

The Ethos of a Catholic School

“Our Catholic Schools have lost their Catholic Identity.” I often hear this said when talking with parishioners or parents or alumni of our schools. I have heard this as Pastor of Christ the Servant Parish, and as a member of the Board of our Catholic High School. So my reflection on this often-times perception of the Catholic school in the 21st Century brings me back to the question of the ethos of the Catholic community itself toward the Catholic school.

The word ethos is defined as the character or attitude guiding the beliefs and disposition of a community; and ethos is recognized as the fundamental spirit of a culture that influences in a credible way the actions of a community in the expression of solidarity and the common good.

What then is the missing ethos of our Catholic schools? I believe it touches upon one very important aspect which is the belief that we as a parish community or local church community share in the responsibility of our Catholic schools. The underlying belief and disposition of the parish is one in which each child has a sacred character and an intrinsic value and destiny for which we share a responsibility – one that asks us to invest time, energy and resources. Every child is important.

Granted the economics has changed - a gallon a gas was less than a quarter - but today’s investment is exponentially proportionate with the cost of living. However, the character of our beliefs and the spirit of our culture have changed and the value of Catholic education is seen quantitatively rather than qualitatively.

I believe that Catholic education can regain its compelling power and future when the revitalization of a community ethos occurs within our parishes themselves, informing our beliefs and attitudes and our stewardship practices. This can only happen when we no longer quantify the investment of Catholic education as an unreasonable burden. As long as we continue to objectify Catholic education, removing ourselves from the equation, Catholic education will remain someone else’s problem and concern, and someone else’s child. The investment in the future of Catholic education is one that is compounded daily and exemplifies an ethos of hard work, values, leadership and service, and sacrifice; it’s all about Catholic Identity.