

Column012620

Companions on the Journey

January 26, 2020

Dear Friends,

Today begins Catholic Schools Week across the Archdiocese and the nation. We still have a rich heritage of Catholic schools in this area but there have been some truly drastic changes since Saint John Neumann decided to open Catholic schools in the 1850's. Those schools were staffed, by and large, by Religious Women, the Sisters (aka the nuns). These women, who gave their entire life to Jesus Christ and in service to the People of God, the Church, taught, instructed, fashioned and served as examples of the faith for generations of Catholic children.

For this, they received their room and board in the Convent where they were assigned. Their Religious community received a stipend, per Sister, each month from the parish funds. There was no tuition for these parish Catholic schools for generations. It was not until the post Vatican II era when the numbers of Religious women began its precipitous decline and the famous baby boomer generation entered in waves into grade school and then high school that lay men and lay women began to be hired to teach in Catholic schools.

But the lay teachers could not live on a monthly stipend slightly more than the Sisters received. There was need to pay a living wage to these valiant Catholic women and men who made untold sacrifices to work for the Church. Parishes were not able to pay for such workers from the Sunday offertory collection. Another revenue source had to be identified. That is the origin of tuition in Archdiocesan schools. But what was happening in this area in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia was being repeated all across this great country.

I was a Freshman in high school in 1961 and there was no tuition but there was a book fee of fifty dollars. That seems like very little today but that was substantial then. Soon there was an annual tuition fee that started at fifty or one hundred dollars. That was in the mid to late 1960's. Today High School tuition at a Catholic High School can be anywhere from \$8800 to \$29,000 depending if it is a diocesan school or private Catholic school. Elementary education tuition can range from \$4800 per student to over \$20,000 per student excluding fees. Catholic education is almost completely lay administered and taught today. Our own school, Our Lady of Mercy Regional Catholic School is an excellent school. It is thoroughly and consistently Catholic in all it does. It is a Nationally Recognized Blue Ribbon School and has state of the art materials and skills, a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) school which we have expanded to become a STREAM school (Science, Technology, Religion, Engineering, the Arts and Math).

The teachers are excellent and there is a wonderful spirit in the school. One of the intriguing features of recent years is the school show which runs for four performances. This year it is Frozen II and fully one third of all the children will be part of the musical. It is such an enriching time and the shows are unforgettable events in the lives of the school community but in the young lives of these children. Keep your eyes peeled for the performance dates. Treat yourself when the dates come. Most of all pray for the success of our school and all Catholic schools and support them with your dollars in every way you can.

Peace,
Msgr. McHenry