



CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE

Diocese of Salt Lake City

Is Catholic Education A Priority?

In a time when society challenges us to have the latest inventions, the most, more and the best we are besought with choices which tend to set our priorities on a definite path. Following the route suggested by advertisers and persons who seek to have everything can focus our attention on materialism and cloud our choices.

Many American households have a television in every room with the ability to receive hundreds of channels. The screens get bigger with each purchase. Our children **want** designer clothes, Ipods, cell phones, computers, and the latest electronic games. Because our neighbor's children are involved in every sport, dance, music lessons, and various other extra-curricular activity we feel our children will be deprived or at a disadvantage if we do not fill their free minutes with similar involvement. Newly married couples need to have a large house, taking on a huge mortgage, rather than living in something they can afford and saving for an upgrade when they have accumulated sufficient funds to buy a better home.

Due to these attractions and perceived needs many families have found themselves with huge credit card debt. They are most likely what is termed "house poor", meaning they are stuck with such a large mortgage, there is nothing to do except give up things or go into further debt. Credit card companies make it easy to get ourselves into serious trouble, locking us into what seems an unsolvable situation. The recent downshift in the economy makes it even more precarious for families with debts.

In order to maintain a lifestyle to keep up with the demands of society, in many cases both parents have to work or one works two jobs. Our lives and those of our children are so busy that we end up having very little family time. Fast food becomes a necessary option rather than cooking and eating a dinner together. Good eating habits have to be trained. If fast food is a regular habit, the syndrome becomes a way of life. Stress increases and we might ultimately realize that accumulation of things is not the stuff of happiness.

There are other values on which to base our choices and set priorities. A good healthy lifestyle is one such direction. If our children did not have all the latest or were at least restricted in their use, they might develop a keener imagination. They would have more time to just be children and fill their free periods with child play, games which involve exercise, dreaming, thinking and planning. Reading could replace sitting in front of a television or computer for endless hours.

Being out from under debt frees us to be happier and under less stress. It might be good to take a long look at what we have and what we need. Decisions should be made on needs rather than wants. Children learn to value what they have if they are not given everything they request. Giving in to demands does not teach them to be patient and work for what they receive.

It seems that Catholic schools are last on the list of wants/needs. Why do you send your child to a Catholic school? If we see it as a priority to be a partner in teaching the faith, are we willing to give up some of the wants? Not to hold up our ancestors as a utopia, but most of our parents and grandparents saw the need to sacrifice in order to provide a Catholic education for their children. They recognized the value of the Catholic community assisting in the faith development of their children. Catholic schools have been proven to be the best way to provide that support to parents.

When you make the choice to send your children to a Catholic school, you may have to consider the fact that you can't have every material possession you want. The Catholic school to which you apply should not be expected to take a last place on your list of debts. If you are used to going to Hawaii or buying a new car every other year you may need to refocus your priority while your children are in school. A vacation to the local mountains or grandparents' house would be less expensive and provide more discretionary funds for education. Having an older car is no blight on your image. As long as it is well maintained it serves the purpose for which it is required.

Often, parents come in and ask for tuition assistance when they have a good income. The school should not be put in the position of being asked to help pay for trips or possessions by cutting the tuition. People in debt have placed themselves in that situation. It is not fair to the parents who really need assistance to be denied due to the allotted tuition income reduction being maxed out. It is also unfair to the families who do make sacrifices and pay their share of what it costs to provide an education to their children.

As implied above, coming to Catholic school should be a commitment which demands sacrifice. If our parents could send all their children to Catholic school and give up certain luxuries as a result, are we not able to follow their example? You might say that tuition then was not high but neither were salaries.

We want to thank all those families who have set Catholic school a priority for their children and have made the many sacrifices this entails.

Catholic school is one of the greatest gifts you can give your children. They will thank you for it later if not when they are attending school. In the process they will also learn the value of sacrifice. What a valuable lesson to pass on to the next generation.

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