



## SAINT PIUS X CATHOLIC CHURCH

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June 8, 2009

To St. Pius X Families in the OCS,  
Greetings,

While it is still early in the process, thirty-three vouchers have already been issued to parish families in OCS for the 2009-2010 school year. So, I consider this to be a good time to reflect further on preserving Catholic schools in our local church. Ultimately this is the motive for our establishing “trackable” requirements for parish vouchers. Among all our parishes, the local base of participating families in our Catholic schools is composed of a shrinking and dangerously small percentage of our families with children. In 2008-2009, 64 out of our 620 families (10%) and 107 out of 428 of our school aged children (25%) participated in OCS. These percentages explain the basic reason our parishes, families, and the local Catholic schools are having increasing difficulty meeting the costs. It means that unless those who participate in OCS and benefit from parish subsidies stand up **together** as witnesses and stewards of this trust, and persuade others to participate, the entire endeavor could collapse. No one really knows what that “tipping point” might be, when the participating base becomes too small to support the weight of the investment and the endeavor collapses. Let me explain a bit more of our parish situation and then describe why a special responsibility falls upon your shoulders and mine.

This parish, like most in the county, is in a very difficult spot. I know of people who not only have left this parish, complaining about our financial support of Catholic schools, but at least one family left the Catholic Church altogether over the issue. In addition to that, for several years we have had parishioners who will not contribute financially to this parish out of protest over the support we give to the Catholic schools. To make things more difficult, many of our parish families who annually make the familiar agreements of stewardship to get a voucher, do not follow through. Some seldom darken our door for the Lord’s Day or Holy Days. I have learned from some of our children that, except for the weekday Mass at school, they would not have Mass at all (and these are children too young to drive).

I am intent upon a more vigorous promotion of our Catholic schools in this parish. More families ought to participate for their children’s sake. But I absolutely need the faithful presence and participation of our parish families now involved in OCS for me to make my case without being vigorously opposed. We also need to have one standard for the issuance of a voucher, applicable to all participating

families, a tangible standard. Heretofore it has been untrackable and a significant number of people took a very unfair advantage of it. I want as little room as possible for anyone to complain about our parish financial support of the schools. It is simply good parish stewardship of our faith resources for our children and youth. It is also a support that is very, very difficult for us to meet financially at this time (we are at least one and a half months behind in our assessment). And I have been highly careful not to focus on OCS as the source of our money challenges. My main concern is for there to be a very strong bond of participation in the Eucharistic life of this parish on the part of all who also participate in OCS. And this brings me to the main reason for the parish requiring the explicit and “trackable” requirements for a voucher.

**“To whom much has been given, much will be required (Luke 12.48).”**

46.6% of our unrestricted parish income goes to meet our obligations of support for Owensboro Catholic Schools. This reflects a shift from historically much higher percentages (80+ %). In the 2008-2009 school year 10% of our families, and 25% of our school aged children participated in OCS. It is clear to all who care to know that this disproportionately small number of families and their children are receiving a much greater portion of the benefit 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 itself 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 three 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 of women 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 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." 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." 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 be 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. Rather than weaken these standards or make blanket exceptions, participating

*Called to a deep, personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ, the church community of Saint Pius X, guided by the light of the Holy Spirit, is committed to living and sharing our Catholic faith expressed in love.*

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: to recruit 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; to support the ongoing faith and academic vitality of the OCS; and to help the parish be an even more vital community of faith in the surrounding society and culture of our times. "To whom much has been given, much will be required."

I believe that the critical challenges of our times: to have authentic and courageous personal Christian faith; to preserve freedom of religious expression; to achieve a well founded and historically informed Catholic identity; to gain the legal protection of and move hearts to the conviction of the sacredness of human life; to uphold a society of virtue, particularly chastity, temperance, justice and self-sacrifice – these challenges need Catholic schools perhaps more than ever before in our history. We and our children are in danger of being swept away by pervasive cultural currents antagonistic to our faith and morals. Those who participate in the Catholic schools must stand together in witness to the trust they have received. Otherwise, we could see in our day the loss of this pillar of Catholic life and social witness.

Sincerely,

Rev. Richard Meredith