

TO: THE CHURCH OF EASTERN MONTANA  
FROM: Most Rev. Thomas J. Murphy  
DATE: May 17, 1981  
RE: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

*Addition of  
has Supervisor*

My Dear Friends,

As we conclude the present school year and plan for next year, I would like to share with you some of my thoughts regarding the religious education and formation of our young people on the elementary and secondary level. Religious education is and has been a significant contribution of the Church to the people of Eastern Montana. Faith is a gift from God and the formation of our young through education in the knowledge of that gift and how it relates to every dimension of life has been and will continue to be a responsibility of every parish in cooperation with parents and family members. I recognize and appreciate the sacrifices people make to meet this awesome responsibility and I believe the Diocese as the focal point and symbol of our unity as Roman Catholics should be of assistance to you in every way possible.

To fulfill our responsibility in religious education, especially in our parochial schools, we have had to face the reality of financial support for our efforts. As you know full well, educational costs have increased dramatically over the past few years. This rising cost, however, calls each and every one of us to examine how we live out the principles of social justice in meeting these costs.

Some parishes have long borne the heavy financial burden of providing religious formation and education through both a parish school and a CCD program. Through their schools, these parishes have offered a tremendous gift to the parish community as well as the larger community both now and for the future. Reality also makes us recognize that parents for various reasons choose not to take advantage of Catholic school education where available. The Church responds to that need through religious education programs. Even though I must be honest and say that in no way is a one or two hour a week religious education program able to offer the same potential benefits as a Catholic school education, we are trying to make religious education programs in parishes with schools and in those parishes without schools an enriching experience for the young people of our diocese. This, of course, calls for financial support.

Key to the success of Catholic schools and religious education programs is the presence of qualified personnel. To obtain such personnel, there is a need to offer a just wage. Over the last few years, parishes have made significant advances in fulfilling this obligation. In examining a report on proposed salaries for the 1981-82 school year, I recognize that half of our schools will offer an equitable or nearly equitable salary plus health insurance benefits. The other half are struggling to offer salaries commensurate with the principles of justice and a few are looking for ways in which to include health insurance as a benefit. I realize the heavy burden this places on parishes, but I

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believe it is critical that we reflect our awareness of social responsibility in dealing with teachers if we are to share the Good News of charity and justice with the students in our schools. The same principle applies to religious education programs.

The principle of justice rests on all our shoulders, yours and mine. As Bishop, I would like to offer financial assistance to our parishes to defray some of the costs involved in obtaining qualified personnel as well as providing quality programs in religious education and formation. The plan is quite simple. Inflation has had both negative and positive effects on all of us. The positive effect is that this past year's interest rate inflation has benefitted our diocesan investments and I want to share that benefit with you.

It seems logical that since your parish supports the diocese in its ministry to Eastern Montana through the CARE AND SHARE appeal, that collection will be used as a basis for determining a formula for financial assistance. Therefore, from the increased investment interest rates we project we will earn during this present fiscal year, I would like to contribute to each parish the dollar amount indicated in the following formula:

I. TO PARISHES WITH ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:

Ten per cent (10%) of the dollar figure actually contributed to CARE AND SHARE by September 15, 1981 (unpaid pledges do not qualify) for the purpose of:

- A. Assisting those schools with a proposed salary base of \$9000.00 or more.
- B. Assisting those schools with a proposed salary base of less than \$9000.00 to raise this base figure.
- C. Assisting those schools not offering health insurance benefits to offer at least 50% of the premium to those who want it.

II. TO CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOLS AND THE COLLEGE OF GREAT FALLS

A direct grant for improving the religion/theology department (personnel and/or teaching materials) in the dollar amount of:

- A. Billings Central Catholic High School \$5000.00
- B. Sacred Heart High School, Miles City \$3000.00
- C. St. Leo's High School, Lewistown \$3000.00
- D. College of Great Falls \$3000.00

III. TO ALL PARISHES OF THE DIOCESE

To every parish that presents evidence that it will use the financial grant to improve its religious education program, five per cent (5%) of the dollar figure actually contributed to CARE AND SHARE by September 15, 1981 (unpaid pledges do not qualify) for the purpose of:

- A. Religious education program improvements in personnel or religious materials
- B. Assisting those parishes with hired religious education personnel to offer at least 50% of the health insurance premium to those who want it.

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A form is enclosed for your use in stating what use you will make of this financial assistance. The grants will be distributed on October 1, 1981.

In addition to the direct financial assistance given to parishes and schools, we are happy to announce even greater service to the Diocese for the religious education and formation of our young people as well as adults. Rev. James Sikora has served as the Director of Religious Education for our Diocese for the past three years. He has done outstanding work not only in the field of religious education, but in all endeavors in which he has been involved. A Search Committee was formed to present recommendations for a replacement in this important diocesan position.

We are happy to announce that we have obtained the services of two extremely qualified married laymen who will serve as Co-Directors of Religious Education for the Diocese of Eastern Montana.

The first is Mr. Patrick Guentert who will assume responsibility for pre-school, elementary, and adult education as well as teacher training. The second is Mr. James Sciegel who will be responsible for Junior High and High School programs as well as the Confirmation program in the Diocese. Mr. Sciegel will also assist Sr. Mary Editha Brown in serving the Religion programs of our Catholic schools at the Junior High and High School level. Finally, Mr. Sciegel will be responsible for ministry to the handicapped which will involve an outreach to the deaf and the mentally retarded.  
blind

A restricted fund given to the Diocese for religious education for the handicapped makes it possible for us to acquire the services of a second person in the Department of Religious Education. We are also happy that some initial efforts will be made to expand our ministry of religious formation and education to the handicapped.

As a result of this financial assistance program to schools, parishes, and the Diocesan Department of Religious Education, almost \$100,000.00 will be available during the next school year to help us respond to this important ministry we share.

This financial assistance and expansion of diocesan services is recognition of the ministry of religious education in our Diocese through school and non-school programs which will help determine the vitality of the Church in years to come. It is also evidence of my own personal concern for social justice for those whom we employ as well as for those who in your parishes financially support the ministry of the Diocese.

The enclosed salary scale and personnel information is also being sent to you for consideration by your school or education committee for adoption as policy. It is my sincere desire that in the near future all of our schools will have a salary and increment scale, health insurance benefits, and personnel policies no less than what is enclosed. I likewise hope that in the near future, we might begin a first step towards a retirement program for all diocesan employees.

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Thank you for all that you are doing on behalf of religious education and formation programs for the people of your parish community. The final command of Jesus to His disciples was to go forth and proclaim the good news to the ends of the world. We share in that response through our ministry of religious education and formation.

With gratitude and appreciation for all that is done to preach the message of Jesus, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,