

PHILOSOPHY OF THE SETON ACADEMY
A Model for Catholic Inclusive Education

The Seton Academy's philosophy is based on the entire tradition of the Roman Catholic Church including the documents of Vatican II, and all papal pronouncements on Catholic education, with a special emphasis on The Gospel of Life and the Code of Canon Law.

Mission

The Seton Academy provides an authentic Catholic education aiming at forming in the students the virtues "by the integration of culture with faith and of faith with living." ("The Catholic School," No. 49, The Sacred Congregation of Catholic Education). The Seton Academy serves as a model for Catholic inclusive education, rooted in the teachings and spirituality of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, our Patron Saint. Our work is inspired and guided by the words found in Mark's Gospel: "*And people were bringing children to him that He might touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this he became indignant and said to them, Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*" (Mark 10:13-14)

Truly Catholic – Truly Inclusive

"[T]hat they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us." (John 17:21)

By Baptism, one is incorporated into the church of Christ and is constituted a person in it with duties and rights which are proper to Christians. -- Canon 96, 1983 Code of Canon Law

Since they are called by Baptism to lead a life in keeping with the teaching of the gospel, the Christian faithful have the right to a Christian education by which they are to be instructed properly to strive for the maturity of the human person and at the same time to know and live the mystery of salvation. -- Canon 217, 1983 Code of Canon Law

The Gospel of God's love for man, the Gospel of the dignity of the person and the Gospel of life are a single and indivisible Gospel. (The Gospel of Life, no. 2)

At The Seton Academy we seek to open wide our arms and our hearts to assisting and to serving all our students in a caring and inclusive Catholic school community where God's unconditional love is made known to all. The Seton Academy is dedicated to excellence where the Gospel values are not only taught but also lived in accordance with our Catholic faith. At The Seton Academy all students are valued as individuals and learn together in general education classrooms. Research has proven the benefits of inclusive education for students with and without disabilities and the failure of segregated systems of education.

From their rebirth in Christ, there exists among all the Christian faithful a true equality with regard to dignity and the activity whereby all cooperate in building up the Body of Christ in accord with each one's own condition and function. -- Canon 208, 1983 Code of Canon Law

The Gospel of life is at the heart of Jesus' message. Lovingly received day after day by the Church, it is to be preached with dauntless fidelity as "good news" to the people of every age and culture... When he presents the heart of his redemptive mission, Jesus says: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). In truth, he is referring to that "new" and "eternal" life which consists in communion with the Father, to which every person is freely called in the Son by the power of the Sanctifying Spirit. It is precisely in this "life" that all the aspects and stages of human life achieve their full significance. (The Gospel of Life, no. 1).

The “good news” of the Gospel must reach all God’s children, including those with disabilities. Every child has an incomparable value and dignity. The exclusion and segregation of children and youth with or without disabilities violate the value of their human life and violates their dignity as children of God.

We cannot but think of today's tendency for people to refuse to accept responsibility for their brothers and sisters. Symptoms of this trend include the lack of solidarity towards society's weakest members-such as the elderly, the infirm, immigrants, children... (The Gospel of Life, no. 8).

We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers and we cannot remain indifferent in the face of the continued exclusion and institutional segregation of our brothers and sisters with disabilities.

This culture is actively fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents which encourage an idea of society excessively concerned with efficiency. Looking at the situation from this point of view, it is possible to speak in a certain sense of a war of the powerful against the weak: a life which would require greater acceptance, love and care is considered useless, or held to be an intolerable burden, and is therefore rejected in one way or another. A person who, because of illness, handicap or, more simply, just by existing, compromises the well-being or life-style of those who are more favoured tends to be looked upon as an enemy to be resisted or eliminated. (The Gospel of Life, no. 12).

We need to be people of life and work against the “conspiracy against life.” We cannot tolerate the exclusion and rejection of children and youth with disabilities from our schools in the name of “efficiency.”

Equally, we, as Catholics, members of the Body of Christ, charged with proclaiming His Good News, cannot accept rejection and segregation of children with disabilities as simply a “method of instruction.” The lives of children and youth with disabilities are precious and must be embraced! The inclusion of children with disabilities in Catholic schools is consistent with our Catholic faith and with the protection of all human life and the promotion of human dignity. We cannot be pro-life and be against inclusive education. The vision of the Church is inclusive. Jesus reached out to all. God’s Kingdom is inclusive – no one is excluded!

The Seton Curriculum

Catechetical instruction is to be given by using all helps, teaching aids, and instruments of social communication which seem more effective so that the faithful, in a manner adapted to their character, capabilities and age, and conditions of life, are able to learn Catholic doctrine more fully and put it into practice more suitably. -- Canon 779, 1983 Code of Canon Law

Having been given the command by Christ to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,” it is to the Church that we look to gain an understanding of the purpose and the ultimate end of education. Men and women were created by God in his image and likeness and destined to spend eternity with him in heaven. This is man's ultimate end, and no amount of earthly knowledge or goods alone, can satisfy his heart or bring true happiness to his world. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton said: “*Let your chief study be to acquaint yourself with God because there is nothing greater than God, and because it is the only knowledge which can fill the heart with a peace and joy, which nothing can disturb.*”

The environment and the curriculum of The Seton Academy are designed to ensure the proper formation and education of the human person in light of his ultimate goal which is a life lived to the greater glory of God and eternal life lived with God in heaven. "Hence", says Pius XI, "the true Christian, product of Christian education, is the supernatural man who thinks judges and acts constantly and consistently in accordance with right reason illumined by the supernatural light of the example and teaching of Christ."

Since true education must strive for complete formation of the human person that looks to his or her final end as well as to the common good of societies, children and youth should be nurtured in such a way that they are able to develop their physical, moral and intellectual talents harmoniously, acquire a more perfect sense of responsibility and right use of freedom, and are formed to participate actively in social life.
-- Canon 795, 1983 Code of Canon Law

The Seton Curriculum is a well structured curriculum which is complete and it is authentically Catholic in content and methodology. In order to live a life 'to the greater glory of God', human persons are called by Christ to go forth into the world and to become, according to the Vatican document on Christian Education, "as it were the saving leaven of the human family." The Christian then must be ready to enter the world in which he lives prepared to "promote effectively the welfare of the earthly city...and to serve the advancement of the human family." Pius XI states that: "The true Christian does not renounce the activities of his life, he does not stunt his natural faculties; but he develops and perfects them by coordinating them with the supernatural." Called by God to bring peace, justice and truth into the society in which he lives, thus fashioning a world more in tune with the dignity of the human person, the Christian must be educated in excellence. The study of that which is excellent in human attainments will bear witness to truth, and thus to God. Authentic Catholic education informs students with the most excellent intellectual accomplishments in the order of nature (i.e. the liberal arts and sciences, the fine arts) and thus disposes them to the crowning intellectual accomplishments of those steeped in grace (i.e. sacred doctrine/theology). In keeping with the perennial philosophy and theology that is the intellectual heritage of every Christian; The Seton Academy seeks to carry on the living tradition of authentic Catholic education.

Children with Disabilities

The acceptance and placement of children with disabilities at The Seton Academy is based on natural proportion guidelines. Children are placed in classrooms based on natural population proportions to the extent possible. The natural proportion principle is based on realistic population groups and therefore limits the number of children with disabilities to a natural distribution. A predominance of children with disabilities or a 50% membership in a school or classroom is not in keeping with natural population proportions. Consequently, there would generally only be one or two children with the most significant disabilities who would be members of a particular classroom. This allows peers and adults in the classroom to more naturally support the presence of the child with significant disabilities and retains the normalizing context of the environment.

Parents – The Primary Educators

The matrimonial covenant . . . is ordered by its nature to the... procreation and education of offspring. -- Canon 1055 §1, 1983 Code of Canon Law

Since they have given life to their children, parents have a most grave (gravissima) obligation and possess the right to educate them. Therefore, it is for Christian parents particularly to take care of the Christian education of their children according to the doctrine handed on by the Church. -- Canon 226 §2, 1983 Code of Canon Law

Parents and those who take their place are bound by the obligation and possess the right of educating their offspring. Catholic parents also have the duty and right of choosing those means and institutions through which they can provide more suitably for the Catholic education of their children, according to local circumstances. Canon 793 §1, 1983 Code of Canon Law

As I recall the powerful experience of the Year of the Family, as if to complete the Letter which I wrote "to every particular family in every part of the world", I look with renewed confidence to every household and I pray that at every level a general commitment to support the family will reappear and be strengthened, so that today too-even amid so many difficulties and serious threats-the family will always remain, in accordance with God's plan, the "sanctuary of life". To all the members of the Church, the people of life and for life, I make this most urgent appeal, that together we may offer this world of ours new signs of hope, and work to ensure that justice and solidarity will increase and that a new culture of human life will be affirmed, for the building of an authentic civilization of truth and love. (The Gospel of Life, no. 6).

Families need to be supported, in particular those families who have been touched by disability and we cannot abandon them. They chose life and we need to welcome and embrace these children and the gifts they bring with them.

Then there are all kinds of existential and interpersonal difficulties, made worse by the complexity of a society in which individuals, couples and families are often left alone with their problems (The Gospel of Life, no. 11).

The Vatican II document Declaration on Christian Education states that parents are the first and foremost educators of their children, and that "their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it." Furthermore, we find this same thinking expressed in Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation on the family, Familiaris Consortio, when he states that *"the right and duty of parents to give education is essential...it is original and primary with regard to the educational role of others...it is irreplaceable and inalienable and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others."* Thus acknowledging these truths, The Seton Academy aids parents in the formation and education of their children based on the principle of subsidiarity.

The principle of subsidiarity holds that "a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a Community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather should support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good." -- no. 1883, Catechism of the Catholic Church; John Paul II, enc. Centesimus Annus (May 1, 1991), n. 48

Among the means to foster education, the Christian faithful are to hold schools in esteem; schools are the principal assistance to parents in fulfilling the function of education. Canon 796 §1, 1983 Code of Canon Law

The Seton Academy provides an atmosphere that maintains and fosters the Christian spiritual, intellectual, moral and physical formation that the students receive at home. The school exists primarily to form the intellect of the student and as such aids parents in those tasks of education that they are not able to completely fulfill on their own.

The mission of The Seton Academy is consistent with the protection of all human life and the promotion of human dignity. As Pope John Paul II stated: *"Where life is involved, the service of charity must be profoundly consistent. It cannot tolerate bias and discrimination, for human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation; it is an indivisible good."* (The Gospel of Life, no. 87).

Parents must possess a true freedom in choosing schools; therefore, the Christian faithful must be concerned that civil society recognizes this freedom for parents and even supports it with subsidies; distributive justice is to be observed. Canon 797, 1983 Code of Canon Law

The Seton Academy is established with the intention of providing "true freedom" for parents in the choice of a school to aid them in the education of their children. The Academy provides a Roman Catholic education in the classical tradition. The vision for the school is to serve students in grades pre-K through fifth. Desiring to be found in the heart of the Church, and providing for the formation of students in an atmosphere free from dissent of its teachings, the members of the board of trustees and all faculty and staff of The Seton Academy take an oath of fidelity to the magisterium, and sign a profession of faith in the

Roman Catholic Church. The Seton Academy is dedicated primarily to serving practicing Roman Catholic families, as well as others who sincerely desire to participate in the total curriculum. The academy does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, disability, national or ethnic origin in its policies of admissions, scholarships, or employment of personnel.

Excellence in the academic formation of its students is enhanced by small class size and best practices, allowing for individual attention and the recognition of the uniqueness of each student. Desiring to provide a Christ-like atmosphere within which education can flourish, The Seton Academy sets prayer not as an isolated activity, but rather one that permeates the entire life of the Academy. In whatever is studied, spoken or accomplished, students, faculty, and parents will conduct themselves in a manner consistent with authentic Catholic living.

Parents must cooperate closely with the teachers of the schools to which they entrust their children to be educated; moreover, teachers in fulfilling their duty are to collaborate very closely with parents, who are to be heard willingly and for whom associations or meetings are to be established and highly esteemed. Canon 796 §2, 1983 Code of Canon Law

The Seton Academy was founded by parents, and its success depends on the support of the parents of its students, as well as that of the community. This support will come in many ways, notwithstanding financial support. Committed to paying fair wages to its employees and to making the school affordable, in as much as it is able, to all families who sincerely desire its education and formation, The Seton Academy must have the financial support of those who believe in its mission.

The goal of education at The Seton Academy is to produce "the true Christian...the supernatural man who thinks, judges and acts constantly and consistently in accordance with right reason illumined by the supernatural light of the example and teaching of Christ."