

The following remarks were presented by Mrs. Marilyn Richardson, principal of St. Michael Parish School, during the Sunday masses celebrating Catholic Schools Week on Feb. 6, 2011.

Good morning.

I would like to thank Fr. McSweeney and Fr. Mike for the opportunity to speak for a brief moment about our parish school.

Having just celebrated Catholic Schools Week has given me cause to reflect a bit about just what it is about Catholic education that has kept me committed to Catholic schools for nearly 30 years.

When I look back, I vividly remember my own experience when I attended Holy Rosary Central School during my elementary years and Steubenville Catholic Central in High School. Even though I attended West Liberty State College, I was able to return to Catholic school when I obtained my Masters Degree at the University of Steubenville. Back in that day, Catholic schools were the schools of choice for almost all Catholic children. The Catholic family had a real commitment to Catholic education and pretty much if you were Catholic, you went to Catholic school.

Times have certainly changed. Many options for both elementary and secondary school are available in our area so why choose Catholic school?

The defining feature of the Catholic School as compared to private or public school is clearly faith integration. Catholic schools infuse faith into every part of the school day. At St. Michael Parish School, We don't just "teach religion" as a separate class. Our faith is integrated into every aspect of our curriculum through prayer, school liturgies, praying the rosary each month for an end to school violence, preparing spiritually for Christmas during the Advent season; Prayer, adoration and Stations of the Cross during the Lenten season, sacrament preparation for first reconciliation, first holy communion and confirmation. The students are actively involved in liturgy planning, community service, outreach to the home bound and infirmed. Living their faith is a vital part of their educational experience. The faculty and staff of St. Michael Parish School make a conscious decision to teach in a Christ-centered environment full well knowing the salaries are well below those offered in the public school. Our teachers follow in the footsteps of the founding religious communities who built our schools on moral values and a partnership with the family.

Teachers must be certified and highly learned in their area of study; they must continue professional development in their field to be able to keep up with ever changing technology and best practices. To them, teaching in a Catholic school is a ministry.

This year's theme *A+ for America's Catholic Schools*, celebrates the fact that Catholic schools add value to our nation. With strong academic standards and graduation rates supported by strong moral values Catholic schools are making a significant contribution to our local

community and our American society. An article written by Elizabeth Barkley entitled "Catholic Schools, I Would Choose Them Again", says it best: Christianity and the Catholic Church have always been about something larger than ourselves. Our journey toward holiness is not an isolated one; it is rooted in community. Catholic schools are there to support children on a daily basis as they grow as students and believers. Our Catholic Schools must meet high academic standards in order for all those we teach to reach their highest potential.

In closing, I would be remiss if I did not recognize all those who contribute to the success of our parish school. First and foremost to Fr. McSweeney, Fr. Mike and all our pastors before them for all the time and treasure they have invested into St. Michael Parish School. Secondly, without the generosity of our parishioners we truly could not exist. Tuition does not cover the cost of our school budget, so we rely heavily on the generosity of our parishioners. Their contribution to CE has enabled us to thrive over so many years. Our parishioners have trusted us and have truly invested in the youth of our parish.

Finally, special recognition needs to be given to our dedicated faculty and staff, our parents for the sacrifice they make year after year to ensure their children attend St. Michael Parish School, and last but not least to our students, who strive each and every day to grow academically and spiritually in the likeness of Christ. We are truly blessed to have a school community that is rooted in faith and committed to excellence.

I will be forever grateful for having had the opportunity to serve St. Michael Parish and Parish School.

Thank you