

Faculty In-Service Series

Gravissimum Educationis: Declaration on Christian Education



THE CARDINAL
NEWMAN SOCIETY

Promoting and Defending
Faithful Catholic Education

by Denise L. Donohue, Ed.D.,
Daniel P. Guernsey, Ed.D.
October 2015

Gravissimum Educationis: Declaration on Christian Education Faculty In-Service

About the Authors

Dr. Denise Donohue is the Deputy Director of K-12 programs at The Cardinal Newman Society. She earned her doctorate in school administration, with a concentration in curriculum development and a dissertation on the establishment of private, independent Catholic schools. She has served as interim chair and visiting assistant professor of a college education department, founder and principal of a Catholic high school, founder and religion coordinator for a Catholic grade school, and assistant head of a Catholic K-12 school.

Dr. Dan Guernsey is the Director of K-12 programs at The Cardinal Newman Society. He is also currently an associate professor of education and chairman of a college education department. He earned his doctorate in educational administration and has master's degrees in English and in educational administration. He has worked for over 25 years in Catholic education as a teacher and a principal at the K-12 level and as an associate professor, department chair, dean of education, and president at the college level.

About The Cardinal Newman Society

For more than 20 years, the mission of The Cardinal Newman Society has been to promote and defend faithful Catholic education.

The K-12 Education Programs of The Cardinal Newman Society seeks to fulfill its mission in numerous ways, including supporting education that is faithful to the teaching and tradition of the Catholic Church; producing and disseminating research and publications on developments and best practices in Catholic education; and keeping Catholic leaders and families informed.

Copyright © 2015 The Cardinal Newman Society. Permission to reprint is hereby granted provided no modifications are made to the text and it is identified as a publication of The Cardinal Newman Society.

The Cardinal Newman Society
9720 Capital Court
Suite 201
Manassas, Virginia 20110
703/367-0333
www.CardinalNewmanSociety.org

Gravissimum Educationis: Declaration on Christian Education Faculty In-Service

In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965), the declaration on Catholic education that followed the Second Vatican Council, this exercise invites those involved in Catholic education to spend some time reading and discussing this seminal work and perhaps looking at some select themes.

It is suggested that the entire faculty is involved in the study, which should take about one or two sessions, for a total of approximately 2 hours. Participants should plan on 30-40 minutes to pre-read the entire document before coming together for discussion noting:

- Any particular sentences or ideas that catch their interest.
- Any concepts or views not fully appreciated before.
- The central and timeless elements of Catholic education as expressed in the document.
- Any elements of the document that are particularly relevant for the school's current situation and particular needs.

For a small faculty, one person with excellent group facilitation skills could be designated as the discussion leader. For larger schools, small groups of 4-5 members are recommended. The discussion leader might begin with overall impressions or questions that have arisen during pre-reading of the document. The leader may also find it helpful to read one of the selected quotes and allow the participants time to write an initial reflection in the "Notes" section. Some possible questions are provided to provoke discussion on particular selections. They need not all be answered, as additional questions may arise from within the groups. Not all of the suggested sections need to be covered; some schools may want to divide the sections among several groups and have them report back to the larger group. Whichever approach is taken, time spent in this important document and gathered as a faculty will be time well spent.

Christian Formation

“A Christian education does not merely strive for the maturing of a human person as just now described, but has as its principal purpose this goal: that the baptized, while they are gradually introduced the knowledge of the mystery of salvation, become ever more aware of the gift of Faith they have received, and that they learn in addition how to worship God the Father in spirit and truth (cf. John 4:23) especially in liturgical action, and be conformed in their personal lives according to the new man created in justice and holiness of truth (Eph. 4:22-24); also that they develop into perfect manhood, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ (cf. Eph. 4:13) and strive for the growth of the Mystical Body; moreover, that aware of their calling, they learn not only how to bear witness to the hope that is in them (cf. Peter 3:15) but also how to help in the Christian formation of the world that takes place when natural powers viewed in the full consideration of man redeemed by Christ contribute to the good of the whole society.”

(Gravissimum Educationis, 1965, #2)

“Finally, in a special way, the duty of educating belongs to the Church... because she has the responsibility of announcing the way of salvation to all men, of communicating the life of Christ to those who believe, and, in her unflinching solicitude, of assisting men to be able to come to the fullness of this life.”

(Gravissimum Educationis, 1965, #3)

Discussion Questions

1. How do we introduce our students to the mystery and way of salvation? Do they actively accept, embrace and celebrate this salvation?
2. How aware are our students of the elements of the Catholic faith? How deeply and sincerely do our students hold and practice the truths of the Catholic faith in all of its fullness and as appropriate to their age? How well can they faithfully articulate the positions of the Catholic Church, especially on contemporary topics particularly relevant to them? How can we teach this better?
3. Do our students participate in Liturgy sincerely and fruitfully? How can we enhance their love, commitment and knowledge of the Eucharist and increase their participation in the liturgical life and sacramental life of the Church?
4. How numerous, effective and vibrant are our retreats, devotions, opportunities for the sacrament of reconciliation, and other spiritual initiatives? How can we pray better and more as a community? How are our students prepared to witness to their hope in Christ: to each other, to the world, and especially to those in need? Are there ways in which we can better prepare them for their role in the Church?
5. How are our students prepared to help in the Christian formation of the world? How can we better prepare them?
6. How confident are we that our graduates are prepared to come to the “fullness of life”? How can we help set them on a virtuous path?

Notes:

Role of Teachers

“Beautiful indeed and of great importance is the vocation of all those who aid parents in fulfilling their duties and who, as representatives of the human community, undertake the task of education in schools. This vocation demands special qualities of mind and heart, very careful preparation, and continuing readiness to renew and to adapt.”

(Gravissimum Educationis, 1965, #5)

“Intimately linked in charity to one another and to their students and endowed with an apostolic spirit, may teachers by their life as much as by their instruction bear witness to Christ, the unique Teacher.”

(Gravissimum Educationis, 1965, #8)

“But let teachers recognize that the Catholic school depends upon them almost entirely for the accomplishment of its goals and programs.”

(Gravissimum Educationis, 1965, #8)

Discussion Questions

1. Do we really see our work as teachers as a beautiful vocation? What does that mean in the context of our personal and professional lives?
2. How do we, as faculty, witness Christ to our students and to each other? How can we do better?
3. How do our lives, both in and out of the classroom, bear faithful, sincere, and integral witness to Christ and his Church? Are there ways in which we can strengthen our own faith life to become stronger witnesses?
4. Are there opportunities to pray with our students and members of our faculty and staff? How can we increase ways to support each other in prayer?
5. How do we, as a faculty, support each other, serve the community, grow and celebrate together? What are other opportunities for building a faith community?
6. The mission and goals of the school depend almost entirely upon us as a faculty: What is unique about our mission in Catholic education? What makes us different from other private or other faith-based schools? Are there more ways we could enhance our school and programs to fulfill our Catholic mission?

Notes:

Encounter with Culture

“The Church is bound as a mother to give to these children of hers an education by which their whole life can be imbued with the spirit of Christ and at the same time do all she can to promote for all peoples the complete perfection of the human person, the good of earthly society and the building of a world that is more human.”

(Gravissimum Educationis, 1965, #3)

“Among all educational instruments the school has a special importance. It is designed not only to develop with special care the intellectual faculties but also to form the ability to judge rightly, to hand on the cultural legacy of previous generations, to foster a sense of values, to prepare for professional life.”

(Gravissimum Educationis, 1965, #5)

“The influence of the Church in the field of education is shown in a special manner by the Catholic school. No less than other schools does the Catholic school pursue cultural goals and the human formation of youth. But its proper function is to create for the school community a special atmosphere animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity, to help youth grow according to the new creatures they were made through baptism as they develop their own personalities, and finally to order the whole of human culture to the news of salvation so that the knowledge the students gradually acquire of the world, life and man is illumined by faith.”

(Gravissimum Educationis, 1965, #8)

Discussion Questions

1. How are we preparing students to serve society and help build a world that is more human? Are there additional opportunities we could provide for our students to ready them for their future role in society?
2. How do we teach our students to judge rightly? How in tune are their values with the values of the Catholic Church? when Catholic values conflict with elements of the modern culture on issues of life, human sexuality and marriage? when Catholic values conflict with our modern culture in areas of social justice and human dignity? How can we teach these values better?
3. How do we transmit the best of our Catholic cultural heritage and legacy? Do all subjects, especially literature, history, art, music, and extracurricular programs, expose students to the best in Catholic thought and to all that is true, good & beautiful?
4. How do we teach our students the right use of freedom, to pursue the good, and to maximize the fullness of their humanity in Christ? How can we better teach the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity?
5. What aspects of our students' lives are most in need of illumination by the light of faith? Are there ways we can strengthen the faith life of our students?

Notes: