

# Innovation Summit *Welcome!*

March 27, 2025 • Center for Pastoral Leadership



**8:30 a.m.**

Opening Prayer and Introduction

**8:45 a.m.**

**Keynote Address, Kevin Baxter, Ed.D.**

*Director, Mary Ann Remick Leadership Program, University of Notre Dame*

**9:45 a.m.**

Panel of School and System Innovation Leaders:

**Mike Wisnor**, *President, Incarnate Word Academy*

**Steffany Congelio**, *Principal, Incarnate Word Academy*

**Christian Dallavis**, *Superintendent, Partnership Schools*

**Emily Gilbride**, *Executive Director, Romero Academies*

**10:45 a.m.**

Panel of Pastor and Principal Innovators:

**Fr. Justin Dyrwal, O.S.B.**, *Pastor, Assumption Parish*

**Fr. Ed Estok**, *Pastor, St. Albert the Great Parish*

**Ed Vittardi**, *Principal, St. Albert the Great School*

**Fr. John Betters**, *Bishop's Liaison for the Keeping the Faith Strategic Plan*

*Pastor, Ss. Robert & William and St. John of the Cross Parishes*

**Fr. Josh Cochrac**, *Administrator, St. Justin Martyr Parish*

**Steve Martin**, *Principal, St. Helen School*

**Fr. Jay McPhillips**, *Pastor, St. Helen Parish*

**11:40 a.m.**

Lunch

**12:30 p.m.**

Breakout Session I

**1:30 p.m.**

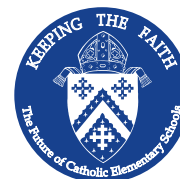
Breakout Session II

**2:30 p.m.**

Conclusion



Office of  
Catholic Education  
Catholic Diocese  
of Cleveland





# Summit Presenters

**KEYNOTE - Kevin Baxter, Ed.D.** of the University of Notre Dame serves as the Director of the Mary Ann Remick Leadership Program and as a Teaching Professor in the Institute for Educational Initiatives. He previously served as Chief Innovation Officer for the National Catholic Education Association, and prior to that as Superintendent of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the nation's largest system with more than 265 schools and 77,500 students. He is author and editor of multiple books, including two on school reform, *Greatness in Smallness: A Vision for Catholic Microschools*, and *Changing the Ending*, a 2011 volume about his work in Los Angeles that featured innovations in school quality and governance, focusing on excellent faith formation and academic outcomes through a variety of different approaches.

**Steffany Congelio** is the principal of Incarnate Word Academy, which received 2023 National Blue Ribbon Schools recognition as an Exemplary High Performing School and achieved Ohio STEAM designation in 2024. She is a 2024 graduate of the University of Notre Dame's Principal Academy.

**Mike Wisnor** is the president of Incarnate Word Academy in Parma Heights. Mike also served as a consultant and interim president of St. Brendan School in North Olmsted in their journey to adopting a classical Catholic educational approach. He is currently consulting with Ss. Robert and William School as it implements a president-principal model, governed by a board of directors.

**Christian Dallavis** is the Superintendent of Partnership Schools, an independent nonprofit school management organization that operates 4 diocesan Catholic elementary schools in the City of Cleveland. Their mission is to develop outstanding Catholic elementary schools that provide students from underserved communities with the academic preparation, values, and skills they need to break the cycle of poverty and lead fulfilling, productive lives.

**Emily Gilbride** is the Executive Director of Romero Academies and a General Partner at Seton Education Partners. Romero Academies is an independent nonprofit that manages two schools on behalf of their parishes in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, partnering with families to form future saints by developing the intellect, forming the character, and engaging the faith of each student.

**Fr. John Better**s is the Bishop's Liaison for the Keeping the Faith Initiative for Catholic Elementary Schools. He is pastor of Ss. Robert & William Parish and St. John of the Cross Parish in Euclid, which support Ss. Robert & William school and is undergoing change to a president-principal model governed by a board of directors.

**Fr. Josh Cochrac** is Administrator at St. Justin Martyr parish in Eastlake, one of six parishes that united to form the Lake County Catholic Schools Network (LCCSN), a separate nonprofit organization, governed by a board of directors to lead the two-school network of All Saints of St. John Vianney and Mater Dei Academy, both in Wickliffe. St. Justin Martyr operated a parish school through 2005 and a combined school with St. Mary Magdalene on its campus through 2013.

**Fr. Justin Dyrwal, O.S.B.**, is pastor of the Assumption parish in Broadview Heights and

**Fr. Ed Estok** is pastor of St. Albert the Great parish in North Royalton. They entered into an innovative partnership between Assumption Academy and St. Albert the Great School in 2018.

**Ed Vittardi** is the principal of St. Albert the Great since 2013 who has led the St. Albert the Great and Assumption partnership, managing initial changes to budget and operational vitality and making key personnel moves. Assumption Academy has seen 50% enrollment growth and stability since that time.

**Fr. Jay McPhillips** is the pastor of St. Helen parish, where he has emphasized stewardship of the entire community, providing a high-quality education while keeping parental commitment for tuition at zero for the past two years. The parish is planning to build a new school facility.

**Steve (Chip) Martin** is the principal at St. Helen school, since 2022 during which time enrollment has climbed more than 16%.

# Breakout Session I

12:30-1:15 p.m.



- **How to Start a Gifted Program at your School — Room E123**

*Friederike Wintersteller and Sheryl Bacher, Notre Dame Elementary School*

Are you looking for ways to provide appropriate levels of challenge and enrichment for the gifted students at your school? In this session, you will learn from an administrator and a teacher of a successful gifted and talented program in our diocese about how to build a program to meet the needs of the gifted and talented students.

- **Considerations in Becoming a JP Provider — Room W176**

*Jodi Johnston, Chief Schools Officer, The JB Network*

*Jason Wojnicz, Chief Strategy Officer, The JB Network*

*Gina Castelli, Intervention Specialist Consultant, The JB Network*

*Jennifer Woodman, Principal, St. Hilary School*

This session is designed for schools who are interested in becoming Jon Peterson providers for the first time and for those who would like to take their program to the next level by providing for students with higher needs at their school. The team from Julie Billiard will share the nuts and bolts of what it takes to implement the Jon Peterson scholarship for the first time. You will also hear from a traditional Catholic school who has successfully created a program over time that meets the needs of students with higher learning and developmental needs.

- **Early Learning Centers and Expanding Your Preschool — Room W173**

*Molly Lorek, Early Learning Center Director, Ss. Robert & William School*

In this session, participants will hear the story of creating an early learning center (infants and toddlers to prekindergarten) from the ground up. Also included will be ways to expand preschool, which is currently the fastest growing group of students in our diocese.

- **Innovative Catholic School Governance 101 — Room W172**

*Frank O'Linn, Superintendent, Diocese of Cleveland*

*Brian Heskamp, Associate General Counsel, Diocese of Cleveland*

One growing innovation in our diocese is changing governance structures in our schools. The parish school model will become increasingly difficult to sustain with a growing number of pastors leading two or more parishes. Hear about many of the governance innovations currently taking place and those that are possible from our superintendent and a member of the legal team who has helped to lead governance innovation in our diocese.

- **STEM/STREAM — Room E131**

*Sandra Wilder, Director, Ohio STEM Learning Network*

Sandra Wilder believes that STEM education is a pathway to students experiencing, learning, and applying academic content in an authentic and relevant manner. The Ohio STEM Learning Network strives to:

- 1) Connect innovative schools, teachers, and administrators to one another,
- 2) Support schools and communities that want to create innovative schools and programs, and
- 3) Build community awareness and drive school and industry partnerships.

Sandra will share her STEM experience in both urban and suburban settings as part of this presentation.



# Breakout Session II

1:30-2:15 p.m.

- **How to Create a Robust Extended Day Program — Room W176**

*Dr. Pat Nugent, Principal, St. Mary, Akron*

*Deneen Watson, Assistant Principal, St. Mary, Akron*

Both urban and suburban schools will benefit from hearing ways to connect community members and parishioners with after-school opportunities. Dr. Nugent will share her after-school program in addition to the creative ways that she utilizes the ACE (Ohio After School Enrichment Education Savings Account) monies to provide leadership opportunities for the underserved students at St. Mary's School, Akron.

- **The Process for Starting a Capital Improvement Project — Room W173**

*Bill Brady, Senior Director of Facilities, Catholic Diocese of Cleveland*

*Patrick Grace, Executive Director, Catholic Community Foundation*

How do you start the process of creating an innovation in your school? What are the considerations required for exploring a major capital project at your school? In this session, you will learn the steps of leading a major capital improvement project in the Diocese of Cleveland.

- **How to Create a School Advisory Board/School Strategic Planning — Room E123**

*Fr. Bob Stec, Pastor, St. Ambrose Church*

*Mrs. Lisa Cinadr, Principal, St. Ambrose School*

Would you like to start a school advisory board at your school, or strengthen the school board that currently exists? In this session, the pastor and principal of St. Ambrose School will share the way that their school advisory board has helped their school to grow operationally, culturally, and academically, with an emphasis on feedback. Hear about the current work of the school board together with parents for creating a future vision for the school.

- **Strengthening Your Middle School — Room W172**

*Mike Modzeleski, Co-Principal, Holy Trinity School*

*Richard Kaliszewski, Principal, Assumption Academy*

*Ed Vittardi, Principal, St. Albert the Great School*

In this presentation, three school leaders who have transformed the middle grades at their schools will share their research, experience, and advice for strengthening the middle school at a Catholic school.

- **Parish School Transformation Through Partnerships — Room E131**

*Scott Embacher, Regional Director, NDAA*

Notre Dame ACE Academies, an innovative program designed to help strengthen and sustain urban schools, has been supporting two schools in our diocese over the past 4 years – St. Anthony, Akron, and St. Augustine, Barberton. Learn how the support of the NDAA framework and personnel have helped both of these schools to show transformational growth operationally, academically and in school culture.

---

Learn More by Visiting  
the Innovation Series:

