

St. Thomas More Academy

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Monsignor John Deitzenbach,
Pastor St.Peter the Apostle Catholic
Church 9201-A Church Street
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Dear Monsignor John,

October 31, 2008

As luck would have it, I ran into Father Keith at lunch on Friday, October 3rd, the day after I had the pleasure of meeting with the priests from the Frederick area. Father Keith mentioned how distraught everyone was after our meeting, and I shared with him that Joe and I were also distraught. It was after this conversation that I decided to write this letter to all of you in hopes that we can come to some sort of resolution

I have no doubt that we all have what is best for the children in our hearts. They are involved in this game of politics and we need to place them first. The children of STMA are caught up in a controversy in which they do not understand why they are being treated as second class Catholics. Given the nature of the controversy, it is not easily explainable. The answer must lie in dialogue of adults and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Because the Church has conferred upon all of you the title "Father," you accept the responsibility to be pastoral as well as being fatherly. Fatherly to me means that one is to protect and guide those under his care. As a father I would be remiss to refuse to discuss a moral/ethical situation with my children. How can we encourage our children to sit down and work out their differences, if we as Catholic Christian adults cannot do the same within our Church? I firmly believe that all of the priests should approach the Archbishop as a unified group and simply request an

opportunity for dialogue. I cannot believe that one in a position of authority, affecting hundred of parishioners, would not be willing to have a discussion regarding this matter.

The independent Catholic school movement presents a changing paradigm which has the potential to create concern, distrust and anxieties. Those of us who are part of the independent school movement truly believe that the movement is inspired by the Holy Spirit, is a service to the Church and provides an opportunity to evangelize and minister to our youth. There were similar concerns with the creation of the Home School Movement, yet today all of us are aware of the many advantages and gifts that this movement brings to our Church and our communities. Perhaps one of the greatest concerns may be the words, "Independent School". Our independence simply means that we assume all financial and legal responsibility of our operation—with no liability for the Archdiocese. We are true soldiers of the faith. All of our teachers and Board Members are required to take an Oath of Loyalty to the Magisterium. We do not and never intend to question Church doctrine. I would encourage you to take the time and visit the NAPCIS.org website and see the mission of the Independent School Movement and the vast resources it offers to educators in the faith.

The Pontifical Council for the Family which has published "Guidelines for Education within the Family" (a copy is enclosed for your review) is unambiguous concerning the rights and responsibilities that parents have in regards to teaching their children about the Theology of the Body. Why does the Baltimore Archdiocese want to take this special and sacred responsibility from parents who choose to offer this topic in the privacy of their own homes and transfer it to the classroom? The classroom policy assumes all students have the same

level of maturity based on age, when only parents can make that judgment.

The "home based" policy is fortified by a study conducted by the Catholic Medical Association Task Force which concluded that current "child empowerment"/abuse prevention programs are either ineffectual or harmful to children. I have received a copy of the full report, and have enclosed a copy of the summary. The Archdiocese of Harrisburg concurs with the Catholic Medical Association Task Force and follows the guidelines of the Pontifical Council. They have developed a home based course that 20 other dioceses have adopted. Additionally, Bishop Vara from Oregon has developed yet another home based program that will be available soon. The fact that there is a variance in the way this material is offered does not support the argument that the Church is Universal and has no variances. This controversy is not based on teachings, doctrine or authority of the Church. Instead it is based on local policy and its implementation on some individual's judgment. That is why some diocese offer a course in chastity, others in Human Sexuality and others not allowing it to be taught at all.

In conclusion, all of you as priests have agreed that STMA is a fine institution. We are proud of the great job being done by our staff in forming our children in the faith as well as developing fine young citizens. We are ministering to children in our community and we are doing God's work. How difficult is it to defend that position to the Archbishop. We—priests, parents, teachers, and administrators™ are all responsible for the children in our faith community. We ask you to help us help the children grow in their faith. We ask that you help us by encouraging the Archdiocese to talk to us rather than dictate terms from on high. Remember, what you do to the least of my brother, you do unto me.

Sincerely,

James A. Merkel, President and Founder

P.S. It has been brought to my attention that notices are appearing in the Sunday bulletins that state students at STMA must sign up for CCD classes if they are preparing for reconciliation or first Communion. I believe it would be better to state that the parents have the choice to either sign up for CCD or request the material for home-schooling.

Some additional words that are pertinent.

From Vatican Council II's "Gaudium et Spes" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) echoes this natural-law doctrine.

"Therefore, there must be made available to all men everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accord with the upright norm of one's own conscience, to protection of privacy and rightful freedom even in matters religious."

Taken from "Recovering a Catholic Philosophy of Elementary Education" by Curtis L Hancock, Newman House Press, 2005, page 110.

"Often, philosophical assertions hide in the fashions of the social sciences. The judgement "Sex and sexuality have become far too complex and technical to leave to the typical parent" is an example of what Eric Vogelin has called the "new Gnosticism", the presumption that values and attitudes traditionally reserved for families are now the domains of technocratic and bureaucratic elites or "experts". The idea that someone not privy to social scientific research is not competent to guide children and adolescents on such sensitive matter. This attitude prevailed during the heyday of progressive education (1900 to 1950), and it persists today in American education". Unfortunately, our Catholic schools are going in the same direction as those of the government operated schools.