*That they may have life*by Bishop Chad W. Zielinski

*Bearers of Good News: Educators of Faith*

There is still a sense of loss that lingers with the recent death of Pope Benedict XVI, but great rejoicing for centuries to come as the Church continues to discover anew the many treasures he left in his teachings that invite us to a renewed personal encounter with Christ and a deeper understanding of the Truth.

I draw your attention to an address given by Pope Benedict XVI on April 17, 2008, to a gathering of Catholic educators. The thrust of the Holy Father’s talk was sharing thoughts on the nature and identity of Catholic education today. To those gathered: “‘How beautiful are the footsteps of those who bring good news,’ (*Romans 10:15*). With these words of Isaiah quoted by Saint Paul, I warmly greet each of you – bearers of wisdom . . . ”

I extend a profound thanks to our Catholic educators serving in our 13 Catholic elementary and three high schools as well as those involved in parish religious education programs throughout the diocese. I also include the primary educators of our children in the faith, the parents. It is they who, before the Christian community, gave God a resounding “yes” at their child’s baptism to raise them in the practice of the faith. In this sacred promise to God, the parents turn to our Catholic educators in our schools and parishes, inviting them to join in the formation of a Catholic conscience of their children. This formation process involves much preparation, dedication, and sacrifice on behalf of both parents and educators.

Pope Benedict XVI reminds us of the focus of this partnership: “First and foremost, every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and Truth. This relationship elicits a desire to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Christ and his teaching. In this way, those who meet him are drawn by the very power of the Gospel to lead a new life characterized by all that is beautiful, good, and true; a life of Christian witness nurtured and strengthened within the community of our Lord’s disciples, the Church.”

The Holy Father continues by emphasizing that the “dynamic between personal encounter, knowledge, and Christian witness is integral to the *diakonia* of the truth which the Church exercises in the midst of humanity.”

The ongoing formation of a child’s conscience sharpens their mind with moral clarity as they encounter the revelation of Divine Truth. Sadly these days the world seems to peddle a package of “personalized truth.” In other words, we each determine our own Truth. This results in moral chaos and confusion. It is completely disconnected from a living, personal encounter with the One, Jesus Christ, who is the fullness of Truth.

Both Catholic and non-Catholic parents enroll their children in our Catholic schools with the full intent that their children encounter the Truth that is different from the confusion of secular society. Some do this through great financial sacrifice. I am always profoundly moved by the personal stories I hear of heroic measures taken by a parent to send their child to a Catholic institution.

Also, it is a reality that our Catholic parishes and schools exist through the extreme generosity of donors. This is what keeps the doors open, the heat on, and a roof over our heads. Most of these donors I know are motivated by an encounter with the Truth, the person of Jesus Christ.

Through this driving passion, they desire that each child, all equal in dignity, to encounter the healing and hopeful presence of Christ.

There has been and will always be a tension between divinely revealed Truth and the message blasted throughout our world, especially via the internet and television. As we live in a nation filled with financial abundance, it seems that we cannot avoid the ever-increasing desire to want more, earn more, and consume more. This stifles the very desire for the beatitude that lives in the core of our being – a desire that true happiness will only be found in a joyful encounter with God. Our parishes and schools must be vigilant of this pervasive mindset while encouraging moderation.

The Good News of the Gospel is just that, “good news.” Amidst the clouds of confusion, the Good News will always prevail. We have some extraordinary examples of this in the great legacies of Catholic educators etched in our nation’s history. Pope Benedict, in his talk, brought to the attention of those gathered two very powerful women saints that profoundly impacted Catholic education in America. “Towering figures, like Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton and other founders and foundresses, with great tenacity and foresight, laid the foundations of what is today a remarkable network of parochial schools contributing to the spiritual well-being of the Church and the nation. Some, like Saint Katharine Drexel, devoted their lives to educating those others had neglected – in her case, African Americans and Native Americans.”

Amidst great adversarial forces and against odds that at times seemed to be impossible, these women established institutions that sowed seeds that would bear abundant fruit in the lives of those whom societies have pushed to the margins. Their witness and sacrifice continue today, and Pope Benedict called it “an apostolate of hope.”

You Catholic educators, along with parents, are “bearers of wisdom and good news,” which is the heart of this apostolate. As ambassadors of hope, the fire of Christ within you allows you to see each child radiate God’s beauty, goodness, and Truth, which in turn helps the child to carry this flame that was ignited in your classroom to their family home no matter how challenging that situation might be. I commend you for your countless sacrifices, never giving up on a child, having hope beyond hope, and taking the torch of faith as a guiding light into the future.

You have my heartfelt support and prayers. Keep the fire of faith burning brightly in the schools and parishes of the Diocese of New Ulm. I echo the parting words of Pope Benedict XVI: “To all of you, I say: bear witness to hope. Nourish your witness with prayer. Account for the hope that characterizes your lives *(cf. 1 Pet 3:15)* by living the Truth which you propose to your students. Help them to know and love the One you have encountered, whose Truth and goodness you have experienced with joy.”