



Bishops' Advisory Committee Meeting Strategic Session June 12, 2023, Orlando, Florida Summary of Proceedings

June Advisory Committee Meeting

In June 2023, prior to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Spring Assembly, Leadership Roundtable convened our Bishops' Advisory Committee with the addition of several other key bishops, philanthropists, and education professionals.

Our agenda asked the bishops and the others invited to attend to provide us guidance on our work with universities, and to advise on what, if any, role that Leadership Roundtable could play in the emerging possibilities opening up for Catholic education. A diverse representation of 19 cardinals and bishops took part in the meeting and gave their advice on these recent initiatives involving Catholic education.

The June meeting was preceded by consultation with the Bishops' Advisory Committee, the USCCB Committee on Catholic Education, the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA), the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (ACCU), the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU), members of the Catholic philanthropic community, and education professionals working on innovative approaches to Catholic education.

Background

Over the past few years, bishops, philanthropists, advocates, and others have raised to Leadership Roundtable that there is a growing, urgent concern for the success and sustainability of Catholic education in the United States, presenting a major opportunity for the Church.

In early 2023, during a meeting with our recently-formed Bishops' Advisory Committee, we asked this group of about 15 bishops an open question: what keeps you up at night? Overwhelmingly, the bishops shared that Catholic education was a great concern and an area where we at Leadership Roundtable might be of support.

As a network-of-networks focused on contemporary leadership and managerial challenges, Leadership Roundtable has been encouraged by Church and philanthropic leaders to offer our convening and leadership expertise to assist with identifying trends and strategies that can help Catholic education – primary, secondary, and higher education institutions – succeed and thrive.

For a few years now, we have been working to deepen partnerships with Catholic universities to scale some of our core programs for the benefit of local dioceses and to provide an avenue for universities to collaborate with and support their local dioceses. In addition, we continue to discern ways we can offer support toward sustainability of Catholic primary and secondary schools nationwide.

Meeting Outcomes

The Bishop's Advisory Committee meeting in June resulted in key insights on ways that Leadership Roundtable could potentially assist efforts to partner with Catholic universities to strengthen community relationships, and to revitalize Catholic education.

University Partnerships

- Working with local universities would help forge stronger relationships between higher education institutions and their local dioceses.
- We need to create an intentional pipeline for leadership at Catholic universities starting with training at the parish level but that could be extended to campus ministry programs and form pastoral leaders, potential teachers, and administrators in Catholic mission.
- The Church has an opportunity to partner with local universities to find and offer scholarships for teachers to pursue their graduate degrees and ongoing formation.

Catholic Education

- The group identified key areas where they felt action is needed and voiced support for creating and advancing a call to action within the bishops' conference in support of the revitalization of Catholic education.

- Overall, the consensus was that there is an opportunity right now to take a more comprehensive approach to strengthen Catholic education characterized by what one bishop called the “4 As”:
 - ★ Affordable
 - ★ Accessible
 - ★ Authentically Catholic
 - ★ Academically excellent.

Key Themes and Insights from Participants

What follows are the main insights, themes, and observations offered by the bishops and participating thought leaders during the Bishops’ Advisory Committee meeting discussion on both university partnerships and Catholic education.

Catholic culture and identity

- Catholic identity is one of our unique qualities and we need to emphasize it and not water it down.
- The school choice agenda has, in some cases, hurt Catholic schools. We need to distinguish ourselves and focus more on deeper spiritual and well-rounded formation.
- Catholic high schools are known for good sports programs. This is good but needs to go hand-in-hand with Catholic identity. Sports can help reach the underserved.
- Parents are craving academic excellence. Catholic schools are successful when they combine academic excellence with authentic Catholic culture and teaching.
- Many families came to Catholic schools due to COVID and stayed because of the culture of care (for the student and family) and the curriculum.
- In many cases more than 50% of children in our schools are not Catholic. Families are there for academics and values. In a strong Catholic culture they can also learn about the faith.
- Catholic culture can create sustainability.

Community and connection

- How we work together in this critical moment is key to success.
- Catholic schools can be a source to bring people together and keep families together.
- The school community helps reach the underserved.
- Schools are an excellent way for parents to have a connection with a parish. Need to develop these local connections beyond active parishioners.
- Schools are a means of evangelization through outreach to families, connection, and community. Rather than seeing non-parishioners as “not my people,” parishes need to find ways to make them their people.
- Parents are the primary educators, so community connection to parents with formation is vital.
- Elementary schools are good vehicles to engage families.
- A useful approach in some places has been to switch from parochial schools to regional schools.

Support for teachers and administrators

- The most animating topic for philanthropists right now is education.
- We need to find and strengthen a new generation of teachers and administrators and pay to keep them.
- We cannot rely on lay teachers who are dedicated without supporting them.
- Many teachers will come to Catholic schools for the mission but still need support to stay.
- Retention of teachers and administrators is vital; are there other ways to support them beyond just salary, such as utilizing unused Church properties for teacher housing.
- There is an opportunity to work with philanthropists, donors, and parishioners to develop diocesan “excellence in education” funds.
- There is a need to offer formation support for administrative staff.

The vital role of pastors

- Pastors are a key to the success of Catholic schools as they set the tone at their parish. For different reasons, many pastors are not in favor or supportive of Catholic schools.
- Engage more with pastors. When pastors do not support the school, it is detrimental and ecclesial support is vital to the success of a school.
- The school and parish need to be one.
- When pastors are not supportive it is still possible for schools to thrive if there are other strong elements and outside support.
- There is a need to educate pastors on the value of Catholic education.
- When a parish loses a school, it can cause the whole parish to struggle.

School governance and collaboration with the laity

- When there are multiple parishes involved in a school, no one parish has ownership, and therefore often no one parish will maintain it. Need to create support from co-responsible experts in the parishes.
- Review governance models to make them more participatory by involving key stakeholders, including lay parents and professionals.
- Religious sisters were key to the early and sustained success of Catholic schools, but today, they are often no longer running our schools. Need to develop new, collaborative structures. The key is collaboration with existing skills and knowledge of parishioners.
- Need to strengthen school boards.

Models of education

- The benefit that often came with movement away from parochial models to various types of models has led to growth and sustainability.
- Catholic schools are not just another form of private education or alternate to public schools. Need to communicate that Catholic schools more than this, they are a third type: one that serves *all* with Catholic culture and values – with religious motivations.

- Schools need to adjust to meet the unique needs of communities they serve. They can create a niche in the educational marketplace if we customize our schools while remaining authentically Catholic.
- Need to keep thinking outside the box and incorporate best practices.

Engaging and serving the Latino community

- Latinos and Hispanics are the fastest growing segment of the Church, but they are not in Catholic schools in proportionate numbers – not as students, faculty, or leadership.
- More outreach and support need to be given especially to immigrant communities.
- Need to recruit and retain more Latino teachers.
- Need to deliberately open or support schools in Latino communities.
- Latinos are very engaged in the Church yet largely do not send their kids to Catholic schools. We need to continue to deepen our understanding Latino/American culture with relation to education and faith and address it with effective solutions.

Next steps for Leadership Roundtable

The bishops and thought leaders who attended the meeting advised Leadership Roundtable to continue our work with universities to scale our programs through their institutions, noting that it would help forge stronger relationships between higher education institutions and their local dioceses. They encouraged us to continue to make it a top priority of our work.

Additionally, they also encouraged Leadership Roundtable to discern where and how we can support their efforts to address the success and sustainability of Catholic education, and, where possible, to leverage our network-of-networks to support ongoing conversation with leaders in the Church about the current opportunities for Catholic education.

After reflecting on the discussions from our committee members and guests summarized above, Leadership Roundtable is working on ways to, where applicable, incorporate them into our ongoing programs, activities, and convenings. To this end, we will continue connecting with partners in the Catholic education space and learning how our particular strengths can be of assistance.

Regarding the institutional Church, we will inform the participating bishops and other identified stakeholders who came to the June 12 meeting of the outcomes. We will also coordinate with the USCCB Committee on Catholic Education, when requested, and support the initiatives and efforts the Committee takes to make Catholic education a national priority.

As advised by our Bishops' Advisory Committee at both its February and June meetings, we will continue to collaborate with USCCB leaders and offer to prepare a larger event, ideally in conjunction with the USCCB Fall Assembly of bishops, philanthropists, and other education professionals to help determine ways of maximizing the current possibilities available to benefit Catholic education in the United States.

Finally, we plan to include a special event on Catholic education during Leadership Roundtable's 2024 Catholic Partnership Summit. This event aims to support our bishops and thought-leaders by continuing to gather them around this issue to respond, as needed, to the emerging needs and trends of the Church in this regard.

Participants

Cardinal Seán O'Malley, OFM Cap.

Archdiocese of Boston

Cardinal Joseph Tobin, CSsR

Archdiocese of Newark

Archbishop Paul Coakley

Archdiocese of Oklahoma City

Archbishop Paul Etienne

Archdiocese of Seattle

Archbishop Borys Gudziak

Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia

Archbishop Gregory Hartmayer, OFM Conv.

Archdiocese of Atlanta

Archbishop Bernard Hebda

Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski

Archdiocese of St. Louis

Bishop Stephen Biegler

Diocese of Cheyenne

Bishop Frank Caggiano

Diocese of Bridgeport

Bishop James Checchio

Diocese of Metuchen

Bishop John Dolan

Diocese of Phoenix

Bishop Barry Knestout

Diocese of Richmond

Bishop Shawn McKnight

Diocese of Jefferson City

Bishop Edward Scharfenberger

Diocese of Albany

Bishop David Toups

Diocese of Beaumont

Bishop Jerry Vincke

Diocese of Salina

Bishop David Zubik

Diocese of Pittsburgh

Bishop Thomas Zinkula

Diocese of Davenport

Ms. Kate Alexander

Senior Communications & Marketing Manager,
Leadership Roundtable

Mr. Geoff Boisi

Founder, Leadership Roundtable

Mr. Michael Brough

Executive Partner, Leadership Roundtable

Ms. Brittany Czekaj

Development Manager, Leadership Roundtable

Ms. Jill Kafka

Executive Director, Partnership Schools

Fr. Kevin Kennedy

Senior Leadership Director, Leadership
Roundtable

Mr. Patrick Markey

Managing Partner, Leadership Roundtable

Mr. Anthony Pienta

Executive Director, Altum Fund

Ms. Kathleen Porter-Magee

Superintendent, Partnership Schools

Ms. Kerry Robinson

Executive Partner, Leadership Roundtable

Ms. Joanne Ruddy

Convenings & Meetings Manager, Leadership
Roundtable

Ms. Alicia Bondanella Simon

Vice President, FADICA

Ms. Kim Smolik

Executive Partner, Leadership Roundtable

Mr. Lincoln Snyder

President/CEO, National Catholic Educational
Association