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**Stemming the tide –
NEW NATIONAL STUDY WILL HELP CATHOLIC LEADERS
ANALYZE AND ACT ON SCHOOL CLOSINGS AND OPENINGS**

PHILADELPHIA – A new national study will analyze where the demand for Catholic schools is strong and growing – and why other schools have closed during the past five years.

The research, commissioned by the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) will not only address trends but specifically provide explanations of why these trends are occurring, according to Sr. Dale McDonald, director of Public Policy and Research at NCEA.

“Catholic educators are committed to keeping the doors of our schools open,” said Sr. McDonald. “To do this, we must understand the dynamics – why some schools are fragile and why others are robust. This study is key to strengthening all our schools.”

Anecdotal information points to economics and changing demographics as the major factors impacting school closings and the enrollment decline, Sr. McDonald added. The research will be conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate

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(CARA) at Georgetown University and led by Dr. Mary Gautier, senior research associate.

The announcement was made during NCEA's annual convention here which has attracted more than 15,000 Catholic educators from across the country.

"CARA will review multiple factors impacting Catholic school openings and closings including tuition costs, region, urbanization, types of school sponsorship, school demographics, distance to the nearest Catholic school, state of the local economy and the existence of voucher programs," said Dr. Gautier.

The research will include a survey of heads of schools and ask principals to provide evaluations of any potential family or local institutional barriers that may be affecting enrollments as well as family or institutional features that contribute to the success of their schools. The questionnaire will explore significant factors related to school administration, finances, development and the local community.

"We've also asked CARA to conduct a poll of Catholic parents," said Michael Guerra, NCEA president. "Catholic educators believe that parents have a right to choose schools for their children and we need to better understand their priorities when it comes to education."

Mr. Guerra reported that the study will be completed at the end of the year. "Losing more than two percent of our enrollment this year and last -- after almost of decade of growth and stability -- has been a clarion call for Catholic educators," added

the NCEA president. "I'm confident that we will not only stem the tide of closings but come back with a stronger, more vigorous school network."

CARA is a national, non-profit, Georgetown University affiliated research center that has more than 40 years experience conducting social scientific studies about and for the Catholic Church. NCEA is the largest professional educational association in the world, with more more than 200,000 Catholic educators who serve 7.6 million students at all levels of Catholic education. The association was founded in 1904.