

Affordability of Catholic education a major issue



Archbishop
Gregory M.
AYMOND

Over the next several months, the 22 Catholic high schools in the archdiocese are inviting elementary students to visit their campuses through open houses. What should schools and families be thinking about when looking for the "right fit"?

It would be great for every school to build an awareness of its unique gifts, charisms and characteristics and to present those to young people. I would encourage students to choose a school not necessarily because somebody

from their family went there or because they follow the football or basketball team but because that school has programs and an approach to instruction that would help them excel.

How do you recall your decision to go to Cor Jesu (now Brother Martin)?

It was a good academic school. I'm sure my parents knew that it was good in terms of Catholic identity. It also was close by. I could walk there. I also had come to know the Brothers of the Sacred Heart and had respect for them.

What did it cost in the mid-1960s?

I think it was \$350 a year. I remember at St. James Major Elementary School I went for \$5 a month. My two sisters went for \$3 and \$2 a month.

The affordability of

On the Web:
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Catholic schools has to be a major issue for you.

The U.S. bishops have pledged to make Catholic education available and affordable, but I must admit in many ways we have not. We continue to be challenged by the question, but we don't have an answer.

You appeared many times before the Texas Legislature to promote school choice, without much success. Why is school choice so important?

Even though sometimes legislators turn a deaf ear – and certainly the teachers' unions fight against us – in my mind it's a matter of justice. People's tax money is keeping public schools open,

and it's a matter of justice that the state has a responsibility to share somewhat at least in the cost of non-public education. We may not realize how well off we are in Louisiana. The state pays for a portion of our textbook and transportation costs, unlike in Texas. We have a voucher program in the city of New Orleans for the lower grades, but if we're really going to talk about justice, it should be extended to other parts of the state.

Are you encouraged by an openness to new educational initiatives in the wake of Katrina?

We can never give up. That's the way of the Lord. We keep holding up the vision – what we believe God is calling us to do as church. We need to work for excellence in Catholic education and for justice. We have to keep singing the same refrain and finding new

ways to sing it.

How does Catholic education in high school differ from elementary school in terms of faith formation?

I like to call our Catholic schools the "schools of discipleship." We not only teach knowledge and academic subjects, but we are also teaching and inviting young people into a relationship with the Lord Jesus and to be his disciples. At the high school level, adolescents are going through many changes. Family relationships become more rocky and tense, and they need someone to guide them in making those relationships valuable, beneficial and effective. They are at a time in which they are questioning many things about God and the church, and that's appropriate for an adolescent. We

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Baby photo on refrigerator sounds 'ultra' cool



Peter
FINNEY JR
CLARION HERALD

I'm dating myself. It used to be that the first picture of your baby was the one the hospital nurse snapped in the delivery room with a Polaroid camera. When the instant film was peeled back 30 seconds later, the photograph showed every wrinkle and was graphic evidence that your shriveled, little bambino had just gone 15 rounds with Muhammad Ali.

Mom had it a little rough, too, of course.

Now the first baby picture that mom and dad place on their refrigerator is the one of their child in utero, courtesy of an ultrasound imaging studio, which can provide remarkable details of their baby's development in the womb.

If seeing is believing, it is difficult to understand how anyone who views the 3D ultrasound image of a developing child at 18 or 20 weeks cannot be anything but over-

whelmed with a sense of awe and the sacred.

For the last 16 years, Mike Rodriguez, a parishioner of St. Charles Borromeo Church in Destrehan, has been an ultrasonographer, which is a fancy title for someone who brings a hidden miracle to light.

Rodriguez and his wife Melissa take baby pictures at a time when baby has the stage all to herself, when the spotlight is trained on incredibly delicate fingers and toes and the known world is soft, nurturing and safe. Quite often, that 20-minute ultrasound photo session is a life-changing experience, especially for an expectant mother who might be worried about the "burden" of having another child.

"Several women have come in and told me, 'I'm going through a tough time in my life and I don't know if I can do this,'" said Rodriguez, who runs Sound Diagnostics, Inc., in Kenner (www.sdn.com). "I would explain my own life and how we have five children. I would say, 'Look, this is a real life.' I don't know whether or not they were appeasing me, but almost all of the women have seemed to

have a revelation and left in a different disposition."

Rodriguez has offered his services to women's crisis pregnancy centers, but the good news is that most of them in the area have their own ultrasound machines that can show women that their unborn child has a heartbeat and a face, even if it has, as yet, no name.

Ultrasound imaging is safe for the developing baby, Rodriguez said. "In over 50 years of ultrasound diagnostics, there's never been a single instance of a problem that has been caused by performing an ultrasound," Rodriguez said.

Many obstetricians will offer ultrasound diagnostics, but few of them will make actual pictures available to the couple. Rodriguez says that's because of legal concerns. That's why he offers his services, which do not include any medical diagnosis.

Typically, a family will sign up for three sessions. At six to eight weeks, a heartbeat can be detected. At 18 weeks, the baby's gender can be determined. Quite often the prospective parents will bring in the extended family – children, grandparents, aunts,

uncles and friends – for the photo sessions.

"The most impressive thing to me has been the older generation who didn't even have ultrasound machines," Rodriguez said. "They couldn't ever imagine knowing the baby's gender before the baby was born. Then they see the baby blinking and moving his hand and doing all these complicated gestures and drinking the fluid and sucking his toes or his thumb. They are in disbelief. They are actually meeting their baby before it's born. I've seen mothers start singing to their babies. I've seen tears of joy."

With all his experience photographing preborn babies, Rodriguez has learned a few valuable tips. His wife's labor for their second-to-last child came on so quickly, he helped deliver the baby in the hospital before the doctor could get there.

"For No. 5, I made the doctor sit back and watch," Rodriguez said. "After the baby came out, I told him he could take care of everything else. He still charged me full price."

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