

Philanthropist's Zeal For Catholic Schools Earns Prize
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Frank Hanna, left, stands with William E. Simon Jr., co-chairman of the William E. Simon Foundation, at the Philanthropy Roundtable's annual meeting Nov. 8-10 in Dana Point, Calif. The organization is a national association of individual donors, foundation trustees and staff, and corporate giving officers. (Photo provided courtesy of the Philanthropy Roundtable)

ATLANTA—Catholic education is the best vehicle for reinvigorating American culture, according to Frank Hanna, an Atlanta businessman whose formula for effective charitable giving recently earned him the 2007 William E. Simon Prize for Philanthropic Leadership.

“One of the most important things is to raise (children) well,” said Hanna, who has focused his resources on K-12 Catholic education. “First and foremost we want to teach them truth, and we want to teach them virtue. I think Catholic schools are in a better position to teach about virtue. As Aristotle said, ‘A happy man is a virtuous man.’” Hanna attended a meeting in Dana Point, Calif., of the Philanthropy Roundtable, which administers the award honoring the late William E. Simon, former U.S. Treasury Secretary and U.S. Olympic Committee president. The award recognizes living philanthropists who have shown exemplary leadership through charitable giving. Adam Myerson, president of The Philanthropy Roundtable, further explained that recipients demonstrate the ideals and principles of “personal responsibility, resourcefulness, volunteerism, scholarship, faith in God, individual freedom and helping people help themselves.”

The recognition comes with a \$250,000 cash award that Hanna will donate to Holy Spirit Preparatory School in Atlanta, one of three independent Catholic schools he helped to establish, and to the Federalist Society, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit specializing in constitutional and legal issues.

Hanna, CEO of Hanna Capital and a parishioner at Holy Spirit Church, is quick to say that philanthropy is not restricted to the wealthy. “(Philanthropy) is the act of one soul loving another. It’s just that some people have extra money, time or energy and can do it on a larger scale.”

Having “extra resources” became more apparent for Hanna when he and his brother sold their company in 1995. Hanna set out on a mission to discover the purpose of and how best to use his “non-essential wealth.”

“I have a scientific mind,” he said. “I like to understand how things work.” He began reading everything he could about wealth by such widely diverse figures as Aristotle, Andrew Carnegie and even Woody Allen, hoping to draw some conclusions

regarding effective philanthropy, a word that, as he pointed out, translates into “love of man.”

Hanna eventually developed a 13-point formula for “philanthropic success” that encompasses components such as “resolve to give away all non-essential wealth,” “start sooner rather than later,” and “support initiatives led by organizations capable of leveraging your gift.”

“What I looked at was how can I share this love (of humanity) in the most important, leveraged manner possible. In business, I use financial leverage to grow a business. How can I do it in renewing our culture, in sharing love with one another? What’s the important thing?”

For Hanna, who is married and has one daughter, investing in Catholic education is the answer and has become his passion and his hope for positively impacting society.

“There’s nothing more I can do for my own child than to raise her in the truth. There’s nothing else, and inherent in this is the love I have for her,” Hanna said, adding later, “God has blessed me with financial success and I have seen what money can do and what it can’t do. If you have money and you’re not virtuous it won’t lead to happiness. Only living in the truth will.” All schools are in the business of raising children, he said. “They help us do that. It’s true that schools impart knowledge, but kids are at school all day long. We raise children in schools.”

Most parents, he said, would rather see their children raised well than be “given steak every night.” And that leads back to virtue. “The first thing is to teach our children virtue and so we have to teach them truth, which is at the core of virtue,” he said. “If we’re going to teach them truth, we have to teach them something absolute, otherwise everything is just relative. Absolute (truth) addresses metaphysical issues. Public schools can’t do that and many private schools don’t want to. Catholic schools teach truth, which is the most important thing and which is why I’m involved.”

Hanna has established three independent Catholic schools in the Atlanta area. His efforts with The Solidarity School, which provides a largely Hispanic immigrant student body with preschool and kindergarten programs, garnered for him a position as co-chairman of the President’s Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans.

That segment of the population tends to be on the lower end of the socio-economic scale and faces the task of learning English, he said. “Beyond that, they face the same challenges as the population at large on how to raise a child to do well.” Many of them are also Catholic.

“The heartening thing I took away from the committee is the number of Hispanic families I met from many places who have incredibly strong family bonds and an incredibly strong love for their children and their very notable willingness to sacrifice for their

children,” he said. “On the other hand, the disheartening thing for Hispanic families is that they’re not given much choice. They’re stuck in public schools that are dysfunctional.”

Jamie Arthur, the Solidarity School’s administrator as well as the vice president of institutional administration at Holy Spirit Preparatory School, acknowledged the impact quality programs have on the Solidarity School students who leave speaking English and who would otherwise have been labeled and limited in the standard ESL track available in public schools which most eventually attend.

“We’re laying the foundation of faith, the foundation of English, while also maintaining their culture,” said Arthur, who praised Hanna as a “visionary” and “a great role model of the servant leader.”

“We have a community that celebrates its Catholicity and celebrates the culture of the people. It really is the good news about Catholic education. We feel we’re living it,” Arthur said.

Gareth Genner, president of Holy Spirit Prep, also praised Hanna for his “lifelong commitment to Catholic education.”

“Literally the school would not exist without the generosity and passion of that family,” Genner said.

Both spill over into the Holy Spirit school community, where students develop academically and spiritually and where families enjoy 130 planned community gatherings such as fellowship dinners and a well-attended evening lecture series.

“We’ve been described as a boarding school,” Genner said, and then added, “but we board the whole family.”

Hanna acknowledged the need to “re-educate” people on why Catholic schools are important. “By teaching (children) we’re carrying on the faith. ... It’s the mission of the entire church and not just of the parent.”

Ironic as it seems, Hanna attended public schools while growing up in Atlanta. “We could still pray then, and there was a Christian ethos still present,” he added. “I had the grace to be exposed to good people along the way. My daughter goes to a Catholic school, and she knew more about being Catholic in the fifth grade than I did then as an adult. I’ve learned after the fact.”

His spiritual life is something that he continues to cultivate. “I’m a very, very rough work in progress,” he said, “but I have hope, that is, I do pray God will help me.”

He starts his day in prayer, often participating in “the treasure” of daily Mass, and recalled the line from Jesus’ prayer that illustrates what needs to be man’s humble dependence on God, as manna was to the Israelites: “Give us this day our daily bread.” “Just the act of praying first, coming before God, taking the time and forgetting about the adequacy of my prayer but seeing in the act a devotion of time to him,” he said. “It’s sort of like putting my money where my mouth is.”

He is challenged by the verse in the Bible, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God.”

“We all wake up every morning, whether rich or poor, man or woman, black or white—we have things we must do. We all have temptations that come along during the day. If we seek first the kingdom of God ahead of money, for example, if we truly desire that, God gives us that.”

He prizes his time growing up and living in Atlanta, recalling one of the lessons of St. Therese of Lisieux. “She said that each person is to pursue God in his own little way wherever you happen to be. ... I live in Atlanta so, ex post facto, I feel God placed me here and so Atlanta needs to be important to me. I can be engaged in my own little way.” He believes the Catholic Church of the Atlanta Archdiocese is important to the country and even worldwide as its rate of growth in the last 20 years rivals other areas.

“There is tremendous growth, vitality. We’ve had good leadership in our bishops; we’ve had many people coming here. Atlanta is known as the city on the move. There’s an interesting culture here—a can-do, ‘let’s create something’ attitude that I don’t find in older, more established places,” he observed.

There’s no wonder, then, why Hanna feels right at home. The 13-point formula for effective charitable giving is detailed at www.philanthropyroundtable.org.

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