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THE DECLARATION ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION:

Reflections by the Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership and the Joan and Ralph Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought
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THE DECLARATION ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LOOKING AHEAD FIFTY YEARS LATER

INTRODUCTION

Michael Duffy

This publication is the first of, hopefully, many collaborative efforts between the Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership and the Joan and Ralph Lane Center for Catholic Studies and Social Thought at the University of San Francisco. The fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council and the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Gravissimum Educationis*, The Declaration on Christian Education, seems a fitting occasion for this volume of essays.

Marking these anniversaries by contributing to the ongoing conversation and study that gave rise to the original document follows a practice within the social and intellectual tradition of the Catholic Church. Utilizing the staff and faculty of both the Joan and Ralph Lane Center and the Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership brought forth a vibrant conversation fueled by intellectual curiosity about the future of Catholic education and its role in contemporary society and the life of the church.

The publication of these essays coincides with another extraordinary variable

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in Catholicism: “the Francis effect.” Since his election to the papacy in 2013, Pope Francis has fostered a culture of openness, honesty, dialog, and renewed engagement with the world. Fifty years after the Second Vatican Council instructed the church to engage more deeply with the world, Francis boldly jumped onto the global stage with a message of a church fully immersed in the world’s “joys and hopes…griefs and anxieties.”

In line with Francis’s renewed engagement with the world, the following essays offer a forward-looking analysis of *Gravissimum Educationis.* In 1965, the Second Vatican Council organized the principles of Christian education into twelve sections: the meaning of the universal right to an education, Christian education, the authors of education, various aids to Christian education, the importance of schools, the duties and rights of parents, moral and religious education in all schools, Catholic schools, different types of Catholic schools, Catholic colleges and universities, faculties of sacred sciences, and coordination to be fostered in scholastic matters.

These principles follow the foundational element of Christian education, which the Council articulated:

> Consequently, attempts are being made everywhere to promote more education. The rights of men to an education, particularly the primary rights of children and parents, are being proclaimed and recognized in public documents. As the number of pupils rapidly increases, schools are multiplied and expanded far and wide and other educational institutions are established. New experiments are conducted in methods of education and teaching. Mighty attempts are being made to obtain education for all, even though vast numbers of children and young people are still deprived of even rudimentary training and so many others lack a suitable education in which truth and love are developed together.

The following essays examine these principles in a new educational context, addressing the role of parents, the vocation of the educator, and the church’s commitment to educating all people, especially vulnerable populations. As Francis calls upon the church and world to think differently, to care for the poor and marginalized, and to enthusiastically engage with society on all levels, the authors included in this volume offer a glimpse of a way forward through Christian education.

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NOW IS THE TIME

Doreen Ferreira Jones

INTRODUCTION

Written in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis,* this essay presents the significance of the document in three sections. The first briefly describes the Second Vatican Council. The second defines the principles put forth in its Declaration on Christian Education and discusses its relevance to today’s world. The third highlights Pope Francis’s views on Christian education today and the role that the Second Vatican Council has upon it.

SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

The Second Vatican Council was the sacred genius of Pope John XXIII, now Saint John XXIII. Shortly after his unexpected election as the 262nd Pope of the Catholic Church in 1958, the Pontiff shocked the world by his decision to create the Second Vatican Council. When asked for his reason for convening

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it, Pope John XXIII replied: "It is time to throw open the windows of the Church and let the fresh air of the spirit blow through." He explained that such an action would usher the Catholic Church into the modern world and into greater dialogue with all peoples.

Preparation for the Second Vatican Council took three years and on October 11, 1962, Pope John XXIII formally opened it with 2,500 Catholic bishops from around the world and numerous Catholic lay leaders and non-Catholic observers in attendance. Between 1962 and 1965, the council met in Rome for four sessions driven by four purposes: to define more fully the nature of the Church and the role of the bishop; to examine Church teachings and practices; to restore unity among all Christians; and to dialogue with the contemporary world’s peoples. Pope Paul VI, who succeeded Pope John XXIII after his death in 1963, closed the council on December 8, 1965. Great reforms resulted from the work of the council. Its fruit took the form of 16 documents (four constitutions, nine decrees, and three declarations). In this essay, I wish to consider the Declaration on Christian Education.

THE DECLARATION ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

In its Declaration on Christian Education, the council recognized the primacy of education to human life and social progress. It reaffirmed the principle that persons "of every race, condition, and age…has an inalienable right to an education." It noted that the Church had never tired of its duty to ensure that all peoples, especially the poor, receive an education that enables them to pursue their ultimate end and to contribute to the good of the society in which they live. Such an education fosters integral human development and prompts individuals to confront moral and social issues with proper knowledge and an informed conscience.

In the Declaration on Christian Education, the council also asserted that all who are baptized have a right to a Christian education that fosters not only their holistic development, but also their spiritual formation. Christian education facilitates a maturing knowledge of the mystery of salvation; the doctrines of faith; the call to service, holiness, and justice; the formation of conscience; and the right to worship in truth and spirit. It promotes the actualization of students’ God-given talents for the good of all. Most importantly, it provides the faithful with opportunities to develop an intimate relationship with God, who is creator, redeemer, and sanctifier, and to experience a Christian community as a lived reality.

Providing all persons with an excellent education is an inordinate challenge. Nonetheless, it is a duty that the Catholic Church has historically embraced. While there is much still to be done in this regard, noteworthy efforts in this task have been accomplished. The works of Fred Klipsch and Lewis Ranieri, two recipients of the National Catholic Educational Association’s (NCEA) 2014 Seton Awards, exemplify this.

Klipsch is the owner and former CEO of Klipsch Group, Inc. He was honored by the NCEA for developing Indiana’s Scholarship Tax Credit Program, which provides K-12 tuition support to low-income families across the state. His program is funded through the generosity of individuals and corporations, whose contributions are eligible for state tax credit, and whose donations make it possible for students to attend a Catholic school of choice. Over the past 20 years, Klipsch has distributed more than $20 million in scholarships to thousands of low-income students, providing them the opportunity of a Christian education. To ensure an excellent education for every child continues to be Klipsch’s lifelong goal.

Ranieri is the chairman of Ranieri Partners Management LLC. He is also the founder and chairman of the Tomorrow’s Hope Foundation, which works to ensure the excellence and the continuation of Catholic schools on Long Island. Over the past 10 years, his foundation has provided more than $10 million in scholarships to students lacking financial resources to attend Catholic schools in the diocese of Rockville Centre. As a product of Catholic education, and one committed to its legacy, Ranieri labors diligently to see that those who desire a Christian education receive the opportunity to have one.

In its Declaration on Christian Education, the council also reaffirmed the role and right of parents as the primary educators of their children, as well as the role and right of the Church and state to support them in that enterprise. It called on parents to set good examples and to utilize the support of Catholic schools in nurturing the Catholic faith of their children. It also charged bishops and pastors with providing Catholic schools for the faithful, noting that Catholic schools were responsible for fostering excellence and holiness, whose donations make it possible for students to attend a Catholic school of choice. Over the past 20 years, Klipsch has distributed more than $20 million in scholarships to thousands of low-income students, providing them the opportunity of a Christian education. To ensure an excellent education for every child continues to be Klipsch’s lifelong goal.

When the Declaration on Christian Education was published, there were 13,000 Catholic schools (elementary and secondary) in the United States, with a combined enrollment of 5.2 million students. According to the NCEA, those numbers have dramatically decreased. Currently, there are 6,568 operative U.S. Catholic schools with a total enrollment of close to two million (1,939,575), representing a 50% reduction in schools and a 60% reduction in student enrollment. Many factors (economic, social, and cultural) have contributed to the decrease in Catholic schools, and to the increase of new trends in education. Two of which include the conversion of closed Catholic schools into public charter schools and the choice of Catholic parents to homeschool their children.
Although their numbers have decreased, Catholic schools remain “national treasures” as described by former U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings—treasures, she noted, that must be preserved for both the Church and society. For the Church, Catholic schools provide the most effective means of evangelizing the world and catechizing the faithful. For society, they foster productive and contributing citizens, who promote the common good and work to fashion a more humane and just world for all peoples. The recent book by Margaret Brinig and Nicole Stelle Garnett, *Lost Classroom, Lost Community,* also suggests that Catholic urban schools contribute not only to the social capital of their students, but also to the social capital of the urban neighborhoods they serve. Therefore, the Church calls upon the entire U.S. Catholic community to do their part to keep Catholic schools vibrant, especially in urban communities.

In its Declaration on Christian Education, the council also addressed the role of Christian education in institutions of higher learning. It called for the establishment of Catholic campus ministry centers at public institutions to support the faith needs of Catholic students and faculty within these schools. It urged Catholic institutions to boldly live their pastoral mission as evangelizers of the Gospel, while fulfilling their scholastic charge in a spirit of freedom and truth. It also asserted that Christian education is a lifelong process and acknowledged the importance of adult catechesis.

Of note, the Declaration on Christian Education called for a broader view of Christian education, noting its importance at every phase of life: childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. While supporting the legacy of Catholic elementary and secondary schools, and the importance of urban outreach, it called for the creation of different types of Catholic schools: professional and vocational schools, adult educational centers, special education centers, college preparatory schools, and teacher training schools. A champion to this call has been the Society of Jesus through its establishment of three new school models: the Nativity Network of Schools which provides Catholic middle school education to low-income U.S. families; the Cristo Rey Network (CRN) of Schools which provides Catholic high school education to low-income U.S. families; and most recently, Arrupe College of Loyola University Chicago which offers a two-year associate degree program to serve students of need within the Chicago area. Twenty-four religious orders and seven Roman Catholic Dioceses have joined the Cristo Rey Network of Schools, and together with the founding Jesuits, they have educated 9,000 young people who live in urban communities with limited educational options.

In addition to articulating the importance of Catholic schools in general and the need to develop new models, the Declaration on Christian Education affirmed the Church’s historical claim of the preeminence of the Catholic schoolteacher in realizing the mission on Catholic education. It declared,

> But let teachers recognize that the Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and programs. They should therefore be very carefully prepared so that both in secular and religious knowledge they are equipped with suitable qualifications and also with a pedagogical skill that is in keeping with the findings of the contemporary world.

Consequently, the council urged Catholic universities to develop Catholic preparation programs for teachers and administrators. The University of San Francisco’s Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership (ICEL) and its Catholic Educational Leadership (CEL) program were established in response to that call. Since ICEL/CEL’s creation, it has informed, formed, and transformed over 1,000 Catholic educators, both religious and lay, from 36 countries, 45 states, and five U.S. territories, for service within Catholic elementary and secondary schools; Catholic institutions of higher learning; Catholic international, national, and regional organizations; religious communities; and diocesan school departments. Today, ICEL/CEL continues to serve the Church and society in great measure through its continual preparation of lay and consecrated religious Catholic educational leaders, who competently and compassionately build the kingdom of God, as they fashion a more just and humane world for all.

The council concluded its Declaration on Christian Education by emphasizing the importance of collaboration among Catholic educators. It called for collegial support related to academic pursuits, empirical research, and international and inter-faith dialogue. Lastly, it entreated young people to value the importance of education and to consider embracing its noble vocation.

**POPE FRANCIS AND CATHOLIC EDUCATION**

“Catholic education,” for Pope Francis “is one of the most important challenges for the Church” committed to a new evangelization in a world in constant transformation. Within this context, the Pontiff maintains that Catholic educators must address three factors promulgated by the Second Vatican Council: the value of dialogue in education; the need for careful preparation for formators; and the responsibility to express the living presence of the Gospel in the fields of education, science, and culture.

First, Pope Francis considers the call to dialogue to be pivotal to Catholic education, as students of many faiths as well as those who do not believe attend
Catholic schools. He asserts that respectful dialogue between teacher and student and among students is the way of Christ and His Holy Church. He recalls that Jesus began his public ministry in Galilee, a crossroad for peoples, diverse in race, culture, and religion, and throughout his ministry he engaged others in open dialogue with compassion. Catholic educators are called to do likewise.

Secondly, Pope Francis asserts that Christian education is dependent upon educators who are carefully prepared for their vocation. He acknowledges that the world has changed dramatically in the modern era and Catholic educators must change too. His words echo those of the Second Vatican Council, which declared that the vocation of teaching “demands special qualities of mind and heart, very careful preparation and continuing readiness to renew and to adapt.”9 The constant advancements in technology require Catholic educators to adapt to new ways of teaching and learning. Sister Angela Ann Zukowski, MHSH is exemplary in this regard.

Zukowski is the Director of the Institute for Pastoral Initiatives at the University of Dayton. Her ministry in distance education spans 40 years, beginning with cable television, advancing to multimedia satellite communications, and now the Internet and digital technologies. She created the Virtual Learning Community for the Faith Formation (VLCFF) program, which began serving one diocese with two e-courses. Today, it serves 55 dioceses in 40 countries with over 112 e-courses and seven online certificate programs with approximately 4,500-5,000 e-students per year.10 In her keynote address at NCEA’s 2013 convention, Sister Zukowski exclaimed, “Catholic educators must recognize that we are no longer simply living in a digital age, we have become a digital civilization. Hence, we must address that reality and adapt our teaching to it.”11

Thirdly, Pope Francis asserts that Catholic institutions have the responsibility to express the living presence of the Gospel in the fields of education, science, and culture while maintaining their academic freedom and the rights of students. He states that in this process Catholic educators are called to share “the Christian message…that Jesus Christ is the meaning of life, of the cosmos, and of history.”12 He declares “Catholic academic institutions cannot isolate themselves from the world, they must know how to enter bravely into the aeropagus of current culture and open dialogue, conscious of the gift that they can offer to everyone.”13 Since his election as Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis has witnessed how to do this with humility and joy.

Lastly, Pope Francis acknowledges that the challenges facing today’s Church are rooted, not in its recklessness, but in its timidity in interpreting and applying the principles promulgated by the Second Vatican Council relative to a contemporary world.14 For the Pontiff, the debates and controversies regarding the meaning of the council have lasted long enough. He models that now is the time to live them. And that is exactly what he is doing. As our good shepherd, he urges Catholic educators to join him, unafraid, knowing that God’s Holy Spirit will illuminate our way! Moreover, Francis invites all of humanity to join him in realizing the proclamations of the Second Vatican Council. Like St. John XXIII, he opens wide the windows and the door of the Catholic Church to allow the “fresh air of the Holy Spirit to blow through,” so that all may be enlivened by its power to renew the face of the earth and to experience God’s everlasting love and mercy, more fully and with great JOY.

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2 Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Christian Education, Gaudium et Spes (1965), 1. Cited hereafter as GE.
4 See the NCEA website for data on Catholic schools, accessed July 8, 2015, https://www.ncea.org/data-information/catholic-school-data.
7 GE, 8.
9 GE, 5.
12 Pope Francis, “Address to the Plenary Session of the Congregation for Catholic Education (for Educational Institutions),” 3.
13 Ibid., 8.
The Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, was issued in October 1965, six weeks before the Second Vatican Council’s climactic document *Gaudium et Spes*. A subject could hardly be more grave than “this most grave matter of education.” Despite all the social changes of the last half-century, one thing has not changed. Good education remains at the heart of what the Catholic magisterial tradition came to call “integral human development,” an implicitly anthropological concept that is foundational in *Gaudium et Spes*. This paper will argue, however, that this anthropology is not consistently evident in this declaration, which in consequence is curiously elusive and even a little incoherent.

The declaration articulates a broad humanistic concept of education in general and of schools in particular:

> Young people must be helped, with the aid of the latest advances in psychology and the arts and science of teaching, to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual endowments so that they may gradually acquire a mature sense of responsibility in striving endlessly to form their own lives properly and in pursuing
true freedom as they surmount the vicissitudes of life with courage and constancy.2

Similarly, in paragraph five:

The school has a special importance. It is designed not only to develop with special care the intellectual faculties but also to form the ability to judge rightly, to hand on the cultural legacy of previous generations, to foster a sense of values, to prepare for professional life. Between pupils of different talents and backgrounds it promotes friendly relations and fosters a spirit of mutual understanding.

This open approach anticipates the paradigm of evangelization underlying Gaudium et Spes. According to Gaudium et Spes, the Church’s stance must be one of “respect and love for the entire human family with which it is bound up,”3 “especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted.” Second, the Church has a “solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit” with the corresponding “duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.” Third, this arduous work of interpretation is offered not primarily by authoritative proclamation but by “engaging with it [the human community] in conversation.” These three elements—of affirmation, solidarity and dialogue—inspired a new style of ecclesial engagement with the world.

The declaration, though, is an awkward hybrid. Explaining the Church’s commitment to education, the introduction reveals a contrasting anthropology to that just described:

To fulfill the mandate she has received from her divine founder of proclaiming the mystery of salvation to all men and of restoring all things in Christ, Holy Mother the Church must be concerned with the whole of man’s life, even the secular part of it insofar as it has a bearing on his heavenly calling.4

In this sentence the paradigm of the Church’s mission is not that of the human family’s conversation partner, in the face of the “hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age”5: it is that of proclaimer and “Holy Mother.” The final clause seems inconsistent with the faith that “eternal life” confers a deep significance on our earthly existence as such, prior to any methodological distinction between “religious” and “secular.” The Lord’s Prayer, for example, asks that God’s will be done “on earth as it is in heaven”; in heaven God’s will is done by definition. Which “secular” part of our lives has nothing to do, for better or worse, with our “heavenly calling”? Given this perspective, it is not surprising that the Declaration appears oblivious of the sweeping social changes that would soon assail the Church. In the present writer’s view, therefore, the declaration has the air of a document of primarily historical interest. In context, it manifests the internal pluralism of the Second Vatican Council itself, the tension of “continuity and discontinuity” with an earlier ecclesial vision. It is hardly a document that helps to shape contemporary educational practice. The remainder of this essay will amplify this preliminary judgment.

THE PRESUMPTION OF A STABLE, SOCIAL, AND ECCLESIAL WORLD

Through much of human history, societal changes were so imperceptibly slow as to appear outside the scope of direct human responsibility. This assumption of stability, exemplified both in feudalism and in the notion of Christendom, persisted into the mid-19th century, even outliving the political cataclysms of the French and American revolutions and the economic upheaval of the Industrial Revolution.

Take the third stanza (now, understandably, rarely sung) of the popular hymn, “All Things Bright and Beautiful:”

The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them high and lowly,
And ordered their estate.

Here, the distribution of riches and poverty is seen as somehow part of a rightful social order. Since each person has a state of life “ordered” by God, to promote social change would even be impious. Was the hymn’s author, Mrs. C. F. Alexander, unconscious of the social convulsions around her, or was she consciously defying them? In an ironic synchronicity, this hymn was first published in 1848, the year when Marx and Engels published the Communist Manifesto.

I cite this hymn since one might wonder whether there is an echo of the hymn’s ahistorical assumption in the declaration’s encouragement to teachers in Christian schools. “Let them work as partners with parents and together with them in every phase of education give due consideration to the difference of sex and the proper ends Divine Providence assigns to each sex in the family and in society.”6 The specific point made here concerns gender, and one might well ask why gender roles are singled out. More generally, though, the reference to “Providence” consecrates and reifies particular, culturally contingent social
structures. If continuity is understood as fidelity, any attempt to "scrutinize the signs of the times" becomes futile. Inevitably, then, we find that the declaration is far less searching and self-questioning than *Gaudium et Spes*.

The declaration does welcome certain changes, seen to embody a smooth process of technological advancement that leaves untouched central spiritual realities. "Enjoying more leisure, as they sometimes do, men find that the remarkable development of technology and scientific investigation and the new means of communication offer them an opportunity of attaining more easily their cultural and spiritual inheritance." Faith and membership in the Christian community are here posited as a "cultural and spiritual inheritance" that is "attained easily," rather than entailing a process of constant personal and institutional renewal and conversion.

A PLURALIST WORLD IN RELATIONSHIP TO A PLURALIST CHURCH

One facet of the disruption of social stability discussed above may be subsumed under the rubric of pluralism. This term appears twice in the declaration. In paragraph six, we read of "the pluralism that exists today in ever so many societies." This version of pluralism is taken to preclude any governmental "school monopoly" in the name of subsidiarity, so leaving space for the Church. Similarly, paragraph seven claims parents' freedom of choice over any civic ideology: "the Church esteems highly those civil authorities and societies which, bearing in mind the pluralism of contemporary society and respecting religious freedom, assist families so that the education of their children can be imparted in all schools according to the individual moral and religious principles of the families."

However, Catholic parents' moral freedom in respect of the state is not seen to imply their freedom over the Church itself. The declaration goes on in paragraph eight to remind Catholic parents of their "duty" of "entrusting their children to Catholic schools wherever and whenever it is possible and of supporting these schools," cooperating with them for the education of their children. Catholic parents are here directed, not encouraged, to support the Catholic education of their children, any qualms being discounted. This directive is taken to flow from the right (but also duty) of the Church itself in its role as educator. She "must be recognized [presumably by the state, amongst others] as a human society capable of educating"); she is "bound as a mother to give to these children of hers an education by which their whole life can be imbued with the spirit of Christ." Also, the Church "must be present with her own special affection and help for the great number who are being trained in schools that are not Catholic."

In this version of pluralism, two situations are envisaged: first, that of Catholic schools which seek to help youth grow "according to the new creatures they were made through baptism . . . and finally to order the whole of human culture to the news of salvation"—in which, therefore, all are baptized; second, that of secular schools (in which "a great number" of Catholic children may find themselves by force of circumstances, not by the legitimate choice of the parents), so that the Church must find a way to support these Catholics.

What of other than Catholic pupils in Catholic schools? There is one glancing reference to this situation, in paragraph nine, "The Church considers very dear to her heart those Catholic schools, found especially in the areas of the new churches, which are attended also by students who are not Catholics." This situation seems here to be regarded as transient, or even anomalous; and it is the school that is said to be dear to the Church's heart, not the pupils. If this last comment is harsh, it remains true that since 1965, the situation has changed beyond recognition. Catholic schools are no longer Catholic *enclaves*, but are themselves pluralist. Their pupils will come, for example, from Muslim or secular humanist families. The teachers too will be religiously plural. They can be required to exercise a degree of empathy with the Christian ethos but not to manifest, as paragraph eight requires, an "apostolic spirit."

Further, since every "Catholic family" now includes non-Catholic and non-Christian members, the parents (adoptive, perhaps, as well as natural; unmarried as well as married) may well differ in religious affiliation: so in exercising their "primary and inalienable right and duty to educate their children" and enjoying "true liberty in their choice of schools" they might find themselves in intense debate.

Such changes in what constitutes a "Catholic family" are replicated at the societal level. I shall close this essay by sketching three illustrative cases. First, the Church itself has changed profoundly: partly through adaptation to external pressures, partly through an internal evolution inspired not least by such central decrees of the Second Vatican Council as *Gaudium et Spes* itself, the Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*, and the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*.

Like the school, the Church is now internally pluralist, and this pluralism precludes any undifferentiated or uncritical acceptance of ecclesial authority. A key transitional controversy occurred very soon after the declaration, following the 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. A crucial and intense ecclesial debate was cut short by an act of the papal magisterium, on an issue that centered on the life experience of married, not celibate, persons. But far from settling the debate, *Humanae Vitae* raised it from the immediate issue of contraception to that of church authority itself. Such controversies, global or local, have become relatively common.
Second, as to the Church’s relationship with secular authorities, in fields other than education, it is evident that long after 1965 the Church is still learning how to live with what might be called “diverse pluralism.” Consider recent debates over health care in the USA, focused on the implications of the Affordable Care Act of 2010, and one structural feature of this debate. In the case of individual Catholics within secular institutions, the U.S. bishops tended to insist on the rights of the Catholic concerned: in the case of non-Catholic employees of Catholic organizations, the bishops defended the right of the institution to express its moral position and ethos, sidelining the Church’s claims. The state exercises a governing as well as a facilitating role. It supports Catholic schools, but also inspects them. It assesses even their religious instruction: not the authenticity of its faith-content, nor the Church as such, but the educational caliber of particular Catholic institutions. Crucially, also, it determines the rights and obligations of those religious institutions that are employers.18

CONCLUSION
The declaration, proceeding from a widespread societal arrangement of its own epoch, sets itself to defend Catholic schools as a parallel system to state secular schools: they were held to support a faith community that was sociologically distinct from the surrounding culture. In this paradigm, the school (1) transmits the faith, and in consequence (2) serves the broader human community.

In a diversely pluralist world, however, the dynamic of the Church’s educational contribution may typically work the other way around. In serving the human community in the light of the Gospel, and learning from that activity, Christians themselves become more open to God. The communication of faith is less a simple “transmission,” than a shared discovery of the God who is always new; of the Spirit who, as Jesus promises, “will lead you in to all truth” (John 16: 13). Growth in faith, served by “Christian education,” involves a decentering through which the Church loses its life of institutional security in order to receive “eternal life.”

1 In his pamphlet “Jesuit Schools and the Humanist Yesterday and Today” in Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits, 47:1 (Spring 2015), John W. O’Malley SJ contrasts (1) “scientific education,” focused on the development of critical thinking and professional expertise, and (2) “humanistic education,” which seeks the overall human development of the student — physical, moral, intellectual, religious and cultural.
2 Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Christian Education, Gaudium et Spes (1965), 1. Cited hereafter as GE.
4 Ibid., 1.
5 Ibid., 3, 4.
6 Ibid., 3.
7 GE, introduction.
8 GS, 1.
9 GE, 8.
10 Ibid., introduction.
11 Ibid., 3.
12 Ibid., 7.
13 Ibid., 8.
14 The Declaration speaks throughout of “Christian education” but of “Catholic schools.” The phrase “Catholic education” occurs only in the footnoted citations. Ecumenical sensitivity was not yet in the bloodstream of the document’s authors.
15 It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss sociological changes within the Catholic education system itself, for example, the rapid decline in the number of Religious teaching in schools, and the subsequent crisis of the very Catholic school system GE defends. See, Margaret F. Brinig and Nicole Stelle Garnett, Lost Classrooms, Lost Community: Catholic Schools’ Importance in Urban America (University Of Chicago Press, 2014).
16 As this essay is written in 2015, the Archbishop of San Francisco is immersed in an embattled conflict between the Archdiocese and the one hand, and many teachers and parents on the other. Whatever anyone stands on this issue (which turns on contrasting perspectives on “Catholic morality”), the conflict demonstrates that church authorities no longer enjoy automatic deference. See Dan Morris-Young, “New Faculty Handbooks in San Francisco to Include Statement Developed by Archbishop,” in National Catholic Reporter, Feb. 4, 2015, accessed July 14, 2015, http://ncronline.org/news/faith-parish/new-faculty-handbooks-san-francisco-include-statement-developed-archbishop.
18 In the UK, for example, the Government determines which specific pupils within a Catholic school may legitimately be reserved for Catholics; typically, say, the Head of Religious Education, but not the Head of Mathematics or the scientific staff. Hence the notion of an all-embracing institutional ethos is diffused.
INTRODUCTION

During the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church released *Gravissimum Educationis* to explicate their vision for Catholic education. The document affirms the Church’s conviction that its members have the right to a Catholic education at multiple levels of schooling. *Gravissimum Educationis* (GE) argues the value of a Catholic education for Catholics and non-Catholics alike and promotes the idea that special attention must be given to marginalized communities.

Fifty years later, Pope Francis continues to remind the Church and its institutions to focus on the marginalized and poor.¹ However, the current state of the K-12 Catholic education in the United States presents challenges to making Catholic education accessible and a viable choice for the Latino
community. In this essay, I provide the history of Latinos in Catholic education and apply the Declaration on Christian Education to the Latino community.

LATINO STUDENTS IN U.S. CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Historically, Catholic schools have educated a portion (albeit small) of immigrant children. In the 19th and early part of the 20th century, Catholic schools served the needs of various European immigrant groups, and in some cases, provided bilingual and bicultural education for German and French-Canadian students. It is worth noting that Catholic schools responded to Latino communities differently than their European immigrant counterparts. Italian and Polish immigrants, for example, benefited from ethnic parishes and bicultural Catholic schools. In contrast, Catholic parishes in Latino communities were led by Anglo, English-speaking priests that undermined the leadership efforts of Latino parishioners. In the 1960s, a coalition of Latino students led protests against subpar educational offerings in Catholic schools and the lack of support for Spanish-speaking Catholics in Los Angeles.

By 1965, when Pope Paul VI issued the Declaration on Christian Education, Catholic schools in the United States experienced their highest enrollment at more than 5.2 million. During this era, Catholic school tuition was considered affordable for working class immigrants and minorities in large part due to the men and women religious working in schools as staff. In the 1980s, Latino student enrollment in Catholic schools (eight percent) closely mirrored the percentage of Latino students in public schools. Today, 15 percent of Catholic school students are Latino, but these students only represent three percent of the total Latino student population. Latinos make up one-third (34 percent) of all U.S. Catholics and this number is set to grow rapidly given the median age of Latinos is younger compared to non-Latino Catholics. Amid these changes signaling a Latino majority, Catholic school leaders have considered how they might attract more Latino families to enroll their children in Catholic schools.

If the Church and its Catholic schools truly want to engage the Latino community in the Christian education project, it must reconcile how it has met (or failed to meet) the needs of Latino students. Inequity, poverty, and marginalization of children, in particular, must be seen and no longer treated as charity but rather as a central cause. To this end, I examine the Declaration on Christian Education, Gravissimum Educationis, to examine how Catholic education has applied the sentiment of the document toward the Latino community.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

One of the principle declarations to come out of Gravissimum Educationis was that all Christians have the right to a Christian education. Although GE does not specify what this Catholic education might look like (K-12, religious education, university), the document does reveal what the purpose of that education should be.

A Christian education does not merely strive for the maturing of a human person as just now described, but has as its principal purpose this goal: that the baptized, while they are gradually introduced the knowledge of the mystery of salvation, become ever more aware of the gift of Faith they have received, and that they learn in addition how to worship God the Father in spirit.

Central to GE is the idea that youth should be provided a forum, namely schools, to discern their relationship with God. My experience and research in Catholic education finds that Catholic schools, some more than others, offer students the opportunity to know God and develop their faith. As a result of their success, Catholic schools have become the central tool the Catholic Church uses to meet their Christian education goals.

But I ask, what of the thousands of Catholic Latinos who do not attend Catholic schools and might not be able to afford to enroll their children in Catholic schools? The tuition of elementary Catholic schools has increased by 69 percent over the decade and the high school tuition has jumped 139 percent, such that the average tuition is $3,673 and $9,622, respectively. In contrast, the median income for Latinos was $41,000, but this number drops to $38,000 when we examine foreign born Latinos. While there are governance models that focus on corporate sponsorship or philanthropic efforts designed to serve the poor, these are limited in number. Schools following these models, such as the Cristo Rey Network or the Nativity Miguel schools, could not feasibly enroll all Latino Catholic students. Catholic school leaders often argue that Catholic education is a matter of choice and sacrifice, while already poor Latino families are judged for not having the disposable income to pay for tuition. A judgment of this type implies that the average Latino should be able to pay for a Catholic education. But consider a family of four living in a metropolitan city such as Los Angeles or New York, where the average rent of $2,500 can cost families the majority of their income ($30,000). Most Latino families do not enjoy the luxury of relatives who might be able to help them economically, which is in contrast to whites who have 10 times the wealth as Latinos.
In good conscience, how can we promote Catholic schools to the Latino community and ignore income inequality? Are we satisfied with a Catholic education system primarily focused on those who can pay for it? Can we be confident in our efforts to amass enough financial aid to give to a lucky few? The educational experience for low-income Latinos is already precarious, and yet, making families wait for yearly notification of their financial sponsorship so that their children can attend Catholic schools risks imposing instability in the educational trajectory of students. In cases of working-class Latino families who do not qualify for financial aid, families often are forced to select one child that is more “deserving” of a Catholic education, a practice common abroad and whose impact on the family unit is questionable. I have sat with families that say they are willing to take on an extra job or two in order to make enough money to pay for tuition, even though this means they may not see their children, let alone have time to share in their love and worship of God as a family unit. This seems to contrast GE’s statements on the family as the first and most important teacher.

Gravissimum Educationis emphasizes the traditional Catholic school as the best (or more suitable) environment for students to learn and worship God. As the number of Latinos rises in the United States, there is a natural conclusion that Latino students will be the new face of Catholic education across the country. However, Latinos have never been the primary targets for Catholic education in the United States. Catholic schools have long time failed to draw on the cultural (religious and linguistic) backgrounds of Latino students, even though GE suggests the importance of honoring the dignity of every person.

All men of every race, condition and age, since they enjoy the dignity of a human being, have an inalienable right to an education that is in keeping with their ultimate goal, their ability, their sex, and the culture and tradition of their country, and also in harmony with their fraternal association with other peoples in the fostering of true unity and peace on earth.

Recently, a group of Catholic educators and researchers have tried to shift this lack of cultural responsiveness in the form of dual language schools, but these are few in number. Demographic shifts signal a new Latino majority in the U.S., and yet Catholic schools have been slow to respond to this reality. Latinos in the United States have been subject to institutionalized racism, a system of oppression and marginalization resulting in sub-par economic realities. Many Latino working-class families are one paycheck away from the streets and yet, Catholic school leaders expect them to take on the additional expenses of a Catholic K-12 education. Gravissimum Educationis does not force parents to choose a Catholic education (as popes and bishops have done in the past), but rather says, “Parents who have the primary and inalienable right and duty to educate their children must enjoy true liberty in their choice of schools.” Many interpret that choice to mean that when presented the opportunity, Latino parents will choose a Catholic school; and many do—at first. Attrition is a pervasive issue in Catholic schools and parents often cite financial issues as the main reason for leaving the Catholic school. Catholic schools boast of strong networks, but when a family is forced to leave a school, these gains are eroded. Research on student mobility (the act of students changing schools for reasons other than grade promotion) points to a detrimental effect particularly on Latino students. School choice has been a longtime answer to disparities in education, supported in some states with vouchers as well as wealthy foundations. However, even if Latino parents were given the option of Catholic schools, the sheer number of Latino families makes these options applicable to a select few and will certainly exclude the majority of Catholic Latinos.

Certainly, the Church has a responsibility to promote Catholic schools as GE suggests, but it also has the responsibility to develop environments that promote religious formation for youth unable to enroll in Catholic schools. GE describes multiple educational projects and yet, religious education outside of the Catholic school appears as an afterthought. However, GE makes it clear that the Church, “in fulfilling its educational role...is concerned especially about those which are her very own.” The document offers few specifics about these educational projects. Notably, for many Catholic Latinos, religious education is the only environment (beyond the family) that provides an opportunity to learn and grow in their faith. Therefore, if the Catholic Church wants to truly engage Latino Catholics in the education project, it will need to expand and strengthen its Religious Education programs to ensure that all Latino children have access to a Catholic education.

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5. Ibid.
Within the Catholic tradition, education is recognized among those rights that flow from the intrinsic dignity of the human person. Since the papacy of John XXIII, Catholic social teaching has relied on a human rights framework to advocate for the education of all people. This teaching was reinforced at the Second Vatican Council in their Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, and in their Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*. At the same time, the Council lacked a robust critique of the ways in which women and girls are denied access to education as a result of social and cultural factors that reinforce sexist attitudes and practices throughout the world. Today, millions of women and girls are denied access to education.

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deprived of the basic right to an education, making it one of the signs of the times to which the Church is called to respond. This essay will revisit the declaration on Christian Education from within this context, identifying challenges and opportunities to realize the Church’s commitment to education for all.

EDUCATION FOR ALL

In 2014, Malala Yousafzai became the youngest person to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. The 17-year-old woman from Pakistan drew global attention when a Taliban gunman shot her in the head because of her courageous advocacy for the right of girls to receive an education. In her acceptance speech, she united her story with the 66 million girls around the world deprived of an education. She lifted up girls from Pakistan, India, Syria, and Nigeria who are threatened with violence if they try to go to school. She specifically expressed solidarity with the Nigerian schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram in April of that year. As I write a year after their abduction, the nearly 300 girls have not been recovered.

Malala Yousafzai and the Nigerian schoolgirls remind the world of the obstacles that women and girls face in their pursuit of an education. The United Nations (UN) points out that 60 percent of the world’s illiterate population is women. In an assessment of 63 developing countries, they concluded that girls are more likely than boys to be out of both primary and secondary school, with the gender gap most significant among secondary aged students. Reasons for the disparity include social, economic, and cultural factors. Some impoverished families prioritize the education of sons over daughters because men have more economic opportunities in their context. Early marriage and pregnancy and the burden of domestic tasks also limit girls’ chances of completing school. Finally, the threat of harassment and violence at school and on the way to school are realities that keep girls out of the classroom.

The education of women and girls remains a high priority for the UN and is central to their Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Looking beyond the MDG’s 2015 target, the UN claims that “Equality schooling for both boys and girls is the foundation for development. No other policy intervention is likely to have a more positive multiplier effect on progress across all the MDGs than the education of women and girls.” Specifically, the UN estimates if all women received a primary education, infant mortality would drop by 15 percent and if all women received a secondary education, it would drop by 49 percent. If all mothers had a primary education, 1.7 million fewer children would be stunted due to malnutrition and if all mothers received a secondary education, it would reduce stunted childhood growth for 12.2 million children. Finally, if all women received a primary education, there would be a 66 percent reduction of death during childbirth.

These are just some of the reasons why investing in the education of girls and women is crucial for the well-being of any society. But as Yousafzai remarks, “Sometimes people like to ask me why should girls go to school, why is it important for them. But I think the more important question is why shouldn’t they, why shouldn’t they have this right to go to school?” If one considers education to be an intrinsic human right, then securing education for all becomes an end in itself. Locating rights in the dignity of the human person, the Catholic Church emphasizes the intrinsic nature of rights, including the right to an education.

EDUCATION IN THE CATHOLIC HUMAN RIGHTS TRADITION

The Second Vatican Council’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World lifted up certain human rights as universal and located them in the dignity of the human person:

At the same time, however, there is a growing awareness of the exalted dignity proper to the human person, since he stands above all things, and his rights and duties are universal and inviolable. Therefore, there must be made available to all men everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, and shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accord with the upright norm of one’s own conscience, to protection of privacy and rightful freedom even in matters religious.

This statement summarizes three key features of Catholic teaching on human rights. Rights flow from the dignity of the human person and are therefore intrinsic and universal. Rights, in the Catholic tradition, are discussed alongside responsibilities, emphasizing one’s obligation to the common good. Finally, Catholic social teaching acknowledges both negative rights—such as protection of privacy and freedom of religion—as well as positive rights—food, clothing, shelter, employment, and education. This view allows the Church to maintain that education, which is among “everything necessary for leading a life truly human,” is a universal and inviolable human right.

The teaching of the Second Vatican Council follows Pope John XXIII’s perspective on human rights as outlined in his encyclical, Pacem in Terris. The right to a general education, the Pope argues, flows from one’s right to enjoy the benefits of culture. John XXIII, who uses a natural law framework to
defend the universal and intrinsic character of human rights, articulated the connection between human rights and peace. Peace, for the Pope, comes from observing divine order on multiple levels—in interpersonal relationships, between individuals and public authorities, and between states. He declares as a fundamental principle of all relationships to be the acceptance that “each individual is truly a person” and therefore has rights and duties. Following John XXIII’s argument, securing the right to an education for women and girls is foundational for building peaceful and well-ordered societies.

REVISITING THE DECLARATION ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The Second Vatican Council articulates in greater detail the universal right to an education in its Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*:

> All men of every race, condition and age, since they enjoy the dignity of a human being, have an inalienable right to an education that is in keeping with their ultimate goal, their ability, their sex, and the culture and tradition of their country, and also in harmony with their fraternal association with other peoples in the fostering of true unity and peace on earth.

The document affirms the intrinsic and inalienable nature of the right to an education, grounded in human dignity and transcending race, condition, and age. The text locates sex along with ability, culture, and tradition as something that should be considered in the specific realization of the universal right to an education. Why did the authors not choose to identify sex along with race, age, and condition as a factor that is transcended by the universality of human rights? Assumed difference between the men and women is a concern among the authors in their discussion of how the right to an education is realized concretely. As a result, the document treats sex and gender differently than other social realities such as race, age, and condition.

The authors’ treatment of sexual difference reflects assumptions about sex and gender that are subject to theological debate. Modern magisterial teaching has favored the view that men and women have intrinsic differences that place them in a complementary relationship. This assumption underlies a number of Catholic teachings on marriage, the family, and the roles of men and women in society. Education, in the authors’ view, should socialize men and women to observe these complementary differences. The document names as a task the collaboration of parents and teachers of Catholic schools to “in every phase of education give due consideration to the difference of sex and the proper ends Divine Providence assigns to each sex in the family and in society.”

Allowing for differences in the way men and women are educated is not inherently problematic from a feminist perspective. In fact, some feminists have argued for this approach as a way to recognize the significance of gender in learning, knowing, and relating in the classroom. The real problem with the document, in my view, is that it fails to identify sexism as a social and cultural reality that, among other things, hinders women’s access to education. Without an explicit critique of sexism, the notion of gender complementarity can serve to reinforce gender-based discrimination. For example, if men are assumed to be more suited for leadership and women for domestic tasks, families might prioritize the education of boys and keep girls out of school and in the home.

The realities of childhood marriage and pregnancy, harassment and sexual violence, and the preference for boys over girls, contributes to the denial of the right to an education for many women and girls globally. By failing to acknowledge sexist attitudes and practices that influence how the right to an education is actualized in real contexts, the document could be interpreted as tacitly reinforcing educational inequalities among men and women. However, this interpretation does not reflect the Catholic Church’s teaching on human dignity and human rights. Nor does it acknowledge the Church’s rejection of sexism as contrary to God’s intent.

By naming education as a universal human right, the Catholic tradition has the potential to offer a prophetic voice in defense of women and girls who are denied the right to go to school. And, in practice, the Church has empowered girls and women through Catholic education even in contexts that would otherwise hinder their access. Representing the Holy See at the 1998 UN Commission on the Status of Women meeting in Beijing, Suzanne Scorsone spoke to this:

> Today there are more than 21.3 million women and girls being educated in Church-run institutions: 84,194 Catholic primary schools teach 11.5 million girls; 237,640 secondary schools teach 6.2 million girls; 3,163 Catholic colleges or universities currently have 1.2 million women students. The Holy See is firmly convinced that even before legal prescriptions or international decisions, the basis for a profound respect for every human person is linked to education. Indeed, it is virtually impossible to measure the harm that results for women, families and communities from ignorance and a lack of education, especially if this is perpetuated over generations.

A contemporary reading of the Declaration on Christian Education should be read in light of the Church’s efforts to empower women and girls through education. By naming the realities that deny women and girls the right to an
education while continuing their efforts to secure these rights, the Church could more effectively address the movement to universal education as one of the signs of the times. The Catholic Church, with its commitment to human rights and its practice of empowering the marginalized through education, could serve as a leader in the effort to overcome gender-based discrimination and achieve universal education, thus, realizing the vision articulated by the Second Vatican Council.


7 Yousafzai, “Malala Yousafzai - Nobel Lecture.”

8 Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes (1965), 26. Cited hereafter as GE. While I use gender-inclusive language whenever possible, the quote follows the language of the document, which lacks such inclusivity.

9 Ibid.


11 PT, 9.


14 This view is laid out more explicitly in the work of John Paul II and has been reinforced by Benedict XVI and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the past two decades. See John Paul II’s apostolic letter on the dignity of women, Mulieris Dignitatem (1988) online at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html.

15 GE, 8

16 A particularly influential example of this view is Mary Field Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Tarule, Women’s Ways of Knowing (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

17 GS, 29.

resources, power, and talent; no individual’s point of view dominates, authority for decisions and actions resides in the group, and work products reflect a blending of all participants’ contributions.³

Some consider parent-teacher collaboration to be the latest buzzwords to address the relationship between families and those who provide resources, services, and support. To collaborate means to work together in a reciprocal relationship based on mutual trust and care. First of all, in order to have a collaborative relationship, families and professionals must value the contributions that each of them offer. As Rose, Gallup, and Elam state:

Eighty-six percent of Americans think parental involvement is the number one way that schools can see improvements. Creating meaningful partnerships with parents, and involving them in school activities as well as the students’ studies, can help to improve educational outcomes such as grades and test scores as well as building self-esteem and decreasing the dropout rate.⁴

Researchers found that parents’ effort is more important for a child’s educational attainment than the school’s effort, which in turn is more important than the child’s own effort.⁵

As we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Christian Education, this essay highlights the importance of parents in the education of their children. The sixth principle of the document espouses the duties and rights of parents. Parents represent a vital source of support for increased student engagement and achievement; they bring skills, values, and knowledge that would benefit both students and teachers. Most importantly, they bring profound commitment and motivation.⁶

RESEARCH CONCERNING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The research is clear—what a family does to encourage learning is more important to student success than family income or education. Research has proven that when parents and teachers work together, everyone benefits: students tend to earn higher grades, perform better on tests, attend school more regularly, have better behavior, and show more positive attitudes toward themselves and toward school. School programs that include strong parent involvement are more effective.⁷ Beckman espouses, “Parents have the most significant influence on the lives of their children, hands down. When Church documents teach that parents are the ‘primary and principle educators of their own children,’ they mean it, not simply because it sounds nice but because it is a basic reality.”⁸

Other research studies indicate that parent involvement leads to decreased student absences and increased academic and behavioral success when compared to students lacking parent support. Students’ attendance is crucial to student success. Several reports have connected frequent absences to low academic performance and increased school dropout rates. Studies conducted lately indicate that attendance may predict a student’s academic achievement as successfully as test scores.⁹

Extensive research conducted by Ruby Payne examines the effects of socioeconomic status on student achievement. She demonstrates that differences in socioeconomic status are one of the leading causes of student achievement gaps. Students from low income households, she notes, lack resources and often lack support at home.¹⁰

Reinforcing the importance of collaboration, there is an African proverb that says, “It takes a village to raise a child.” Hilary Rodham Clinton drew upon this proverb in 2006, releasing the 10th anniversary edition of her book, It Takes a Village. The former First Lady, a longtime advocate for children, expresses her concerns for the children of today’s world and offers her ideas for developing our society into one that values children’s unique contributions. Collaboration is central to her vision. Although collaboration between parents and teachers is not always a smooth process, Clinton and others highlight the need to continue collective efforts to involve parents in collaborating and creating opportunities that will enhance the school experiences of children.

DEVELOPMENT OF PARENT-TEACHER COLLABORATION

I personally had the opportunity to begin the process of developing a parent-teacher collaboration plan at a Catholic school a few years ago. At that time, I was president of the school board at a prominent Catholic high school in California where my daughter was enrolled. During my presidency, one of the board’s goals was to increase parental involvement at the school. To set a context, I suggested the board review Joyce Epstein’s Six Types of Parent Involvement. This framework assists educators in developing school and family partnership programs. Epstein writes, “There are many reasons for developing school, family and community partnerships. The main reason to create such partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life.”¹¹

Epstein’s framework defines six different types of parent involvement:

- Parenting: Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.
- Communicating: Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school programs and children’s progress.
- Volunteering: Recruit and organize parental help and support.
- Learning at Home: Provide information and ideas to families about...
how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.

- Decision Making: Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.
- Collaborating with community: Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

The school board then sent a questionnaire to all families along with a letter explaining its purpose, which was to assess the barriers that impeded them from better involvement in the school and to invite their suggestions for successful parental involvement. The following four questions were included:

- In what ways does the school provide opportunities for family involvement?
- What is keeping you from getting involved in your child's education?
- What strategies do we use to actively solicit feedback, ideas, comments, and concerns from families and their children?
- What processes are in place to facilitate communication between families and staff?

Identified Barriers

What are some of the identified barriers to family involvement? There are many barriers that, if not addressed, can lead to families rarely attending meetings or other functions related to their child's education and future planning. With an overwhelming response from the parents, the following were identified as potential barriers to involvement:

- The lack of child care
- The lack of transportation
- Not being available during the time of the school function
- Not feeling they have anything to contribute
- Not understanding the educational process
- Having language and cultural differences
- Feeling intimidated

Successful Strategies for Parent Involvement

The results of the survey indicated that it was not enough to just invite parents or family members to the school for parent/teacher conferences and for school programs, but parents must be proactively supported in order for their involvement to be successful. The board took the following ideas into consideration:

- Offering ongoing training for families to learn about strategies they could use at home to reinforce student's learning
- Communicating between home and school on a regular basis (parents and families feel comfortable coming to the school, sharing ideas, and voicing concerns)
- Networking programs to share information and resources

Creating Opportunities for Increased Parent-Teacher Collaboration

What are some opportunities for schools to increase parent and family involvement? Schools can increase parent and family involvement by:

- Opening school gyms, pools, and classrooms for after-school events for families, with school staff present for interaction and communication.
- Providing a suggestion box for families who may not want to discuss an issue in person, but would like to communicate a concern or complaint.
- Offering school space for social events planned with families to celebrate families, students, teachers, and community. It is difficult for families to feel welcome at schools that have no space for families to go.
- Appointing a parent to serve in the capacity of coordinator of volunteers.

The development and circulation of the survey not only provided an opportunity for the school board to gather information about the parent-teacher collaboration at this particular school, it also enlightened the principal as to what resources were necessary to fully implement a plan.

CONCLUSION

As we review the Declaration on Christian Education 50 years after its publication, the Church continues to emphasize the importance of collaboration between the school and home. The Church was correct then and the Church is correct today. According to The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School:

Partnership between a Catholic school and the families of the students must continue and be strengthened: not simply to be able to deal with academic problems that may arise, but rather so that the educational goals of the school can be achieved. Close cooperation with the family is especially important when treating sensitive issues such as religious, moral, or sexual education, orientation toward a profession, or a choice of one’s vocation in life. It is not a question of convenience, but a partnership based on faith. Catholic tradition teaches that God has bestowed on the family its own specific and unique educational mission.
The first and primary educators of children are their parents. The school is aware of this fact but, unfortunately, the same is not always true of the families themselves. It is the school’s responsibility to promote this awareness. Every school should initiate meetings and other programs that will make the parents more conscious of their role and help to establish a partnership—it is impossible to do too much along these lines. It often happens that a meeting called to talk about the children becomes an opportunity to raise the consciousness of the parents. In addition, the school should try to involve the family as much as possible in the educational aims of the school, both in helping to plan these goals and in helping to achieve them. Experience shows that parents who were once totally unaware of their role can be transformed into excellent partners.16

10. See Ruby Payne, A Framework for Understanding Poverty for strategies to help impoverished students succeed academically despite economic disadvantages.
12. Ibid.
14. J.A. Ashbaugh, A Study of the Effects of Parental Involvement in the Success of Students on a High-Stakes State Examination (PhD diss., Duquesne University, 2009).
16. Ibid., 48.

In the waning months of 1965, the Catholic Church concluded the Second Vatican Council with the publication of several decrees and declarations. John Cogley, reporting for the New York Times on the progress of Vatican II, commented on those final weeks: “The fourth and final session of the Ecumenical Council Vatican II has been a business-like meeting devoid of the excitement and dramatic encounters of earlier sessions…The dominant note of the present session is a search for consensus.”16

Tucked rather quietly into the final slate of deliberations, Gravissimum Educationis, the Council’s Declaration on Christian Education, drew little fanfare and garnered swift approval with an overwhelming majority vote.2 American newspaper coverage spoke only to Gravissimum’s calls for the widespread accessibility of moral education, the civic support of religious schools, and the role of parents.3 In the United States, Catholic education in...
1965 appeared, albeit deceptively, to be in fine form: enrollment figured at an all-time high as a result of Catholic immigration, demand for access outpaced available seats, and staffing leaned heavily on the commitment of women and men religious. On the surface, the declaration could be seen to affirm the current realities of American Catholic education. But, an undercurrent of crisis would surface as the school system’s unsuccessful efforts to meet the overwhelming demand eventually led to precipitous declines in enrollment and a shifting workforce, trends that continue today.4

Based on public response to the document in 1965, one might posit that Gravissimum would offer little impact on the future of Catholic education. Yet, few could ever have imagined the transformation that would result from Vatican II when it began. John XXIII’s aggiornamento not only opened the windows of the Church for fresh air.3 It initiated a radical look at the Catholic identity of the universal Church and its mission with winds of change remarkably powerful for an institution that prided itself on tradition and preservation. The Council was at once a simultaneous maneuvering of the Church to delineate apostolic legacy all the while revolutionizing Catholic faith experience in the modern world. Such was the “updating” that Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI brought to the fore.

From my vantage point as a 21st century Catholic educator, I believe that the transformative impact of Gravissimum Educationis was not felt in its immediate era, but rather one farther afield by about 50 years. Yes, in this anniversary year of publication, we are ready to hear the declaration’s compelling invitations to innovate the “ways and means” of sharing, deepening, and integrating the Christian experience for all in a pastoral and responsive way.4 Such continuity and creativity are the enduring themes of Pentecost and Vatican II. Pope John XXIII experienced his own Pentecost moment, one he recounts in his opening address to the Second Vatican Council (1962). Describing the moment of inspiration with Pentecost-like imagery, John XXIII believed that the Church needed “a new enthusiasm,” that the teaching of the Church needed to “be more widely known, more deeply understood, and more penetrating in its effects on men’s moral lives,” and that it should “be studied afresh and reformulated in contemporary terms.”7 He recognized that it was time to offer a fuller, holistic Catholic education to examine and innovate the “ways and means” of sharing, deepening, and integrating the Christian experience for all in a pastoral and responsive way.8 His own passion for innovation and renewal would inspire not only the council fathers, but all who participated in the work of the council—religious and lay faithful, Catholic and non-Catholic.

Gravissimum Educationis, along with other Vatican documents, emerged from that Spirit-infused beginning. The Declaration on Christian Education

with the confidence to share the Good News. Pentecost, after all, was the commissioning of the global and apostolic Church.

Cannot the same be said today? What draws me and others to Catholic education is not unlike what the early disciples experienced with Jesus: moments of mission aligned resonance, congruency of values, and belonging in a faith-filled learning community. There is a joy and fulfillment that pervades a Catholic educator who answers the call to teach. Yet, sometimes I witness colleagues who feel trapped in the same upper room that harbored the apostles. The challenges outside are daunting. Catholic schools face numerous questions about the authenticity of Catholic identity, the declining presence of religious involvement, and the increasing diversity of enrollment demographics. Models of learning are shifting, as are technological tools and relationships in society. And, the fiduciary needs for sustainability are juxtaposed with a desire to educate those students who might not have the financial access. Our predecessors in Catholic education these last fifty years labored to respond to these challenges with mixed results, evidencing an uneven history of determined resolve to survive or disheartened resignation amid closures.

I believe the Pentecost moment that began at Vatican II is still unfolding, only now in a new generation of educational leaders. As committed educators, we are engaged in the full metanoia of the Church, realizing the prophetic vision first articulated in the declaration. So how can we find the courage to speak? As a people of Pentecost, we can recognize God working in us and trust that we are not alone. We can look to scripture, tradition, and innovation for the winds of the Spirit to empower our voices to proclaim.

Such continuity and creativity are the enduring themes of Pentecost and Vatican II. Pope John XXIII experienced his own Pentecost moment, one he recounts in his opening address to the Second Vatican Council (1962). Describing the moment of inspiration with Pentecost-like imagery, John XXIII believed that the Church needed “a new enthusiasm,” that the teaching of the Church needed to “be more widely known, more deeply understood, and more penetrating in its effects on men’s moral lives,” and that it should “be studied afresh and reformulated in contemporary terms.”7 He recognized that it was time to offer a fuller, holistic Catholic education to examine and innovate the “ways and means” of sharing, deepening, and integrating the Christian experience for all in a pastoral and responsive way.8 His own passion for innovation and renewal would inspire not only the council fathers, but all who participated in the work of the council—religious and lay faithful, Catholic and non-Catholic.

Gravissimum Educationis, along with other Vatican documents, emerged from that Spirit-infused beginning. The Declaration on Christian Education
firmly rooted the missiology of the Church in an evangelizing education that attends to the needs of the whole child as a member of the community:

The influence of the Church in the field of education is shown in a special manner by the Catholic school. No less than other schools does the Catholic school pursue cultural goals and the human formation of youth. But its proper function is to create for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity, to help youth grow according to the new creatures they were made through baptism as they develop their own personalities, and finally to order the whole of human culture to the news of salvation so that the knowledge the students gradually acquire of the world, life and man is illumined by faith.9

The distinctive proposition of Catholic education is its potential to weave together faith with learning and community, in the school and in the world. Within the declaration, we observe the importance and adaptability of such integrative education for human formation, the quality and approach of that enterprise, and the persons and communities who are charged with that mission. For the 21st century school, this integration of Gospel spirit is essential for forming our young people for wholeness and life in an exponentially advancing civilization. The windows of Vatican II were left open to allow for engagement with the world and a response to the changing needs of students and teachers.

Amid a hierarchy of constituents, Gravissimum Educationis recognized the prominent role of teachers in the educational mission of the Church. Extending the theological constructs on the laity from the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium, the narrative described three elements that define the nature of the educator—vocation, formation, and gospel witness:

Beautiful indeed and of great importance is the vocation of all those who aid parents in fulfilling their duties and who, as representatives of the human community, undertake the task of education in schools. This vocation demands special qualities of mind and heart, very careful preparation, and continuing readiness to renew and adapt.10

But let teachers recognize that the Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and programs. They should therefore be very carefully prepared so that both in secular and religious knowledge they are equipped with suitable qualifications and also with a pedagogical skill that is in keeping with the findings of the contemporary world. Intimately linked in charity to one another and to their students and endowed with an apostolic spirit, may teachers by their life as much as by their instruction bear witness to Christ, the unique Teacher.11

The affirmation of the educator’s vocation in these passages is a powerfully prophetic statement by the evolving Church. I imagine that discussions of vocation at that time were both carefully considered and hotly contested, just as they are now. While promoting the common call to holiness offered by baptism, other conciliar documents delineated the vocations of those vowed and ordained religious.12 And yet, overall, an expanding value and lexicon for the laity in the council resulted in a new sense of apostolic relationship available to all—laity and religious—that is inclusive of partnership and participation in the life of the Church.13

This attention draws out the specific lay vocation of the educator, demonstrating the priority and pride of place for the educator’s work in the shifting Catholic paradigm. “The work of these teachers, this sacred synod declares, is in the real sense of the word an apostolate most suited to and necessary for our times and at once a true service offered to society.”14 Here, the teacher is called to follow in the footsteps of the first apostles: hearts blazing with faith, challenged to grow as a professional educator who utilizes the best of academic inquiry, spiritual seeking and pedagogical skill, and “endowed with apostolic spirit” to become “a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself.”15 Each of these elements is intimately connected to the living tradition of the Church while boldly empowering for the future. Growth for education and the educator are paramount and it is indeed up to us, as the declaration suggests.

If Gravissimum Educationis and the lessons of Vatican II speak to the people of God at all in the 21st century, let it be that the laity are awaking to leadership. Certainly, the demographics showcase a new permanence: 97.2% of all Catholic educators are lay people with the remainder left to clergy and religious.16 Though there is at times hesitation to embrace the lay leadership vocation of Catholic education, the American Church has affirmed this position in the last 50 years with episcopal publications that speak to the formative encouragement of administrators and teachers while religiously sponsored schools emphasize educator formation in their charism.17 And more recently, the Congregation for Catholic Education, accompanied by Pope Francis’s blessing, is exploring education through the conciliar values of dialogue, diversity, and universality in affirmation of the changing needs of the Church.18 Such conversations, as well as those that happen on the campuses of schools every day, indicate the support of clergy and religious to carry forward
the educational apostolate in ways that enable educators to define our own Catholic lay vocation.

If all Catholic educators of the 21st century were to truly accept the declaration’s invitation to vocation, formation, and Gospel witness, the result of such a response would be, simply, the Reign of God, here in our midst and still yet to come. Our Church near and far would become a community of transformation, offering a powerful experience of evangelization. As Pope Francis describes in Evangelii Gaudium, “an evangelizing community knows that the Lord has taken the initiative, he has loved us first (cf. 1 Jn 4:19), and therefore we can move forward, boldly take the initiative, go out to others, seek those who have fallen away, stand at the crossroads and welcome the outcast.”

Such a description is one more reminder of Pentecost and the possibilities of the Spirit to empower God’s people.

Today, the vision, philosophy, and pedagogy of Gravissimum Educationis in our Catholic schools offer the greatest potential to evangelize 21st century communities, perhaps even more potently than do similar efforts in parishes. In a review of personnel numbers alone, lay Catholic educators outnumber lay professional ministers in parish ministry seven to one. What does this say about where people are drawn to witness the Gospel in their vocation? The loving, learning, and transforming relationships in Catholic schools embody a reality of Church, especially for young people, families, and educators, which is closer to the Gospel experience than can be commonly found in the parish. For successful and sustainable schools, this speaks of the fiduciary, organizational, and personnel systems in place to support such relational evangelization. And, for those imagining new paradigms of educational program and operations, the creativity of innovation is emerging with exciting results.

Those Catholic schools and educators that have already affirmed their apostolic call to proclaim the Good News in Catholic education are evidence of the Spirit’s gifts in this new era.

The Spirit’s blessing came down upon everyone there in the upper room. This is the prophetic image offered by the Declaration on Christian Education. Catholic learning communities can embody the best of Catholic identity, integrating theological understanding and faith practice that exist in universal relationship with a diverse and complex world. For all connected to Catholic education, this is our common call to respond to the signs of the times. Catholic educators can lead our Church with wisdom, partnership, and vision. Perhaps it is time we anoint each other with the Spirit who lives and breathes within us. Veni Sancte Spiritus, Come Holy Spirit! Inspire us with the fire of your love.

3 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 5.
11 Ibid.
12 Several documents on categories of vocation (Clergy, missionary, women religious) were also published in 1965.
13 Lumen Gentium, Gaudium et Spes, among others, explore the common call to holiness and new terms for the faithful People of God, the Body of Christ, the Church.
14 GE, 8.
15 Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium (1964), 33. Cited hereafter as LG.
17 To Teach as Men Did, Lay Catholics in Schools. The Religious Dimensions of Education in a Catholic School, Renewing our Commitment are series publications by the USCCB. Many religious congregations—Jesuits, Mercy Sisters, Religious of the Sacred Heart, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Christian Brothers, and others—developed materials and processes that prioritize charism formation.
21 The Drexel Schools Initiative in the Diocese of San Jose is one model of creative, strategic Catholic schooling in California. See http://drexel.sj.org/site/default.aspx?PageID=1
A few days ago, I attended a recognition ceremony of a nun who had been teaching for 50 years, and I was struck by her humility as she modeled how ongoing self-critique allowed her to continue to grow, improve, and thrive. She did not have all the answers, she told us, and even after 50 years of award-winning teaching, it was questioning the answers that she thought she had that made her teaching more effective. She reminded us that education is most impactful when it dives into the tension between what we know and what we have yet to question, between who we already are and whom we have yet to become. That is, education is most impactful not when it downplays or attempts to simplistically resolve the many contradictions within, but rather, when it dives into these tensions and balancing acts to explore the possibilities for learning.

With her experiences as the backdrop, I returned home and reread the Second Vatican Council’s declaration on Christian Education. I found myself stirred by at least two tensions that the declaration suggests lie at the core of Christian education. It was not difficult for me to reflect on my own
teaching experiences to see how very present these contradictions were in schools and how they have the potential to be both troubling and productive when fully engaged.

MY OWN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Twenty years ago, soon after teaching abroad for a year, I returned to the neighborhood where I grew up and began a full-time position as a mathematics teacher at a small Catholic high school. I was both curious about and eager to teach in a school where faith and religious education were a central part of the identity and the curriculum, unlike the public schools that I had attended not too long prior. The school had about one-fourth the size of enrollment of the typical public high school in the area, which made my job enviable to my teacher colleagues at other schools. I still remember fondly how the small classes allowed me to frequently interact with my students, monitor their progress, advise them on projects, and communicate with their parents. It also provided opportunities for additional student interaction, as when advising independent projects, coaching the math league, or creating and conducting an after-school choir, which this school afforded me the freedom and support to pursue.

These school characteristics helped me to understand why many of the students in the Catholic school did not identify as Catholic and/or had parents who also did not identify as Catholic, but who nonetheless sought a Catholic school because they believed, rightly or wrongly, that it would offer what was not commonly found in the larger public schools. The school boasted smaller class sizes and more individualized attention; high expectations for academic rigor and multiple avenues for advanced study; rich interdisciplinary curricula that included the arts; an emphasis on student independent research; ample opportunity for participation in extra-curricular activities; and of course, attention to the spiritual and moral dimensions of our lives through Catholic teachings.

TEACHING WHAT TO THINK VERSUS TEACHING HOW TO THINK

The centrality of Catholicism at the school did not mean that the practice of Catholic education was without ambiguity and contradiction. At the orientation for new faculty, for example, we were instructed that, as teachers, we were not to say anything in contrast to the teachings of the pope. When the new science teacher asked what this meant if a student were to ask about birth control, we were told not to answer, but instead to point to the phone book allowing them to research on their own. So, too, with sexual orientation: “Don’t ask, don’t tell” was the practice not only in the military at that time, but also in this school, where rumors circulated of gay, lesbian, and bisexual teachers, but where conversations were hushed, except to reprimand homophobic name-calling.

Yet, in that same new-teacher orientation and in faculty meetings throughout the year, the teachers were reminded that one of our primary goals was to install a curiosity and skepticism within our students, and to support them in developing their own capacity for independent thinking and critical questioning, particularly about injustices in their communities and the world. Toward that end, students needed to meet a community-service requirement of hundreds of hours that linked the ideals of “doing good” with actually going out into communities to do so. During their junior year, all students needed to conduct an independent research project that culminated in a formal presentation, and although the topic was of their choosing, many chose topics of social relevance and controversy. Every spring, even if students were not taking a math course at the time, they needed to research a topic and prepare a poster presentation that showed math in everyday life. Furthermore, in our math department, we opted to adopt textbooks that replaced drills and repetition with individual inquiry and student-generated knowledge.

As we were teaching students the church doctrine, we were also teaching students to question any doctrine. As we were preparing students to fit into the church and the world at large, we were also supporting students in changing the world and all aspects within. And while these contradictions, at first glance, may have seemed counterproductive, or hypocritical, or uneasy, I eventually came to appreciate how such contradictions are always at the heart of the educational endeavor and are most productive when we refuse to downplay or simplistically resolve them. Education happens only when diving into and working through contradictions. We needed to teach, even as we troubled those very teachings. We needed to expose students to new knowledge and ideas, even as we taught students to see the limits and partiality of any knowledge being taught as they aimed to co-construct what we do not yet know. This was the kind of student that we believed our Catholic schools should be striving to graduate.

WHOM AND WHAT WE TEACH VERSUS HOW AND WHY WE TEACH

Over the past few decades, the face of Catholic education has changed in several ways. We see a “browning” of the Catholic Church membership and audience as Catholicism continues to spread in industrializing nations in Africa, Asia, and South America, while at the same time shrinking in the West. Simultaneously, educational institutions are experiencing a similar demographic shift, not only in universities abroad, but even in K-12 schools in the United States, particularly as parish Catholic schools shrink and new schools targeting underserved populations of students in urban contexts
expand. As these K-12 Catholic schools shift to serve a different population, they are also recruiting more and more from families that do not identify as Catholic, but that seek an alternative to public schools. And as the percentage of Catholic-identified students shrink, so does the percentage of religious members who are teachers, meaning that more lay persons, and even more non-Catholic persons, are teaching in Catholic schools. Not surprisingly, Catholic schools often find themselves struggling to strike a balance between serving Catholic and non-Catholic students while staying true to their Catholic mission.

At the Catholic school where I taught, we frequently reminded ourselves of the mission put forth by the religious order that founded the school and its historical commitment to serving communities in highest need. Similarly, at the university where I currently lead, we frequently remind ourselves of our Jesuit Catholic founding and the centuries-long legacy of advancing care and justice for those people who are most marginalized, particularly through an education that centers on teaching and learning in the service of these higher ideals. And we do so regardless of the religious affiliation or non-affiliation of the faculty and the students, but because that is what it means, we believe, to teach as framed by Catholic values. Catholic education is partly about the who and the what (teaching by Catholics, to Catholics, about Catholicism), but it is also about the why and the how (teaching in a Catholic way and within a Catholic framework). The shifting social contexts of any school or university provide constantly emerging new opportunities needed to dive into contradictions in ways that bring renewed clarity to larger questions.

CONCLUSION

At the 50th anniversary celebration for the teaching sister, I shared with her one of my favorite memories of my entry into the Catholic school. As an ambitious new teacher, I remember preparing my lesson plans for the first few days of class, attending meetings of the department faculty, and feeling lucky that I was entering the school right when the curriculum was undergoing a significant transformation. I was confident that I was the right person to help raise academic rigor and bring new vision for math education. Before the students arrived, as I readied my new classroom, the nun who previously taught in that room visited me, but she was now transitioning into retirement. She was still teaching, but only part-time in the courses that she valued the most—the remedial mathematics courses for students who otherwise would not be able to graduate.

As she welcomed me to the classroom, she shared why she continues to teach. Over the years, she had seen many curricular trends or reform initiatives come and go, and she had seen the demographics of the student and teacher population change, but through it all she knew that her core mission was to educate the students who otherwise would fall through the cracks, the students whom others had given up on, the students who are the reason why we need this school. Schooling toward a Catholic mission will, of course, evolve with the times, but it always keeps the wellness of such students at the center, she gently reminded me. I am still learning how to strike that balance, which perhaps puts me in good company with the veteran teaching sisters whose legacies I am honored to follow.