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## Maintaining Catholic Identity is Vital, Says U.S.C.C. Secretary for Education

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## NEWS RELEASE

### **MAINTAINING CATHOLIC IDENTITY IS VITAL, SAYS U.S.C.C. SECRETARY FOR EDUCATION**

DAYTON, Ohio — Sister Lourdes Sheehan, R.S.M., says Catholic and non-Catholic educators are facing common challenges — recruiting and hiring high-quality teachers, curriculum development and assessment — but Catholic schools have the added challenges of financial constraints and rising costs.

Sheehan, in her second stint as secretary for education at the United States Catholic Conference, will present “Catholic Schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Challenges and Opportunities” at 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 11, at the University of Dayton’s Kennedy Union. Sheehan is the 2000 Joe Rogus Speaker, named for the longtime UD professor of educational administration who was known and respected for his expertise in Catholic education.

It’s vital for Catholic educational leaders to maintain the school’s Catholic identity in a context that often includes non-Catholic students, Sheehan said, and a complete commitment to the Catholic mission and values on the part of the faculty and staff is an integral step in maintaining the Catholic identity.

“If you are going to run a Catholic school, it should be the best academic environment it can possibly be,” said Sheehan. “The environment of the school should be so that children can integrate the education into their religious lives.”

Sheehan said the need for Catholic education is stronger than it has ever been. She hopes the commitment to the nation’s 8,000 Catholic schools, and the more than three million children enrolled, remains strong — not as an alternative to a stylish academy or poor public school, but as a place to learn and grow spiritually.

Sheehan said she is encouraged by the passion she sees in the parish communities supporting the Catholic school system. Sheehan also advocated that Catholic universities continue implementing the church’s vision by educating and preparing good Catholic teachers.

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“What Lourdes is trying to do is effect systemic change and get universities involved in education at all levels,” said Sister Angela Lydon, S.B.S., director of the Center for Catholic Education at UD. “What she is doing is working systemically on all levels. We’re working locally but we have the global and systemic applications in mind.”

Sheehan’s message complements the University’s mission to produce good teachers committed to Catholic identity. The Center for Catholic Education is spearheading the effort through the 2-year-old Lalanne program, which fosters professional development and spiritual growth in a community context for UD religious studies and education graduates teaching a Catholic school setting. The Center for Catholic Education is also working with the Archdiocese of Cincinnati on a mentoring program modeled after the Educational Placement Services’ Pathwise program and tailored to the Catholic identity.

Sheehan knows the impact the late Joe Rogus had on Catholic school leadership in the United States. She is even a bit humbled to take the stage in his honor.

“Joe Rogus had such an impact on Catholic school leadership,” Sheehan said. “Everyone in Catholic education, as long as he was alive, knew Joe Rogus.”

Rogus urged Catholic school leaders to emphasize a distinct faith identity and strong values, both facets of Sheehan’s vision for the future of faith-based education.

“Joe Rogus cared deeply about quality education and he believed that through the Catholic schools children could become more in touch with both their spiritual and intellectual possibilities,” said Thomas J. Lasley II, dean of the School of Education and Allied Professions at UD. “Sister Lourdes Sheehan is a national leader in Catholic education. Her vision is shaping how Catholic schools can better fulfill their purpose and mission.”

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For media interviews, contact **Sister Lourdes Sheehan, R.S.M.**, at (202) 541-3130.