Reflecting on a Legacy of Spiritual Leadership, Commitment and Service

Bishop Francis Xavier DiLorenzo, 12th Bishop of Richmond, having reached the age limit for a bishop has offered his resignation to Pope Francis, formally starting the retirement process that is prescribed by canon law when a Catholic bishop reaches his 75th birthday.

The Bishop will not immediately step down from his office as the 12th Ordinary of the Catholic Diocese of Richmond. “The work of the Diocese and Parishes will continue without interruption,” Bishop DiLorenzo wrote in his Easter letter. The official announcement of his retirement will occur on the same day as the appointment of his successor. Until then, Bishop DiLorenzo continues to serve in the pastoral governance of the Diocese with all the rights and powers of the Ordinary.

Looking back with admiration and forward with anticipation, Bishop DiLorenzo reflects on his years of service and dedication to Catholic education with great humility. When asked what he considers his most successful accomplishments regarding Catholic education, Bishop DiLorenzo expressed, “tuition assistance, sustaining our school system and integrating our schools with students of diverse social and economic backgrounds.”

For the 2016-17 school year, a record-breaking total of over $5.5 million in tuition assistance grants and scholarships were awarded to Catholic school students in our Diocese. This represents contributions and commitments from individuals and businesses throughout the Diocese, inspired by Bishop DiLorenzo and his conviction that our Catholic schools welcome all children whose parents want them to receive a Catholic Education.

“Opportunity, hope, and faith come from the gift of a Catholic education. Our young people are defining their identity in an ever-changing society. Providing them with a strong foundation today gives them the tools needed to chart a path that is based on strong, well-defined morals and beliefs. Learning is more than that which is found in a textbook or measured on a test. It is a nurturing environment, one that models Gospel values and respect for all children. It is one that has rigorous curricula standards, one that challenges each student to think critically and interact globally, all within Christ’s teachings.” said Bishop DiLorenzo.

“When I arrived in Richmond, I found that our Catholic schools, though faith-filled and academically strong, had fallen on hard times. The numbers of families choosing Catholic schools were steadily falling away year after year. I wondered how we could be losing so many families when our schools were so good. I asked my staff to survey families with children in Catholic schools and those who had left. I discovered that affordability was cited by parents as the number one reason for not choosing Catholic schools for their children. I tasked a committee consisting of members of the diocesan school board, my staff, and several pastors to look into parish support and tuition assistance offered to our families. What emerged is the Parish Sharing initiative, which provides parents, including the poorest among us and recent immigrants, additional financial support and the chance to offer the gift of a Catholic school education to their children. Other important initiatives include the requirement of sound business practices in our schools, the founding of the McMahon-Parater Foundation for Education, the successful pursuit of Virginia scholarship tax credits, Federal Title resources, and adherence to tough accreditation standards.”

The Catholic Diocese of Richmond has developed a set of strategies aimed at increasing enrollment, and primary among them are increasing the pool of needs-based tuition assistance. Enrollment in the Diocese’s Catholic schools has stabilized and in recent years many schools have experienced enrollment increases. No schools have closed since 2009-10. Clearly, the increases in tuition assistance beginning in 2012-13 have made an impact on parents’ decisions to enroll their children in a Catholic school. In total, enrollment increased in 2016-17 and enrollment has increased or is stable in eighteen of the twenty-four diocesan schools when compared to the prior year. The future for our Catholic schools is looking brighter!

“The Segura Initiative has been a very successful program and has been replicated by other dioceses as a great example of integrating our schools with students of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.” Bishop DiLorenzo explained. The Segura Initiative for Children was

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initiated by Bishop DiLorenzo in 2010 with two students. Its purpose is to increase enrollment of Latino students in Catholic schools of the Diocese of Richmond by providing tuition assistance to Hispanic families who have demonstrated financial need. In addition, this Initiative is committed to providing professional development for Catholic school communities of the Diocese to ensure that they provide innovative instructional programs that foster a comfortable, bi-lingual, Christ-centered environment for all students. Today, all 29 of our private and diocesan Catholic schools are creating a welcoming environment and providing funding for 386 of our 948 Latino students. The passionate determination of our committed leadership team, a variety of recruitment strategies, and the passage of tax-credit legislation secured this outcome.

“As increased funding has been provided to families through tuition aid, more students with economic need are availing themselves of a Catholic school education. This vision of Catholic schools’ availability is exactly what my brother bishops had in mind when they set the bold vision for Catholic education,” said Bishop DiLorenzo, “I am proud to report that enrollment has stabilized in recent years due to these efforts. Today in our Diocese, thanks to our community support, we are able to offer the opportunity of a faith-based education to all, regardless of their economic condition.”

On May 18th, 1968, Bishop DiLorenzo was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia by John Cardinal Krol. This year marks his 49th anniversary of priestly ordination. When asked what Bishop sees as the biggest change in Catholic Education in his 75 years, he replied, “A transition from religious men and women in the classroom to very dedicated lay teachers.”

Fifty years ago, seeing a nun dressed in a habit teaching a classroom of children was the norm in Catholic grade schools and high schools across the country. Today, most Catholic schools are staffed primarily by laypeople. This change has happened gradually as a smaller number of men and women choose to become priests, nuns and brothers which means that fewer Catholic schools have them as instructors. According to The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in 2016-2017 there are 152,883 total full time equivalent teaching staff in Catholic elementary/middle and secondary schools. 2.6% of that total are Religious/Clergy: 2,470 or 1.7% Sisters, 784 or 0.5% Clergy and 743 or 0.5% Brothers.

All students have a favorite subject and for Bishop DiLorenzo, while in high school, it was Biology. “We had labs, so there was something about looking through a microscope and seeing things that the naked eye couldn’t see. I really enjoyed it!” When asked if he ever thought about being a doctor, Bishop chuckled, “I thought about being both a doctor and a priest. I went to Villanova for about five summers while in the Seminary. We were being prepared to teach Science in Catholic schools. I found that God answered my questions about where I should be – in the vocation of science or ministry – two semesters of Organic Chemistry was the turning point. It was an easy decision!”

The Bishop has a special message to our 397 graduating high school seniors. “As a community, we want to be supportive of their realistic choices. Our wish is that they would continue with the development of their faith through their college Catholic campus ministry.”

With retirement on the horizon, the Bishop plans to continue in ministry. “I am a lifer! I really like what I do. I wish the Office of Catholic Schools all the best. I will continue serving as Bishop, with the help of God’s grace, until Pope Francis appoints another Bishop.” he said, “Nature prepares you at 75 to say it is time for someone else to take over. I look forward to the changeover of the administrative work at the Diocese. I will continue offering the Sacraments and helping with daily mass and confession at St. Peters, by the Capital in center city. I ask for your prayers throughout this time of transition. It has been my profound privilege to serve as your Bishop. I am deeply grateful to you, the clergy and lay faithful, and I am satisfied knowing we did our best work together for the greater good of the Church we serve. I look forward to retiring here in Richmond and will help out in parishes where I am needed.”

Bishop DiLorenzo has led the Diocese of Richmond since May 24th, 2004. The Catholic Diocese of Richmond encompasses 33,000 square miles, including the Eastern Shore, stretching from the Chesapeake Bay west to West Virginia and Kentucky. It includes 150 parishes & missions and about 236,000 Catholics.

Thank you for your spiritual leadership and for reflecting so clearly the presence of Christ throughout your tenure as Shepherd of the Diocese of Richmond, Bishop DiLorenzo. We are inspired by your dedication to Catholic education and to our Lord. We send our heartfelt thanks and many good wishes to you, for a healthy, enjoyable, and productive retirement. God will reward you for all the work you have done for us. Our Diocese is clearly a better place because of your service among us. Your flock has come to know you and love you.
From Academics to Athletics: Epic Achievements from our Amazing Schools

All Saints Catholic School's 8th grader, Taiheem Churchill, was awarded the 2017 Black Catholic Youth Leadership Award and Augustus Tolton Scholarship at the Catholic Diocese of Richmond’s Black Catholic Leadership Award Banquet for his leadership and service at All Saints and in his parish, Holy Rosary.

A son of immigrants to America, Dean Ngendakuryio is the All-American boy. He attended Benedictine via its Corporate Internship Program. Dean also earned the rank of captain in the Corps of Cadets and earned first-team All-State honors on the football field. Because of his leadership, talents and hard-work, Dean will become a part of the United States Military Academy’s Class of 2021.

On May 12, 2017 the dedication for the revitalization of Monica Ashman’s Memorial Garden took place. The garden further unites the Blessed Sacrament Huguenot Catholic School family and community as it provides a long-lasting tribute to loved ones who have past as well as a place for survivors to remember and heal.

Charlottesville Catholic School was able to open doors this fall to our newest Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math Center (STEAM) that consists of a two-story 6,000 square foot addition. The Center has provided exciting teaching opportunities by offering more space and the appropriate materials so that students can truly have a hands on experience while inspiring critical thinking and problem solving. CCS is excited about the STEM focused science curriculum and all of the exploration that has already taken place since opening the new wing.

Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School’s Running Club meets every morning before school and is open to all students! The running program’s goal is to encourage students to be more health-conscious and to make exercising fun! Lourdes students start their day by setting and meeting personal goals while helping each other achieve them. Lourdes has over 100 students and many community volunteers participating!

Saint Benedict Catholic School joined the universal church in celebrating the canonization of Saint Teresa of Calcutta on September 4th, 2016, the church’s newest saint, just 19 years after her death. Students learned about the life of Mother Teresa, and they also studied Indian culture, including: food, art, and folk stories.

Saint. Bridget School transformed the 1917 Westhampton Baptist Church into a new 23,941-square-foot space that can hold up to 180 students. Elementary school operations will continue at the existing campus located less than a mile away from the new middle school campus. The renovation also provides a student commons, 10 classrooms, auditorium, science lab, cafeteria, teacher workroom, and administration offices. Site improvements include additional parking, drive-thru lanes, bus drop off lane, and wheelchair lift for handicap access. The Class of 2017 will be the first to graduate in the new school.

During the 2016-2017 school year, St. Edward-Epiphany Catholic School middle school students completed more than 2,200 service hours through the “Soar Into Service” Community Outreach elective offered to students in sixth through eighth grade. Students served dozens of organizations throughout the greater Richmond community and beyond both during school hours and on evenings and weekends.
Saint Gertrude High School students are connecting with teenagers in European countries through the Global Exchange Program. The program, in its first year of implementation, provides an opportunity for SGHS students to be immersed in the language, culture, and history of either France or Spain for ten days and in return the host sisters stay with a SGHS student and her family, experiencing life in America.

Three St. Joseph School students from the 8th grade class were accepted into the Governor’s School, including Maggie Walker Governor’s School for Government and International Studies and Appomattox Regional Governor’s School for the Arts and Technology.

St. Joseph School presented “The Sound of Music” under the direction of the school’s new director of theater arts April Corbett. Both performances were sold out.

Career Shadowing Experience (CSE) at Holy Cross Regional Catholic School is designed to give 10th grade students relevant and meaningful experience in a professional career setting and to aid students and parents in making decisions about college selection and future career choices. During Career Day, students set up booths and teach the rest of the school about their profession. Students shadowed the following professions: veterinarian medicine, attorney at law, physical therapist, orthodontist, architect, dentistry, marketing & communications, judge, software developer, event planning, pathologist, movie art department, and architectural engineer.

The hills were alive at Roanoke Catholic School on May 24 and 25 when a cast of 40 students, from PreK to 11th grade, presented “The Sound of Music” under the direction of the school’s new director of theater arts April Corbett. Both performances were sold out!

Sacred Heart Catholic School sixth grader Ryan Crawford won the National History Bee Charlotte Regional competition, sixth grade and under division, April 26, 2017. Ryan has been invited to compete in the finals of the 2017 National History Bee. Ryan also won first place in the school spelling bee held in February, and the Danville city-wide spelling bee in March after competing in 25 rounds. Ryan qualified for Scripps National Spelling Bee and National History Bee. Both competitions are scheduled the same week in June, so Ryan chose to compete in the Scripp’s National Spelling Bee held in National Harbor, Maryland. At this writing, Ryan made it through round 1!

Saint Mary’s Catholic School is celebrating the successes of our Eighth Grade graduating class whom have attended our stringent IB program since 6th grade, will move on to high school. Our own Jack O’Leary and Abby Kupstas received high awards for Spanish and French contests. Jack received “First Place in Classroom Experience” out of over 30,000 students tested from The American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese. Abby Kupstas placed first in the state of VA and was awarded the top National French Association platinum award out of 20,483 students tested.

St. Anne Catholic School held its first Faith Rally this year. The title of the rally was Mission Possible. Students were taken to various stations throughout the campus of St. Anne Church and School to learn about the many things that make our faith and our campus special. Our faculty and our 8th graders did a fantastic job! One of the sanctuary stops was learning about the holy oils with our principal, Ms. Schneider. Another stop involved students recreating our beautiful stained glass windows.

While the academic, faith-filled, and social growth of each one our students is what St. John Neumann Academy regards as its most important success story each year, our school community agrees that the financing and construction of our new school and campus is certainly our most exciting success story this year. Our new school, playground, and athletic field will open this August - in time for the upcoming 2017 school year and will allow SJNA to increase its enrollment to 250 students!
Christ the King Catholic School students have much to celebrate! For the fourth consecutive year, the CTK Mathletes, ranked “Number One Mathlete in the Nation.” Students in grades 3-8 meet biweekly to share their love of math! Students in grades 6-8 competed in the Second Annual Spanish Language Bowl. CTK 7th and 8th graders placed second and third. Students in grades 6-8 participated in Forensics, placing second in both Prose and Impromptu. Students in grades 3-6 competed in the First Lego League and won the Judges’ Award. Students in grades 3-8 performed in the musical “The Music Man, Jr.”

Our Lady of Mount Carmel 2nd graders became published authors this year. After receiving a grant from the Student Treasures Publishing Company, students worked diligently to create their collaborative masterpiece entitled “Letters to the Saints.” In this book, each student wrote a letter to, and drew a picture of, their patron saint. When their books finally arrived, excitement filled the room as they signed each other’s books. Being an author is cool!

Realizing that Christ himself was a refugee, the Peninsula Catholic community reflected on how the Holy Family was able to escape death through the help of a soldier. Sue Wilkinson, Catholic Charities, PC students and the PC community “adopted” a refugee family. A young father, a cook at the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan, his wife and their five children were forced to flee the threats of the Taliban. This spring, they arrived in the USA. Furniture, food, transportation, and monetary gifts were donated. An apartment was secured, cleaned and filled with all the necessities. They will find jobs and their children will register in schools. Our PC community is a place where all are welcome.

Using software and hardware provided by the Diocese of Richmond, Bishop Sullivan Catholic High School piloted Connecting Crusaders, a program that allowed Bishop Sullivan CHS assistant principal Dr. Dan Miani to teach a unit of probability to St. Pius X Catholic School students without traveling to their school. Later in the spring, Social Studies teacher Mrs. Chrissy Sweeney explored the wonders of Ancient Egypt with students at St. Pius X Catholic School also using the Distance Learning Program. All participants enjoyed the collective learning experience.

Portsmouth Catholic Regional School’s Forensics team traveled in April to Williamsburg for a Tidewater Catholic Middle School Forensics League meet against six other area Catholic schools and placed 1st overall! In January, Portsmouth Catholic Regional School participated in a school-wide Day of Service to support local organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, Maryview Bon Secours Medical Center, Children’s Hospital of the King’s Daughters, the homeless that were housed at local parishes, H.E.R., Inc., and Maison Fortune’ Orphanage in Haiti. Each grade level worked on multiple projects.

The 2016-17 school year saw an incredible rally for Saint Gregory the Great School mission of building strong relationships and community. With record-breaking donations through the tax-credit program as well as 100% participation of our school board and faculty in our Saints Annual Appeal, it is clear SGGS is dedicated to ensuring our students receive the highest quality education from an exceptional teaching staff.

St. John the Apostle Catholic School hosted a STREAM EXPO in partnership with Old Dominion University, the Center for Coastal Physical Oceanography, to showcase their year-long ocean research. This initiative focused on authentic, problem-based learning where St. John the Apostle students investigated environmental issues, and possible solutions, relating to our local ocean in Virginia Beach.

Saint Mary Star of the Sea’s middle school students supported the Haitian Ministry at St. Kateri Tekakwitha Catholic Church by raising funds to help four students in Haiti attend school for a full year. To raise funds, students pledged to live in ways similar to the people in Haiti. For a full week, students gave up technology, did their dishes by hand, helped prepare dinner, cleaned the house, etc. Father Michenet DuPortal, from St. Michel’s parish in Boucan Carre, Haiti visited Saint Mary Star of the Sea School to thank the students for their support.
The Office of Catholic Schools is updating our current curriculum for all academic areas. As part of our commitment to provide our students with an engaging, high-quality, rigorous program, the Diocese of Richmond has begun an effort to revise and enhance our academic curriculum. In the past, through the Consensus Curriculum process, content area curricula have been revised on a regular basis. The Consensus Curriculum was presented as a list of concepts to be understood by the conclusion of a school year. The Diocese is undergoing the work to transition from this concept-heavy list to a more skill-focused curriculum. Curriculum Councils made up of teachers from across the diocese met throughout the year to develop new curricula for Social Studies, Visual Arts, Health and Physical Education, and Music courses. In the coming years, all content areas will be updated with a focus on skills and application. All new curricula are organized into skill-focused standards. These standards define what students will be able to do as a result of learning and are overarching expectations for learning. These standards are supported by incremental targets, known as benchmarks, that enable students to meet the standard. The major differences between the previous curricula and the updated documents are the organization by skill-focused standards and specific, action-oriented and measurable benchmarks. Parents and teachers will be able to assess student progress much easier now that the benchmarks are measurable. The Standards and Benchmarks documents will be available on the Office of Catholic Schools website as each content area is reviewed.

"We are giving teachers a complete package with supports in place to assist them in their instructional planning and assessment."

Julia Crowder, Coordinator for Educational Programs

Consensus Curriculum Update: Bringing New Expectations to Student Learning