



# Principles of Catholic Identity in Education



THE CARDINAL  
NEWMAN SOCIETY

Promoting and Defending Faithful Catholic Education

# Introduction

*Principles of Catholic Identity in Education* articulates elements the Church expects to find in all Catholic schools and which distinguish them from other schools. The principles are derived from Church documents related to education, including the documents of Vatican II, documents from the Vatican Congregation for Catholic



Education, and the writings of various Popes. The five principles are: *Inspired by Divine Mission; Models Christian Communion; Encounters Christ in Prayer, Scripture, and Sacraments; Integrally Forms the Human Person* and *Imparts a Christian Understanding of the World*. Each principle includes a summary which is comprehensive, yet concise, and reflects the language found in the Church documents.

## **Intention for Use**

The Cardinal Newman Society is dedicated to promoting and defending faithful Catholic education. These principles act as a framework to guide Cardinal Newman's K-12 efforts and to ensure they are aligned with the Church's guidance.

## **Suggestions for Use**

Because these principles are directly formulated from Church teaching, anyone involved in Catholic education may find them of use in providing direction, inspiration, guidance, or evaluation of their educational efforts.

## **Principle I**

### **Inspired by Divine Mission**

Catholic education is an expression of the Church's mission of salvation and an instrument of evangelization:<sup>1</sup> to make disciples of Christ and to teach them to observe all that He has commanded.<sup>2</sup> Through Catholic education, students encounter God, "who in Jesus Christ reveals His transforming love and truth."<sup>3</sup> Christ is the foundation of Catholic education;<sup>4</sup> He journeys with students through school and life as "genuine Teacher" and "perfect Man."<sup>5</sup> As a faith community in unity with the Church and in fidelity to the Magisterium, students, parents, and educators give witness to Christ's loving communion in the Holy Trinity.<sup>6</sup> With this Christian vision, Catholic education fulfills its purpose of "critical, systematic transmission of culture in the light of faith"<sup>7</sup> and the integral formation of the human person by developing each student's physical, moral, intellectual, and spiritual gifts in harmony, teaching responsibility and right use of freedom, and preparing students to fulfill God's calling in this world and to attain the eternal kingdom for which they were created.<sup>8</sup> Catholic education is sustained by the frequent experience of prayer, Sacred Scripture, and the Church's liturgical and sacramental tradition.<sup>9</sup>

## **Principle II**

### **Models Christian Communion and Identity**

Catholic education teaches communion with Christ, by living communion with Christ and imitating the love and freedom of the Trinity.<sup>10</sup>



This communion begins in the home—with the divinely ordered right and responsibility of parents to educate their children—and extends to the school community in support and service to the needs of the family.<sup>11</sup> It unites families and educators with a shared educational philosophy to form students for a relationship with God and with others.<sup>12</sup> The educational community is united to the universal Church in fidelity to the Magisterium, to the local Church, and to other schools and community organizations.<sup>13</sup>

The school community is a place of ecclesial experience, in which the members model confident and joyful public witness in both word and action and teach students to live the Catholic faith in their daily lives.<sup>14</sup> In an environment “humanly and spiritually rich,” everyone is aware of the living presence of Jesus evidenced by a Christian way of thought and life, expressed in “Word and Sacrament, in individual behaviour, [and] in friendly and harmonious interpersonal relationships.”<sup>15</sup> The school climate reproduces, as far as possible, the “warm and intimate atmosphere of family life.”<sup>16</sup> As members of the Church community, students experience what it means to live a life of prayer, personal responsibility, and freedom reflective of Gospel values. This, in turn, leads them to grow in their commitment to serve God, one another, the Church, and society.<sup>17</sup>

All teachers and leaders possess adequate skills, preparation, and religious formation and possess special qualities of mind and heart as well as the sensitivity necessary for authentic witness to the gospel and the task of human formation.<sup>18</sup> Teachers and leaders of the educational community should be “practicing Catholics, who can understand and accept the teachings of the Catholic Church and the moral demands of the Gospel, and who can contribute to the achievement of the school’s Catholic identity and apostolic goals.”<sup>19</sup>

## **Principle III**

### **Encounters Christ in Prayer, Scripture & Sacrament**

Rooted in Christ, Catholic education is continually fed and stimulated by Him in the frequent experience of prayer, Sacred Scripture, and the Church's liturgical and sacramental tradition.<sup>20</sup> The transmission of faith, catechesis, is intrinsically linked to these living encounters with Christ, by which He nurtures and educates souls in the divine life of grace and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>21</sup> By their witness and sharing in these encounters, educators help students grow in understanding of what it means to be a member of the Church.<sup>22</sup> Students discover the real value of the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation, in accompanying the Christian in the journey through life. They learn "to open their hearts in confidence to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through personal and liturgical prayer", which makes the mystery of Christ present to students.<sup>23</sup>

## **Principle IV**

### **Integrally Forms the Human Person**

A complex task of Catholic education is the integral formation of students as physical, intellectual, and spiritual beings called to perfect humanity in the fullness of Christ.<sup>24</sup> The human person is "created



in ‘the image and likeness’ of God; elevated by God to the dignity of a child of God; unfaithful to God in original sin, but redeemed by Christ; a temple of the Holy Spirit; a member of the Church; destined to eternal life.”<sup>25</sup> Catholic education assists students to become aware of the gift of Faith, worship God the Father, develop into mature adults who bear witness to the Mystical Body of Christ, respect the dignity of the human person, provide service, lead apostolic lives, and build the Kingdom of God.<sup>26</sup>

Catholic education forms the conscience through commitment to authentic Catholic doctrine. It develops the virtues and characteristics associated with what it means to be Christian so as to resist relativism, overcome individualism, and discover vocations to serve God and others.<sup>27</sup> “Intellectual development and growth as a Christian go forward hand in hand” where faith, culture, and life are integrated throughout the school’s program to provide students a personal closeness to Christ enriched by virtues, values, and supernatural gifts.<sup>28</sup> As a child of God, made in his image, human formation includes the development of personal Christian ethics and respect for the body by promoting healthy development, physical activity, and chastity<sup>29</sup>

In Catholic education, “There is no separation between time for learning and time for formation, between acquiring notions and growing in wisdom”; education and pedagogy, inspired by Gospel values and distinguished by the “illumination of all knowledge with the light of faith” allows formation to become living, conscious and active<sup>30</sup> The atmosphere is characterized by discovery and awareness that enkindles a love for truth and a desire to know the universe as God’s creation. The Christian educational program facilitates critical thinking that is ordered, precise, and responsible as it builds strength and perseverance in pursuit of the truth.<sup>31</sup>

## Principle V Imparts a Christian Understanding of the World

In the light of faith, Catholic education critically and systematical-ly transmits the secular and religious “cultural patrimony handed down from previous generations,” especially that which makes a person more human and contributes to the integral formation of students.<sup>32</sup> Both educator and student are called to participate in the dialogue of culture and to pursue “the integration of culture with faith and of faith with living.”<sup>33</sup> Catholic education imparts “a Christian vision of the world, of life, of culture, and of history,” ordering “the whole of human culture to the news of salvation.”<sup>34</sup> This hallmark of Catholic education, to “bring human wisdom into an encounter with divine wisdom,”<sup>35</sup> cultivates “in students the intellectual, creative, and aesthetic faculties of the human person,” introduces a cultural heritage, and prepares them for professional life and to take on the responsibilities and duties of society and the Church.<sup>36</sup> Students are prepared to work for the evangelization of culture and for the common good of society.<sup>37</sup>



## Notes

- 1 Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, The Catholic School (Vatican City, 1977) 5-7; Pope Paul VI, Gravissimum Educationis (Vatican City, 1965) 2; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, To Teach as Jesus Did (Washington, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1972) 7.
- 2 Matthew 28:19-20.
- 3 Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting with Catholic Educators: Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI (Washington, April 2008) 2; Pope Benedict XVI, Spe Salvi (Vatican City, 2007) 4.
- 4 The Catholic School (1977) 34; Congregation for Catholic Education, Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion (Vatican, 2014) III.
- 5 Congregation for Catholic Education, The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (Vatican City, 1988) 25.
- 6 Congregation for Catholic Education, Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful (Vatican City, 2007) 5, 10; The Religious Dimension of Education 44.
- 7 The Catholic School (1977) 49.
- 8 Canon Law Society of America, Code of Canon Law (Washington, D.C., 1983) 795; Gravissimum Educationis, Introduction; Congregation for Catholic Education, Circular Letter to the Presidents of Bishops' Conferences on Religious Education in Schools (Vatican City, 2009) 1.
- 9 The Catholic School (1977) 54.
- 10 Educating Together 10, 12-14.
- 11 Code of Canon Law 793 §1; Congregation for Catholic Education, Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith (Vatican City, 1982) 12.
- 12 Lay Catholics in Schools 22; The Catholic School (1977) 53; The Religious Dimension of Education 34.
- 13 Educating Together 50; The Religious Dimension of Education 44.
- 14 Educating Together 5; Congregation for Catholic Education, Educating in Inter-cultural Dialogue in the Catholic School: Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love (Vatican, 2103) 86; Lay Catholics in Schools 18; United States Conference Catholic Bishops, Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary & Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium (Washington, DC, 2005) excerpt.
- 15 The Religious Dimension of Education 26, 28.
- 16 The Religious Dimension of Education 25-26, 28-29, 40; Educating Together 48.
- 17 Code of Canon Law 795; To Teach As Jesus Did 107; The Religious Dimension of Education 39; Educating Today and Tomorrow, conclusion.
- 18 Gravissimum Educationis 5, 8; Code of Canon Law 803 §2; To Teach as Jesus Did 104.
- 19 United States Catholic Conference Bishops, National Directory for Catechesis

- (Washington DC, 2005) 231-233; Congregation for Catholic Education, The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium (Vatican, 1997) 19.
- 20 The Catholic School (1977) 54-55; Pope Pius XI, Divini Illius Magistri (Vatican City, 1929) 15-17, 76; Catechism of the Catholic Church (Vatican City, 1993) 2675; Educating Today and Tomorrow I, 1b.
- 21 Pope John Paul II, Catechesi Tradendae (Vatican City, 1979) 23; Educating Together 17, 26.
- 22 The Religious Dimension of Education 78; Educating Together 26.
- 23 The Religious Dimension of Education 79, 83.
- 24 Circular Letter 1; The Catholic School on the Threshold 4; The Religious Dimension of Education 98.
- 25 The Catholic School on the Threshold 9; The Religious Dimension of Education 55, 84.
- 26 The Religious Dimension of Education 95; The Catholic School (1977) 7; Educating Today and Tomorrow III.
- 27 The Catholic School on the Threshold 10; The Catholic School (1977) 12, 45; Educating Together 46.
- 28 The Religious Dimension of Education 51, 63; Educating in Intercultural Dialogue 64-67; The Catholic School (1977) 37; Lay Catholics in Schools 56; Educating Together 24.
- 29 The Religious Dimension of Education 84, 112.
- 30 The Religious Dimension of Education 1; Educating in Intercultural Dialogue 56; The Catholic School on the Threshold 14; To Teach as Jesus Did 102.
- 31 The Religious Dimension of Education 49.
- 32 Lay Catholics in Schools 12; The Catholic School (1977) 26, 36; The Religious Dimension of Education 108.
- 33 The Catholic School (1977) 15, 49; The Religious Dimension of Education 34, 51, 52.
- 34 The Catholic School on the Threshold 14; The Religious Dimension of Education 53, 100; Gravissimum Educationis 8.
- 35 The Religious Dimension of Education 57.
- 36 Gravissimum Educationis 5; Lay Catholics in Schools 12.
- 37 Saint Pope John Paul II, Ad limina visit of bishops from Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin (May 30, 1998); Renewing Our Commitment, excerpt; Educating Today and Tomorrow II-1.

## About the Project

The Cardinal Newman Society's publication of *Principles of Catholic Identity in Education* culminates an extensive review of Vatican documents from the past century to identify essential marks of a Catholic education.

It is our hope that the *Principles* will encourage new awareness of what makes Catholic education special and essential to the Church's mission of evangelization. At the Newman Society, the *Principles* serve as the starting point for all of our work in elementary and secondary education.

Although no project of this scope can capture every aspect of Vatican teaching, the *Principles* faithfully reflect recurring themes and key expectations of the Church for Catholic schools, with regard to their unique mission of evangelization and formation. As much as possible, the five principles cite verbatim the language from Vatican documents.

The project grew out of a plan to update criteria for the Catholic Education Honor Roll, by which the Newman Society identifies and recognizes schools that are fully committed to faithful Catholic education. Our goal was to ensure that the criteria accurately reflect the Vatican's expectations for Catholic schools and no other agenda.

The Principles were developed by Cardinal Newman Society's K-12 Education Fellow Dr. Jamie Arthur, Deputy Director of K-12 programs Dr. Denise Donohue, Director of K-12 programs Dr. Dan Guernsey, and President Patrick Reilly.

At their core, the *Principles* reflect the beauty and the breadth of the Vatican documents on Catholic education. The Church's vision for Catholic education is rooted in her vision for humanity, raised to sainthood in Christ.

In other words, students should develop a love for truth, a desire to know God's creation, and virtue.

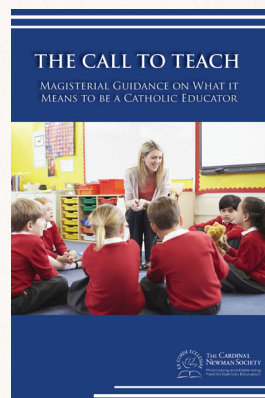
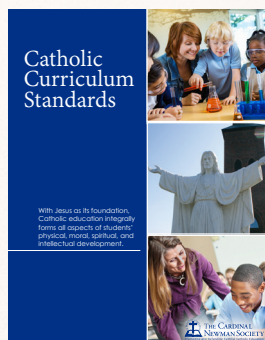
# Other Resources from The Cardinal Newman Society

**Catholic Curriculum Standards** help keep focus on what is unique about Catholic elementary and secondary education: its evangelizing mission to integrally form students in Christ and transmit a Christian worldview. The standards cover English language arts, math, scientific topics, and history, focusing on unique Catholic insights into these curricular areas and complementing the Church's standards for religious instruction

**The Call to Teach**, with the support of magisterial documents, explicates the teachings of the Catholic Church summarizing the role of lay Catholic teachers and their qualifications; pedagogical, educational, and cultural goals; relationship to the Church; and Gospel witness.

***My Future, My Faith***, a full-color magazine, features more than a dozen articles designed to help parents and students navigate the transition from high school to college. Each year the New Society distributes free copies to Catholic high schools across the country.

To learn more about our K-12 Programs and resources, email [K12@CardinalNewmanSociety.org](mailto:K12@CardinalNewmanSociety.org) or call 703/367-0333 ext. 111, or visit us online at [CardinalNewmanSociety.org](http://CardinalNewmanSociety.org).



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Principles of Catholic Identity

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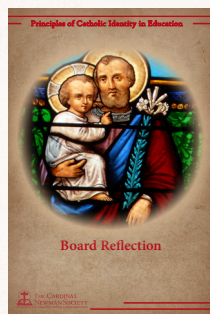
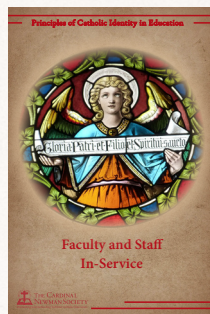
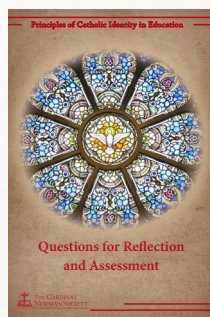
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