



2023
HIGHER CALLING
HIGHER STANDARDS



Renewal of the Mission of
Catholic Education in the
Diocese of Springfield in Illinois

The Catholic Church educates more than ten-thousand students in thirty-six Catholic grade schools and seven Catholic high schools in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. These forty-three schools represent the Church's largest investment of resources in pastoral ministry in our diocese, reflecting both the requisite resources for operating effective schools and the high priority we place on handing on the faith to the next generation. More than places of academic learning, our schools are centers of formation for children and community for Catholic families. It is common for many of our schools to have served multiple generations of children from the same families, and they are central to our lived experience and history. Our schools are staffed by dedicated teachers and administrators who have devoted their lives to the formation of our young people. Our Catholic school system is a central pillar of our faith community and brings much vitality, purpose, and clarity of mission.

Our schools, however, are facing significant challenges that, if left unaddressed, threaten to undermine their stability, vitality, and effectiveness in fulfilling their mission of discipleship. To varying degrees, our schools are facing financial, operational, and cultural disruptions and risks just at the time when the need for a Catholic school system is as urgently needed as ever before. Our schools are in urgent need of renewal. The Diocese of Springfield in Illinois is confronting this reality with a concerted effort to renew all aspects of Catholic education in the diocese – beginning with clarity of mission and purpose and expanding through several, interrelated strategic efforts intended to strengthen the effectiveness, affordability, and sustainability of our schools.

This document outlines the context for this renewal effort, the challenges we are seeking to address in Catholic education, the concrete initiatives we are undertaking for renewal, and the expectations and guidelines for our schools' engagement in this renewal. Consistent with the second declaration of our Fourth Diocesan Synod of 2017, which states that "all pastoral initiatives are set in relation to holiness,"¹ and the fifth declaration, which states, "Formation for discipleship and stewardship as a way of life shall be the primary focus of the catechetical programs in our Catholic and parochial schools, high schools, and parish schools of religion..."² our schools have a higher calling than just academic learning, and we have higher standards to which we hold ourselves accountable. We also have an opportunity to impact our culture in positive way and fulfill our mission to sanctify the culture and world in which we live. The Catholic education renewal effort in our diocese seeks to refocus all our resources and energies on the higher calling of discipleship formation and to ensure that we are aligned and equipped to sustain the higher standards associated with this critical mission.

¹ <https://diospringfield.cld.bz/FourthSynodCompiledActsDeclarationsandStatutes/8/>

² Ibid.

Historical Context

As we undertake this critical renewal effort, it is instructive to consider the historical arc of Catholic education in the United States, to recenter on the original mission for which our schools were intended, and to recognize some of the significant developments within and outside of the Church that shape our current circumstances. The third Baltimore Council of U.S. Bishops, which is recognized as the seminal moment in the establishment of the American Catholic school system, was called in 1884 specifically to contend with organized and widespread anti-Catholic discrimination. This council exhorted bishops to establish Catholic schools in every parish as a means of ensuring that Catholic families had access to opportunities for their children to be educated and formed in the faith and to provide parish schools of religion in those places where the establishment of a Catholic school was not feasible. Thanks to this exhortation and a flourishing of vocations to men’s and women’s religious orders devoted to Catholic education, the Catholic education system in this country blossomed and flourished, expanding for nearly a century. By 1970, there were 11,000 schools in the U.S. with 4.4 million students enrolled.³ From this peak, however, a precipitous decline ensued over the next five decades. As of 2021, 6,000 Catholic schools remained with 1.6 million students enrolled.⁴ During this same period of time, the total Catholic population grew from 48 million to 68 million. In other words, while the Catholic population in the U.S. grew by 40%, the number of Catholic schools *dropped* by nearly one half, and the number of students enrolled declined by more than two-thirds. The drop in the percentage of Catholic children enrolled in Catholic schools from 1970 to 2022 is nothing short of breathtaking. While many factors certainly contribute to this decline, two, in particular, are worth noting: a general decline in active practice of the faith, and the decline in religious vocations.

With regard to the former, the statistics show a precipitous decline in the practice of the faith among American Catholics, beginning around 1970, and continuing through current times. For example, during this time period, as noted above, the Catholic population grew by 40%, but infant baptisms dropped by 60%, from 1 million to 400,000.⁵ This decline in baptisms relative to Catholic population represents a profound change in the life of the Church. For the “greatest generation,” baptizing children and sending them to Catholic schools was simply taken for granted—and this generation had lots of children, creating the “baby boom” after World War II. Subsequent generations, however, have not followed suit. From 1970 onward, far fewer parents have baptized their children and sent them to Catholic schools. Similarly, between 1970 and 2021, the

³ Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) (<https://cara.georgetown.edu/frequently-requested-church-statistics/>)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

number of annual Catholic marriages nationally fell by more than 75%, from 426,000 annually to just under 100,000, a decline which began to significantly accelerate around the year 2000.⁶ Further, weekly Mass participation dropped by half, from 70% to roughly one-third of Catholics.⁷ It is impossible to ignore the profound effect of fewer Catholic married couples baptizing fewer Catholic children and fewer of those actively participating in Sunday Mass. In secular terms, our Catholic schools of today – whose mission is, explicitly, to support Catholic parents who are the first teachers of the faith⁸ – have a dramatically smaller total addressable market than they did when most of the schools in our diocese were established.

Adding to this challenge, the concurrent decline in the number of priests and religious staffing our schools has raised the cost of education in Catholic schools and resulted in steadily increasing tuition levels. Between 1970 and today, the number of religious sisters has dropped 75%, from 161,000 to less than 40,000. The number of diocesan and religious priests has been cut nearly in half, from roughly 60,000 to 34,000. As a result, the percentage of priests and religious among teaching staff in American Catholic schools fell from 90% to 10%.⁹ The loss of priests and religious sisters from our schools necessitated the hiring of predominantly lay employees. The employment of lay teachers has required salaries and benefits necessary to provide for families; and these costs have resulted in ever-increasing tuitions for Catholic schools. In the decade of the 2010's alone, average Catholic grade school tuitions rose by nearly 40%, while average Catholic high school tuitions rose 82%.¹⁰ Once again, the effect of this trend on Catholic school enrollment cannot be ignored. In the wake of the shift from religious to lay staffing of schools, our entire school system has struggled with the tension between increasing tuition to cover rising costs and keeping tuition affordable for families. With each increase in tuition, more families find it harder to pay the cost for enrolling their children in our schools. As noted above, given general demographic changes and decline in participation in the life of the Church, many of our schools were already struggling with declining enrollment, particularly in urban areas that have seen out-migration of Catholic population and many rural areas that have seen precipitous declines in population. Thus, balancing the tension between covering costs and maintaining enrollment has made tuition-setting a perennial struggle.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Cf., *Code of Canon Law*, canons 774 §2, 793, and 798.

⁹ Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) (<https://cara.georgetown.edu/frequently-requested-church-statistics/>)

¹⁰ CARA Catholic Schools White-graphs, p. 12 (<https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catholic-education/upload/CARA-Catholic-Schools-Data-Points-white-graphs-2014.pdf>)

Further, the decline in religious sisters, brothers, and priests in our schools has also left a formation void. For generations, our schools were staffed with religious who underwent several years of spiritual and intellectual formation prior to working actively in the apostolate. As our schools shifted toward reliance on lay staff, this gap in faith formation has presented a profound challenge, notwithstanding requirements such as catechist certification. As engagement in the faith has declined in general, as outlined above, far fewer well-formed lay faithful are available to staff our schools. Exacerbating this problem, a nationwide shortage of teachers and administrators, has developed over the past decade. Far fewer young people are pursuing careers in education. In the decade between the 2008-2009 school year and the 2018-2019 school year, there was a 35% decline in enrollment in traditional teaching programs.¹¹ In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, this talent shortage has been exacerbated by higher numbers of people leaving the teaching profession. With each retirement, relocation, or resignation of a teacher, principal, or staff member, our schools are having a harder time finding replacements. In the past, it was not unusual for many of our schools to receive up to 20 applicants for an open grade-school level teaching position. Today, it is typical for our schools to receive only one or two applicants. This shortage of qualified, Catholic teachers is projected to worsen in coming years.

New Challenges and the Urgency for Renewal of Catholic Schools

While the arc of history outlined above shows a dramatic growth and expansion, followed by a precipitous decline in Catholic education, we find ourselves in circumstances today that heighten the urgency of renewing our mission of Catholic education. We must undertake serious efforts to stem the decline and shore up the vitality and stability of our schools. Echoing the conditions that prompted the founding of a school system, we once again find ourselves in an era in which cultural norms, educational philosophy and policies, and even the legal and regulatory environment are at odds with the Church. Once again, Catholics are being told that our beliefs are unwelcome and unacceptable in the public sphere. Once again, teaching and living the fullness of the Catholic faith runs against the grain of the broader culture. Unlike the conditions that prompted the American bishops to call for the founding of Catholic schools across the country, however, the hostility and contradiction to the faith are not, primarily, theological and ecclesiological. Rather, the challenge for the tides pushing against our faith in the current arena are secular in nature, involving a resistance to

¹¹ <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/fewer-people-are-getting-teacher-degrees-prep-programs-sound-the-alarm/2022/03#:~:text=Traditional%20teacher%2Dpreparation%20programs%20saw,alternative%20programs%20experienced%20drops%2C%20too.>

religious belief and practice generally, and an intense pressure to adopt beliefs about moral living and even the reality of the human person that are incompatible with the revealed truth and the teachings of the Catholic faith.

Notably, the Catholic faith of multiple nominees to the Supreme Court of the United States has been explicitly challenged by members of the Senate Judiciary Committee as disqualification to serve on the Court.¹² The United States Secretary of Education has instituted a policy that interprets Title IX such that children with gender dysphoria must be treated based up on the gender by which they “identify,” regardless of biological sex.¹³ Similarly, the President of the United States has issued an executive order that would force our schools to adopt policies and curricula that conflict with the essential truths of our faith.¹⁴ Similar pressure is being exerted at state and local levels via accreditation bodies, regulatory, and administrative requirements. This top-down pressure from the government on our schools demands solidarity and strength of governance that protects each individual school from facing an overwhelming tide of pressure. We find ourselves once again in the same situation that prompted the bishops to establish our Catholic school system in the 19th Century. Just as our schools face increasing pressure to remain viable, we face a heightened pastoral imperative to ensure that Catholic education is accessible and affordable to all Catholic families. After decades of reprieve from anti-Catholic Protestantism embedded in our cultural institutions, we face a new form of aggressive secularism that is increasingly anti-Christian, and particularly anti-Catholic.

Perhaps even more concerning is that these pressures, prevailing ideas, and beliefs—and the pressure to adopt them—are omnipresent in a hyper-connected social media, digital communication world that is having a profound impact on the social and emotional stability of our children. The still new and dramatic growth in the use of smartphones, other digitally connected devices, social media, and digital communication has impacted how young people process information, experience entertainment, engage socially, and, even how their brains function.¹⁵ According to a 2021 study by Common Sense Media, teens spend an average of almost nine hours per day on screens, while

¹² Cf. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mDQM1TzIAM>;
<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2018/07/10/supreme-court-nominee-brett-kavanaugh-trump-anti-catholic-bigotry-column/770712002/>;
<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/catholicnews/2017/09/concerns-of-anti-catholic-bigotry-as-judicial-nominee-questioned-about-faith/>

¹³ <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-confirms-title-ix-protects-students-discrimination-based-sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity>

¹⁴ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/03/08/executive-order-on-guaranteeing-an-educational-environment-free-from-discrimination-on-the-basis-of-sex-including-sexual-orientation-or-gender-identity/>

¹⁵ <https://healthtalk.unchealthcare.org/the-effects-of-smartphone-usage-on-the-brain/>

“tweens” (aged 8-12) average 5.5 hours per day.¹⁶ From 2015 to 2021, this usage increased nearly 30% and 25%, respectively, and this rate of increase in use is accelerating over prior periods.¹⁷ These patterns of consumption reflect the intent of the design of social media platforms, which are intentionally designed for addiction.¹⁸ Further, the content commonly distributed through this methodology is, even according to internal research by Meta (the parent company of Facebook and Instagram), oversexualized or otherwise “regrettable.”¹⁹ A Wall Street Journal report showed that the harm caused by social media – Instagram in particular – on the well-being of teen girls is measurable and well understood by the purveyors of social media platforms. Yet very little is being done about it. Our schools are seeing significant increases in disciplinary issues, disruptive and harmful situations, bullying, grooming and exposure to abuse of students by other students and adults, and even instances of child pornography. It is hard to overestimate the cultural, moral, and developmental effect of this tsunami of change among our Catholic school students, and our renewal efforts must confront this reality directly.

Against this backdrop, there is also a growing awareness of a behavioral health crisis in our society, most alarmingly among our children. Anxiety, depression, and suicide rates are all on the rise. The percentage of teens who self-report depression increased by 60% between 2007 and 2017, including one in five teenage girls.²⁰ A full 70% of American teenagers reported experiencing anxiety in a 2018 study.²¹ Clearly, social media and technology have played a hand in this decline in wellness among our children. Through the lens of our Catholic faith, we see clearly the deeper reality of the confusion of identity, deterioration of family, relationship, and community, and the decline in supernatural faith and receptivity to the graces of the sacraments as the root cause and destabilization of the environment required for children to flourish. We must embrace our responsibility to address this pastoral imperative decisively, making our schools a safe haven for children to learn the truths about their identity as children of God, made in his image. Our schools must become centers of stability for families to build relationships, skills, and community. Our schools must help young people find the certainty and peace of their identity in relationship to God and to one another as fellow children of God. Our schools must help students cultivate habits of virtue that enable freedom and foster confidence. Our schools cannot be viewed—in fact, *must not be*

¹⁶ The Common Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens, p. 3.

https://www.common sense media.org/sites/default/files/research/report/8-18-census-integrated-report-final-web_0.pdf

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ <https://towardsdatascience.com/ hooked-b44813baf91e>

¹⁹ https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebooks-most-popular-posts-were-trash-here-is-how-it-cleaned-up-11669140034?st=hpt8ekhxpjo63ka&reflink=desktopwebshare_permalink

²⁰ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/12/a-growing-number-of-american-teenagers-particularly-girls-are-facing-depression/>

²¹ Ibid.

viewed—as private alternatives to public schools. Incidents of bullying, child pornography, threats of violence and other incidents related to social media in our schools have been occurring with greater frequency, and this infiltration of the worst aspects of our culture into our schools must be actively and intentionally resisted.

Clarity of Mission & Renewal

The circumstances outlined above clearly call for an effort to renew our schools and ensure their stability, vitality, and availability to all the faithful—precisely as Catholic schools, because they are places of formation in the faith in a world in which it is much harder for the faithful to raise children in the faith. In light of the pastoral imperative for vibrant, authentically Catholic schools, and the contemporary challenges confronting our schools, the diocese is undertaking a comprehensive effort of renewal. Our schools cannot address these issues in isolation, but if we close ranks and consolidate our efforts, we can secure a vibrant future for Catholic education in the diocese. The bishop and his staff are committed to doing so and have launched a comprehensive renewal effort, “Higher Calling, Higher Standards,” that will unfold over several years. This effort involves, first and foremost, a clarification and refocusing of the mission and identity of our schools. Flowing from that clarified mission and identity, multiple, interrelated efforts are being initiated. We will address the talent, formation and equipping of our teachers and principals, our governance, structures, and operations, and our Catholic identity and financial stability.

The objectives and measures of success for this initiative are not, primarily, about preserving or growing enrollment or the number of schools in our diocese. In fact, if necessary, it is better that we have fewer, smaller, authentically Catholic and vibrant schools to serve the families who are committed to our mission, than to have many private alternatives to public schools that are failing to form Christian disciples. To be clear, the pastoral imperative of Catholic education in our diocese is not to preserve the cultural institution or heritage of any particular school—as important as the history of each school may be. Rather, our mission is to form the next generation of Catholic disciples of Christ. Our success is not measured in total number of students enrolled, in athletic championships earned, or in the worldly success of those who graduate from our schools. Indeed, we expect and aim for excellence in these areas. But these aspects are by-products, not goals, of our mission of Catholic education. In fact, if we achieve these aims at the expense of our mission to form disciples, we have utterly failed in the ministry with which God has entrusted us.

The mission of our Catholic schools in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois is the formation of Catholic, Christian disciples. This mission demands that our schools provide intellectual, spiritual, and human formation for young people who are equipped for human flourishing and for eternal life with Jesus Christ; and that they support the Christian family, providing formation and community for families to grow in virtue, in love of God and in service of neighbor.²² Our schools exist to help our young people understand who God created them to be and how to understand and engage with the world that God has created for them to steward. Our schools recognize the responsibility of parents to serve as the first teachers of their faith to their children, a divine calling that flows from the sacramental character of their baptism and holy matrimony, and we seek to support and encourage parents in fulfillment of this duty. Likewise, our teachers have a prophetic calling flowing from their baptism and confirmation, to teach and promote the faith. Our teachers are not merely employees. Our teachers are ministers of the Church, aiding pastors and the bishop in fulfilling the Church's mission to promote and defend the faith.

In their fulfillment of this mission, Catholic schools in the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois hold themselves to high standards marked by seven essential characteristics. These defining characteristics of Catholic schools are derived substantially from the five marks of Catholic education enumerated in Archbishop J. Michael Miller's synthesis of Magisterial teaching on Catholic education,²³ which Archbishop Miller published while serving as the Vatican's Secretary of the Congregation of Catholic Education. The five marks of Catholic schools have been expanded with two additional marks specific to dynamics and concerns in this diocese. The seven defining characteristics are as follows:

1. ***Inspired by a Supernatural Vision:*** All aspects of the instruction, curriculum, environment, and culture of our schools are rooted in and flow from a faith in and understanding of the Blessed Trinity as the deepest reality, and embrace our destiny to live eternally with God. Our destiny to live with God in beatitude sets the horizon of vision for all our schools and all the work that they do in forming Christian disciples.
2. ***Imbued with a Catholic Worldview across the Curriculum:*** Flowing from the supernatural vision, our schools reveal the unity of the Creator in creation. In teaching math and science, we reveal the intelligibility, and goodness of creation, which points back to the intelligence and goodness of the Creator. In art and

²² Cf. General Directory for Catechesis, §75-78, 226-23

²³ J. Michael Miller, "The Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools," 2005. See also the Instruction of the Congregation for Catholic Education, "The identity of the Catholic school for a culture of dialogue," January 25, 2022.

music, we reveal the transcendentals of truth, beauty, and goodness that point us back to the source of all that is true, beautiful, and good. In literature and history, we explore the human soul and moral life in relation to God, and the drama of the human response to God's loving plan and the providence and active presence of God in the unfolding of human life.

3. ***Founded on Christian Anthropology:*** Our policies, curriculum, and instruction help young people to come to a fuller understanding of their identity as children of God, an awareness of the effects of the Fall of Adam and Eve, a grateful awareness of the truth and the promise of our redemption in Christ Jesus, and a commitment to the struggle for growth in holiness and virtue through worship, and the sacramental life. We equip our students to flourish by helping them to build habits of virtue and avoid habits of vice, and we foster a sense of peace and confidence in their identity as children of God, created in His image, and redeemed and recreated in Christ.
4. ***Animated by a Spirit of Community and Communion:*** Our schools exist to support parents as the first teachers of the faith, to strengthen and enhance the lives of families, and to provide a community in which Catholic families can live and raise their families together. Our school communities are an extended part of our parish communities, and, as such, our pastors, teachers, principals, staff, students, and parents are "living stones" of the Church of which Christ is the cornerstone and all are part of the Mystical Body of Christ. The awareness of this deepest reality animates a sense of true communion and community within our schools – one that extends seamlessly from and to the life of our parishes and cannot be separated from them. Engagement and alignment of school parents with this spirit of community and communion is essential and cannot be taken for granted.
5. ***Sustained by Gospel Witness:*** All administrators, teachers, staff, and coaches in our schools fulfill a prophetic role of witness by their lives and serve, explicitly, as ministers of the Church. They are called to preach the gospel in what they say and how they live, and they instruct and encourage young people to do likewise. Our students are called to bear witness inside and outside of school in how they treat others, in their concern for the poor and marginalized, and in their upright living in harmony with the Gospel. Our school families are called to live in a manner that reflects their baptismal identity and their vocation of raising children in the faith.

6. *Accessible, Affordable, Stable:* In each parish and deanery, pastoral plans are established to ensure that all the faithful have access to Catholic schools. Each school will establish a plan to fully fund its operations through financial support of the parishes and benefactors without charging tuition. The founding of Catholic schools in the United States was made possible only because of the stewardship of service offered by religious sisters, brothers, and priests, who basically volunteered their efforts with little more than room and board for their material compensation. Lay teachers today also contribute some stewardship of service, as the salaries of Catholic school teachers are less than what they could be making in the public schools, but costs are constantly increasing due to inflation and the need to pay a just wage. The continued viability of Catholic schools will thus require stewardship on the part of the whole community of faith. Just as public schools are supported by all taxpayers whether they have children or not, Catholic schools must be supported by all the parishioners, lest Catholic schools become either an option only for the wealthy or disappear entirely. The parents of school children should not have to shoulder this burden alone. Our Lord's command to make disciples of all the nations is the responsibility of the entire community of faith.²⁴ Diocesan, deanery, parish and school leaders must work creatively and diligently to plan for the vitality and stability of Catholic education in our communities above the particular needs of individual schools. Where fitting and practical, collaborative Catholic school systems are established to secure these aims of accessible, affordable, and stable schools in each of the communities across the diocese.
7. *Organized and Governed from the Heart of the Church:* Each of our school communities finds its identity, mission, and purpose within the Catholic community. Our schools are governed from the authority that Christ has entrusted to the diocesan bishop as a successor to the apostles. Parish schools or community Catholic school systems are to be governed by pastors of participating parishes, and governing boards of high schools or other schools not directly sponsored by parishes. Schools sponsored by religious are to involve the diocesan bishop or delegates, along with local pastors in their governance to ensure the alignment and shared mission of Catholic education.

²⁴ Cf., Matthew 28:19-20.

Strategic Plan

While the strategic plan will continue to be developed and modified as this renewal effort unfolds, below are some of the key pillars that will be of sustained focus in the “Higher Calling, Higher Standards” renewal effort:

- Formation: With the founding of the Evermode Institute here in our own diocese, all teachers and principals in all of our schools will engage in a multi-year program of formation in the faith. This formation will equip, encourage, and inspire our teachers to fulfill their mission as ministers in the Church, to fully understand what we believe and why. This formation will have a strong orientation toward “faith and reason,” evangelization, and apologetics. This formation program will also include a strong dimension of personal spiritual formation such that our teaching flows from a personal life of prayer, devotion, and relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Catholic Culture, Identity, and Standards: In recognition that our mission of forming Catholic disciples of Christ is increasingly different and often at odds with the direction of education in the public sector, we will migrate away from recognition by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and focus on standards and accreditation set by the Catholic University of America’s Institute for the Transformation of Catholic Education or a comparable program that will set clear standards for curriculum and culture in schools based in an authentically Catholic philosophy of education. Efforts will be undertaken to increase the practice of devotionals and sacramental life in our schools, including more frequent Masses, more opportunities for the sacrament of reconciliation, more opportunities for Eucharistic adoration, incorporating more spiritual pilgrimages and retreats, and similar practices.
- Policy Refresh and Family Discipleship Commitment: Our policies pertaining to standards of conduct, expectations, and discipline in our schools and among our faculty and staff will be refreshed in light of the renewal of mission and contemporary challenges (notably, social media and digital communications). Also, our Family School Agreement will be revised and renewed to provide greater clarity of and accountability for parents enrolling their children in our Catholic schools. Our Family School Agreement will establish a baseline of expectations for all families but will distinguish between “Active Parishioner” and “Non-Parishioner,” whereby the active parishioner commits to full engagement in the life of the parish, notably including regular Mass attendance and financial contribution. Those who commit as Active Parishioners will eventually pay no

tuition, and non-parishioners will pay the full cost of education and will not be subsidized by the parish. Active Parishioners will also commit to ongoing formation so that they are equipped to fulfill their duty as the first teachers of the faith to their children. Further, formation and training will be offered and required for parents in recognition of their roles as first teachers of the faith.

- Talent: Efforts will be undertaken to both recruit and “grow our own” pipeline of Catholic school teachers by promoting the special vocation to teaching, creating alternate pathways for the formation and licensing of teachers that reduce the burden of cost, and creative solutions for housing and community to help new teachers get established in their careers. Also, the Bishop has created a new Department of Catholic Education and is conducting a national search for a director of this department. The Office for Catholic Education and the Office for Catechesis will be part of this new department. The department-level director role will be specifically focused on supporting strategic planning and renewal efforts.
- Financial Stability, Structure, Governance, and Operations: Each Catholic school or community Catholic school district, as they may be formed, will be responsible for developing an economic and pastoral plan to phase out tuition and transition to parish support. The sponsoring or, in the case of a local school district model, participating parish pastors will be responsible for these plans, collaborating closely with principals, diocesan staff, and other key stakeholders. In communities with multiple Catholic schools, a process of planning and discernment of appropriate levels of collaboration and consolidation of resources, operations, and governance to optimize vitality and sustainability will be undertaken. Practical and realistic assessments must be made of the capacity and demand for the community, and plans will be developed to expand, contract, or reallocate capacity based on the needs and resources of the local community.

Summary

Catholic Schools are a central part of our obligation and mission to go forth and make disciples. They are a most effective means of forming the next generation in the faith and providing a community of Christian discipleship in our parishes. Given the changes in our culture, in public education, and in our regulatory environment, our Catholic schools are now urgently needed as a safe haven for families to help their children grow, develop, and flourish. Given this pastoral imperative, serious and sustained efforts must be undertaken to shore up the sustainability and vitality of our schools as we renew our evangelical mission. This renewal effort is fraught with challenges, obstacles, difficulties, and hard decisions. It is also the work that God has called us to at this moment in the life of the Church, and we embark on the journey of renewal with confidence in his providence and guidance.

Given at the Chancery of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois this 28th day of January in the Year of Our Lord 2023, the Memorial of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the "Angelic Doctor," patron saint of Catholic schools, colleges, and universities.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thomas John Paprocki". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning of the first letter.

Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois