

Evangelization, faith formation key aspects of case for support

By Jerry Zufelt
EDITOR

GREENSBURG — The orientation sessions being held for diocesan catechists this month are one sign of the importance of evangelization and faith formation initiatives in the diocese and emphasizes why that is a major element in the case for support in "Today's Challenge - Tomorrow's Hope" Capital and Endowment Campaign for the Diocese of Greensburg.

Evangelization and faith formation was a significant topic in the diocesan strategic planning process, the report of which was presented to Bishop Lawrence E. Brandt in September 2006. Recommendations in that area included diocesan assistance for the parishes and training of catechists.

Those recommendations also led to Bishop Lawrence E. Brandt's pastoral letter, "The Transmission of the Faith in the Present Culture," which includes a Catechetical Master Plan for the diocese.

The most important initiative of that plan, which will be funded by the campaign, according to Robert Sherwin, managing director of the Office for Evangelization and Faith Formation, is the training and catechetical certification process.

A \$3.5 million Evangelization and Faith Formation Endowment Fund will be created in The Catholic Foundation for the Diocese of Greensburg as a result of "Today's Challenge - Tomorrow's Hope" reaching its \$45 million goal.

The fund will receive its share of gifts



Campaign Highlights

- The "Today's Challenge - Tomorrow's Hope" Capital and Endowment Campaign for the Diocese of Greensburg is near 60 percent of goal with more than \$26.3 million in gifts and pledges made on an overall goal of \$45 million.
- Group Two's 24 parishes currently conducting their campaigns are more than two-thirds of the way to their \$15.4 million goal with more than \$10.4 million in gifts and pledges.
- St. Joseph Parish, Uniontown, and St. Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Kittanning, are the first two Group Two parishes to surpass their goals at 114 and 106 percent, respectively.
- St. Mary Parish, Yatesboro, and St. Bernard of Clairvaux Parish, Indiana, are at 90 and 86 percent of their goals, respectively.
- More than 7,000 people have made gifts and pledges to the campaign.
- There are 35 parishes that will begin their individual campaigns in early 2010.

Totals are from the diocesan campaign office as of Nov. 6, 2009.

during the five-year pledge redemption phase.

"It is an important initiative of both the campaign and this office to assist

those who have catechetical roles in our parishes, schools and families be the best they can be as they transmit the faith," Sherwin said.

He said the capital and endowment campaign will also support evangelization programs in every parish in the diocese and additional staff in the office to lead diocesan efforts in evangelization and family life.

Parish catechetical leaders are excited about the support they have been receiving from diocesan faith formation leaders and the implementation of the training and certification process.

"We have great, good-hearted teachers," said Scott Martin, director of faith formation for St. Sebastian Parish, Belle Vernon, and The Epiphany of Our Lord Parish, Monessen.

"Some volunteers know a lot (about the faith), and some have gaps in their knowledge," added Martin, who oversees 25 volunteer catechists teaching more than 150 students in the two parishes. "We can do training on the parish level, but it is much better to have diocesan training."

Martin, a member of the diocese's faith formation leadership committee, also said the training and certification will help ensure consistency in theological knowledge.

Molli Vassar, director of faith formation for St. John the Evangelist Parish, Uniontown, is also looking forward to that consistency resulting from training and certification.

"It is really important that we have a consistency and continuity between the bishop and his teaching office and

the parishes, and that the bishop's and church's vision be consistently communicated to the diocese," Vassar said.

She said that training and certification will help provide parish leaders and volunteers with a better sense of the role of the diocese as the local church under the guidance of the bishop.

"I think our catechists will feel more sure of themselves when they know what they are receiving is what the bishop and the church want taught," Vassar said.

She hopes that level of confidence also will inspire younger parishioners to become involved in faith formation.

The endowment fund that will receive gifts from the campaign will help support diocesan programs for training, continuing formation and advanced certification of catechists.

Sherwin said the diocese has "made much progress in implementing the initiatives Bishop Brandt outlined in the pastoral letter," including the transition in raising the age for reception of the administration of the sacrament of confirmation to 13 or eighth grade; the training and certification process for catechists; and continuing work on the faith formation curriculum for pre-K-12 and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

"We are steadily making progress on these initiatives," Sherwin said, "and the work on them will never really stop. The Evangelization and Faith Formation Endowment Fund will support our ongoing efforts to teach and spread the Catholic faith across the diocese."

Everyday Faith

Catechetical Master Plan: Catholic identity of Catholic schools

In his pastoral letter "The Transmission of Faith in the Present Culture," Bishop Lawrence E. Brandt dedicates a section to the Catholic identity of Catholic schools. In that section, he writes:

"Formation in the faith and teaching a way of living based on the example of Christ are primary reasons why our Catholic schools exist. These priorities permeate every facet of our educational settings. Faith formation designed by the Church in light of its teaching and based on the Gospel is what is meant by Catholic identity. Catholic schools must be committed to this. In every dimension of the life of Catholic schools, teachers have a highly significant impact in creating and sustaining this environment of Catholic identity. It is essential that every person charged with this responsibility have both an understanding of Catholic faith formation and an appreciation for the attitudes and behaviors called for by these teachings. For teachers who instruct children and youth, specifically in Catholic doctrine and practice, this responsibility is especially serious."

It is important for us to understand the basis of this exhortation by Bishop Brandt. Teaching on the Catholic identity of Catholic schools finds its base in the Second Vatican Council document Declaration on Christian Education

and in teachings of the U.S. bishops.

The Vatican II document states that it is the proper function of Catholic schools "to create for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity, to help youth grow according to the new creatures they were made through baptism as they develop their own personalities, and finally to order the whole of human culture to the news of salvation so that the knowledge the students gradually acquire of the world, life and man is illumined by faith.

So indeed the Catholic school, while it is open, as it must be, to the situation of the contemporary world, leads its students to promote efficaciously the good of the earthly city and also prepares them for service in the spread of the Kingdom of God, so that by leading an exemplary apostolic life they become, as it were, a saving leaven in the human community" (Nos. 25-26).

In 1988, the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education stated that the entire school community is responsible for its Catholic identity in the document



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"The Religious Dimension of Education in the Catholic School," which states: "Every one directly involved in the school is a part of the school community - teachers, directors, administrative and auxiliary staff. Parents are central figures, since they are the natural and irreplaceable agents in the education of their children. And the community also includes the students,

since they must be active agents in their own education" (No. 32).

The U.S. bishops get specific about the responsibilities of teachers in the emergence of the Catholic identity of the school in the "National Directory for Catechesis," which states: "The role of the religion teacher is of first importance. Religion teachers in Catholic schools not only teach the Catholic faith as an academic subject but also bear witness to the truth of what they teach. ... Religion teachers in Catholic schools have the same responsibilities and perform many of the same functions of parish catechists. Therefore, they should be practicing Catholics with a thorough knowledge of the Christian message

and the ability to communicate it completely, faithfully and enthusiastically; they should also meet diocesan standards for certification as a catechist."

Additionally, according to the "National Directory for Catechesis," all teachers have a role in the Catholic identity of the school and the faith formation that takes place there. "The distinctive Catholic identity and mission of the Catholic school also depend on the efforts and example of the whole faculty. All teachers in Catholic schools share in the catechetical ministry."

In the concluding section on Catholic identity of schools in his pastoral letter, Bishop Brandt writes, "... Every staff member is required to meet the training and certification criteria set by the Superintendent of Catholic Schools and the Managing Director of the Office for Evangelization and Faith Formation. These provisions will ensure that the Catholic identity within the Catholic schools of the Diocese of Greensburg reaches and maintains the highest level of priority in the schools and is embraced by the present generation and those in the future."

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