



LORD, TO WHOM SHALL WE GO?

Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan

Graduates, Catholic Schools Look Forward With Hope

Being a Cardinal has its benefits, but few compare with the privilege of being able to travel across the archdiocese and visit our Catholic schools. What a joy it is to witness, firsthand, how the spiritual leadership of our pastors and the dedication of our teachers and principals are passing on the faith to the next generation.

Catholic education has a profound and lasting effect on those who are blessed to experience it. Students realize these blessings when preparing for graduation, as they reflect on the years at their school and their growth as learners, and as young men and women of faith. We celebrate these accomplishments with graduation ceremonies and parties, and at the seniors' Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral.

To our graduates: know how proud I am of your achievements! Take the lessons learned and the values taught with you as you continue on your life's journey, led by the light of Christ. To all our students: know how dear each of you is to me and, more importantly, to God. To our wonderful teachers and principals: a heartfelt thanks for your selfless devotion to the children entrusted to your care. Miracles happen every day in classrooms across the archdiocese as a result of your amazing work. And let's not forget all our moms and dads, grandparents, relatives and friends; you deserve a round of applause for your support and sacrifices made to provide your child with a Catholic education—I salute you!

Students, however, don't just wake up, diplomas in hand. It takes hard work, focus and planning. They must follow a specific course of study and well-thought out curriculum. Similarly, we cannot build that better, brighter future for our schools without a roadmap, a plan of action, a vision. That vision for our schools is what our strategic plan, Pathways to Excellence, is all about.

The Latin root of the word "graduate" means "to take a step," and suggests movement and progress. Much like our graduating students, we as a Catholic school community have also taken important steps during this past year to ensure our schools stay strong for future generations.

After much analysis and careful planning, we are moving forward with the regionalization process outlined in Pathways to Excellence. Simply put, regionalization is about every Catholic doing their part, sharing responsibilities and working together to ensure a vibrant future for our schools. Regionalization may be a new name, but it is fueled by the



Maria R. Bastone

PRAYING TOGETHER—Seniors from St. Vincent Ferrer High School in Manhattan pray during Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral April 26. The Mass was one of two for the Class of 2012 celebrated by Cardinal Dolan. Students are, from left, Victoria Bachurska, Feona Bryant and Adalisa Manjarres.

continue in the coming months to prepare them to begin operations in September. Then, our fully operational, pilot regional boards will also have the full support of the Superintendent's Office and the Finance Office as we work together to make our plan a successful reality.

same "can do" attitude and resourcefulness that have always been trademarks of our schools.

Our schools succeed because we all work together—parents, pastors, educators, administrators, parishioners and students. In that way, schools are like families, in which everyone has a role to play—from the superintendent down to the janitor who sweeps the halls. We all need to pitch in, roll up our sleeves and do what needs to get done, so kids get the education they need and the future they deserve.

Regionalization involves the coming together of parish elementary schools into geographic regions, so that everyone has some "skin in the game." Every parish will be responsible for, contribute to and have a voice in Catholic education in the archdiocese. Every parish will support the schools in their region, even if a school is not on their property.

As you may have heard, we have created three pilot regions: Staten Island, Rockland, and Northwest/South Bronx. Each of these new regions will be governed by a board, made up of outstanding and talented individuals committed to the mission of Catholic education, our laity working together with the clergy. For schools, this means that they will now benefit from the whole new range of knowledge and expertise these folks bring to the table, including finance, marketing, and of course, education.

Pastors and lay members of the new pilot boards have already begun training sessions which will con-

We've made some impressive strides, but there's still more work to do. Like the accomplishments of our students and their families, this work will require effort and sacrifice. Some struggling schools will painfully have to close this time next year, to create stronger, local options. But the end result is well worth our efforts. I knew this every time I stepped into a Catholic school this past year, whether it was Mount Carmel/Holy Rosary in Manhattan; Iona Prep in New Rochelle; St. Peter-St. Paul on Staten Island; St. Frances de Chantal in the Bronx; Coleman High School in Ulster County or Maria Regina High School in Hartsdale. I knew this when I looked out at a sea of young faces at our annual high school seniors' Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral. I've tried to inspire them; I know they have inspired me!

Graduation is a time of looking back with pride and forward with anticipation. During this graduation season, as we all take our next steps toward the future, we look forward with hope, a hope that shall not fail us. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we forge ahead with confidence and creativity, as we strengthen and modernize the way we support and manage our schools.

Planning for the future is what we do, whether you are a kindergartner or a Cardinal. Having met with students, teachers, parents, principals, pastors and board members, I know that our school system's future is in good hands...and ultimately, in God's hands.