

INSTITUTE FOR  
CATHOLIC LIBERAL  
EDUCATION

# ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

*March 4, 2025*

Rosemary Vander Weele

# OPENING PRAYER



## For Ordering a Life Wisely

O merciful God, grant that I may desire ardently, search prudently, recognize truly, and bring to perfect completion whatever is pleasing to You for the praise and glory of Your name.

Put my life in good order, O my God. Grant that I may know what You require me to do.

Bestow upon me the power to accomplish Your will, as is necessary and fitting for the salvation of my soul.

Grant to me, O Lord my God, that I may not falter in times of prosperity or adversity, so that I may not be exalted in the former, nor dejected in the latter.

May I not rejoice in anything unless it leads me to You; may I not be saddened by anything unless it turns me from You.

May I desire to please no one, nor fear to displease anyone, but You.

May all transitory things, O Lord, be worthless to me and may all things eternal be ever cherished by me.

May any joy without You be burdensome for me and may I not desire anything else besides You.

May all work, O Lord, delight me when done for Your sake and may all repose not centered in You be ever wearisome for me.

Grant unto me, my God, that I may direct my heart to You and that in my failures I may ever feel remorse for my sins and never lose the resolve to change.....



O Lord my God, make me submissive without protest, poor without discouragement, chaste without regret, patient without complaint, humble without posturing, cheerful without frivolity, mature without gloom, and quick-witted without flippancy.

O Lord my God, let me fear You without losing hope, be truthful without guile, do good works without presumption, rebuke my neighbor without haughtiness, and—without hypocrisy—strengthen him by word and example.

Give to me, O Lord God, a watchful heart, which no capricious thought can lure away from You.

Give to me a noble heart, which no unworthy desire can debase.

Give to me a resolute heart, which no evil intention can divert.

Give to me a stalwart heart, which no tribulation can overcome.

Give to me a temperate heart, which no violent passion can enslave.

Give to me, O Lord my God, understanding of You, diligence in seeking You, wisdom in finding You, discourse ever pleasing to You, perseverance in waiting for You, and confidence in finally embracing You.

Grant that with Your hardships I may be burdened in reparation here, that Your benefits I may use in gratitude upon the way, that in Your joys I may delight by glorifying You in the Kingdom of Heaven.

You Who live and reign, God, world without end.

Amen.

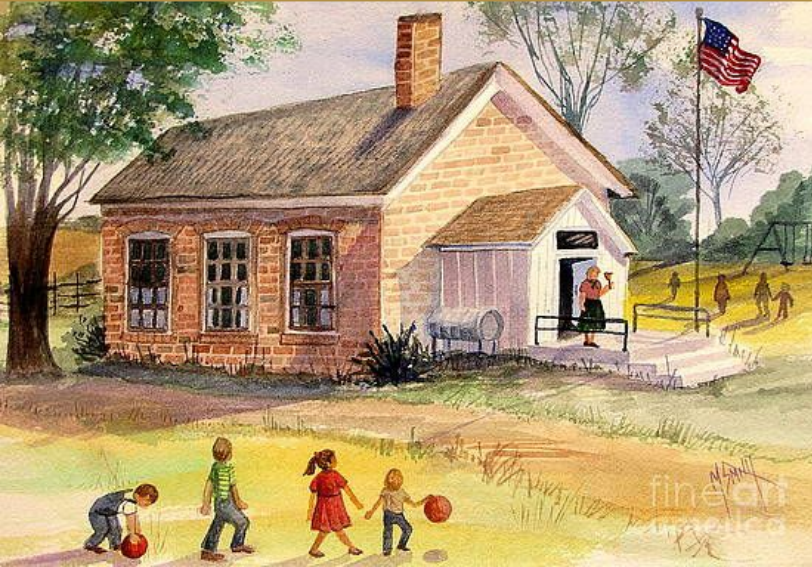


# It's time for Spring Cleaning!

1. Spring is a great time to teach/  
remind faculty about the  
**importance of order.**
2. Necessary in our **personal** lives  
and a great way to relate to  
teachers in their **vocational** life.
3. Having an **orderly classroom**  
and school reaps many rewards!



# School Culture



Since the **school is rightly considered an extension of the home**, it ought to have "some of the amenities which can create a pleasant and family atmosphere." [40] This includes an adequate physical plant and equipment. It is especially important that this "school-home" be immediately recognizable as Catholic.

The Incarnation, which emphasizes the bodily coming of God's Son into the world, leaves its seal on every aspect of Christian life. The very fact of the Incarnation tells us that the created world is the means chosen by God through which he communicates his life to us. What is human and visible can bear the divine. If Catholic schools are to be true to their identity, they should try to suffuse their environment with

delight in the sacramental. **Therefore they should express physically and visibly the external signs of Catholic culture through images, signs, symbols, icons and other objects of traditional devotion.** A chapel, classroom crucifixes and statues, liturgical celebrations and other sacramental reminders of Catholic ecclesial life, including good art which is not explicitly religious in its subject matter, should be evident.

# School Culture

- Upon entering the school, a person should know that the **sacred** is upheld and revered throughout the building.
- Catholic identity is *living* throughout the school, the externals support this reality.
- Choose **artwork** well. Spend money to bring beauty into the school.
- Remember the mission...

*"From the first moment that a student sets foot in a Catholic school, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment, one illumined by the light of faith, and having its own unique characteristics.*

*The Council summed this up by speaking of an environment permeated with the Gospel spirit of love and freedom. In a Catholic school, everyone should be aware of the living presence of Jesus the 'Master' who, today as always, is with us in our journey through life as the one genuine 'Teacher,' the perfect Man in whom all human values find their fullest perfection. The inspiration of Jesus must be translated from the ideal into the real. The Gospel spirit should be evident in a Christian way of thought and life, which permeates all facets of the educational climate"* St. John Paul II Message to the National Catholic Educational Association of the United States (16 April 1979)



# Getting Personal

1. Classroom set up is **personal**, a lot of a teacher's time and investment is spent in the classroom- it is near and dear
2. Now is the time to pay attention to the **importance of order**.
3. Necessary in our **personal** lives and in our **vocational** life.
4. Having an **orderly classroom** and school reaps many rewards!





# Getting Personal



# Classroom Environment

*“A place for everything and everything in its place.”* Dr. Maria Montessori

Students come to school impressionable even to the smallest detail in the classroom.

Simplicity and order offer students the opportunity to absorb from their environment free from distraction.

Order in the classroom teaches the *habit of order in life*.

The fewer distractions students encounter, the deeper they are able to go in *encountering reality*.




# Classroom Environment

- The classroom is an extension of the home. Plants, natural lighting, beautiful pictures enhance the environment and add to the culture of the classroom.
- Students should be exposed to reality in a way that does not stifle them or fill them with useless information.
- The most important point to *education is an atmosphere* that creates a setting that is godly, disciplined and a desirable place for children.
- *Simplicity and beauty are what allow children to make sense of the world.*



# Classroom Environment



We must help our teachers **fight**  
the temptation to overwhelm  
the walls.

*While Montessori and Mason had fundamental philosophical disagreements, both realized the need for simplicity and order in the environment for children to learn.*

- Children cannot learn through the constant sensory bombardment that has saturated our culture today.
- Our goal is to help children discover and make sense of the world, to wonder and be able to experience reality in its truest form.
- Can only be done in an environment that lends itself to order and beauty.

- The ability for children (and adults) to focus comes from the development of paying attention to one thing at a time.

# Orderly Classrooms

## Orderly Classrooms include:

1. Teacher's desk in order
2. Space for students to store their things in an orderly way.
3. Simple desks with few ways for distraction.
4. Clean walls with beautiful artwork.
5. Space in the classroom designated for prayer.
6. Offer students encounters with beauty- artwork, classical music, etc.  
Great way to evangelize!





Assess the different rooms pictured:

1. Is it orderly?
2. Is it beautiful?
3. Is it homey?
4. Is it natural?
5. Is it peaceful?



# The importance of beautiful artwork...

*“Montessori was always insistent that children should not be fobbed off with inferior art...She maintained that, though perhaps children are not able to put their impressions into words like an art critic, they are, nonetheless, very susceptible to the appeal of real beauty. We should never dream of putting them off with “pretty, pretty” pictures or badly composed pictures, under the impression that as “it is only for children” any sort of illustration will do. Child psychologists are agreed that the “explosive period” for appreciation of art takes place at about age five.”* The Child in the Church, pg 198.













# RENEWAL OF AN ENTRYWAY

Courtesy Catholic Schools Playbook, Harrison Design, The Hawthorn School

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# RENEWAL OF AN ENTRYWAY

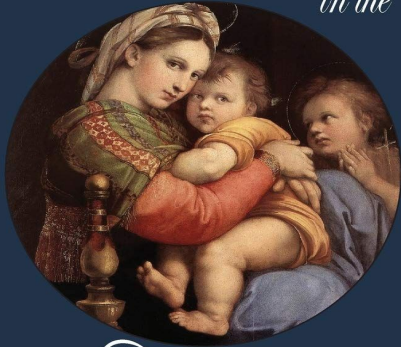




# In Summary

- As stated in *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*:  
“From the first moment that a student sets foot in a Catholic school, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment, one **illuminated** by the light of faith, and having its own unique characteristics.”  
(Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988)
- This cannot be boiled down to a rubric- this is a living culture that permeates the hallways, classrooms, etc.
- Our children are in great need for exposure to beauty, simplicity and reality in a way that fosters wonder.
- *Creating this culture must involve the teachers and their understanding of the Church's teaching.*
- We can gather much from Maria Montessori and Charlotte Mason- we have the freedom to take what is good from their philosophies and make it our own.

# *The Child* in the



# *Church*

By  
MARIA MONTESSORI AND OTHERS  
Edited by E.M. Standing

## Discussion and homework

### Start spring cleaning in your building!

1. Assess where the needs are for simplifying, bringing order and beauty in the environment.
2. Create your school's "philosophy of the environment" Ask the faculty to work with you on this so they buy into the principles of simplicity.

3. Then, have each teacher produce a short narrative or list of a few things they will do to move their classroom environment to a greater order over the summer, eg., add rug and/or floor lamp; create a list of rotations for posters so they are not all up, cluttering; add an art piece, etc.?

**Due MARCH 18**

*The Holy See's*  
**TEACHING**  
*on*  
**CATHOLIC**  
**SCHOOLS**



*Archbishop J. Michael Miller, CSB*  
SECRETARY, CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION