

“TO WHOM MUCH HAS BEEN GIVEN, MUCH WILL BE REQUIRED (LUKE 12.48).”

Almost fifty percent of our parish income goes to meet our obligations of support for Owensboro Catholic Schools. This reflects a shift from historically much higher percentages. The percentage of our parish member families and their children participating in OCS has also fallen. It is clear to all who care to know that a disproportionately small number of families and their children are receiving a much greater portion of our parish financial resources compared to those who participate in our parish religious education programs instead of Catholic schools. This is not in any way to say that only the families and children participating in the Owensboro Catholic Schools are the beneficiaries of this financial investment. The U.S. Catholic Bishops, all of the Bishops of Owensboro, and American history assert that the whole Church and this society are the direct and indirect beneficiaries of the investment the Catholic communities and organizations have poured into Catholic schools. The Catholic Bishops are clear in their firm commitment to maintain and to develop Catholic schools. This is also a continuing commitment and mandate of the Bishops of Owensboro underlying the commitment of this parish to OCS. With the other parishes of the city we participate in a covenant together and with OCS, a covenant which we are not at liberty to abandon even were we so inclined.

The maintenance of the local Catholic schools has always been an expensive venture sustained by very serious and demanding sacrifice. Early on that sacrifice was hidden to the eyes of many for it was offered through the poverty of religious orders and the clergy. The material poverty which now sustains our local Catholic schools is borne by the self-sacrifice of participating families and those who willingly participate in assisting them through the assessments of local parishes and the energies made to bear in fund raising. It is abundantly clear that nearly all who have been educated in our local Catholic schools have received a rich heritage indeed. Of them, as the Lord Jesus said, “Much will be required.” It is then a sad irony when we find parents and grandparents who have prospered, at least materially, as a result of the educational foundation for life they received in Catholic schools, as I said made possible by the life sacrifices of others, not themselves sacrificing materially so that their children would have this same benefit. History has often noted that the spiritual challenge of prosperity is that the beneficiaries forget the source of their blessings. This has almost certainly been happening locally.

Parents bear the primary responsibility for sharing the Catholic faith with their children and in determining how they choose to do so. Catholicism as a lived and felt religion is primarily a matter of home-schooling. Parishes are the Eucharistic and sacramental communities gathered to celebrate that faith which is lived at home, in the Church, and in the wider society. The stewardship of the family for the obligations of life and faith is augmented by the stewardship of the Catholic faith community. Under this covenant of trust parishes assist their member families and even the broader community which it evangelizes in meeting their responsibilities of living and handing on the faith. What we have received from God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, we are obliged to cultivate and offer to our own and to the world around us or we fail utterly as a Church. “To whom much has been given, much will be required (Luke 12.48).” When parents determine not to participate in local Catholic schools, the parish offers its assistance for them in meeting their faith responsibilities. No methods and structures, however, have been found anywhere or by anyone to

equal or to surpass the faith assistance usually available in Catholic schools. It is not a matter of finance. It is a matter of time and the comprehensiveness of an entire educational context.

All the member families of a parish church are nourished by their common celebration of the sacraments together. No individual family or group of families constitute an initiating community. That is found in the Eucharistic community of the parish. No religious educational program or structure, of the home or otherwise, substitutes for the sacramental formation and celebration of the parish church. Families, Catholic schools, and religious education programs, all direct their participating members to the Eucharistic community for the celebration of the very summit of Catholic Christian life, primarily the Sunday Mass of the Lord's Day. It is the Eucharistic community which is the sacrament and anticipation of the Community of the Blessed in the Kingdom of God. It is here that family finds its deepest value and goal. All Catholic institutions and programs serve the vitality of the assembly of faith which celebrates the Lord's Supper and proclaims the Gospel from out of that celebration until the Lord comes.

“To whom much has been given, much will be required (Luke 12.48).” All parish families are invited to participate in the local Catholic schools. That participation inevitably requires significant sacrifice. It is true that the more families and children of a parish enrolled in OCS, the greater the financial contribution of the parish to OCS will be. That is as it should be. That same sacrifice will have to borne by all the more shoulders. This, too, is as it should be. The current parish requirements of participating families, in addition to the family's personal investment, are minimal for the parish to meet its own responsibilities of assistance to them in handing on the faith. The requirements are adaptable to all real circumstances, e.g., the athletic and academic extracurricular schedules which take children out of town on the weekends. Rather than weaken these standards or make blanket exceptions, participating families will be called collectively to an even greater task. The parish needs an organized group of OCS participating families to work with the parish representative to the OCS Education Council for the support of participating parish families – recruiting more families to participate in the Catholic schools so as better to meet their own needs for living and sharing the faith with their children; supporting the ongoing faith and academic vitality of the OCS; and for helping the parish be an even better faith support to families and more vital community of faith in the surrounding society and culture of our times. “To whom much has been given, much will be required (Luke 12.48).”