

Thank Catholic schools for faith in every student

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By Sheri Conover Sharlow

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Their high achievement comes as they spend half the money of Indiana's public schools

by Sheri Conover Sharlow
Libertarian Writers' Bureau
<http://www.writersbureau.org>

While government schools scream about small cuts in their state funding, Catholic schools will celebrate the great work they do with half the per-student spending of their counterparts.

This is Catholic Schools Week, when schools nationwide will showcase what they do for millions of children.

Criticisms that Catholic schools skim the top talent aren't true. Many take all comers.

The difference? They don't let excuses explain away poor achievement. This year's Catholic Education Week theme - Faith in Every Student - perfectly sums up the goals of these schools.

I point to my alma maters, McAuley High School and Assumption Elementary School in greater Cincinnati. Both draw heavily from blue-collar families. Both have long offered a high-quality education that rivals some of the city's best schools. Both rely on parents and alumni to fund new facilities.

Surprisingly, Catholic schools frequently are less annoying than public schools that nickel-and-dime people to death with sales of wrapping paper, candy and other things that no one wants. This comes after they tax us to death. (Why do they need more money? Half of our education dollars never make it to the classroom, but get sucked up in education bureaucracy.)

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St. Paul Elementary, where my daughter Meredith attends kindergarten, strictly limits fund-raising to very few events. Focus on those and the school will get enough.

If you can't afford the tuition, even if you're not Catholic, these schools usually find a way for your children attend. They offer scholarships. High schools frequently allow students to sweep floors or wash dishes to offset tuition and to get work done less expensively

At my high school, these low-skill student workers freed our maintenance workers to do the high-skill work of taking care of the building.

Compare that building to Marion High School, both of which were built around the same time, and you'll see what a huge difference it has made. McAuley looks amazing. Marion High School is falling apart because maintenance wasn't a priority. Now the school corporation is sending taxpayers an

avoidable multi-million-dollar bill.

Catholic schools don't fit every student. Students with special needs may not find the proper resources. Some schools may have education methods that don't suit specific students. Some families may find that Catholic teachings clash with their own.

This is why I hope that Catholic Schools week inspires not only those who attend Catholic schools, but everyone who wants the best for Indiana's children.

Lutheran schools, which are common in Fort Wayne, do excellent work. Other Christian schools, whether denominational or non-denominational, are multiplying as parents become frustrated with public schools that challenge their religious teachings.

Actually, private schools are the proper places for morality-based teaching. Catholic schools trace their roots back 100 years, when public schools taught religion that was hostile to Catholicism. Instead of griping, Catholic parents put their kids in their own schools. Problem solved.

Public schools have their place. But we cannot expect each school to be all things to all people. Private schools have a vital role to play for our children. So could charter schools, if Indiana stops sabotaging them with restrictions.

Indiana could encourage more private schools and home-schooling by offering tax incentives to anyone who pays for a child's education. Despite public-school belly-aching to the contrary, this would leave more money for public schools because they would have fewer kids to educate and more opportunities to specialize.

Regardless of your religious beliefs or your devotion to public schools, please say thanks to Catholic schools. They demonstrate the amazing things that happen when we put faith in our children.

Sheri Conover Sharlow, a former journalist, is the product of 11 years of Catholic education. Her daughter, Meredith, is the fourth-generation in her family to attend a Catholic school.

Catholicism for Dummies – A Book Review

By Lisa M. Hendey

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I am always on the lookout for resources that will assist me in learning about my own Catholic faith and in sharing that faith with my children, family and friends. I find *Catholicism for Dummies* (Wiley, June 2003, paperback, 384 pages) an excellent resource for both my own research and for teaching the faith in a straightforward yet comprehensive manner. Authors Rev. John Trigilio Jr. and Rev. Kenneth Brighenti have compiled a wide-ranging resource which will be of help for anyone looking to increase their knowledge of and devotion to their own practice of Catholicism.

Written in a concise, organized fashion, the *Catholicism for Dummies* offers practical information on all of the most basic elements of Catholicism, including – but not limited to – the Four Marks of the Church (One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic), the structure of the Church, basic beliefs, worship types, the Sacraments, the Mass, and much more. Timely (and at times controversial) issues of concern to most Catholics are discussed.

I found especially enjoyable the "Part of Tens" which relates the stories of remarkable Catholic role models and landmarks. The two appendices, one detailing the popes and a second outlining a brief history of the Church, are helpful additions.

Buy this book for your own Catholic library or as a gift for a friend interested in exploring the treasures of our Catholic faith.

For additional information on *Catholicism for Dummies* visit

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0764553917/digitalcropper-20>

Lisa M. Hendey is a mother of two sons, webmaster of numerous web sites, including

<http://www.catholicmom.com> and <http://www.christiancoloring.com>, and an avid reader of Catholic fiction and non-fiction.

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