



## **CATHOLIC SCHOOLS DINNER**

Marquette University/Alumni Union  
February 13, 2003

What an honor and a joy to be with you all this evening. After Italian restaurants, what I enjoy talking about most is Catholic schools. Any success I have achieved as a human being, as a priest, as a bishop, is due to the grace of God, my family, and Catholic schools. Last week I turned fifty-three, and over half my life -- twenty-three years -- has been spent as a student in Catholic schools, and I thank God every day for that gift.

And this wonderful evening I look out and see men and women who feel the same way. What a grand occasion for me to express my deep appreciation and admiration for all who labor to keep our Catholic schools strong and vibrant: our priests, religious women and men, our archdiocesan Department for Parishes and Schools, our parishes, our parents, our principals, staffs, and teachers, our volunteers and our beloved students, our foundations and benefactors, both personal and corporate -- I thank God for all of you; I thank you for all you do and mean for this "pearl of great price" we call Catholic education.

Since my arrival in this great Archdiocese almost six months ago, I have been amazed at the enthusiasm about our Catholic schools I sense everywhere. Are they expensive? You bet they are! Do they demand unending work and sacrifice? They sure do! Can they be troublesome and time-consuming? Yep! Are they worth it? Yes, yes, a thousand times yes!

My family moved into the parish where I was raised, Holy Infant in Ballwin, Missouri, the year it opened, 1955. That year, ground was broken at the new parish site . . . For a church? No. For a rectory? No. For a convent? No. For a parish center? No. . . . Ground was broken for a school, eight classrooms, all filled with at least fifty students each, and a hall to serve as a "temporary" church. There I entered first grade in 1956. Exactly twenty years later I entered the same "temporary church" to be ordained a priest. "Tim," the beloved pastor whispered as we entered, "I am so embarrassed. Twenty years and we still do not have a permanent church." To which I replied, "Don't worry; if you had built a church and not a school twenty years ago, I would not be here to be ordained a priest today."

These are heady days for me, of learning, listening, meeting people, observing, as I set goals and a vision for the years the Lord gives me as your shepherd. But two goals are already very clear in my mind, heart, and soul: one, to keep our Catholic schools strong, to keep them excellent, accessible, and affordable; and, two, to keep them Catholic.

Remember when the foreign visitors in the gospel came to the apostles and said, "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." I propose to you that's what our parents and students say to us when they come to our schools: "We would like to see Jesus."

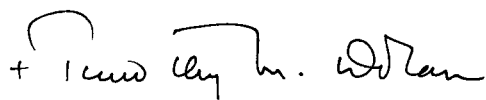
And we show them Jesus because our schools are Catholic -- with a capital "C". Here they learn not just about a way of education, truth about subjects, or preparation for life; here they learn about the One we call the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Here the most important person is not the principal, teacher, or pastor, but the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Here they learn the teaching of Jesus as passed on in His Church; here they learn to love Him and trust Him in prayer; here they are prepared to receive Him in Holy Communion; here they learn about His Mother and His saints; here they imbibe His commandments, beatitudes, and moral imperatives; here they learn that the goal of life is to know, love, and serve Him in this life, and to be happy with Him forever in the next; here they learn of their innate dignity as a child of God, made in His image and likeness, and that they owe themselves, and others, dignity and respect.

Anyone from St. Anthony in Pewaukee? I love that life-size wooden carving of "Jesus in the Boat" in your entrance; it's an "action statue", meaning the kids are invited to enter the boat and sit next to Jesus. That's our Catholic schools, Catholic with a capital "C"!

And our schools are "catholic" with a small "c", because they are holistic, comprehensive, all-embracing, welcoming, and concerned about others. Is anyone surprised that it was the Church who founded universities? The Church that calls itself catholic is holistic in that it forms soul, mind, heart, and body; it is comprehensive in that no value or interest that ennoble God's creatures and creation is alien to it; it is welcoming and all-embracing in that all are at home in her embrace; it is concerned for all because her Founder is Savior of all. Our schools are "catholic" with a small "c".

Three years ago my little niece Shannon, then nine years old, was diagnosed with cancer. We were blessed with a wonderful pediatric oncologist to care for her, Dr. Bob, a man of deep Catholic faith, with a wonderful staff. Shannon became close to a loving nurse on his staff, Jill, who is Jewish. Our whole family got close to her. One day Jill confided to us: "I have discovered that our little patients who go to Catholic schools heal better, and, even if they do not heal, they remain happier even as they are dying. Their schools pray for them and with them; their schools are not afraid to speak of faith, hope, and love; their schools are not afraid to talk about dying, heaven, and eternity; there they learn that the greatest horror is not suffering and early death, but to have no reason for it."

That's the best mission statement I've ever heard for our Catholic schools. Thanks for keeping them strong.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Timothy M. Dolan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Timothy M. Dolan  
Archbishop of Milwaukee

