

THE MICHIGAN CATHOLIC
Article by Adam Cardinal Maida
for section on Salute to Catholic Schools

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

As we celebrate Catholic Schools Week 2003, I am delighted to offer words of congratulations and prayerful best wishes to all those involved in this great enterprise. I join with all our clergy, religious, and lay faithful in thanking God for our 152 Catholic schools here in the Archdiocese and our long and distinguished tradition of quality Catholic religious education from birth to death. Our Catholic schools serve 48,000 students from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade and are staffed by over 2,700 dedicated teachers who give of themselves most generously day-in and day-out. Certainly, we have reason for great pride!

What makes a Catholic school *Catholic*? I suppose there are many ways of answering the question, but may I suggest that, ultimately, the commitment of the parents and teachers is the cornerstone of why our schools remain faithful in their mission. Parents make a huge commitment – not only in terms of dollars, but also in terms of time – when they send their sons and daughters to Catholic schools. While they may, at times, be choosing a Catholic school because of its discipline and high quality of academic excellence, a major factor is always the fact that religion is a vital part of the curriculum, shaping all that happens in all the activities of the school day.

Our Catholic school teachers choose to work for a salary much less than they could demand elsewhere precisely because of their same commitment to our Catholic values and Gospel message. I thank all those who choose Catholic education, for you are truly *“Making a World of Difference”* as suggested by the theme for this year’s Catholic Schools Week.

Catholic schools have, as their primary purpose, the nurturing of faith and the formation of the *whole* person within the context of a community. As the General Directory for Catechesis puts it, *“The Catholic school is a most important locus for human and Christian formation.”* In other words, the Catholic school is intended to be a sort of “second home” in which faith values are not only taught in *word*, but also lived in *deed*. With many challenging issues facing us each day in the fields of business and science, and with so many concerns for justice and human rights at home and throughout the world, Catholic schools offer unparalleled settings for the formation of the leaders of the next generation.

Catechesis – that is, the study of the faith – is not confined merely to religion class; it truly permeates every aspect of the school environment, including sports programs, all other academic subjects, the way discipline is administered, and how people share social opportunities. Formation in the faith also helps our young students and their families to appreciate the responsibility that we have to bring Good News to the poor and to serve the needs of all who hunger in body or spirit; I am very proud of the many social service programs which take place in conjunction with our Catholic grade schools and high schools. Furthermore, our Catholic schools are very generally very diverse and help our students appreciate the challenges of a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic world.

Yes, our Catholic schools here in the Archdiocese are truly *“Making a World of Difference”!*

I thank you for your support of Catholic schools and I encourage any parent considering a Catholic school for their children to stop by one of our schools and visit with the staff. Finally, I join you in praying *with* and *for* the young people currently enrolled in our Catholic schools: may their experience in our schools help them – already here and now – to know and love the living God and every one of their neighbors!

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

Adam Cardinal Maida