

## **Catholic Schools Leadership Banquet**

**May 16, 2019**

My dear friends and co-workers in Catholic Education, what a special joy it is to be with you this evening as we celebrate our 28th annual Catholic School Leadership Awards! This is a happy and blessed time to recognize and celebrate the outstanding work, creativity, and contributions of our Catholic School teachers, administrators, and staff members. Catholic education continues to be a light that shines brightly in the midst of an often dark world. I want you to know that I am so proud of you, so delighted to be with you, and so willing to continue working with you in this noble mission.

The Archdiocese has been working on its Pastoral Priorities over these past years, and Catholic Schools have been very much a part of these priorities. This past year we looked at what it meant to create a culture of encounter, after the encouragement of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, and as a result the 5th National Encuentro. We know that by the word, "Encounter," the Holy Father meant a true opening and presence of one person to another, and one community to another. This implies listening deeply to the experiences of the other, and trying to understand how another feels, thinks, and perceives. It does not mean always agreeing! But it does mean that we encounter others in the way Christ encountered them. In fact, Christ still encounters the world, but now through us. And so, teaching our children the spirit of Encounter is very important.

But now we are moving toward the next part of our Pastoral priorities, and this involves creating a culture of Accompaniment! The Holy Father,

when speaking to the bishops of Brazil, offered this thought: “we need a Church capable of walking at peoples’ side, of doing more than simply listening to them; a Church which accompanies them on their journey...” The Holy Father was referring to the many who have walked away from faith over the years. He made the comparison to those who, after the crucifixion of Jesus were walking away from Jerusalem in disappointment and fear. Jesus accompanies those who are walking away and, through encountering and sharing, turns their direction and brings them back to Jerusalem, back to their faith.

This is our challenge now, throughout our culture. Whether it is the Church or other important institutions many people walk away in disappointment. We should be the least surprised, because we know that in human life we struggle with our weakened, yet beautiful, human nature. In this sense accompaniment is about a return to a genuine understanding of what it is to be human. To be weak, yet loved. To be broken, yet redeemed! And only by means of faithful accompaniment can we help the human race to remember who they are — who all of us are — beloved children of God drenched in His loving grace. If we can help people to remember this, then perhaps we can help to create a more gracious world, and help to prepare for the Advent of the Kingdom of God when all things shall be summed up in Christ.

Encounter, then, cannot be a one-time thing, a temporary state. No. Encounter gains its meaning when joined to faithful accompaniment. Faithful accompaniment is the antidote to a throw-away culture, where we are tempted to simply walk away from every trial and problem. Catholic Schools, and you, dear teachers, principals, coaches, administrators, and staff, are the artisans of a new culture for the next generations! You are the

ones who will teach, not simply by words, but most importantly by your faithful actions, that a culture of encounter and accompaniment can be made real.

I am very proud of the academic and athletic accomplishments of all of our schools. But I must tell you, I am most especially proud that we have the opportunity to create a new generation of disciples and missionaries for Christ! That is our greatest testimony in the tradition of Catholic education.

May Our Lord bless you and accompany you in your journey. And, let's be sure to accompany one another along the way! Amen!