



May 27, 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Launched in January 2023, the *Keeping the Faith* strategic aims to strengthen our system of Catholic elementary schools by ensuring they remain irresistibly Catholic, academically excellent, operationally sound, and geographically accessible. As we approach the halfway point of this five-year plan, we write to share our progress, reflect on emerging needs, and outline strategic adjustments.

Together, we have achieved meaningful progress in all goal areas. Along the way, we have gained insights that continue to shape our work. At the same time, the landscape of Catholic education has shifted. Just months after the plan's release, Ohio's school choice scholarships became available to every household on a sliding scale. This policy shift necessitated substantial updates to our schools' practices and systems that are still underway. Strengthening financial and operational guidance and support has emerged as a top priority in this evolving context.

A key focus remains engaging every parish in the ministry of Catholic education. After the plan's launch, we organized all parishes into groupings with elementary schools. The first cohort has completed its analysis and developed partnerships, formalized through memorandums of understanding (MOU). The second cohort is planned but will be postponed until late 2025 to allow time to strengthen financial models and provide another year of data. The delay is a hopeful and strategic choice. With better data and planning, we will be able to offer clearer, more effective guidance to schools and parishes.

What follows is an overview of progress in each of the plan's six goal areas that are advancing the *Keeping the Faith* vision for the flourishing of Catholic elementary education in our diocese.

Gratefully yours in Christ,

Fr. John Betters

Bishop's Liaison for Keeping the Faith
Initiative for Elementary Schools

Frank W. O'Linn, Ed.D.

Secretary of Education and
Superintendent of Schools

Catholic Identity: Drew Courter joined the diocese in 2023 and has been leading retreats along with formation and professional development activities for both teachers and principals as our Director for Catholic Identity. He continues to develop faith formation programs for all elementary staff members. Drew also led the process to strengthen the religion certification process for all elementary educators, which was announced in the spring of 2025.

Academic Excellence: A common vision for academic excellence is now shared among schools, featuring standards-based learning and assessment, which have scaled to all schools for grades K-3. Diocesan recommendations for high-quality materials are in place for Mathematics and English Language Arts. A newly instituted annual report of Elementary Academic Progress shows our students continue to outperform Ohio public school peers across multiple years of test scores.

Leadership and Talent: A comprehensive pipeline of 70+ future leaders has been created through the Aspiring Leaders program. Over 60 current school leaders are participating in leadership coaching through Notre Dame ACE Principal Academy, Boston College Lynch Leadership Academy, and University of Cincinnati Oli-4 program. An improved onboarding process for new Catholic school pastors and a School Pastor Advisory Board have been established. A 2025 Innovation Summit punctuated an ongoing Innovation Series that is teaching best practices from this diocese and beyond to school leaders and governance stakeholders.

Finance: Diocesan-wide standards and strategies were created for setting tuition, generating and delivering financial aid, and maximizing available public funding for parents. With public funding and generous philanthropic support, enrollment in Catholic elementary schools has risen in each of the past three years.

Governance: Every parish in the diocese has been grouped together with one or more Catholic elementary schools with the expectation that all groupings will either create a memorandum of understanding (MOU) regarding collaboration or enter into a more formal relationship through a school corporation, LLC, or Network. New models of governance are being explored, and several have been initiated by current parish/school groupings. To date, approximately half of the groupings have completed agreements in their areas.

Marketing: Michael Suso joined the communications office in July 2023 as Director of Marketing for Catholic elementary schools. He leads centralized marketing efforts and developed tools to strengthen the marketing capacity of Catholic schools. Notable accomplishments include: the creation of a comprehensive marketing plan for school leaders, development of Catholic Schools Week resource toolkit, redesign of the OCE web presence, development of data-driven annual ad campaign, creation of an OCE brand, and doubling the engagement of OCE social media.