

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This coming fall, the Church will begin a year dedicated to evangelization. During that time, our Holy Father has asked us to commit ourselves to proclaiming God to “the people of our time.” Pope Benedict’s call to this new evangelization has caused me to reflect on our own children and teenagers who are literally the “people of our time.” These periods of reflections have reminded me again how essential Catholic schools and religious education are to the mission of the Church.

Some of you may not be aware that this year is the 20th anniversary of the new Catechism of the Catholic Church. Those of you who are of my generation probably remember hearing the word catechism as a first grader in Catholic school. You may even remember the little blue book called the Baltimore Catechism and the sister, priest or lay teacher who first taught you about our faith.

Though we were not their natural children, these good people helped our parents form us in the faith. They took personal responsibility for seeing that we understood “Who” it was that created us, loved us and saved us. Because of their labors and the financial sacrifices of many others, we were formed in our faith. These good people knew that it was not just our parents’ responsibility. Though that generation of adults may not have used the word “evangelization” as frequently as we do today, they understood its meaning.

Those of you who are a “little” younger than I, probably experienced the same type of support from your parish community. Now it is our turn to see to it that the children of our time receive our support. I am asking all of you – not just parents and grandparents but even those without their own children – to see that today’s youth are adequately formed in the faith. This is the responsibility of every baptized Catholic.

As we begin a new school year and a year of evangelization, I am asking you to “partner with me in grace” to see that our children are catechized. You can do this in several ways.

We have four elementary and one Catholic high school in our diocese that offer not only formation in the faith but also wonderful academic programs. These are schools where prayer is not forbidden, where God is mentioned frequently and where Jesus’ teachings are evident in all that occurs. I ask all of you to encourage our youth to attend a Catholic school if one is available in their area.

Often times, parents are concerned that tuition for their youngsters might be too costly. Encourage parents to call our schools to investigate the possibility of tuition assistance. All of our schools offer tuition based on a sliding scale.

Let me also thank all of you who are providing financial help for a grandchild or for a friend’s child who is currently attending Catholic school whether in our diocese or elsewhere. From personal conversations, I know that many of you are doing that or providing other assistance like helping with school supplies or by attending a Catholic school fundraising activity. If you’ve never attended a Catholic school fundraiser, perhaps this is the year to do that. You’ll not only support a worthy cause but probably have a wonderful time.

If a Catholic school is not an option for a child, please encourage him or her to attend parish religious instruction. Steward your time by volunteering to teach at your parish. Both our parishes and the diocese provide training for those of you who may not feel qualified to take on this important job.

You can support your parish in this ministry in other ways. Some of our parishes provide Adult Formation or Scripture classes during the same time period as the children’s education programs. This

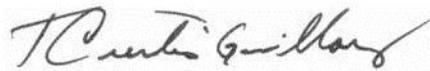
gives parents an opportunity to grow in their faith while their youngsters are in religion class. Perhaps you could find ways to support that program.

Today's world presents many temptations for our youth. I imagine it is easy for parents to become frustrated and fearful as they see their children facing the turbulence presented by the secular world. Parents need to know that Our Lord is with them guiding them as they guide their children. But, parents also need to know that we, as the Catholic community of Southeast Texas, are supporting them in this important responsibility

Our Lord and Savior told us to "go forth and teach all nations." I think it is imperative that we start here – in our own backyard – with our own youngsters first. Once our children and teenagers are formed in the faith, the future of the Church is secure and these young people will see to it that our Lord's mandate is fulfilled.

Thank you for all you have done thus far to assist our Catholic schools and our parish religious education programs. Know that you and your parish are in my prayers. And may Christ, the Good Shepherd, hold our children in His loving protection through this coming school year.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Curtis J. Guillory". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C".

Most Rev. Curtis J. Guillory, SVD, DD
Bishop of Beaumont