

In the early 2000s, Archbishop J. Michael Miller wrote a book titled *The Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools*. In summarizing papal interventions and key Church documents on Catholic education, he identified five essential marks of an authentic Catholic school, marks we wholeheartedly embrace and seek to integrate into the mission of Frassati Academy.

I'll first briefly go over these five features and then offer a few insights into our educational approach. In the interests of time I will not explicitly quote his words in this summary but invite you to read it for yourselves.

1. Inspired by a Supernatural Vision

Catholic education forms the whole child and seeks to fix his or her eyes on heaven. It forms boys and girls who will be good citizens of this world, loving God and neighbor and enriching society with the leaven of the gospel, and who will also be citizens of the world to come, thus fulfilling their destiny to become saints.

2. Founded on a Christian Anthropology

Children are, first and foremost, children of God, made in His image and likeness. The authentic Catholic school must be founded on Jesus Christ. It must continually propose Christ to children as both the model and means to their development into the fullness of their humanity.

Pope St. John Paul II once wrote that "Catholic education is above all a question of communicating Christ, of helping to form Christ in the lives of others."

At Frassati Academy, among other things, learning about the saints will provide inspiring examples of what it means to be human and where our ultimate destiny lies.

3. Animated by Communion and Community

The Catholic school is not an institution but a genuine community of faith. This community is shared between students, teachers, parents, staff and all who work towards the good of the school. One of tonight's aims is in fact to begin the growth of THIS community through gathering and dialoging together.

Elementary schools "should try to create a community school climate that reproduces, as far as possible, the warm and intimate atmosphere of family life. Those responsible for these schools will, therefore, do everything they can to promote a common spirit of trust and spontaneity."

At Frassati, participating in Mass together regularly, celebrating feast days and the liturgical seasons, and even wearing uniforms will contribute to the sense of our communal identity.

4. Imbued with a Catholic Worldview throughout its Curriculum

Catholic schools aspire to teach the love for wisdom, habituating each student “to desire learning so much that he or she will delight in becoming a self-learner.” They teach children they are capable of coming to know truth. Catholic schools also integrate faith, life and culture, showing that faith is not separate from life and culture but must permeate and transform it.

5. Sustained by Gospel Witness

Teachers and staff have a supernatural calling. They are called not just to teach but to be witnesses: “The nobility of the task to which teachers are called demands that, in imitation of Christ, the only Teacher, they reveal the Christian message not only by word but also by every gesture of their behavior”

To best strive towards realizing these and such goals, Frassati is adopting a classically grounded catholic approach to education, one that affirms students’ ultimate identity and calling, their place in the world and in history, and one that exposes them to the many riches of our tradition. It is important to note that the work on curriculum is ongoing, and that this approach is one that will take time to realize.

Nonetheless, I’d like to outline four key elements of this approach:

1. Context over Content

The goal of this approach is not just to fill children with content and information - something we’re overwhelmed with - but to give them the wisdom and discernment to sort content by context, from a foundation in truth. The first context is being sons and daughters of God, which is the primary interest on which all other content is evaluated and assimilated or rejected. Context first, content second.

2. Continuity and Identity

This approach promotes an identity that holds to continuity with what is excellent from the past. It keeps a student grounded as the inheritor of human knowledge that has gone before, both sacred and non-sacred. In this way, it anchors students in their time and place in history and enables them to see their historical place as part of a chain, grounding them, and giving them concrete guideposts for life. They are able to see themselves not as “accidental” or “meaningless”, but as part of a story that they will inherit as disciples of Jesus.

3. Ability over Appearance

This approach prizes ability over appearance. It is interested in childrens' growing formation and capacities, privileging character and virtue. To be able to ask the right questions, weigh the right information, and to make right and true judgments. To be able to write well, think well, speak well, compete well, and act well, to become fully alive in Christ!

4. Excellent Content

This approach prepares children to encounter the truest and noblest texts of human history. Putting children in contact with Scripture, excellent works of literature, poetry, philosophy, science, art and architecture appropriate to their ability produces excellence and expansiveness of thought and expression. As St. Paul said "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

Archbishop Miller warned that education is not a commodity; it is not an instrument for the acquisition of information that will improve the chances of worldly success and a more comfortable standard of living. Such an impoverished vision of education is not Catholic. Catholic education sets out to be a school for the whole human person, grounded in Christ, its vital principle.

It is our mission to make Frassati Academy such a school.