

## **Back to School: Time of Hope**

By The Most Rev. Daniel E. Flores, Bishop of Brownsville

I remember my youth in the home of my parents, facing what early September meant: it meant going back to school. This was an exciting, challenging time; a time of many questions, full of anticipation of new experiences and, without realizing it, a formative period. A time of hope. I would like to dedicate this letter to anyone committed to the education of our youth. It is dedicated mainly to young people themselves.

I pray that our youth enjoy this time of their lives. I encourage them to devote all possible attention to the study of their academic subjects. Our ability to learn and investigate, to seek truth and rejoice in having found it, marks the high-point of our dignity as beings created in the image and likeness of God. Furthermore, I urge you not miss the opportunity to grow in the most important of human values. Pay attention to your peers with whom you are going through this stage of life. Journeying together in school offers young people a privileged time to form bonds of friendship and, more importantly, learn how to work in community, how to respect the rights and gifts present in other people. It is a time to mature in the richest dimension of human life: interpersonal relationships.

To the parents of our youth: I thank you for the sacrifices you make to provide a good education for your children. The time spent talking to them about what they are learning in school is an indispensable gift for their formation. At school, children are confronted directly with a broader world outside the home, therefore they must have your help to understand what they are observing and experiencing in this world. I urge you wholeheartedly not to leave your children alone at this critical time in their lives. They need your wisdom and practical perspectives on life.

To the teachers and school administrators in the Valley, I assure you of my prayers. We know that many Catholics are directly involved in the education of our children, contributing to this essential mission through Catholic parochial schools, public schools and other private schools. To all of you I would recall that the vocation to form the next generation is one that impacts the future in a direct way. Recognize that the training of the mind of young people requires that the educator be competent in his or her field. At the same time, it requires excellence in the essential human virtues: temperance, fortitude, justice and prudence. The student assured of the goodness of the teacher will undoubtedly pay attention to the subject matter being taught and take this teaching to heart.

Young people need to know and talk with educators who are patient, compassionate and fair in order to receive from them confidence in the future and in the value of life's struggle. Without this confidence and hope in the future, of what benefit is the training of the mind?"

We share a common responsibility in the education of our youth. God calls us to dedicate ourselves to the task personally, each with his own gifts to promote the good. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, the first student in the school of her Son, and for that reason the first teacher of the early Christians, protect all of you with her mantle during this new school year.