

Education's focus should be on creating good citizen's first

Dear Friends of Catholic Schools,

Just before Thanksgiving, I was blessed to participate in the World Congress on Catholic Education in Rome. This Congress was called by the Vatican Congregation for Catholic Education. Presenters and speakers, approximately 43 different ones from approximately 17 different countries, spoke about the theme of the Congress, "Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion."

The event began with remarks from the Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education. We were treated to an audience with Pope Francis at the close of the Congress. There were one or 2 presentations in English, and only one or two presenters from the United States in the sessions for K-12 Catholic schools (there were some separate sessions for Catholic colleges and universities). Thank heavens for headsets with translations (!), although I must say that I was embarrassed that I only spoke one language. Most attendees were fluent in multiple languages.

What occurs to me as I reflect on all of the information I heard in Rome is how the current trends in public education seem to be missing the mark. On the surface, it seems difficult to argue with the importance of "college and career readiness." Who does not want this generation of students to be prepared for the world of college and work? This end, though, is woefully lacking, and may, in fact, produce the exact opposite of the intended outcomes because this narrow focus ignores the primary purpose education serves in society.

Speaker after speaker affirmed that the greater purpose of education in society is "to understand culture, life, and the interrelationship of peoples." Education should be about producing good citizens who have the vision to identify problems and the skills to work toward ethical solutions for the good of the community. This can only be accomplished if students are properly formed as human persons who truly understand the dignity of life and the values integral for humanity. Thus, education cannot be separated from these values. One speaker commented that if secular education across the globe today were effective in accomplishing this greater purpose, we would not be seeing the types of senseless violent acts we are experiencing in our world.

I came away from the Congress truly with a "renewed passion" and also a renewed sense of purpose for our efforts with Catholic schools in our Archdiocese. I am thankful that we appear to be on the right track as we remain steadfast in "...forming young people as free and responsible human beings" (Pope Francis) who can bring God's love to our world that so needs to experience it.

¡Vaya con Dios!