May 28, 2019

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Thank you for participating in our most recent survey, *Catholic Identity: Defining Characteristics*. As you well know, the mission of our Catholic schools is to proclaim the Gospel, to build community and to serve others. Catholic schools must provide an excellent academic program that is developed in a faith-filled community that reflects the teachings of the Catholic Church. As Pope Benedict XVI stated, “Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the good news. First and foremost, every Catholic institution is a place to encounter the Living God, who in Jesus Christ, reveals His transforming love and truth. Catholic schools are an outstanding apostolate of hope.”

As the parents and guardians of Catholic school students, you have a unique perspective on our Catholic identity; we welcome your opinion as we assess that identity. In our assessment of our schools, we are guided by the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools*. The survey you completed specifically assessed the defining characteristics of Catholic schools. The characteristics serve as the platform on which our standards and benchmarks are built. They provide the justification and meaning to all we do in our schools. These defining characteristics are:

- Centered in the Person of Jesus Christ
- Contributing to the Evangelizing Mission of the Church
- Distinguished by Excellence
- Committed to Educate the Whole Child
- Steeped in a Catholic Worldview
- Sustained by Gospel Witness
- Shaped by Communion and Community
- Accessible to All Students
- Established by the Expressed Authority of the Bishop
We had 1873 responses from parents and guardians and the results are most gratifying to see. Your responses to the statements were very positive, particularly in the following areas: the display of symbols of the faith throughout the school; the school is a community of prayer; Jesus and His teachings are made known to all students; students develop a closer relationship with Jesus Christ; and, the school lives the Gospel message through service to the poor and those in need. You can clearly see how closely these statements align with our defining characteristics.

As we look to next year, using your responses as a guide, we will be providing additional opportunities in our schools and diocese to assist parents/guardians to fulfill their role as the primary teachers of the faith to their children. By using our year of consecration to Our Lady of Guadalupe, we want to live Bishop Checchio’s words, “to set a fire in the heart of our world, allowing God’s love and power to burn more brightly here in Central New Jersey.” We will have many opportunities to work together during the upcoming school year.

One of the statements you responded to is: Our school does everything it can to eliminate obstacles that hinder or exclude students from receiving a Catholic education. As a school and diocesan response to your interest in this, we will refocus our efforts at advocacy for school choice in the NJ Legislature and for meaningful change to the current system of school busing. We will be looking for innovative suggestions from our parents/guardians as we work together to address these ongoing concerns.

As this school year comes to a close, I want to thank you for your participation in our surveys this year and your dedication to Catholic education. Pope Benedict XVI stated, “A good school provides a rounded education for the whole person. And a good Catholic school, over and above others, should help all its students to become saints.” Thank you for allowing us to partner with you and your children in this beautiful task.

Sincerely,

Ellen F. Ayoub
Secretary of Education