



CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

ANNUAL REPORT

**2023
2024**



Divine Providence Academy.
Conklin & Ravenna

Table of Contents

- 3** Letters from Bishop Walkowiak & Superintendent Faber
- 4** A Eucharistic Life
- 6** Catholic Culture & Mission
- 8** Programmatic Excellence
- 10** Accessibility & Investment
- 12** Stewardship & Sustainability
- 14** Our Catholic Schools
- 15** In Gratitude

Mission

**We prepare students to
seek and fulfill God's plan
for learning and life**

Vision

**An alliance of Catholic
schools expanding
outstanding educational
ministry**

A Note of Introduction

Dear friends in Christ,

I am thankful for those who invest in our Catholic schools. In the following pages you will see evidence of the return on our mutual investment. As partners in this sacred mission, your active involvement, support, and dedication are essential.

It is my hope that children and parents share a life of faith at home, igniting a passion to know, love and serve God and neighbor as disciples of Christ. Catholic schools enkindle this passion through the celebration of the Eucharist as school communities on a weekly basis, along with daily opportunities to encounter Jesus Christ. These moments help our children create a strong foundation for a life of faith on earth and eternal joy in heaven.

Thank you for your support of our Church's evangelizing mission.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak
Bishop of Grand Rapids



Dear friends of Catholic schools,

It is my honor to share with you the Office of Catholic School's 2023-2024 Annual Report!

Catholic schools have been blessed by so much growth and opportunity. It seems everywhere I look I see God's work alive and well through the countless individuals and families that support our 31 Catholic schools. The gifts and talents of our students, parents, faculty, leadership, and clergy continue to make our schools great! They are top-performing academic centers of evangelization and formation for the whole family.

In the following pages, guided by the four priorities of our strategic plan, you will see exceptional ways our schools are growing and providing opportunities for outstanding educational ministry. May this Annual Report serve as a catalyst for you to extend invitations to others, encouraging them to join our school communities. We stand ready to welcome them and to equip their children to fulfill God's divine plan for both learning and life.

Sincerely,



David Faber
Superintendent of Catholic Schools





A EUCCHARISTIC LIFE

1,274

**Masses celebrated
with students**



NATIONAL
**Eucharistic
Revival**

is the joyful and expectant response of the entire Catholic Church in the United States of America to unite us once again around **the source and summit** of our faith.

The call to renewal includes four invitations: reinvigorate worship, create moments of personal encounter, engage in robust formation, and send Catholics forth as missionaries.



St. Charles Borromeo Catholic School, Greenville

35

**Current students
baptized into
the Catholic Church**

7,596

Hours of adoration

Catholic schools facilitate daily encounters with Jesus Christ through the celebration of the sacraments, adoration, and participation in special events related to the National Eucharistic Revival. Through these opportunities, students are encouraged and supported as they deepen their own personal relationship with the Lord.



Ludington Area Catholic School

“

I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.

John 6:51

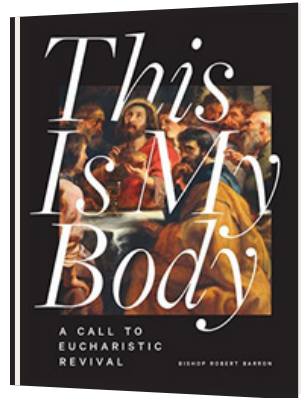
”

381

First communicants



Corpus Christi Catholic School, Holland



In August 2023, each teacher in our schools received a copy of Bishop Robert Barron's book titled, "This is My Body"

8,638

Student confessions heard

Schools and parishes provided an abundance of special events focused on the Eucharist including:

Processions, guided adoration, retreats, faculty formation, displays of Eucharistic miracles, parish missions, and consecration to the Eucharist

*Data aggregated from 23 of our 31 Catholic schools

CATHOLIC CULTURE & MISSION

Our Catholic schools support the evangelical mission of the Church and seek to serve both children and their parents. At Ludington Area Catholic School, a program called “Parents in Faith” equips and supports parents in the faith formation of their children through virtual meetings and sharing of resources. The twice monthly meetings are hosted by Principal Jan Bigalke, who also serves the school as a teacher and certified catechist. Featuring prayer, guest speakers, and practical tips, these meetings help parents keep Christ at the center of their family life.

Evangelizing school families is equally important at St. Michael Catholic School in Remus. Principal Karen Gostomski, a recent convert to Catholicism, recognizes that the Mass can appear “rehearsed and ritualistic” to the many non-Catholics in the school community. “But as we seek to grow deeper in the Eucharist, we see the whole point.” Karen still thinks about an inspiring moment after the school’s All Saints’ Day Mass in which a group of students rejoiced in a deeper understanding that the saints are present with us during the heavenly liturgy. To help families unfamiliar with Catholic worship and belief, nearly two-thirds of the school families, St. Michael’s has started sharing pamphlets explaining the faith. The efforts are bearing fruit, as students and their families are beginning to see connections between classroom lessons and the weekly liturgy. The school is fulfilling its mission to “walk with God, learn, grow and serve” by inviting the broader community to grow in their understanding of the Catholic faith and open their hearts to a transforming relationship with Jesus.



St. Michael Catholic School, Remus

During this year of Eucharistic Revival, each pastor in the diocese has examined their parish community’s celebration of the liturgy with an eye to reinvigorating worship. Additionally, Dr. Aaron Sanders, director of the Office for Worship at the diocese, has delivered presentations on Excellence in Liturgical Ministry at our regular principal’s meetings. Incorporating what they have learned from Dr. Sanders, our school leaders have been instrumental in working with their pastor to enhance school liturgies and prayer to ensure everyone within our schools can fully experience, with reverence and appreciation, the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.



Holy Trinity Catholic School, Comstock Park



Muskegon Catholic Central

Our Catholic schools are animated by communion and community, and intentionally focus on developing relationships and building positive school culture. “We want a culture of being Christ-centered in all that we do,” says Stephanie Callow, principal of Muskegon Catholic Central. Part of that includes the implementation of a positive behavioral framework where students learn what is expected of them throughout the school day. At the elementary levels, students are guided by a mission to be respectful, responsible, safe, and Christlike. Students in grades 7-12 pursue “GOLD expectations,” representing gratitude, open-heartedness, leadership, and determination.

In two years, since rolling out this framework and implementing a robust service model called “Faith in Action,” there has been a positive shift in the school, specifically in the upper grades. Immersed in Catholic social teaching, students learn what it means to truly become disciples of Christ. “We’ve seen kids become more engaged with each other, learning how to resolve conflicts and work together. Parents have also noticed the change, sharing with administration that their families feel even more comfortable and supported,” says Principal Callow.

The staff of our Catholic schools are dedicated to forming the next generation of faithful leaders. To do this, they participate in professional formation to grow in the faith so they can serve as witnesses to the students they teach.

To begin this school year, the Office of Catholic Schools welcomed Father Paul Shelton, SJ, to address our 400+ diocesan teachers and support staff. Father Shelton is the director of vocations for the Midwest province of Jesuits and a eucharistic preacher for the National Eucharistic Revival. His presentation, “A Eucharistic Life: Taken, Blessed, Broken, Given”, invited attendees into a deeper understanding and devotion to the greatest mystery of our faith.

In October, we hosted Bishop Joseph N. Perry, retired auxiliary of Chicago and current chairman of the USCCB’s Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism. In a country that has seen increased racial prejudice and social unrest, Bishop Perry encouraged our educators and administrators to recognize the incompatibility of racism with the gospels, to celebrate the diversity of God’s people, and to work to serve those living on the margins.

In the spring, Cardinal Thomas Collins, archbishop emeritus of the Archdiocese of Toronto, joined us for a day of reflection. His pastoral letter, devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, complemented the theme of the Eucharistic Revival shared throughout our schools this year.

With the help of these faithful men, our school staff came away renewed and on fire for sharing Christ’s love with our students.



Bishop Walkowiak & Cardinal Collins
with CCHS server



Sacred Heart Academy, Grand Rapids

Catholic schools instill in students a love of learning and encourage them to pursue a virtuous life through intentional, daily practices. St. Charles Borromeo Catholic School, Greenville, students start their day in community by lining up peacefully in the hallway, where they pray together and recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Then the students focus on a virtue of the week. Specific students are recognized and celebrated for living out that virtue, and all students are challenged to follow suit.

Similarly, St. Robert Catholic School, Ada, also assigns a virtue of the week to its students, even through winter and summer breaks. They use social media to share the virtue and challenge parents, grandparents, and the whole parish community to grow alongside the students.

PROGRAMMATIC EXCELLENCE

For students in diocesan schools, faith formation extends beyond the classroom and right onto the athletic field. This year, GRACEAC (Grand Rapids Area Catholic Elementary Athletic Council) has introduced a program called “The Virtues of Greatness,” designed to develop and nurture character through sport.

The program is simple but powerful. Prayer kicks off each practice (or game). Through a weekly email, coaches are provided a virtue and ways that it may be relatable on an age-appropriate level. They are encouraged to connect the virtue to their sport and throughout the practice or game, coaches “catch” athletes exhibiting the virtue and celebrate it, highlighting the connection between the virtue and the athlete’s performance and contribution to the team. Brad Sturgell, GRACEAC program director, says, “As our athletes grow in their understanding of the virtues, it will become second nature to incorporate them into their daily lives and help them achieve greater success on the field of play.”



St. Robert Catholic School, Ada



St. Patrick Catholic School, Parnell

Our students share their gifts and talents in many unique ways. Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic School's Battle of the Books program invites 4th grade students from across the diocese to show their academic prowess through friendly competition. This year nine schools participated with St. Patrick, Parnell winning the competition.

Through two Office of Catholic Schools-sponsored events, our students learn of the centrality of the arts to a life of faith. This year's inaugural Catholic Schools Art Show featured student artwork from 20 Catholic schools. Open to the public, over 800 pieces of art were on display for two days at Cathedral Square Center. In addition to the Art Show, again this year 4th graders from across our alliance came together for the 28th annual Songfest. Both of these events assist our students in a deeper understanding of art and music as ways we give glory to God.



Songfest 2024



Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic School, Grand Rapids



West Catholic High School, Grand Rapids

ACCESSIBILITY & INVESTMENT

As we welcome learners of all abilities, our schools are working to make sure the right supports are in place.

Bishop Walkowiak and the Catholic Foundation of West Michigan has provided a one-year opportunity for all Catholic schools to partner with All Belong Center for Inclusive Education through a diocesan cohort. This opportunity extends professional consultation, high-level support, learning modules, and resources to each school to equip our faculty to serve students with learning exceptionalities well.

Additionally, Catholic Central High School (CCHS) co-sponsored a state-wide conference on April 19, titled “Catholic Schools Full Inclusion: The Why and How.” CCHS administration and students presented to 34 schools from Michigan and Indiana on their experience of the day-to-day inclusion of students with diverse learning needs through their AMDG Inclusion program and student support services. We are grateful to see our school leaders sharing their expertise with Catholic schools across the region.

In October, West Catholic High School (WCHS) welcomed a group of 15 students from Grand Rapids’ sister city of Perugia, Italy.

In addition to coming to class, students were given a genuine Michigan experience. They were paired with a WCHS student and housed by their family, attended football games, enjoyed a beach day, and met with Bishop Walkowiak and Mayor Bliss. Then, in a true exchange, 15 WC students attended school in Perugia, Italy for two weeks in spring 2024 living with their exchange partner. This is the first time in WCHS history, domestic students attended an international school for credit bearing courses. Students were provided an opportunity to grow spiritually when Sister Frances Zajac, FSE, the new assistant principal, invited WCHS students to connect with the Franciscan sisters of Assisi (approximately 15 minutes from Perugia) during the exchange. It was inspiring to see how our sister city connection bridged a friendship of faith to Perugia.

In addition to the students from Perugia, West Catholic is currently hosting 32 international students from 12 countries/administrative regions – Austria, Brazil, China, France, Germany, Hong Kong, South Korea, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, Ukraine, and Vietnam. The international program truly highlights the global church.

Demand for quality education is rising and our Catholic schools are seeing enrollment increases as a result. With nearly 7% growth in enrollment over the past three years, we are constantly welcoming new students into our communities.

- With its daycare program thriving, Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic School will add another classroom of Kindergarteners in the coming school year.
- Holy Spirit Catholic School's lower grades continue to grow prompting the addition of elementary classes.
- St. Robert Catholic School, which opened in 2018, is adding its first middle school classroom.
- SS Peter & Paul Catholic School is in its 7th year of enrollment growth.

Our school leaders are feeling the momentum and embracing the many opportunities to evangelize new students and families.



Our Catholic schools are investing in the future with many schools currently running capital campaigns for significant projects, including facility upgrades and additions, increasing teacher and staff compensation, and expanding tuition assistance. These investments are vital to ensure the schools' sustainability, growth, and ability to provide excellent Catholic education to more students.

The following schools are investing in the future through current and planned campaigns:

- Bishop Baraga Academy
- Catholic Central High School
- Corpus Christi Catholic School
- Holy Spirit Catholic School
- St. Michael Catholic School
- St. Paul the Apostle Catholic School
- St. Robert Catholic School
- St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic School



St. Paul Catholic School, Grand Rapids



STEWARDSHIP & SUSTAINABILITY

This year, the Office of Catholic Schools launched a new, 5-year strategic plan called "Catholic Schools: Bridging Faith and Future 2023-2028." It provides a framework for our alliance of schools to adapt to changes, seize opportunities, and overcome challenges while working to achieve our mission and vision.

Our continued strategic planning efforts have led to great successes - we have seen enrollment growth across the diocese in six of the last nine years. We have welcomed a record number of preschoolers and kindergartners which is a proven strategy for sustainable enrollment. Additionally, the strategic plan has brought about a network of shared services within the alliance, greater collaboration, and capacity-building at all levels.

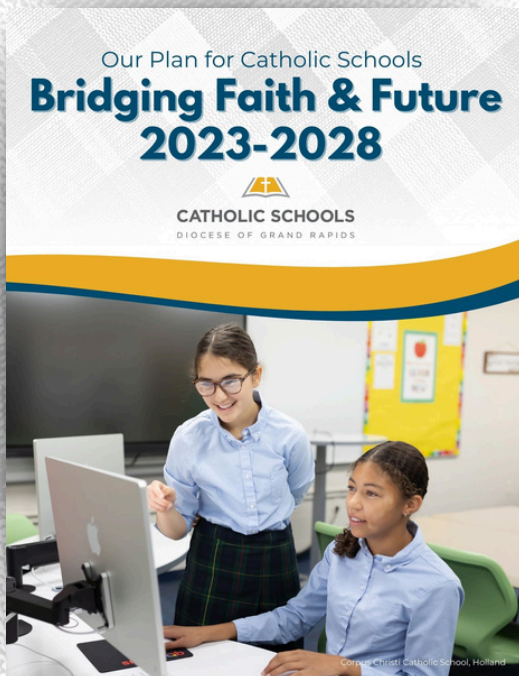
This has been especially true at the board level. The Diocesan Catholic School Board has hosted bi-annual School Board Summits where we gather individual schools' boards of limited jurisdiction and their committees in the fall and spring for targeted professional development and best practice sharing.



Diocesan Catholic School Board
Spring Summit, 2024

Already this year, there are a number of achievements based on the strategic plan to be celebrated:

- The percentage of baptized children enrolled in Catholic schools is currently 20%, up from 17.7% in the previous year.
- Increased participation in the sacrament of confession along with students examining their conscience and pray the Act of Contrition.
- Schools are embracing a regular cycle of strategic planning as evidenced by the use of diocesan-developed tools and resources.
- Practices have been put in place to address the spiritual, social, and emotional health of our students, teachers, and leaders.
- The Catholic Foundation of West Michigan is now represented on our Diocesan Catholic School Board as the chair of our development committee bringing a high level of expertise to our development efforts.





St. Patrick Catholic School, Portland

By serving the whole family, St. Patrick Catholic School in Portland is working toward growth in addition to sustainability. This growth starts with serving the youngest children in the community. Building upon their successful half day preschool, St. Patrick’s has been adding greater capacity for child care with summer programming and dedicated rooms for infants and toddlers. Families have responded positively and the program is full with a waiting list.

“Once families get established with our daycare, they build relationships, trust, and comfort with us. When it’s time to enroll in preschool, we see the vast majority of them continue at St. Patrick’s.” This growth isn’t limited to the school either. Some families who come to St. Patrick School aren’t parishioners, and some aren’t Catholic either. But as their children go through school, the Holy Spirit moves in their lives. “It’s very organic,” says Principal Courtney Smith, who heads up preK through 8th grade. “We meet people where they are. As the students grow and learn the faith, many times, they ask to become Catholic. That naturally leads the parents to follow and enter the Church as well.”

Promoting the Catholic Schools brand remains an important part of our efforts to recruit and retain students, teachers, and leaders.

As the teacher shortage persists across the country, we continue looking for new ways to recruit and hire for mission. Through the use of PowerSchool SchoolSpring Job Board our schools have the ability to consolidate the openings from our schools into one landing page, show openings in a map view, and extend the reach of our posts to thousands of prospective teachers using this tool in their job search.

The admissions and enrollment office has been revamped to better serve the needs of our alliance. A director of marketing & admissions focuses on communicating the good news about our schools and educating both active Catholics and the West Michigan community about our ministry. Two admissions advocates are responsible for nurturing leads and promoting our schools at community events. They are both multi-lingual which helps us to better serve families in every community.

“*There is nothing more gratifying than welcoming families into our schools and seeing their delight in their new school.*”

- Gabriela R. Giralt, Admissions Advocate

Working and growing with the faithful of our community has been the greatest blessing.

- Theresa Benesh, Admissions Advocate



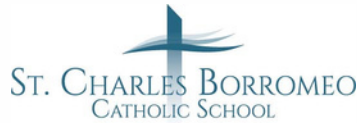
Our Catholic Schools



DIVINE PROVIDENCE
ACADEMY



Our Lady of Consolation
CATHOLIC SCHOOL



In Gratitude



Our Lady of Consolation
Catholic School, Rockford

Bishop's Fund for Catholic Education

This endowment provides nearly 60% of the total support for annual Bishop's Scholarships.

In the past academic year, Bishop's Scholarships have been awarded to

**851 students totaling
\$511,500.**



2023-2024 DIOCESAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL BOARD

TIM THIMMESCH
Board Chair & Building
and Grounds Committee

DOUG ANTER
Marketing Committee

CHERYL BUTKUS
Committee on Directors

REV. PETER DAMIAN
Clergy Representative

SUE HAAS-WILLIAMS
Strategic Planning
Committee

REV. DARREL KEMPF
Mission Effectiveness
Committee

**KRISTINA MARTINEZ-
PRECIOUS**
School Principal

**SR. COLLEEN ANN
NAGLE**
Mission Effectiveness
Committee

TERESA REID
Development Committee

KEVIN SIMON
Finance Committee

LUZIA TARTARI
Admissions Committee



2023-2024 OFFICE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS' STAFF

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Superintendent

SARAH GREY
Assistant Superintendent

THERESA BENESH
Admissions Advocate

LUKE CUNNINGHAM
Administrative Assistant

SUZI FURTWANGLER
Student Support &
Innovation Consultant

**GABRIELA RICKERS-
GIRAULT**
Admissions Advocate

BRAD STURGELL
GRACEAC Program
Director

SARAH TOEPFER
Director of Marketing
& Admissions

ENCOUNTER JESUS.



**Come and see the difference a daily
encounter with Jesus will make for your child.
Contact us today!**

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