

## **Testimony by Zdravko and Nela Kirincic (Croatia)**

We are Zdravko and Nela Kirincic.

We come from Croatia and have six children. The oldest son is twenty-eight years old and ordained as a priest, Ann is twenty-five years old and has recently finished college and is now working as a special education teacher, Dominic is in college, Daniel and Philip are in high school while the youngest daughter Paulina is still in the elementary school.

Our task is to share our experience about the effects of Catholic school on work and leisure, and our testimony is about our experience that we had with our children on their journey through life.

As young parents, we had the opportunity to live in America where two of our oldest children attended a private Catholic elementary school. Our experience is that the American model of Catholic education is more flexible than the Croatian model and allows each school to create plans and programs that can put more emphasis on education rather than knowledge only. It is this freedom that enables the school to combine "work" with the aspect of "rest". Out-of-class activities were well organized, the school often took part in the life of the parish community; also it supported charitable and social work. The classes were small which allowed an individual approach to each student.

After our return to Croatia, our children finished state elementary school because there was no Catholic school in vicinity of our home. Then they enrolled in a Catholic high school in Pazin in Istria. This is the only Catholic school that has a dormitory, where children can stay during the week. Our three eldest children have graduated in that classical gymnasium, while one of our sons is currently still attending it. We believe that the school through its educators and through its Catholic-oriented educational system is having a positive impact on the maturation of our children and

has served as an extended arm of our parental education. Children spend that turbulent period of adolescence in an environment in which it is easier to find like-minded friends and form friendships that usually remain for life, which can be very valuable, according to the testimony of our children.

In Croatia there are forty-two Catholic preschools, twelve Catholic high schools, and only two elementary schools. The Croatian model of education for high schools does not allow many changes and modifications of the existing school curriculum, so it is not always suitable for Catholic education. The curriculum is very demanding and does not leave enough space to emphasize Catholic upbringing of children. However, we believe that a greater educational factor than school is the presence in a dormitory and the life in the free time after school. Actually, this is where truly work and rest are bound together. In “dormitory life”, educators have a crucial role as persons into whose hands we entrust the upbringing of our children. It is they who partake in leading our children through their very difficult period of gradual independence with their own example, testimony, friendship but also authority. It is therefore important that they be responsible and mature persons, full of the spirit of God, with whom we as parents can confide and talk to for the sake of our children. Therefore, we believe that the greatest attention must be focused on the careful selection of teachers and educators who will be responsible for the upbringing of our children.

Vedran, when talking about the influence of dormitory life and catholic school education on his priestly vocation, remembers the opportunity to attend the everyday mass, the possibility of monthly confession, the flexibility to partake in spiritual conferences and retreats and the presence of a priest in the dorm with whom he could talk to and confide important issues. The catholic school was a place where he could flourish without difficulty or hiding his vocation and played a crucial role in his way toward the priesthood. It is much easier to practice faith when the surrounding is healthy and assists and awakens the thirst for God.

We can say that the most important of all is the foundation on which Catholic schools are based. It is essential that the school leadership has clear understanding of what it wants to achieve by being a Catholic school and that it doesn't fear being different from public school. It is its' being catholic which makes it special, precious and irreplaceable as solid ground for the education of the Christians of tomorrow.