

Archbishop Robert J. Carlson's Talking Points
John F. Kennedy Catholic High School
February 2, 2012

- I want to begin my presentation with a word of thanks to the more than 3000 people—including many of you—who responded to my invitation two years ago to help me keep Catholic education *Alive in Christ* here in the Archdiocese of St. Louis. The past two years we have witnessed a tremendous outpouring of support for our Catholic schools and all our education and faith formation programs.
- I especially want to thank the four planning teams led by Msgr. John Unger, Msgr. James Callahan, Fr. Jeff Vomund and Msgr. Greg Mikesch. Their hard work and their commitment to Catholic identity, evangelization, social justice and stewardship are reflected on every page of the plans they developed for my consideration. What they have recommended is far too extensive and detailed to discuss today—or to implement all at once—but what they have accomplished is extraordinary. Their recommendations will serve as blueprints for building the future of Catholic education in our Archdiocese for many years to come!
- My objective today is to share with you my priorities for *Alive in Christ!* These are based on the more than 40 action plans recommended to me in the four goal areas of Catholic identity, evangelization, social justice and stewardship. While I can readily accept and endorse all of the actions recommended by the four planning teams, I know we can't do everything right away. Therefore, I want to state as clearly as possible those actions that I think deserve our immediate attention.
- Here, then, are my priorities for the investment of our time, our energy and our human and financial resources during the next few years. We will have copies of these for you as you leave this afternoon so it's not necessary to take notes.

1. My first priority is **to strengthen Catholic identity**. I want to do this by promoting collaboration among all parish, archdiocesan and private Catholic schools. Gone are the days when schools see themselves primarily as “competing” with one another—both on and off the athletic field. We must all work together to ensure that our schools are *Alive in Christ* and that our Catholic faith is transmitted to future generations!

I also want to make sure that prayer, weekly Mass, devotions, vocation awareness, Christian service and spiritual formation are as important to the daily life of our schools and faith formation ministries as academic excellence and other activities are. No visitor should enter a Catholic school without seeing multiple signs of the school’s vibrant Catholic identity. Each day should begin with prayer and reading the life of the saint of the day or the prayer for daily Mass. Schools should pray the Rosary—especially during October and May—and the Stations of the Cross during Lent. Services projects should be provided for each class level as appropriate. Teachers should have read the Catechism of the Catholic Church so they know where to find the answers to questions students (and their parents) are asking. Classes in apologetics should be required for 8th graders (and for seniors in high school). Mission clubs and Vocation Week programs should be readily available. Principals should receive training in your role as a spiritual leader. And it goes without saying that we should only use textbooks approved by the bishops’ conference and the Catholic Education Center.

Catholic identity is not something we can afford to take for granted. It is absolutely essential for handing-on the faith to the young Church in our Archdiocese!

I am asking George Henry, Msgr. John Unger and the leadership of the Catholic Education Center to help me plan and implement new initiatives to strengthen Catholic identity during the next six years as we prepare for the 200th anniversary of Catholic education in our Archdiocese. But I would like every pastor, principal and school administrator **to make Catholic identity your first priority** and to pay

careful attention to the way Catholic identity is expressed in your parish and school communities!

2. My second priority is **to establish benchmarks and standards of excellence for academics and faith formation (with special emphasis on meeting the needs of children with disabilities or other special needs) and then ensuring these are measured and implemented.** “Excellence” is a word that is overused. Unless we can verify that our education and faith formation programs are second-to-none, we will not be able to convince families to make the sacrifices that are required to send their children to Catholic schools, Parish Schools of Religion or other formation ministries.

I am asking the Catholic Education Center’s staff to work closely with pastors, school administrators and parents to develop measurable benchmarks and standards of excellence for my approval for implementation in all our parishes and schools.

3. My third priority is **adult faith formation and lay ministry formation with special emphasis on classes for parents on the sacraments their children are receiving.** You know as well as I do that adult faith formation is the key to growing our parishes and schools. It all begins with Catholic identity and with adults who understand and practice their faith so fervently that they want to hand it on to their children. Let's do more than talk about forming adults. Let's make this a priority for every parish!

I am asking the Catholic Education Center to develop new resources to help parishes offer classes for parents whose children are receiving the sacraments. I have also asked Dr. Ed Hogan and the staff of the Pope Paul VI Pontifical Institute to fully implement our new lay ministry formation program so that parishes get the resources and training they need to fully engage adults.

4. My fourth priority is **to continue and expand evangelization efforts in our parishes and schools.** Catholics Come Home has been an excellent beginning, but we must grow our efforts to reach out to those who do not know Jesus Christ, those who no longer practice their faith, and all whose faith needs to be renewed by a fuller understanding of Catholic teaching and a more active participation in the Church's life. I have outlined a program of outreach for parents after a child is baptized that I would like all parishes to adopt and take seriously. Unless our children are baptized and our young families are catechized, there will be no students to enroll in our schools and our PSR programs!

I am asking Msgr. Rivituso to work with Apostolic Services and the Office of Communications and Planning to make sure that parishes have the resources and assistance they need to continue and expand our evangelization outreach. I'm also asking the Catholic Education Center to work with the Office of Worship to develop new outreach programs for young families with pre-school children. Pastors, please give this outreach to families of newly-baptized children your special attention. We cannot afford to let these families drift away because they have not been welcomed into the parish community!

5. My fifth priority is **creative and proactive marketing and enrollment management in schools**. There is a growing body of research that shows that the key to healthy school finances is “utilization.” Schools that are full have a much better chance of being vibrant—operating in the black—than schools that are under-utilized. That means **filling the empty seats** must be a top priority for every school that is not already full. The funding strategies I’ll discuss in a few minutes are designed to help fill our empty seats, but we also need all elementary schools in our Archdiocese to have a current and proactive marketing plan to help ensure that our numbers are growing—not in constant decline.

I am asking the Catholic Education Center’s staff to work closely with our Office of Communication and Planning to help make marketing and enrollment management an even greater priority for parishes and schools. “Filling the empty seats” should be a priority for every school, but I think this is especially beneficial for parishes and schools that are already working closely together (for example, the Northeast County Federation, Holy Cross Academy and the South City Collaborative.)

6. My sixth priority is **to maintain, and renew, our commitment to help students who are poor or marginalized reach their full potential as children of God**. Our commitment to the poor dates back nearly 200 years to the very beginnings of Catholic education in St. Louis. As a Catholic community, we have done remarkable things on behalf of children who otherwise would not have a chance to break the vicious cycle of poverty or to overcome disabilities that too often place them on the margins of society. But much more needs to be done. We can’t rest until every child who wants a Catholic education is given equal access to the opportunities our schools and faith formation programs provide to help students achieve their full potential as God’s children. To be successful, we have to address the tensions that exist in our communities, and we must reach out to those who are financially poor (in our cities, suburbs and rural areas). We must also extend a warm welcome to immigrants, members of minority races or ethnic groups and to families whose children have special

needs. This is nothing less than the **Gospel imperative to recognize Christ** in those who are different from ourselves, especially the poor and the most vulnerable members of our communities.

I am asking Dr. Karen Tichy and the staff of the Catholic Education Center to work with me to sustain, and strengthen, our commitment to social justice and service to those with special needs. We need to support and expand all efforts to meet the special education and faith formation needs of children who have disabilities or other special needs.

Our Archdiocese has been a leader in social justice outreach. We should be proud of our past achievements, but we should not rest on our laurels. Much more work needs to be done in this important area of our Church's ministry. It won't be easy. It won't be popular, and it won't be inexpensive. But our Lord has commanded us to serve "the least of these" sisters and brothers of ours as though we were serving Him. We dare not neglect this sacred duty.

7. My seventh priority is **to engage in proactive, deanery-based planning to encourage collaboration among parishes and schools**. We all know that growth is not possible without "pruning." Six years from now, we can't reasonably expect to have exactly the same number of schools in the same locations. We either plan together—in positive, proactive ways—or we allow forces outside our control to plan for us with consequences that are not in the best interests of anyone. I am committed to leading us in an effort that will encourage positive discussion and decision-making for the common good of all, but I will need your help to be successful.

I am asking all of the deans to work closely with me, the members of our Archdiocesan Planning Commission, the Office of Communications and Planning and the Catholic Education Center to design and implement deanery planning processes that will help us all prepare for the future needs of parishes and schools in all 11 counties of our Archdiocese.

8. My eighth priority is **to offer parish and school leaders education and training in planning, governance, leadership development, lay formation, organizational management and financial planning.**

Speaking for the pastors, I can say without any hesitation that the majority of us were not trained for the kinds of administrative and financial duties that all pastors must assume today. We need better “on the job” training and we need help discerning what only we can do and what can be delegated to others. I suspect many principals are in the same situation—having been trained as educators and now being expected to do an extraordinary job as administrators.

I am asking Dr. Ed Hogan and the staff of the Pope Paul VI Pontifical Institute to work closely with Mr. John Schwob, Director of Planning, and the staff of the Catholic Education Center to develop the resources and training programs needed to help pastors, school administrators and their leadership teams successfully lead and manage our parishes and schools.

9. My ninth priority is **to develop new funding to increase the financial resources available for mission schools and for Catholic families in all regions of the Archdiocese.** Recent experience confirms that we can “fill the empty seats” and balance our budgets if significant tuition assistance dollars are available to help families afford Catholic schools. Especially during tough economic times, the challenges faced by our families and by our parishes and schools can seem overwhelming. We are all making sacrifices to keep our parishes and schools financially healthy, and I want to emphasize how grateful I am to everyone one of you for the extraordinary efforts you have made to bring us to where we are today. Thank you. At the same time, it is my responsibility to ask you to do even more for the sake of our mission. That’s why I have accepted the recommendations developed during the past two years of discernment and planning for an **increase in parish education assessments** to provide significant additional funds for tuition assistance to “fill the empty seats” and help Catholic families and students who attend mission schools afford a Catholic school education.

The material you will receive at the conclusion of our meeting today will describe these efforts in more detail but here are some highlights:

- All parishes will be expected to contribute 2 percent of all parish external revenue, excluding endowment contributions, toward tuition assistance for families with demonstrated financial need who want to attend, or remain in, Catholic elementary schools in all regions of our Archdiocese. This contribution will be phased in over a two year period with parishes contributing 1 percent for the 2012-13 school year and 2 percent annually beginning in the 2013-14 school year.
- All of these new assessment funds will come back to parishes in the form of tuition paid to elementary schools. Although we are not able to include high schools in this new program, we are confident that strengthening our elementary schools means we are also helping high schools indirectly.
- I have also endorsed the **long term proposals to develop major new endowment funds to support tuition assistance by means of an archdiocesan-wide capital campaign and a new archdiocesan foundation.** The new revenue generated by the campaign and by our endowment building efforts will be used to provide additional assistance to families from all regions of the Archdiocese with elementary and high school age children.

I am asking Dr. David Mueckl, Chief Administrative Officer, to work closely with Deacon Frank Chauvin, George Henry, Brian Niebrugge, Kevin Short and the staffs of the Archdiocesan Finance Office, the Catholic Education Center, the Office of Stewardship and the Annual Catholic Appeal and the Today and Tomorrow Educational Foundation to implement the immediate and long term initiatives I have approved for develop new funding sources for tuition assistance for Catholic families and mission schools.

10. My tenth, and final, priority is **to work with the Missouri Catholic Conference to seek government assistance** for families who choose Catholic and other non-government schools. I am aware that this will not be easy, but it's a matter of justice and the experience of other Midwestern states suggests that, if we're smart and focus on what's possible rather than what's desirable, we can make progress over time. In fact, there are some initiatives being proposed this year that suggest we may be able to make some real progress in this area after many years of frustration!

I am asking George Henry, Brian O'Malley and the staffs of the Catholic Education Center and Catholic Charities to help me work with the Missouri Catholic Conference to set ambitious but achievable goals for our efforts to obtain government assistance for families who choose Catholic and other non-government schools.

- None of the above actions can be really successful unless we are willing to do three things:
- First and foremost, we must entrust our Archdiocese—our people, our parishes, schools and other Catholic institutions—to the grace of God. None of us can grow Catholic schools any more than we can grow a grain of wheat or a stalk of corn. We can cultivate, plant and nurture, but only God can do the actual growing. This is not an excuse to shrug our shoulders or abandon the effort. On the contrary, we must pray hard, and do all the work that is required for God's grace to be effective. But it's important that we remember that we are not in control, God is.
- Secondly, we must provide the bold vision and courageous leadership that are needed to overcome all the obstacles that inhibit growth in Catholic identity, enrollment and finance. If we leaders are half-hearted; if we lack imagination or if we falter in our commitment to the future of Catholic education, our schools and faith formation ministries will not be *Alive in Christ!*

- Finally, we must be willing to sacrifice. The nearly 200 year history of Catholic education in this Archdiocese is filled with stories of pioneering women and men who made costly and painful sacrifices in order to provide the children of this region with schooling based on the Catholic faith. Beginning with St. Rose Philippine Duchesne and the Jesuit missionaries in 1818, and continuing throughout all the intervening years, parents, pastors, women and men religious and parishioners in every region of our Archdiocese have worked hard and given generously to make Catholic education possible. It has never been easy—or inexpensive. It has always required sacrifice. And I believe it always will.
- As we work together—with the help of God’s grace—to build the future of Catholic education in the Archdiocese of St. Louis, some schools will have to close. I hope these are few and far between. But systemic decline is not inevitable. *Growth is possible* if we trust in the power of God’s grace; if we are bold and courageous in our leadership; and if we are willing to sacrifice and give generously for sake of the greater good.
- Once again, thank you for the leadership you provide, and the sacrifices you make, every day. May the Lord who has begun this good work in us now bring it to completion. Thank you.