

Statement on Catholic School Education

The Most Reverend Wilton D. Gregory, Archbishop of Atlanta

February 2010

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, stated in his address to Catholic educators in 2008, “Education is integral to the mission of the church to proclaim the Good News.” (*Christ Our Hope*. 2008) I could not agree more, along with the American bishops. “Our vision is clear: our Catholic schools are a vital part of the teaching mission of the Church.” (USCCB 2005)

Each year we celebrate Catholic Schools Week and we commemorate the high standards of excellence and the quality of education available in Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Atlanta. We recognize the educational and social excellence that our Catholic school students have attained through their many accomplishments and achievements. We sincerely thank all the parents and guardians because we know you are the primary teachers of your children and you have made tremendous sacrifices to carry out the important responsibility to raise your children in the practice of the Catholic faith. The Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of Atlanta support you in your role as your child’s teacher in the ways of faith.

We express our gratitude and admiration to the highly qualified Catholic school administrators and teachers for your dedication, sacrifice and commitment to providing an exceptional educational experience for young people that is both truly Catholic and of the highest academic quality. We also thank our pastors and parochial vicars who play an important role in the ministry of Catholic education and faith formation of our children.

Catholic education has made a major contribution to society by educating millions of citizens with the moral and intellectual training necessary to make positive contributions to local, state and nationwide community efforts. It would be impossible to imagine our American society today without the transforming grace of Catholic school graduates.

What are our Catholic schools doing right? Past research studies provide evidence of what we do so well in our Catholic schools - our schools are successful because they have a well-defined curriculum, parental involvement and support, and teachers, staff members and administrators who witness a

sense of calling to assist students' spiritual, academic, developmental and physical growth.

The challenges facing the Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Atlanta today include the tremendous growth in the number of Catholics in this area and the current economic climate. We recently called upon the experts from The Catholic University of America to assist in planning for the future and we now have a strategic plan that we shall follow. We are striving toward the goal of making our Catholic elementary and secondary schools more available, accessible, and affordable to all Catholic parents and their children, including those who are underprivileged and those struggling just to make ends meet.

The Archdiocese of Atlanta will continue to pursue initiatives in both the private and public sectors to secure financial assistance for parents so that they can better exercise their right to choose the best schools for their children.

Catholic schools remain at the heart of the church. Within our schools, the primary focus must remain an unyielding commitment to strong Catholic identity and sound moral teaching. This is the mission of our Catholic schools and therefore absolutely central to their existence. As the Archbishop, I am proud that the Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Atlanta continue to provide strong faith formation for our youth.

We make the environment of our schools of the highest quality because of our Catholic identity which provides the foundation for the existence of Catholic schools. The Catholic identity ensures that our young people are equipped with a sound education, rooted in the Gospel message, the Person of Jesus Christ, and rich in the cherished traditions and liturgical practices of our faith.

Catholic schools play a part in forming future leaders in the church, future priests and religious as well as a highly educated laity. The burden of supporting Catholic schools has never been met by parents who pay tuition alone. As generations have done for the past 200 years, we urge the entire Catholic community to support our schools with a focus on the spirituality of stewardship.

Our Catholic schools are a living witness to the unity we have in Jesus. We celebrate the legacy of Catholic school education and embrace a future with great expectation for the future leaders of our Church emerging from our Catholic schools.

May God continue to bless our commitment to our students in the years ahead. They are a light to the nation and a resource to the world as the hands and feet of Christ.

Wilton D. Gregory,

Archbishop of Atlanta