

Defining Characteristics of Catholic Schools

5. Steeped in a Catholic Worldview

Catholic education aims at the integral formation of the human person, which includes “preparation for professional life, formation of ethical and social awareness, developing awareness of the transcendental, and religious education” (The Catholic School, 31). All curriculum and instruction in a Catholic school should foster: the desire to seek wisdom and truth, the preference for social justice, the discipline to become self-learners, the capacity to recognize ethical and moral grounding for behavior, and the responsibility to transform and enrich the world with Gospel values. The Catholic school should avoid the error that its distinctiveness rests solely on its religious education program (Miller, 2006, pp. 43–45, 52).

Narrative Summary

The Vatican’s Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education states, “The school is where young people gradually learn to open themselves up to life and to create an attitude to life as it should be. The school should be a place where values are actively lived forming a community whose values are communicated through the interpersonal and sincere relationships of its members.” Simply put St. George Catholic School is providing a Catholic foundation for our students so that they will grow to be successful, happy, contributing members of society.

As mentioned several times, service to the sick and needy in the community is one of St. George’s strengths. Students are actively involved in contributing to service projects throughout the year. This year, the St. George Student Council has member representatives assigned to each service project. The focus on service and social justice gives St. George students the opportunity to see that others have needs and answer God’s call to have a servant heart and to be the hands and feet of Christ.

St. George Catholic School has strong ties with St. George Church Parish. Students adopt Parish shut-ins, candidates for priesthood and those seeking to join religious orders and write to them throughout the year. This past year, one of the Deacons, who was recently ordained, was so moved by the letters he received from a class that he invited them to his ordination. In 2013, St. George Catholic School adopted religion standards to guide our religious education program. Many of the standards focus on Catholicism around the world and the Catholic customs of other countries. This year the school choir has chosen several multi-cultural songs to sing during the celebration of Mass. These songs remind us of the universality of the Catholic faith. Many of the standards also emphasize service to others and social justice. Students have responded to these messages through their words and actions.

Lastly, St. George has a comprehensive discipline plan. The plan is designed to help students learn from their mistakes, become socially aware and make moral and ethical choices. The disciplinarian, posts a picture of Jesus with a child in her office.

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Frequently, she has students look at that picture and asks them, “What would Jesus do? What is he thinking right now?” Pink slips are given for students who make poor choices, while gold slips are given when students make wise choices. Both slips display pictures of Jesus teaching a group of children. Rules and consequences are designed to be fair, firm and loving, teaching students that they are forgiven just as God forgives them; allowing them to move forward. Addressing misbehavior and poor choices in the early years, helps to ethically and socially ground students, better preparing them for the future.

Examples

- service projects
- shut-in letters
- letters to deacons and candidates for the priesthood or religious life
- integration of religion throughout subjects
- religion standards
- discipline
- guidance
- music education

Direction

St. George Catholic School devotes a lot of time and effort to service and social justice opportunities for students. The AdvancED Defining Characteristics Survey of April 2013 indicates that 75% of St. George Catholic School stakeholders identified this as one of the school's strengths. Increasing student participation by allowing them to witness the needs of others, first hand, and/or having students provide direct services to those in need is an important goal.