

**St. Margaret Mary Deanery  
Elementary School Update  
November, 2005**

**Historical Foundations**

Beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Catholics put a primary value on the need for religious instruction through schools. Schools were seen as the hope of the church for the future and set Catholicism in the U.S. apart from Catholicism in other nations. Without a doubt, the development of the parochial school was a keystone of Catholic institutional life in the United States. Thanks to parents and countless women and men religious, Catholic schools became an essential part of the church's evangelization program.

For the church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the goals are the same, (1) pass on Gospel Values (2) assist parents in teaching Catholic beliefs and living our faith and (3) provide the best academics to prepare our children for the future. Because Catholic schools play such a vital role in passing on the faith of our ancestors and the traditions of Catholicism, the pastors of our deanery believe it is important to plan for our schools future. The question for us, as for those who came before us, is, "HOW?" How do we do it?

St. Margaret Mary Deanery, over the past two years, has approached our future planning by developing two separate tracts: (1) Exploring and developing the Pastoral Regions approved by Archbishop Pilarczyk and (2) Devising a **Deanery plan** for Catholic Elementary education whereby every child, family and parish benefits.

- Since June 2002, concerned laity, pastors, principals and Archdiocesan officials have been discussing the future of Catholic elementary education.
- In May 2004 a steering committee was commissioned to devise proposals for the deanery focused on: demographics, faith formation, enrollment, financial status, facilities, parent participation and educational scenarios.
- During the summer and fall of 2005, parishes held focus sessions to prayerfully reflect on various scenarios for Catholic elementary education.
- General total enrollment in Catholic Elementary Schools in the deanery is decreasing at a slow, steady pace. The decline appears to be greatest in the lower grades. While it is projected that the population of the Deanery will decline over the next 5 years by just over 1%, the population of children ages 0-14 will decline by 6%.
- All reporting schools in the deanery are operating at a deficit from \$25,000-\$560,000 per year. Many parishes have reached the point that it is a significant financial burden to operate a parish school. As enrollment decreases, cost increases, as cost increase, tuition increases and enrollment drops, creating a downward spiral.

## Current Situation

The pastors remain committed to providing Catholic Education as part of our deanery planning for the future. We are first and foremost concerned about what is best for our children and families. We realize that the current model of elementary schools that served us well is no longer viable. Discussion has focused on "**4 Areas of Education**".

Planning for area schooling in our deanery will allow us to:

- assure a quality education for our children grounded on Catholic values and the Gospel
- be financially solvent and affordable
- provide the best educators, facilities and programs for our children's education
- provide Catholic education for our children without the necessity of families leaving their parish where they are spiritually and pastorally nourished and registering at another.

Currently parishes in three areas are talking and exploring "**Area Education Centers**".

- St. Vivian, St. Bartholomew, St. James of the Valley, and Our Lady of the Rosary
- St. Ann, Assumption, St. Clare, St. Margaret Mary, Little Flower
- St. John the Baptist, Corpus Christi, and St. John Neumann

St. Ignatius, St. James the Greater and St. Clement schools will remain as they are.

## Future Opportunities

To date **NOTHING** is concrete or final. Whatever is proposed in our deanery will go first to the Cincinnati Education Committee of the Archdiocese and then to the Archbishop for final approval. Due to financial constraints and low enrollment, some of our parishes will be developing concrete plans sooner than others. But these more immediate plans will be part of larger "Area Plans" supported by all the pastors, Pastoral Councils and School Boards/Education Commissions.

This is a challenging and exciting time for us as Church. This is our time to realize we are a community of believers, not merely geographical groupings. This is our time to assure future generations of Catholics a solid, financially viable education, rooted in the Gospel.

Will it be different? Most definitely.

Will it be better? With God's grace it will.

Please know we will continue to communicate any and all future developments.