

NCEA Closing Mass  
Thursday of Easter Week, 2010  
The Most Reverend John C. Nienstedt

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My dear brothers and sisters, how good it is to be here today, to celebrate with you this final Mass of the 2010 National Catholic Educators Association. It is my sincere hope and prayer that your time here in the Twin Cities has been informative and helpful to you in your critical vocation as Catholic educators. And make no mistake about it – it is a vocation, a calling from God, a mission to communicate the truth, goodness, and beauty of the Faith through an education directed to the Eternal. Thank you for being here, and may God bless your necessary and important work. I wish you safe travels home, and a very Blessed and Holy Easter Season.

How fitting are the final words of the Holy Gospel tonight for our gathering these days? “You are witnesses of these things.” Is this not the ultimate mission of Catholic education? To give witness to the truth of the Gospel, which is, in the end, Jesus Himself? This is what sets Catholic education apart from other educational institutions; this is what makes us “Catholic.” Let us be clear – a Catholic school is not just a private school gussied up with a few extra religion classes. Rather, a Catholic school, to be afforded the venerable name “Catholic,” must see itself directed not just to success in this life, but even more importantly to success in the next. In other words, a Catholic education must be directed to union with God forever in heaven. To claim otherwise is to miss the whole point of a Catholic education.

Now, this is not to say that a Catholic education isn’t meant to provide a student with the fundamentals of earthly citizenship and the tools to succeed in the demanding and challenging marketplace in which we live.

We can say with justifiable pride that Catholic schools are some of the best institutions society has to offer in these areas, and it is precisely why so many non-Catholic families choose to send their beloved children to our schools. With the help and dedication of so many wonderful teachers, many of whom are present today, this will continue, and Catholic education will be known for generations to come as being synonymous with excellence.

But to be frank, the *natural* goods of a Catholic education are, in the end, worthless without that eternal direction and supernatural context which make Catholic education unique. To make the standards of the world the standards of our schools is to build our house upon sand – and one day, the floods of secular values will do away with that house. We must be committed to making our schools places of Christian witness – and this is my challenge to you today. I challenge you to continue to build your institutions upon the solid rock of Christ and the peace that only He can offer.

The Gospel records that Christ opened the Scriptures for his Apostles in the upper room – He opened their eyes to the significance of His own life, death and resurrection.

In a similar way, a Catholic school should open the student's eyes to the significance of his or her own life, but more importantly to the connection between the student's life and the life of Jesus. Jesus must be taught as the principle of interpretation to life, to the world and to one's own destiny. To neglect to share the person of Jesus with one's students is a grave injustice to the souls with whom we are brought into contact. We must pray for the grace and strength to proclaim His name with vigor and joy.

Of course, the most basic way that we do this, the most essential form of witness, is by *living* the Faith ourselves. This brings the task of communicating the Faith and being witnesses to the Gospel far beyond the religion classroom. Our schools are called upon to be places where a culture is bred and nurtured, and that culture is the culture of Divine life and Divine love. This depends on lives dedicated to Christ and His Church, and not just on book knowledge. I urge you all, for the sake of the children to which you are called to serve, to renew your own efforts this Holy Easter Season to root your lives in Him who has come to save us.

Again, I thank you for your hard work, dedication and selfless service to the children whom you teach. It is a noble task to which you have been called, and I thank you for saying yes to that call. As we prepare to receive our Lord in Holy Communion and to recognize Him in the breaking of the bread, let us pray for the strength to redouble our efforts to bear witness to Christ. And may God bless the fruit of our labors, labors that truly have eternal significance.