

## Marketing Our Unity and Diversity

Catholic schools, like most other schools, are communities with diverse student populations, also mirrored in the people who staff our institutions. That diversity may be in many forms— cultural, ethnic, socio-economic, religious, race, family structure, learning styles, or ability. We celebrate our diversity by respecting and accepting these differences and by using them to enhance the education of our children.

The word *catholic* means “universal.” Being catholic, we are expected to reach out to people of different cultures and faiths. To be truly catholic, we must not only accept diversity, we must embrace it. Our Christian foundation calls us to be more than tolerant; we are to be open to others and welcome them into our community. They, in turn, are called to reach out to us in a similar way.

Catholic schools are unique in that we have a distinct advantage because the teachings and beliefs of our faith envelop diversity. Teachers can assert that since we are made to the Image of God it is essential to love and respect everyone. They also are able to refer to the perfect role model: Jesus Christ. It is through the examples in His life that Catholic schoolteachers and staff are able to teach their students to be open and accepting of all individuals, and most important of all, to value the differences.

Our Catholic schools strive to promote an appreciation of diversity. We are fortunate to be able to implement this in many ways. Among these are:

1. Arrange field trips that expose students to other cultures
2. Host a Cultural/Heritage Fair to share food, clothing, and customs with others
3. Review textbooks and resources to ensure that diversity is promoted
4. Encourage interaction among schools with diverse backgrounds
5. Establish a calendar of holidays and events focused on respect for diverse backgrounds
6. Institute an instructional program that holds teachers accountable for integrating diversity awareness and acceptance into the curriculum
7. Utilize seminars and workshops to train teachers to develop strategies to teach respect for diversity.

A main focus of Catholic schools is to develop a community of learners in which all feel accepted and valued. By doing so, they affirm the self-worth of all students and create a spirit which celebrates life. Close relationships among faculty, staff, parents and students are also fostered to further strengthen our unity.

Once again we will soon celebrate Catholic Schools Week. What a superb opportunity to show that which makes our schools unique! It is a special time to show how the Catholic schools are able to encourage diversity and a welcoming atmosphere in a faith-based manner. United as God's children, it is imperative to share the Word of God with others.

Jesus taught us always to respect every person as a son or daughter of God, regardless of his or her culture or social class. Catholic schools allow for diversity while keeping a common unity in Jesus Christ. Our unity in Christ brings this diversity to a higher plane, galvanizing our efforts to appreciate those things which make us different and making more apparent those which make us similar.

We are able to express our all-encompassing attitude toward diversity through daily prayer in the classroom and through the liturgy of the Catholic Church on many other occasions. The importance of prayer in teaching diversity in our schools is made evident in the beautiful prayer that follows:

### *Seeing with God's Eyes*

*Lord, can you fix my eyesight like you did for the blind man?*

*I want to see with your eyes those who are teased for being different at school.*

*I want to see with your eyes the homeless person on a park bench.*

*I want to see with your eyes people from other races and cultures.*

*I want to see more than people who think that being thinner or stronger makes you more lovable.*

*I want to see more than people who look at wealth and think that's what life is all about.*

*Help me to see with your eyes, Lord!*

*Blind me to the way the world sees so that I won't give in to judging people on their looks or skin color or possessions or personality.*

*Help me to see, and to love, as you love, Lord – with eyes so wide open that they see past the outside and right into the heart of another.*

### *The Catholic Youth Bible (John, Chapter 9)*

Our calling is to the realization that we are all children of God. The image of Our Creator is stamped on the soul of each person. This truth is the foundation of our faith and the reason Catholic schools exist.

All the members of our school community truly market our unity and diversity. The parents and students entrusted to us hopefully bring this attitude of respect and caring into the greater community. Gestures of love and kindness reinforced in Catholic schools are to be shared and re-shared in our world so this influence does not end, but rather ripples outward to change the world.

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