

## Catholic Identity and Catholic Schools: An Ethos of Stewardship

Catholic Identity is a term often used to describe a fundamental character of a school that is truly Catholic. Certainly Catholic Identity can be interpreted in a multitude of ways. For some it means having a crucifix in every classroom; for some it is having religion classes; for others it is the nostalgia of days when the religious sisters taught in every classroom. Each is for many symbolic of our Catholic schools.

When describing Catholic Identity I like to use the Greek word “ethos.” Ethos is defined as the character or attitude guiding the beliefs or ideas that provide the disposition of a community. Ethos is further defined as the fundamental spirit of a culture that informs the beliefs, values, moral behaviors and practices of a community. Ethos furthermore has the power to influence in a credible way the actions of a community in the expression of solidarity and the common good.

So what is the ethos or character or attitude that guides our parish community? What are the fundamental determining factors of our lives as a Catholic people? What power or powers influence how we live as a Catholic community? Is there a guiding ethos that determines the quality of our parish and school? Is there a fundamental spirit that guides our actions and behaviors?

This Lenten Season reminds us that there is no by-pass around the cross. Jesus shows us that resurrection – new life – an awakening to a new way of life – is only accomplished by self-giving love. It is the self-giving love of Christ that forms the “ethos” or disposition that describes a genuine Catholic community. Saint Paul reminded us in his letter to the Philippians that our attitude must be that of Christ- an attitude of self-giving love. Now is the time for our community to more intentionally examine who we are as followers of Jesus Christ and how we will live out our life as Christ the Servant Parish according to an ethos of self-giving love. Self-giving love is not merely a nice thought; rather it demands an investment.

For us as a parish community a particular concern and expression of this self-giving love is the commitment we share to see our children formed within the Catholic faith. As a diocesan parish with a Catholic school this challenges us to examine the place of the Catholic school in our culture. Unfortunately, the spirit of our culture is often referred to as individualistic, relativistic, materialistic, and consumer oriented. Each of these descriptors is a challenge to the ethos of an authentic Catholic Community in engaging our culture. The ethos of the first community described by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles is that *“the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possession, but everything they owned was held in common”*, and again *“There was not a needy person among them.”* The challenge for Catholic education and our parishes is the spirit of a culture that is the antithesis of the Spirit that is reflected in Luke’s Community. The ethos of a self-giving love exemplified in Jesus, is crucified by the nails of individualism, relativism, materialism and consumerism.

As parishioners of Christ the Servant, now is the time for each of us to reflect on the ethos of our community life – and the future of our parish and of our school. When we as a community share in the responsibility, each according to the means God has given, then new life will flourish abundantly and as the prophet Isaiah wrote “*Their descendents shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed.*”

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