



STATEMENT ON CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND PARENTS' RIGHT TO CHOOSE

January 1998

As we begin the celebration of Catholic Schools Week 1998, we take this opportunity to express our admiration and to say a special word of thanks to the parents of children in Catholic Schools. Their great sacrifices and commitment in order to provide a faith-oriented education have not gone unnoticed. We pay tribute to their faithfulness and to the special contribution they make to the success of our Catholic Schools.

Many others deserve our thanks as well. To the sisters, brothers and priests who have contributed so much to the rich history of Florida's Catholic Schools, we are greatly indebted and appreciative. To the teachers and administrators of today - nearly 6000 strong in 220 schools - we offer our sincere praise. The fruits of their labors make an ongoing contribution to our State. We are justly proud of the reputation enjoyed by our Catholic Schools in this State, where more than 90,000 students receive their education. We are gratified that in each of the past ten years, Catholic Schools in our State have experienced an increase in overall enrollment.

We congratulate the ongoing efforts of the Florida Federation of Catholic Parents in the pursuit of educational choice. Its advocacy to encourage and develop support for legislation will enhance the rights of all parents to choose the education that will best meet the needs of their children -- be it public, private or parochial. Everyone has a right to education and parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that will be given to their children. It is important to remember that parents are the first and foremost educators of their children. They should not be penalized for choosing for their children an education according to their beliefs.

In the past we have expressed our support for Public Schools and we reaffirm that support here. Our Catholic Schools, along with the other nonpublic schools in the State, are partners with the public schools in accomplishing the all important work of educating the children of Florida. We reiterate our encouragement to parents to be involved in the education of their children regardless of where they may attend school.

Many parents desire a moral code, a value system and faith formation as part of their children's education. They are responsible for their children and should be able to make fundamental decisions about where and how they learn. Educational policies of our State should allow them to choose environments that affirm their beliefs and allow their values to be extended.

In this era of alarming rates of illiteracy, drug use and crime among youngsters, it is essential that parents be afforded the right to choose the school they deem best for their children's moral and intellectual development. This is especially true for the poor. Equal educational opportunity should be available for all. The poor are limited in their choice of schooling for their children. They are unable to move to areas where better educational opportunities exist and tuition costs at many private schools are beyond their reach. They deserve special consideration in any policy to extend the rights of parents in choosing their children's education.

As long time advocates for the rights of parents, we take this occasion of Catholic Schools Week 1998 to ask all Catholics and people of good will to join in the effort to ensure that all parents are afforded the right to choose the type of education that will best meet the needs of their children.

John Clement Favalora

Archbishop of Miami

John J. Snyder

Bishop of St. Augustine

Robert N. Lynch

Bishop of St. Petersburg

Norbert M. Dorsey, CP

Bishop of Orlando

John H. Ricard, SSJ

Bishop of Pensacola/Tallahassee

J. Keith Symons

Bishop of Palm Beach

John J. Nevins

Bishop of Venice

Agustin A. Roman

Auxiliary Bishop of Miami

Gilberto Fernandez

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Thomas G. Wenski

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