



St. Mary Catholic Schools  
Grades P3-12

A Community Inspiring Success

## St. Mary Catholic Schools Board of Directors President's Report March 3, 2020

### Disciples on the Way: Strategic and Mission Plan for Catholic Schools

As the Diocese has provided direction for Disciples on the Way within Catholic Schools, St. Mary Catholic Schools (SMCS) has incorporated the following into its Board of Trustee and school practices.

Parish connections have been a prime focus over minimally three of our four Board of Trustee strategic initiatives: Finance, Community and Continuity, and Catholic Identity. The focus has been on:

- 1) shared services and financial sustainability of both parishes and SMCS,
- 2) our combined responsibilities for increasing weekend Mass attendance and parish involvement from school families along with Catholic school enrollment from our parish families, and
- 3) providing a welcoming and inviting atmosphere for our parish priests within our schools on a regular basis.

With the elementary campuses on parish sites, there is a natural connection to that parish. Our goal is to enhance that connection particularly at the middle school and high school levels.

In staff development for school system employees, we incorporated the entire Alpha series with the "Discover Jesus" focus. All employees, regardless of their role, participated in the video series and small group discussions. The small groups had consistent membership and were set up to represent various campuses and job roles.

As we look to "Follow Jesus" as a next step, we are using the Christ Life series in 2019-2020 professional development. These are being set up as mini-retreats within our regularly scheduled professional development days. All administrators and teachers attended the Diocesan Discipleship training in August to start our journey to "Follow Jesus".

At SMCS and as disciples of Jesus Christ, we take inspiration from St. Teresa of Calcutta to '**do small things with great love**'. Our schools adopted this mantra as our theme for the year. The Discipleship thought for the day announced daily in our middle school is just one practical example of bringing discipleship and evangelization to life daily within our schools. We also incorporate quotes from St. Teresa of Calcutta in all of our school and system newsletters.

At the high school, our chaplain is with us each Wednesday, either celebrating Mass with the high school students, or being available for other mentoring and faith-filled activities. Our elementary students attend weekly Mass with our parish priests; the priests also administer sacraments and celebrate Mass at our middle and high schools.

Our school community answers the Catholic call for social justice and discipleship by hosting fundraisers for a variety of causes including cancer research, food banks, sexual/violent assault awareness, and participates in the annual United Way campaign. Campus blood drives, mentorship opportunities with not-for-profit organizations, and providing volunteer service in many capacities to the community are ongoing. Students' families are encouraged to volunteer for parish ministry roles, including ushering, singing in the liturgical choirs, and helping at parish events.

Several of our high school students participated in a service trip to Dominican Republic this past summer. In addition to their mission work, students participated in Mass and community time to reflect upon the beauty of being a missionary in our Catholic Church. Annually, several high school students participate in the Washington DC March for Life rally.

Designed to connect our five schools and five parishes, our annual Connect 5 run/walk campus event places a focus on parish engagement. Parish, school staff, and Board of Trustee members actively engage in Connect 5 activities, which includes a spiritual walk through Jane's Woods. This community-building event also provides financial support to our five schools and five parishes.

In September 2019, facilitators from the Diocese of Green Bay, Barry Metzentine, Director of Parish Operations and Parish Mission Planning (PMP), and Todd Blahnik, Superintendent of Catholic Schools, led a special session that included all parish/pastoral leaders and SMCS administrators. The Diocesan representatives provided an overview of the Parish Mission Planning process and the parish/pastoral leaders provided a status update on their individual PMP processes. The facilitators, along with the SMCS president, stressed the need for inclusion and partnership with the schools in the PMP process.

### **Vocations Support**

Our high school vocations course encompasses all vocations and assists students with being aware of and listening for their personal call to follow Jesus in their lives. This call may lead them to the single life, the married life, or the consecrated life.

Additionally, we have been able to fill our high school campus minister position that has been open since our previous campus minister left our system. Both he and our middle school campus minister are members of our Board of Trustees Catholic Identity Committee, and they, along with our school administrators and school faculty, work to bring a renewed focus on faith throughout our school day.

Our high school chaplain is intentional and focused with his support of vocations. We also continue to invite current seminarians into our schools and classes and are proud that we continue to have our own SMCS sons and daughters to call upon as they discern their own path to priesthood or consecrated life. Fr. Matthew Rappl, a more recent son from our system, has been involved with our school Masses and has participated in alumni events interacting with our current students.

## **Specific Challenges**

- While our enrollment grew 6.5% (55 students) overall this year over last year, it continues to be a top priority. Many factors continue to challenge us with enrollment, including:
  - continued decline in the number of school age children
  - competition for students from solid public and private area schools, and the ability to retain students once attracted
  - continued decline in number of Catholics and number of families engaging in our five Catholic parishes and/or desiring a Catholic, faith-based education
  - the continued shift in family decision making, with children being allowed to choose a school of their choice
  - a greater number of students (enrolled and prospective) who have learning, behavior and/or mental health issues that the system is not staffed to accommodate, and
  - the ability to make Catholic education affordable for all!
- The overall cost of quality education continues to rise beyond tuition increases. Major expenses related to compliance, operation of new facilities, technology, the need for more specialized teachers and counselors, focused professional development and staff training, and attainment of competitive salaries all need funding.
- Our system is financially at risk if supporting parishes are unable to meet their subsidy allotment. Assessing the model in today's environment identifies problems with the health and predictability for both SMCS and the parishes. Subsidy income for the system is declining and the parishes are paying more than is sustainable. We must redefine the term "Investment" for both our school system and our parishes. An organizational structure that crosses traditional boundaries to create new pathways for collaboration and ministry beyond just financial, needs development in partnership.

## **Priorities for Year 2020-2021**

- Achieve progress towards the goals of the SMCS strategic initiatives, which currently focus on growing enrollment, academic excellence, obtaining financial stability through future funding models, and advancing Catholic education and while creating dynamic Disciples of Christ.
- The St. Mary Catholic Schools Foundation is now established! The biggest challenge for the foundation is to bring in the major gifts we hope the foundation will attract. To meet the goals of the 2020-2021 budget, a key revenue component is counting on sustainable dollars coming from major gifts and new endowments. The leadership of our new SMCS Director of Mission Advancement along with the SMCS President and Foundation Board members will help to drive attainment of this goal.

- Continue work to close the teacher salary gap to 75% of the average market value or better; we will continue to use a salary model to support teachers with an emphasis on competitive and equitable pay for early and mid- career educators with incremental pay for high demand fields.
- Develop and implement training for professional staff that will better prepare our teachers, counselors, and administrators to address the diverse student and classroom needs. We also need to continue on-going staff training related to prevention and response to critical situations and mental health awareness to meet the needs of our school community while complying with requirements of DPI and our DOJ School Safety grants.
- Foster greater partnership with our parishes to collaborate on spiritual ministry. Achievement of this will require engagement of all stakeholders! The goal will be to identify and develop shared ministry opportunities while enhancing school involvement to attain the goals of the parish mission planning:
  - to live our common mission to foster households and communities of discipleship through the mission and ministry of the Catholic Church, and
  - to impact the communities in which we dwell through alignment and mobilization of our parishes, schools and ministry efforts which will inspire cultural change at the parishes and schools.