



Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown

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Dear Friends in Christ,

Our *Proclaim!* Television Ministry frequently shines the spotlight on the great Catholic schools throughout the Diocese. These segments often take our viewers inside the classrooms to see the faith-filled environment, high academic standards, and remarkable outreach to others. As we celebrate Catholic Schools Week 2017, I cannot help but recall some of the students, parents, and educators I have interviewed as part of those TV segments. Together, they symbolize this year's theme: **Catholic Schools: Communities of Faith, Knowledge, and Service.**

I think of Emma and Chloe, students at All Saints School in Cresson. The siblings enthusiastically told me about their prayer buddies – older students who accompany the younger students to Mass each week to worship God and experience His love and mercy. It is awesome to hear our students articulate their awareness and gratitude for their education in an environment where the Sacred Liturgy, daily prayer, the Word of God, seasonal devotions, and other acts of **faith** are integral to their education and formation.

Brothers Blaine, Marshall, and Garrett wanted me to know that their teachers at Saint Benedict School in Carrolltown inspire them to learn. Certainly academic excellence is synonymous with Catholic education. As more of our schools embrace a curriculum emphasizing Science, Technology, Religion, Engineering, the Arts, and Math, our students are gaining even more **knowledge** for future educational and career opportunities.

Since faith and knowledge demand action, our students are also engaged in **service** to others. Maggie, Maddie, and Greta, members of the Service Club at Saint Joseph's Catholic Academy in Boalsburg, told me about their work with The Thirst Project, a non-profit organization that builds wells and brings clean drinking water to persons in other countries. Whether it is around the world or closer to home, our students are making a difference. I am so proud them! The word Catholic means universal. Our students have the universal perspective through which the Gospel is to be shared and lived everywhere.

As you can see, we have many reasons to celebrate this Catholic Schools Week. As always, I salute the students, parents, administrators, teachers, and staff. Thanks to their tireless commitment, we are truly building for the future. As I get ready to join in the Catholic Schools Week festivities, I want to share one more memory from a recent television interview. Tim, a parent at Holy Name School in Ebensburg, reminded me that parents should not consider Catholic education as a financial sacrifice, but rather an investment in their child's future. I could not agree more! May the Lord continue to bless our great **Catholic Schools: Communities of Faith, Knowledge, and Service!**

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Mark L. Bartchak

Most Rev. Mark L. Bartchak

Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown