



68/2021  
27 January 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This past week in our country we celebrated Catholic Schools Week. I celebrated a Mass at the Cathedral that was virtually watched in all our Catholic Elementary Schools. It was a great joy for me. In that same joy, I wanted to share some exciting news! Since coming to the Diocese of Cleveland this past fall, I have come to see that one of our great treasures is our Catholic School System. We are blessed with 87 Elementary Schools and 20 High Schools as well as a number of preschools, childcare centers, colleges and universities. We educate over 37,000 children in our K through 12 schools. Without a doubt, this is a very important youth ministry of our diocese.

Aware of shifting demographics, enrollment challenges, and a desire for a renewed vision for Catholic education here, a yearlong “Think Tank” was convened under the leadership of my predecessor, now Archbishop Nelson Perez. This Think Tank emphasized the need for a plan for Catholic schools in the Diocese as well as the need to address several areas of concern, ranging from governance and finance to efforts to offer high quality and vibrant Catholic schools accessible to all.

With the transfer of Archbishop Perez and the limitations caused by the pandemic, strategic planning was put on hold. Over the last few months I have met with various stakeholders around the Diocese as well as many priests and other leaders. They have encouraged me to restart this strategic planning process as soon as possible. I am now able to move this forward.

**I am very excited to announce the *Keeping the Faith: The Future of Catholic Schools Initiative* in our Diocese.** This initiative is a major undertaking in our Diocese, and I have assembled a task force to lead us through this process and present me with a strategic plan for our Catholic Elementary Schools by May 2022. After reviewing the plan with additional consultation, I hope to begin to implement this plan in the 2022 – 2023 school year.

The Task Force is charged with creating a plan with objectives, strategies, and tactics to keep our schools grounded in the Catholic faith, academically excellent, and as widely available and affordable as possible within our Diocese. The hope is that this plan will serve as a model that can be used to strengthen our Catholic high school system and guide our Parish Schools of Religion, Youth Ministry and Adult Faith Formation programs.

The Task Force includes just over 50 members to assist in this work. These members represent clergy, school staff, diocesan staff, and members of the business community and experts in education.

This initiative is not about closing schools, merging them, or suggesting major reconfiguration throughout the Diocese. While some of this may come naturally as part of the process, I believe that we can create something that allows Catholic schools to be viable, accessible, and vibrant for those who want them to be the best option for their children’s education and Christian formation.

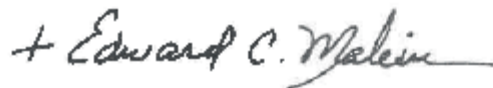
The Task Force will use the guiding principles of **Strong Mission, Multiple Models, Subsidiarity, Parish and Diocesan Support, Parental Choice, and Innovation** in creating this plan. The Task Force will look specifically at and make recommendations to strengthen six areas of Catholic Schools: Quality &

Catholicity, Leadership, Data Systems, Finances, Governance and Marketing and Communications. Finally, we will work to create an atmosphere within the Diocese of Cleveland that emphasizes the relationship of our Catholic schools to each other rather than one that encourages an unhealthy competition among them. **The education and Christian formation of our youth is the responsibility of all of us, and this must also include our common support of our Catholic schools.**

Considering this treasured heritage and shifting context, I, and leaders of Catholic schools in the Diocese believe it is the right time to reflect deeply and creatively on the vision, strategy, and operational norms of Catholic schools in the Diocese of Cleveland, to deepen and renew the commitment to our mission, and to chart a course for the future of Catholic schools in the Diocese of Cleveland. We look forward to sharing with you in the coming months and years our plans to *Keep the Faith* with a secure and strong *Future for our Catholic Schools*.

May God bless the children in our care, their families, all those who serve the educational mission of our Church, you, and those you love.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Edward C. Malesic, JCI,  
Bishop of Cleveland

**The Steering Committee for the Task Force:**

Fr. Don Oleksiak, Vicar General/Moderator of the Curia, Diocese of Cleveland  
Frank O'Linn, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools, Diocese of Cleveland  
Fr. John Betters - Pastor, St. Robert and William Parish & St. John of the Cross Parish  
Ed Vittardi - Principal, St. Albert the Great School  
Tracey Arnone, Associate Superintendent, Diocese of Cleveland  
T.J. D'Agostino, Ed.D., Education Professor, University of Notre Dame

**In addition, the following serve as Diocesan Liaisons & Sub Committee Co-Chairs:**

Augie Paocetti, Campus Minister, St. Ignatius High School  
Fr. Patrick Schultz, Parochial Vicar, Sacred Heart Parish (Wadsworth)  
Diane Corrigan, Clinical Associate Professor, Cleveland State University  
Katie Dougherty, Principal, St. Francis De Sales School (Akron)  
Fr. Ed Estok, Pastor, St. Albert the Great Parish  
Suzanne Lester, Principal, Elyria Catholic High School  
Fr. Joe Previte, Pastor, Holy Rosary Parish  
Jery Straub, Finance Director, St. Mary Parish (Hudson)  
Fr. John Valencheck, Pastor, St. Sebastian Parish  
Sr. Erin Zuhal, OSU, Assistant Principal, Cleveland Central Catholic  
Chris Serger, Director, Solutions Engineering, Salesforce.  
Brianna David, Pastoral Associate, St. Mark Parish  
Sr. Helen Weis, Retired Educator  
Mary Ann Blakeley, Senior Director of Human Resources, Diocese of Cleveland  
Tom McBride, Office of Education Director of Technology, Diocese of Cleveland  
Dennis Beckstrom, Office of Education Controller, Diocese of Cleveland  
Jim Gullick, Chief Finance Office, Diocese of Cleveland  
Brian Heskamp, Associate General Counsel, Diocese of Cleveland  
Vincent Gardiner, Chancellor, Diocese of Cleveland  
Deacon Jim Armstrong, Executive Director of Communications, Diocese of Cleveland