



Office of the Bishop

Dear Catholic School Teachers and Catechetical Ministers,

Thank you for the care and commitment you bring to the children of our Catholic schools and parishes every day. Your work is critical in leading our youth closer to the person of Jesus Christ. This is the essential mission of the Church. It is the ultimate outcome of our ministry.

We also realize that the world as we know it is becoming ever-more complex and difficult to navigate, especially for the lives of our children. The effects of secular myths and misrepresentation of facts in our current cultural landscape can challenge and even devastate the genuine formation of faith for our young people. In fact, according to the 2017 study *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics* (Saint Mary's Press and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate), the median age for religious disaffiliation is 13 years old. Successive PEW surveys have equally shown that religion is on a steep decline among our youth. In 2016, 39% of those surveyed between the ages of 18-29 selected "none" as their religious affiliation (hence the nickname "nones"). This is up from 23% in 2006. If left unabated this will grow to 50% by 2023. A primary documented cause for this phenomenon is the perceived rift between faith and science.

This is nothing new. Dating as far back as St. Augustine and his refutation of Astrology in the 5th century, science in the service of human beings has always been encouraged and supported by the Church. The complementary truths of faith and science were recently addressed by Pope Francis to the Pontifical Academy of Science, "I encourage you to persevere in your search for truth for we ought never to fear truth, nor become trapped in our preconceived ideas, but welcome new scientific discoveries with an attitude of humility."

We have an opportunity in our diocese to address this specific issue programmatically through our prescribed religious studies curriculum in schools and parishes. To meet this challenge directly, we are requiring implementation of select modules from the *Credible Catholic* series for our junior high school-aged children (see: <https://www.crediblecatholic.com/>). *Credible Catholic*—an apologetic series addressing secular myths and misstated facts produced by Fr. Robert Spitzer, S.J., Ph.D., and President of the Magis Center—is being implemented in all 12 Catholic dioceses across California. Our collective hope is that this instructional content is integrated within other academic subjects. The transmission of faith works best when it is given context and not simply isolated from other modes of learning in "religion" class. Our Diocesan Office for Schools and Office for Evangelization & Catechetical Ministries will assist in the training, implementation and support plan for all school teachers and parish catechists at the junior high level. More information will be coming soon from these respective offices.

Lastly, we understand that no program can take the place of your own genuine witness of God's love and compassion to our children. It is for this affirmation of your own call to educational ministry that we are most grateful.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert W. McElroy
Bishop of San Diego