

Good afternoon. My name is Lytia Reese, and I am the Superintendent of Schools. I would also like to introduce the members of the Office of Education; Judith Brandon- Senior Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent; Michael Mastrocinque- Director of Instruction; Anna Bragg- Director of Marketing and Enrollment; and Marcia Navarro- Assistant Superintendent of Leadership. Thank you for all that you do in service to our school leaders, faculty and staff.

As you've probably heard, the Diocese of Raleigh turns 100 next year. As we begin the commemoration of our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it is only fitting that we celebrate the good news of our schools. For the first time in the history of the diocese, we have all gathered together, faculty and staff, as a faith-community of Catholic schools to worship and pray for the sacred work that lies ahead of us- the ministry of Catholic schools- to transform of our communities (local, national, and global) by ensuring all students are formed into passionate disciples and leaders for the Church who evangelize through Sacred Scriptures, practice our faith traditions, and serve as the hands and feet of Christ.

At this time, I would like to welcome the newest members of our Catholic schools! If you are a new to Catholic schools, please stand. Welcome to Catholic schools in the Diocese of Raleigh! If you are celebrating your 5<sup>th</sup> year of service to Catholic schools, please stand. If

you are celebrating your 10<sup>th</sup> year of service, please stand. 15 years... 20 years... 25 years... 30 years... 35 years... 40 years... 45 years... more than 45 years? Thank you to all of our faculty and staff for your hard work, dedication and formation of our disciples and scholars.

I'd like to take some time to honor the history of our past 100 years and set the vision for our Catholic schools over the next 100 years. Over more than the past 100 years, we have grown our enrollment from the first student enrolled in our oldest Catholic school, St. Mary in Wilmington, established in 1869 to the over 9,200 students we served in our Catholic schools last year. Together, we have reversed the trend of diocesan-wide declining enrollment and in the last 3 years, we've grown our diocesan-wide student body over 10.2%, achieving the highest student enrollment in the history of the diocese. And we are continuing to grow! As Catholic schools across the country close, a majority of the schools in the Diocese of Raleigh are approaching capacity and others are expanding. Infant of Prague will open its doors to high school students having expanded from a PK-8 to a PK-12. Blessed Sacrament will open their new middle school facility to accommodate their growing school community. And, under the leadership of Bishop Luis, the Office of Education is exploring the opening of a new diocesan high school in Durham. We have concluded the first phase of the feasibility study and will begin phase two, a

financial feasibility study to ascertain the operational vitality and sustainability of a new diocesan high school in Durham. As we look forward to the next 100 years, our vision is to fully realize the evangelizing mission of Catholic schools by ensuring we are accessible to and inclusive of any student regardless of location, socio-economic status, race, cultural background, religious affiliation or learning exceptionality.

In the last century, our Catholic schools in our diocese provided its students in eastern NC with an excellent education and established a reputation for caring, faith-filled classrooms with high academic standards. As we envision the next century of Catholic school education, it is important that we evolve and embrace innovations and tools that will assist us in delivering rigorous and engaging academic programs which are infused with Catholic Social Teachings and Gospel Values. In this way, we will have the capacity to welcome, celebrate, develop, and meet the needs of all learners.

This shared vision will require each of us to contribute our individual gifts and talents and to make personal sacrifices to advance the greater good. Our society enjoys autonomy, celebrates individuality, and takes pride in individual accomplishments, but, as Christians, we are called to be a community- one in Christ's Body. In first Corinthians 12 verses 12-

27 the Scripture says... As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ.

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

Now the body is not a single part, but many.

If a foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body.

Or if an ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended.

If they were all one part, where would the body be?

But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," nor again the head to the feet, "I do not need you."

Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor, and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety,

whereas our more presentable parts do not need this.

But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it,

so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another.

If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy.

Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it.

Therefore, we are called to live out the Catholic Social Teaching of Solidarity in our schools and in our lives. An explanation of solidarity found on the USCCB website states, "Solidarity acknowledges that we are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace."

Over the course the coming years, we must join together to do hard work of not only educating our students, but to also form them as individuals to serve and honor the Body of Christ. That our concern has to be for all our brothers and sisters, not only for those who like you, live like you, worship like you, think like you.

It is incumbent upon us to not only teach, but to model solidarity- To live it out not only in our words but also in our actions. To recognize that God created each of us in His image and that the diversity of those images belong in our schools and should experience welcome when they arrive there. We must have the courage to invite in and accompany our most vulnerable students and families into our communities and to love them enough to put their needs before our own.

Please be assured of our prayers. We are here to assist and support you in your service to our students and families. I wish you blessings on this school year.