

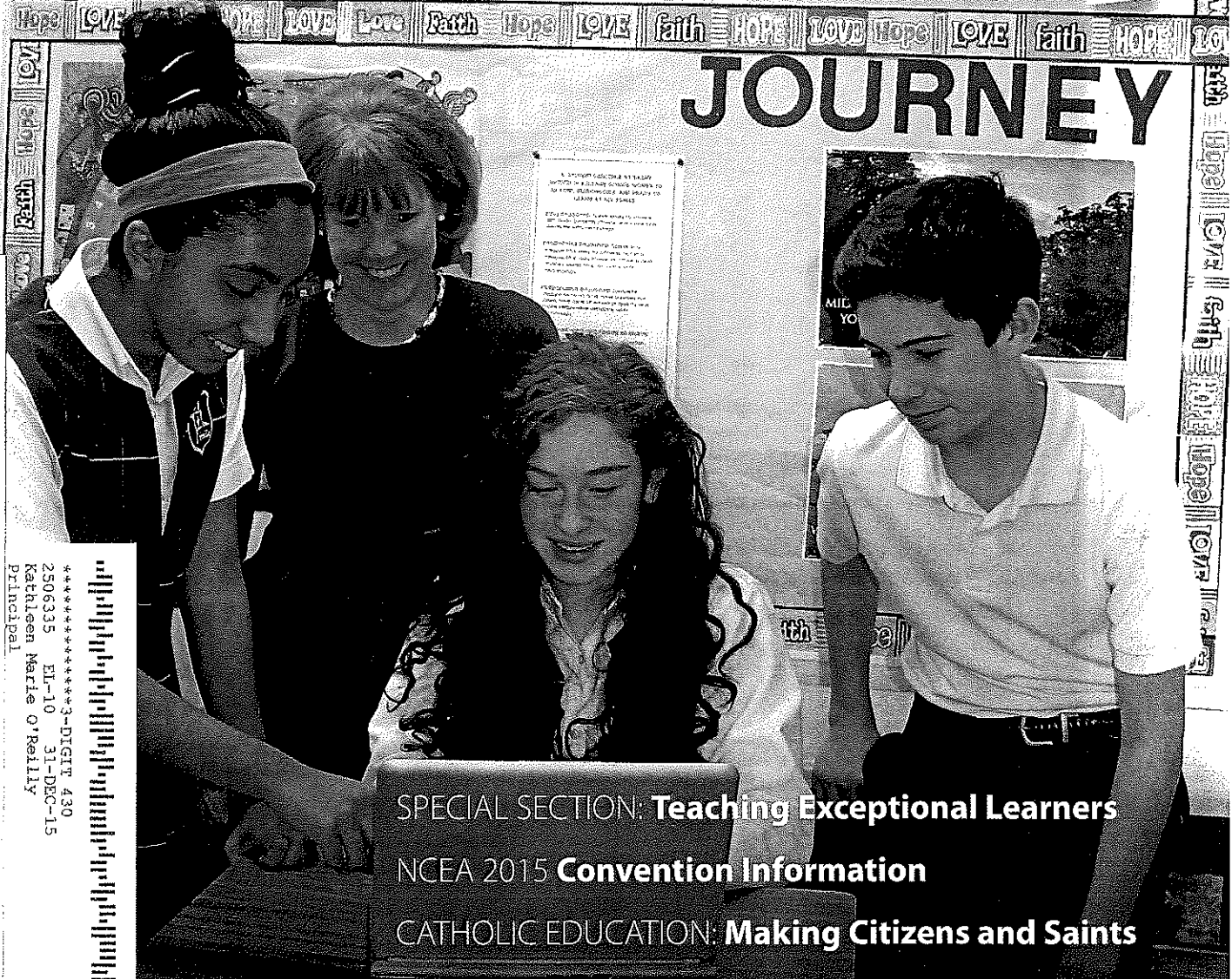
# momentum

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# New Movements in School Finance

In the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and the neighboring Diocese of Columbus, people are working on a number of levels to bring innovative financial practices to these two important Ohio dioceses.

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**If a religious sister could travel in time** from her classroom in 1965 to a classroom in the present year, hopefully she would be encouraged. Sister would see engaged students wrestling with a challenging curriculum. They may sit in different arrangements, collaborate a little more than they used to and use a lot of technology. The subjects would probably be updated to fit modern standards. A person who is living out the universal call to holiness through his or her vocation—whether religious or laity—would lead the classroom. Most importantly, one hopes that Sister would find an environment that is welcoming, uplifting and Christ-centered.

Unfortunately, a walk down the hallway and a chat with someone involved with school finances could very well be less gratifying for Sister. Generally speaking, Catholic schools are having a hard time making ends meet. Rising costs of education, shifting demographics and competition from charter schools are among a litany of factors that have put Catholic education in a difficult place. But this is not the end of the story. Across the country, pockets of hope are forming, where just as Catholic schools have adapted in other areas to best meet the needs of the times, they are finding new ways to keep themselves financially afloat. In the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and the neighboring Diocese of Columbus, people are working on a number of levels to bring innovative financial practices to these two important Ohio dioceses.

## The Archdiocese of Cincinnati— Lighting the Way

In August 2012, after two years of research, the Archdiocese of Cincinnati released a strategic plan titled *Lighting the Way: A Vision for Catholic School Education*. This document addresses six categories identified as predictors of overall school vitality. *Lighting the Way* outlines guidelines and initiatives that are currently being implemented in the schools. It seems that the document has already made a considerable impact since its August 2012 release. *Lighting the Way* focuses on laying guidelines for schools so that they become and remain authentically Catholic, academically excellent and economically sustainable.

One of the major components of *Lighting the Way* is a comprehensive metric designed to measure financial vitality. This innovative system is used to collect data from all of the schools in the Archdiocese, rating their performance in over 30 specific indicators falling into eight broader financial categories. Simple data entry forms for each school are collected by the Archdiocese each year. The schools are rated and ranked in each category. This allows schools to compare performance and to communicate accurately about particular strengths and areas of concern. It also gives the Archdiocese a much clearer picture of the financial outlook within its



New ideas are coming forth across the country, as diverse as the populations that they serve. Each situation within schools and dioceses requires unique answers. While schools maintain a common identity in Catholicism, each one has its own population, charisms, and challenges. It remains, then, for the local schools and dioceses themselves to seek solutions that are sustainable, prudent and in line with Catholic social teaching.

schools than isolated systems of recordkeeping for each school might be able to.

This in-depth reporting also makes it possible for schools to trace possible causes for areas of concern. When the data is collected and analyzed, the Archdiocese is able to identify the approximate bottom 25-percent-performing schools and meet with them to craft individualized plans for improvement. In addition, the metric allows for the collection and dissemination of information on best practices. The financial vitality metric delivers consistent, centralized evaluation while allowing a good amount of freedom and individuality among schools. Centralized data collection allows the archdiocese to evaluate the effectiveness of each school's financial practices, to investigate possibilities for improvement, and to gather information about what is working particularly well.

hundreds to the number of students enrolled in Catholic schools in the diocese. A bold vision for growth and beautiful location, however, are not the only things that make Cristo Rey unique.

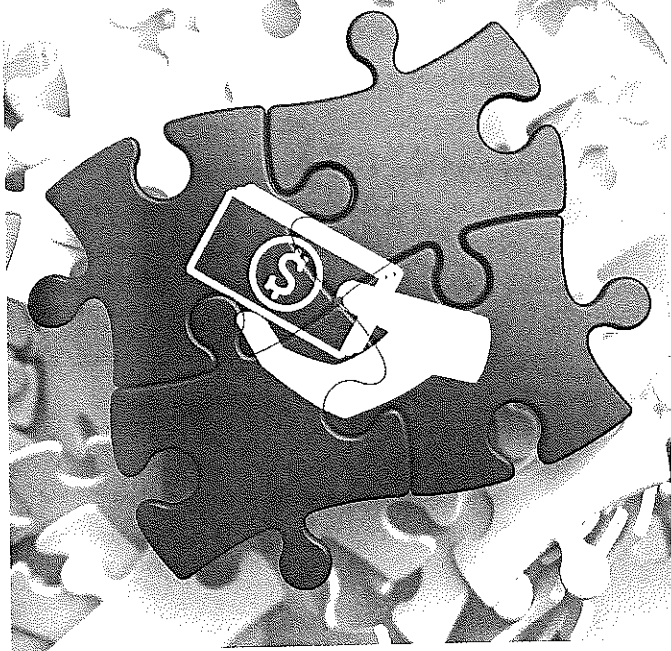
Cristo Rey Columbus High School is part of the Cristo Rey Network, a national network of schools dedicated to the education of economically disadvantaged students in a Catholic, academically rigorous, college preparatory environment. Each school is independent in governance and operation, but adopts the mission and model of the network. These schools address a vital need in their service to impoverished families by offering under-resourced students a top-notch education focused on helping them to succeed later in life. So far, results have been outstanding. Since the first school opened in Chicago in 1996, the Cristo Rey Network has grown to include 26 schools, and boasts a 100 percent acceptance rate among all of its students to two- and four-year colleges. However, as with most private education, there are considerable tuition costs, which financially challenged families can have difficulties meeting. The Cristo Rey Network model offers a unique solution to this problem.

What makes Cristo Rey Network schools both sustainable and affordable is their work-study program. In this program, Cristo Rey partners with local businesses to arrange employment for each of its students. Students work one or two days per week at hospitals, corporate offices, law firms and other places of business. Their paychecks go to the school and are used to offset tuition. Four students work a single job, equaling the number of work hours of one full-time employee. On the other days of the workweek, students attend normal high school classes, although with a slightly longer day and more challenging curriculum than they might find elsewhere. The school itself covers training in professionalism, transportation to and from work, and scheduling. Any remaining cost of education is defrayed by other means, including private donations and small contributions paid by families, if possible. Besides the financial benefits of this model, students are given valuable job experiences and networking opportunities before they even graduate high school. A unique financing model, a culture of excellence, and a bold vision make Cristo Rey Network schools a powerful presence and a sign of hope in Columbus and across the nation.



### **The Cristo Rey Network—Working for Success**

Operating in the Diocese of Columbus, newly opened Cristo Rey Columbus High School is the first new Catholic high school in Columbus in quite some time. The school is currently in its second academic year of operations and has moved into a beautiful, historic, newly remodeled building in downtown Columbus. Within the next few years it will operate at full capacity, adding



### **Saint Brigid of Kildare Elementary School—Building an Endowment**

In Dublin, Ohio, Saint Brigid of Kildare Elementary School is leading the way in what members of the school community hope will be a new movement in Catholic education funding. When St. Brigid's opened its doors in 1996, it was the first Catholic school opened in the Diocese of Columbus in more than 30 years. Attached to the burgeoning Saint Brigid of Kildare Parish (founded just nine years earlier), the school started out using a cost-based tuition/need-based assistance financial model to administer tuition fees. In this model, there is no parish subsidy. Instead, families paid the entire cost per student for their child, with need-based financial assistance available to help those who could not afford the full price. The benefit of this model is that it takes pressure off of the parish to pay for the school, which in this case freed up funds to pay for debts incurred during the start-ups of the parish, school, and other church projects. However, as the years have passed, the cost per student has continued to increase, and it became hard for families to keep up. A new model was needed to address the issue of rising tuition costs while avoiding the burden of subsidizing the school. Monsignor Joseph Hendricks, longtime pastor of Saint Brigid's Church, assembled a committee to come up with ideas to ensure the future sustainability of the school in the face of rising costs.

With these things in mind, Monsignor Hendricks and the committee came up with a bold solution: create an endowment large enough to freeze, lower, and eventually end tuition costs, to allow for future additions to the school, and to fund programming—in short, to fund all of the school's operational costs indefinitely. About two years into the effort, the school has raised around \$4 million—a small, but significant chunk of the eventual goal of approximately \$50 million. Nonetheless, St. Brigid's believes that endowments may be the answer to the national problem of rising costs of operating Catholic schools. Saint Brigid of Kildare Elementary School is a good place to start. It boasts an academically excellent school and a supportive, generous parish community, as well as a parish staff with a strong track record in fundraising.

Although not all schools and parishes have the means to create such a large endowment, the Saint Brigid's community hopes that someday such efforts could occur on a diocesan level for every school, not only those with the means. Saint Brigid of Kildare Parish hopes that a bold vision for its future can inspire a truly monumental movement among Catholic schools everywhere.

### **Finding the Right Method**

It would be inaccurate to suggest that the practices outlined above are the only feasible solutions to financial problems in Catholic schools. New ideas are coming forth across the country, as diverse as the populations that they serve. Each situation within schools and dioceses requires unique answers. While schools maintain a common identity in Catholicism, each one has its own population, charisms, and challenges. It remains, then, for the local schools and dioceses themselves to seek solutions that are sustainable, prudent and in line with Catholic social teaching. Questions such as financial means of the school community and willingness to participate in campaigns ought to be carefully considered. Further, possible impacts of such efforts on the wider community should be weighed out. While a particular financial method may be attractive in one setting, it may not be prudent in another.

Nonetheless, the fact remains: successful Catholic schools find ways within their unique circumstances to work towards financial security. Reflecting on one's own school environment and culture can lead to valuable insights in this regard. Sister may find different reasons to smile in a Catholic elementary school in Philadelphia than she would in a Catholic high school outside of Seattle or one in rural Texas. One can hope, however, that one of the many reasons for Sister's joy is the financial stability of each of these schools. Innovative solutions are being found to the financial woes afflicting America's Catholic elementary and secondary schools. With a little creativity and determination, more and more are waiting to be found.

*John Welsh is currently a senior at the University of Dayton studying Secondary Catholic Religious Education. He recently worked as a research intern for UD's Center for Catholic Education exploring creative financial models being utilized by Catholic schools in different situations in the Diocese of Columbus and the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.*

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