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A pastoral letter on handing on  
the faith to the young Church

by

The Most Reverend Robert J. Carlson  
Archbishop of St. Louis  
March 24, 2011



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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Jesus Christ left his disciples with this mandate: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). Forming children in the Catholic faith is a crucial task if the Church is going to have the ever-fresh energy needed to fulfill that mandate from Christ.

In short, *handing on the faith to the young Church is an essential part of the Church’s evangelizing mission.* And Catholic schools—both by virtue of the numbers of children formed and by virtue of the example of formation provided—stand at the heart of the task of forming children in the Catholic faith. The stability and the growth of Catholic schools, therefore, are topics that must concern all Catholics who take the missionary mandate of Christ seriously.

During Catholic Schools Week 2010, I shared with you my vision for Catholic schools. At that time, I borrowed one of the themes used by Pope Benedict XVI during his pastoral visit to the United States in 2008: *Alive in Christ!*

A year ago, I expressed my conviction that to truly be Alive in Christ, our schools must be vibrant and growing. I invited our parish and school leaders, parents and parishioners in all 11 counties of our archdiocese to share with me their ideas on how to achieve the three priorities I set for growing Catholic education in the Archdiocese of St. Louis:

1. **The school must have a vibrant Catholic identity.** It must be clearly and unquestionably a Catholic school, and everything about the school’s academic and formation programs must be grounded in the teaching and practice of the Roman Catholic Church. Every person in a Catholic school—regardless of his or her faith tradition or social, economic or ethnic background—should be growing in their understanding and appreciation for what the Catholic Church teaches. We should never impose our Catholic faith on anyone, but we should be eager to share what we believe with others—inviting them to learn, to pray and to serve with us. And everyone in a Catholic school in this archdiocese should be proud of the contributions that the Catholic Church has made to our diverse cultures and to the rich traditions and history of our communities and our state.

2. **The school must be growing.** Proactive recruitment and enrollment management strategies are an essential sign of life for Catholic schools. All Catholic schools in our archdiocese should either have a commitment to increase their enrollments or, if a school is filled to capacity, to refer families to nearby Catholic schools and assist them in enrolling there. We cannot be content with the status quo or, worse, with declining enrollments in our schools. To truly be *Alive in Christ*, our schools must be vibrant centers of evangelization and missionary activity. Promoting growth is not optional—no matter how difficult the challenges. Excellence in our educational programs, in our liturgy and spirituality and in our service programs all contribute to a vibrant, growing school community, but we can't stop there. Every school should have a student recruitment plan, and every member of the school community should have a part to play in growing the school's enrollment.
3. **The school must be financially healthy and, at the same time, provide assistance to those who otherwise could not afford to attend a Catholic school.** This is perhaps our greatest challenge. The cost of a Catholic school education threatens the continued existence of too many schools in our archdiocese. That's precisely why this must be a top goal for all of us. The Catholic school system in our archdiocese, and throughout the United States, was built by the stewardship of religious women and men and the sacrifices of Catholic families who were largely immigrants or rural poor who gave so much to provide Catholic schools for their children. Vibrant Catholic schools demonstrate something of that same spirit of stewardship and sacrifice. They work hard to achieve financial health and vitality, and they do whatever they can to help families who otherwise could not afford a Catholic school education for their children.

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Nearly 3,000 people participated in the listening sessions, online survey and consultation meetings that have taken place during the past year. I want to express my sincere thanks to everyone who planned these important activities and to all who participated. During the past year, I received hundreds of suggestions (from thousands of people) on how to grow Catholic schools, Parish Schools of Religion and all our ministries to children, youth, young adults and adults. The response has been overwhelming, and, almost without exception, the suggestions I received have been positive and helpful to the vision I shared with you a year ago: to make our Catholic schools truly *Alive in Christ!*

To all who participated in the past year of listening and learning and to all who work so hard to hand on the Catholic faith to our young Church, I want to say “thank you” and “God bless you” for the great work you are doing in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and His Church.





1818



1818



1898

**Alive in Christ: 2018**

The hundreds of suggestions I have received from pastors, professional educators, parents, parishioners and experts in the field of mission advancement have convinced me that the challenges we face as we look to the future are not insurmountable. A passion for Catholic education exists in the 11 counties of our archdiocese, and it cannot be contained. There is also a zeal for God’s Word made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ that compels us to continue and grow all our education and faith formation ministries! The clergy, religious and faithful people of the Archdiocese of St. Louis love our parishes, schools and Catholic institutions. We are proud of the traditions of faith and service that have made this region distinctively Catholic—the Rome of the West—and that set us apart as people who treasure our Catholic identity and the history of pioneering women and men who worked so hard to build the Church in St. Louis.

We are intensely proud of our past, and rightly so, but now it’s time to look to the future. Many of you have asked me during the past year: Where are we headed? How can we sustain and grow the proud heritage we have received from our ancestors in the faith? What can we do to make sure that we truly are *Alive in Christ* now and in the future?







1947



2011



2018



2018

The future is in God’s hands, and we are called to trust in the providence of God. I’d like to suggest a slightly different theological take on that point: But the Father invites us—just as He once invited the Blessed Virgin Mary—to cooperate with the Holy Spirit; by doing so, we can help ensure that the fullness of life in Christ can be handed on to future generations. And just as the Holy Spirit guided the apostles, helping them face squarely the challenges and opportunities of an unknown future, so we trust that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide us.

With confidence in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, I want to respond to the challenge of handing on the faith to our young Church by calling our attention to the 200th anniversary of Catholic education in the Archdiocese of St. Louis that we will celebrate seven years from now, in the year 2018.

What will Catholic education look like in seven years? Will we continue the 40-year decline in enrollment and in the number of Catholic schools? Or can we reverse the trend and begin to grow our Catholic schools, Parish Schools of Religion, Youth and Young Adult Ministry and adult formation programs?

Will tuition in our Catholic schools have reached an all-time high—and will parents look elsewhere for the formation of their children? Or can we find ways to help all families in need afford a Catholic school education?

I believe that we can stem the decline and begin to grow our schools. Today, 66 percent of our elementary children are either in a Catholic school (44 percent) or Parish School of Religion (22 percent); 35 percent of our high school youth are in our Catholic high schools. That means that, except for a small percentage who are educated at home by dedicated Catholic families, *one third* of our elementary children and *two thirds* of our high school youth are not receiving any form of religious instruction or spiritual formation. This is unacceptable. We cannot permit half of our children and youth to “fall through the cracks” and remain untouched by the teaching and practice of our Church. The Lord has commanded us to hand on His Good News to future generations. And He has given us the Holy Spirit so that *His* ministry might be continued through *us*. We must respond without hesitation and with full confidence that He is with us as we seek to do His will.

1818: St. Louis University is established by Bishop DuBourg – the first Catholic College west of the Mississippi River.

1818: St. Rose Philippine Duchesne opens the first free school west of the Mississippi River.

1898: Sts. Peter and Paul School.

1947: Cardinal Ritter desegregates Catholic Schools 7 years before the United States Supreme Court mandate.

2011: Archbishop Robert J. Carlson announces the Mission Advancement Initiative to renew Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of St. Louis.

2018: Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of St. Louis are growing as centers of excellence in education and spiritual formation for the young Church.



## A future full of hope

*For I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare, not for woe! plans to give you a future full of hope (Jer 29:11).*

What will be the state of Catholic education in the Archdiocese of St. Louis seven years from now in 2018?

Ensuring the stability and growth of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of St. Louis will undoubtedly require sacrifice. But, in the words of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI: *The saints were able to make the great journey of human existence in the way that Christ had done before them, because they were brimming with great hope* (Saved in Hope, 39). I, too, am brimming with great hope: hope for our children, and hope for our Catholic schools. My hope is rooted in the promise of Jesus Christ that “I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:20).

My vision for Catholic education in 2018 looks to a future full of hope, and I invite you to join me in sharing that hope. This faith-filled future can be expressed using four important concepts:

### 1. Catechesis/Academic Excellence

By the year 2018, I hope we can say that Catholic schools and Parish Schools of Religion in the Archdiocese of St. Louis will be growing, not declining. They will be vibrant centers of faith formation and educational excellence dedicated to handing on the faith to the young and keeping God at the center of each student’s life. Teachers will personally witness to their belief in Jesus Christ so that each student, as Pope Benedict XVI stated, “will grasp in his or her innermost depths the life-transforming fact that God exists, that he loves us, and that in Christ he answers the deepest questions in our lives.”

All areas of the curriculum and extracurricular activities will have as their purpose to deepen the student’s relationship with Christ, the key to complete human fulfillment. Students will encounter Christ through His Word and sacraments, which will lead them to concrete works of mercy and service to their brothers and sisters. Through the formation students receive in our schools, the Church and the world will be blessed with future saints of the twenty-first century.

Catholic identity of our parishes and schools will be a sign of hope to all. Our schools will be the first choice for parents who recognize their own primary role in the education and faith formation of their children.

In our Catholic schools, educational quality will be unparalleled with academic performance far exceeding minimum standards, and all schools in the 11 counties of our archdiocese will be recognized as being among the best in the state of Missouri and in the nation.

All parishioners will recognize Catholic schools as part of their call to teach the Gospel to all generations, to pass on our faith tradition, and to embrace all God’s children as their own. Because our parishes and schools will be a sign of hope for all, their enrollments will be growing such that *there will be no empty seats*; and their finances will be strong enough that *no child will be denied a Catholic school education simply because of the inability to pay for it*.

Parishes will embrace schools as vital extensions of parish ministry. Schools will celebrate their affiliation with parishes, religious communities and the archdiocese and seek to be effective instruments of evangelization and social justice.

## **2. Evangelization**

By the year 2018, I hope we can say that we have reversed the downward trends of parish membership, infant baptisms, Mass attendance, reception of the sacrament of penance and active participation in the life of the Church. We will share more fully in the abundant life offered by Jesus and, as a result, we will go forth like Jesus to invite others to share that same life.

Catholics who once left the Church will be coming home. Registrations and parish membership will be increasing; Sunday Mass attendance and the reception of the sacraments—especially the sacrament of penance—will be on the rise. Youth and young adult ministries will be vibrant. Increasing numbers of Catholics will be actively involved in a variety of parish-based ministries. Adult formation will be strong. Lay ecclesial ministry will be growing. Vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, consecrated life and dedicated single life will be at a 25-year high. Marriage and family life (the domestic church) will be healthy and growing—both spiritually and in the number of children per family. Divorce rates will be declining. Life will be regarded as sacred and inviolable—from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death.

Individuals, families and parish communities will experience the “new springtime” of faith and spirituality that Pope John Paul II prayed for at the beginning of this new millennium of Christian history. As disciples of Jesus Christ committed to proclaiming His Good News of salvation, we will reach out to all who are outside our community of faith, and personally invite them to share in our journey to holiness. Our parishes, schools and archdiocesan ministries will truly be *Alive in Christ*—filled with youthful enthusiasm and the desire to worship the Lord and serve Him faithfully.

## **3. Social Justice**

By the year 2018, I hope our archdiocese will be recognized as a leader in the Church’s social justice ministries. The same spirit that built Catholic hospitals, Catholic Charities, and so many other Catholic outreach programs will animate our parishes and schools anew. Our parishes and schools will teach—and practice—the basic tenets of Catholic social teaching. We will give witness in our words and our actions to the dignity of all human life, to the fundamental importance of the family in social, economic and political life, to work as a basic human right, to the preferential option for the poor, and to the stewardship of all creation. Students in our schools and Parish Schools of Religion will learn Catholic social teaching as a constitutive element of the Gospel. Our service programs, our sports and recreational activities and all our ministries will reflect an awareness of our Church’s commitment to the peace of Christ and to the fairness and equality that can only come when we recognize that we are all sisters and brothers, members of the one family of God.

By the year 2018, I pray that we will have made significant progress in our efforts to address the class and racial divisions that exist among us. I also hope these divisions will be faced honestly and that proactive strategies can be developed to effect real change in our attitudes and in the way we act toward one another as individuals and as communities of faith.

#### **4. Stewardship**

By the year 2018, I hope people throughout the United States and the international Catholic community will look to the Archdiocese of St. Louis as a model stewardship diocese. Individuals and families in parishes throughout our 11 counties will be committed to practicing stewardship as a way of life.

In 2018, I hope our Catholic people will be giving themselves more wholeheartedly to the Lord in their prayer, in their active involvement in the life of the Church and in their willingness to give back to the Lord with increase. Our archdiocese, its parishes, schools and agencies, will model good stewardship in personnel policies and practices, in the maintenance and care of physical facilities (especially our worship spaces), and in the development and use of financial resources. A new archdiocesan foundation will be working hard to grow endowment funds to help guarantee the financial stability of parishes, schools and archdiocesan ministries. An archdiocesan-wide capital campaign will have helped to build our capacity for stewardship-based fundraising and will have generated significant new dollars for local parish and school needs and for tuition assistance for all families in need.

#### **St. Rose Philippine Duchesne**

As we look to the 200th anniversary of Catholic education in St. Louis, let's place our Catholic schools, Parish Schools of Religion, and all our faith-formation programs under the patronage of St. Rose Philippine Duchesne. Her deep faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and her commitment to the education of children set an example for many generations of Catholic educators who came after her. Let's pray that St. Rose will intercede for us as we face new challenges and opportunities in the great work of handing on our faith to the young Church.

I hope that in 2018, we will be a growing Church that is challenged to keep up with the increasing demands of parish, school and archdiocesan ministries. I know we will welcome this challenge—confident that the Holy Spirit will lead us into our third century of evangelization and social justice through Catholic education! As a “stewardship archdiocese,” we will be grateful, accountable, generous and eager to return God's gifts with increase. We will trust in Divine Providence, first and foremost. But we will also practice the biblical principle that “faith without works” is incompatible with the commands we have received from our Lord Jesus Christ to proclaim His Gospel and to provide even the least of His sisters and brothers with life's basic necessities, including food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, productive work and the right to life!

By 2018, I hope we will be growing as stewards. This experience of spiritual growth will make it possible for us to develop our material resources and to engage in all the ministries of worship, faith formation and outreach to the poor that have been hallmarks of this faith community for the past 200 years. Please God, may this vibrant tradition of faith continue for at least two more centuries so that when our descendents celebrate the 400th anniversary of Catholic education in St. Louis, we will still be growing—in prayer, in faith formation, and in service to all God's people!

My vision for Catholic education in 2018 and beyond is that we will continue to be *Alive in Christ!* I want us to be a Church that is not simply “managing the decline” but is truly growing in our ability to hand on the faith to future generations.

I want us to help the young Church provide the proactive leadership we need to carry out Christ’s work in the decades ahead. I want our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren in the faith to thank us for providing them with the tools they will need to articulate their faith—the faith of the apostles—and to witness to it in their words and their actions no matter what challenges they meet in the unknown future.

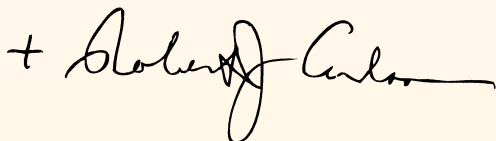
My vision for 2018 and beyond is that we will eagerly and unapologetically serve the needs of all children, youth and adults who long to see the face of Jesus Christ! As I said a year ago when I first proposed my vision for Catholic schools, I am not naïve. I know that many cultural influences are at work against maintaining a strong Catholic identity in our schools. I know that we face demographic and other challenges to the growth of school enrollments. And not a day goes by that I don’t hear from a pastor or school administrator who is facing serious financial problems—or from parents who are struggling to afford a Catholic school education for their children.

I believe the challenge is clear. We must keep our schools Catholic. We must grow them. And they must be financially sound and able to assist those in need. Our Lord didn’t say it would be easy to be His disciples or to proclaim His Good News, but He did promise to remain with us and to send us His Holy Spirit to guide us. Our job is to discern God’s will through prayer and meditation on His Word, and then to act boldly with confidence in His grace.

As we begin this Mission Advancement Initiative, *Alive in Christ 2018*, let’s place ourselves and all our parishes, schools and archdiocesan ministries in the hands of Christ the Teacher. Let’s pray that His Spirit will guide and sustain us in the challenging years ahead. We are blessed with the inspiration and example of St. Rose Philippine Duchesne and all the pioneering women and men who have gone before us in the ministry of Catholic education here in the 11 counties of the Archdiocese of St. Louis. May their prayers support and direct us as we continue the great work that they began here nearly 200 years ago.

Finally, let us turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary. God the Father gave her the mission of protecting and nurturing the physical body of Christ in her womb, so that He could be brought forth to proclaim the Good News. Our mission as Catholic educators—parents, pastors, school administrators and teachers—is to tend and nurture the growth of the mystical body of Christ, so that it can go forth to proclaim the Good News. Since Mary knows how to do this better than we can ever imagine, her intercession is crucial for the success of all our efforts to hand on the faith to the young Church!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert J. Carlson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "R".

Most Reverend Robert J. Carlson  
Archbishop of St. Louis



**I believe what Jesus promised:**

“I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly.” Thank you, Father, for sending Jesus to be my friend and my brother. Fill me with His Spirit that I may be strong and loyal in following Him. May I bring His joy and love to all I meet. May Jesus remain with me always so that I may be “alive in Christ.” I ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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**ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS**