



December 19, 2010

Dear Highlands Families,

I hope you are all doing well and enjoying the first days of Christmas break! Please receive my prayers and best wishes for all of you throughout this Christmas season.

At our faculty and staff Christmas gathering last week, I had the opportunity to address all of the teachers, staff, and administrators. After my first full semester with all of them, there was one thought that I most wanted to leave with them before breaking for Christmas. I also want to share the same words with you.

It is simply this, and I do not say it lightly: I consider it a great privilege to have been called to serve at the Highlands. My esteem for all who work here continues to grow as the year progresses. Each week also brings a new admiration for the quality of students that we have, watching how they respond and grow with the education and character formation they receive here.

Let me point out a few things that bring me to say this.

- Three of our seniors are in the running for recognition by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation, an academic honor given out only to the very top students in the country. (Please say a prayer that they do well!) One of our seniors already received early acceptance at the University of Chicago with a full scholarship.
- Our science department chair, Dr. Trulson, was recognized by the American Chemical Society Southwest Region with an award for excellence in high school teaching.
- Our girl's junior varsity and varsity volleyball teams both had their best season ever. Coach Finkenkeller was named TAPPS district coach of the year.
- The Iowa Standardized Basic Skills Test results came in a few weeks ago. It is administered to 1<sup>st</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and is an objective reference point for our student's academic level of performance. On average, our students scored in the top 20% in the country. Our first graders achieved scores that rank them nationally in the top 94<sup>th</sup> and 95<sup>th</sup> percentile in Math and Reading respectively!

The above items are significant achievements and I could easily extend the list. But my admiration for the school is rooted in something deeper, in what I consider to be the cause of the above successes. Allow me to illustrate it with a few incidents from the last six months.

- I was moved game after game by our high school football team, that even though they were outsized and outnumbered virtually every time they stepped on the field, they never once stopped fighting with their whole heart, to the last play of every game. I didn't see an opposing team that did better than our players on that count. Just a few years from now, the scores will be forgotten, but our boys will carry with them a spirit of tenacity and fight for the rest of their lives.
- One of our high school students commented, "I like the rigor of the school. Not only does it challenge you academically but it challenges you to be a better person. There aren't enough schools like that."
- Just before Thanksgiving a second grader wrote, "The things I am most thankful for are how the teachers spend their time teaching quality techniques for all kinds of things. I am also thankful for the playground. But, most of all there is something special about our school. It just seems like every time I come here I feel an energy flow through the air in the most beautiful way and that is what I love about the Highlands School." Yes, a second grader wrote this!
- Someone captured a beautiful comment from one of our third graders: "I found God here. I never knew He cared about me before!"
- Throughout the semester, a number of our newer staff and faculty members have pulled me aside individually to say, "Father, I just wanted to thank you for having me here. I am so grateful to be a part of this school."

So, can you see why I count it a privilege to be called to serve at the Highlands School? We have a great school. Moreover, thanks to the work of the teachers, students, staff, and administrators, the school is also a better institution than it was six months ago on many counts: academic, discipline, and the spirit of school pride and unity, just to name some salient aspects.

Among all of us at the Highlands there is a deep commitment to continue improving what we do here for your children. We are honored that you would entrust us with such a key role in supporting you in their education and formation, and we give you our unwavering dedication and service.

Again, count on my prayers for you and your families this Christmas season. Rest well and pray well! I look forward to seeing you in the new year. May God bless you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Daniel Ray LC". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fr. Daniel Ray LC  
President  
The Highlands School