic high schools (<https://chestertonschoolsnetwork.org>)

Classical Learning Test: Offers assessments to help educators equip the whole human person—intellectually, emotionally, and ethically (<https://www.cltexam.com>)

Boethius Institute: Forms educators in traditional liberal arts and sciences (<https://boethiusinstitute.org>)

Evangelization and Culture: Issue 17 of this journal produced by the Word on Fire Institute specifically focuses on education and the classics (<https://institute.wordonfire.org/journal-17-education>)

Catholic Textbook Project: Creates textbooks proceeding from the insight that mankind and history are transformed irrevocably by Christ and his Church (<https://www.catholictextbookproject.com>)

Catholic Education Partners: Fosters parental empowerment by expanding education choice initiatives and protecting religious liberty (<https://catholiced.us>)

Books

Beauty for Truth's Sake: On the Re-enchantment of Education by Stratford Caldecott

Beauty in the Word: Rethinking the Foundations of Education by Stratford Caldecott

A Benedictine Education by John Henry Cardinal Newman

From Christendom to Apostolic Mission: Pastoral Strategies for an Apostolic Age by the University of Mary

Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools by Archbishop J. Michael Miller, CSB

iGen: Why Today's Superconnected Kids are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood by Jean M. Twenge

John Senior and The Restoration of Realism by Fr. Francis Bethel, OSB

Poetic Knowledge: The Recovery of Education by James S. Taylor

Renewing Catholic Schools: How to Regain a Catholic Vision in a Secular Age by the Institute for Catholic Liberal Education

Rewiring the Mind: A Reader in the Philosophy of Catholic Education by Ryan N.S. Topping

The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness by Jonathan Haidt

The Case for Catholic Education by Ryan N.S. Topping

The Catholic School Playbook by Michael Ortner and Kimberly Begg [expected publication January, 2025]

The Crisis of Western Education by Christopher Dawson

The Heart of Culture: A Brief History of Western Education by the Habiger Institute for Catholic Leadership

The Idea of a University by St. John Henry Cardinal Newman

The Restoration of Christian Culture by John Senior

Truth on Trial: Liberal Education be Hanged by Robert Carlson

Words Made Flesh: The Sacramental Mission of Catholic Education by Jared Staudt

Recommended Publishers

Ignatius Press (<https://ignatius.com>)

Magis Institute (<https://www.magiscenter.com>)

Cluny Media (<https://clunymedia.com>)

Word on Fire (<https://www.wordonfire.org>)

Secretariat of Catholic Education (catholiceducation@usccb.org,
<https://www.usccb.org/committees/catholic-education>)

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