



# CATHOLIC SCHOOLS *in the* ARCHDIOCESE of NEW YORK

Faith-Based.Future-Focused.

PASTOR NEWSLETTER • WINTER 2020



## #ArchStudentService



Dear Pastors,

In all my years as a Catholic educator I have never been more proud of every single parent, student, teacher, aide, principal, pastor, office worker, custodian, nutrition staff, bus driver — everyone who plays any role in a day in the life of any of our schools. Not only did our buildings safely open for in-person instruction as scheduled in September, we remained open for in-person instruction throughout the fall. Now, as winter brings challenges that seem to be eclipsing those of March and April, our schools are not only still open, but they are safe and frankly, they are thriving.

Even in the face of the greatest global crisis in a century, our schools continue to do what we do best, better than anyone else, because our people are the best. As a community of faith, that begins and ends at the doorstep of all the pastors, priests and deacons. Your pastoral presence and spiritual guidance have been invaluable in our school communities and crucial to our being able to move forward against the most harrowing headwinds.

The snapshot of our greatness captured in the next few pages includes the persistent drive for academic excellence as well as the focus on our guiding Catholic values, which not only define us, but provide light in the darkest of times. You will also see an uplifting look at one of our principals carrying on the legacy of his mother, as he has established his school as a pillar of a very challenged community in the Bronx. This year that school, Our Lady of Grace, celebrates its 70th anniversary.

There is also a very special feature on Fr. Arthur Mastrolia, Pastor of St. Clare Parish and School on Staten Island. I am most grateful for his partnership in the sacred mission of Catholic education and for taking the time to participate in the creation of this quarterly publication.

I trust everything you see in this newsletter will make you as proud of our schools as I am. Thank you for choosing a Catholic education, and for being a partner in making our schools the best place for children to pray, learn and grow together.

With gratitude,



Mr. Michael J. Deegan  
Superintendent of Schools  
Archdiocese of New York



*Superintendent of Schools Michael J. Deegan visited every Catholic school within the nine regions of the Archdiocese of New York to wish a heartfelt "Welcome Back" to the principals, teachers, students and parents.*

## AN INTERVIEW WITH RICH HELMRICH

**“My favorite part of entering the school building is knowing how blessed I am to have the opportunity to serve the Our Lady of Grace School community each day.”**

Principal Rich Helmrich has been a Catholic school educator in the Archdiocese of New York for 15 years, and he is the current principal of Our Lady of Grace School in the Bronx. We interviewed Principal Helmrich on his experience.

***With COVID on everyone’s minds, were you nervous to start the school year this September?***

While the health crisis was certainly at the forefront of my mind, I entered the school year with a deep sense of resolve and steadfast determination. This was in large part due to the extensive planning that took place over the summer at our school and throughout the Archdiocese of New York. The Health and Safety Task Force of the Superintendent of Schools Office provided schools with a blueprint on how to safely reopen in September and it was a valuable tool that we used to develop our own specific plan for the Our Lady of Grace School community. The preparation helped us begin with the very smooth opening and we were honored that News12 Bronx visited us on the first day of school to see how we implemented our new safety protocols and procedures.

***How do you keep your school community united, even with some students engaging in remote learning?***

It is so important to have the mindset to treat this unique school year as an opportunity to further engage our school community members, especially our dedicated students and families.

It really began when we initially closed in March and created virtual Google Classrooms and daily Zoom sessions for all 17 of our classes and individual school e-mail addresses for all 350 students. These learning hubs helped everyone stay “connected” with each other each day. We also created a special Google Classroom called the “Jaguars Den”, where students and staff could share book suggestions, exchange gamertags and even vote on the best school lunch. We considered this “virtual recess” and it was certainly a daily destination for everyone at OLG!

While we were fully remote to conclude our school year in June, we also hosted many virtual events with our students and families, including Honors Assemblies and Graduations.

As we monitored the Zoom participants during these events, we had family members join us from all over the

United States and from many countries around the world. These family members would not normally be able to attend our in-person ceremonies, but it was so rewarding to see hundreds of virtual participants engaging and celebrating our students and their accomplishments. Even though we were not physically in the same space, the staff and I never felt more connected to our school community than during those special events in June.

This year, we continue to have our individual online learning hubs, participate in school service projects and organize special events each month. All of our students are active participants, from our youngest learners to our Class of 2021 graduates.

We still pray together each morning, host our charity fundraisers and food drives, participate in Dress Down Days, and engage our school community in virtual Prayer Services on a consistent basis.

I spent a great deal of time with our teachers and staff before the school year started making sure we had procedures and protocols in place in order to engage all of our learners, both in-person and remote. I often “test” this theory by visiting a classroom, sitting in the back of the room, and closing my eyes. If I cannot tell who is in person, or who is at home during instruction and interactions with the teacher and fellow classmates, I know that our plan is working and that everyone feels like valued members of the classroom and school community.

***What is your favorite part of entering the school building each day?***

My favorite part of entering the school building is knowing how blessed I am to have the opportunity to serve the Our Lady of Grace School community each day. While walking the halls and visiting our classrooms (both our in-person and virtual learners via Zoom), I still have the same sense of gratitude and appreciation as I did when I started ten years ago.

***Tell me about a favorite moment from this school year.***

There are so many memorable moments so far this year; it is difficult to select one! If I had to choose, it would be overhearing an interaction with one of our Kindergarten students and their parent at dismissal during the first weeks of school. The parent was opening the car door and making their way to our designated pick-up spot outside. The student immediately recognized his mom and yelled out, “Mommy, your mask, you need your mask; we have to keep everyone at OLG safe!”

This really showed me how even some of our youngest learners recognize the importance of following our school safety procedures, both inside and outside of our school building. In that moment, I learned that our greatest health and safety ambassadors are our students.



***How does your Catholic faith play a role in your leadership style?***

My Catholic faith is not just the basis of my leadership style; it is the foundation for all that I do each day. The servant leadership approach that I most associate myself with puts others before oneself. This type of selflessness is often seen in the Bible and throughout the ministry of Jesus Christ and is a great lesson not just for our children, but for all adults as well.

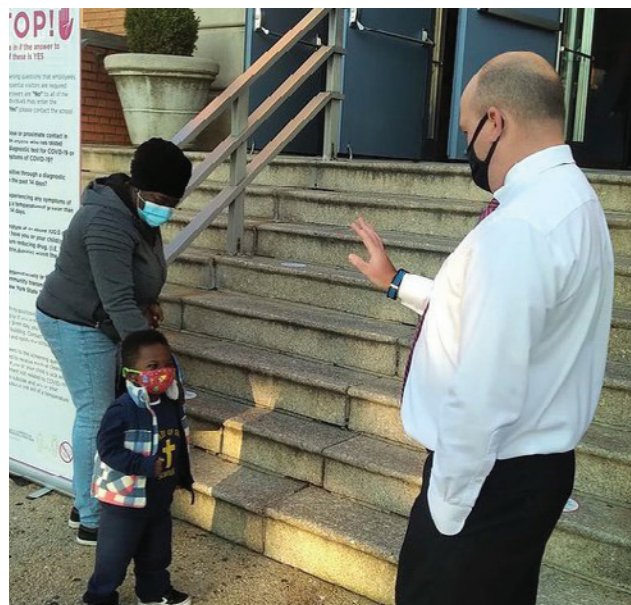
***Did your Catholic faith play a role in your decision to become a principal?***

My Catholic faith helped me through the discernment process when I was considering becoming a principal in the Archdiocese of New York. Although it was difficult to leave the full-time teaching profession with my own class each year and move into administration, I knew that I would be able to interact with more students and families in a leadership role. I am proud of what we have accomplished together as a school community and look forward to what we will be able to achieve together in the future. I still miss the classroom, but I try to substitute as much as I can each year. I will always consider myself to be a teacher first.

***How long have you been a Catholic educator? Did you attend any Catholic schools growing up?***

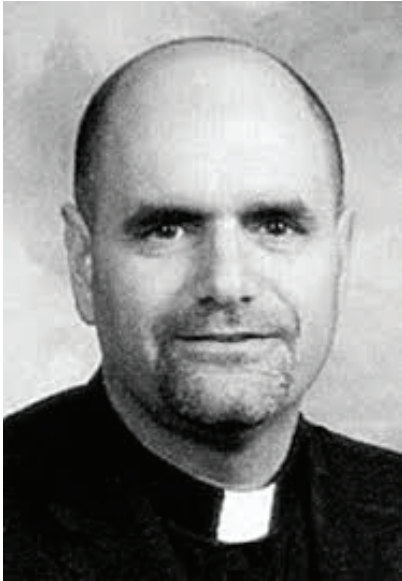
I have been a Catholic educator in the Archdiocese of NY for 15 years, beginning as a teacher at St. Peter School in Yonkers, NY. I then transitioned into school administration as part of the Curran Catholic School Leadership Academy, where I interned as an Assistant Principal for one year at St. Ann School in East Harlem. I am now serving as Principal of Our Lady of Grace School in the Bronx, NY and am celebrating my 10th year of serving this wonderful school community.

Growing up, I attended St. Pius X School in Scarsdale, NY from Pre-K to Grade 3. I also attended St. John's University for my Master's Degree in School Building Leadership as part of the Curran Catholic School Leadership Academy as part of Cohort II of this life-changing program.





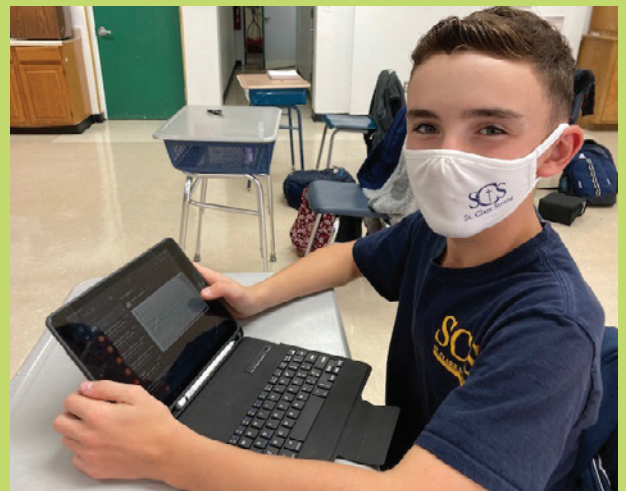
## A WORD FROM ONE OF OUR PASTORS



It is truly a privilege to be the pastor of a parish in the Archdiocese of New York with a Catholic elementary school. I have been pastor at parishes with a regional school as well as at a parish that operates its own school. Both experiences are enriching because at one, the pastor has the opportunity to work with a wide range of professionals in the field of education; when he oversees his own parish school, the pastor can take pride in a great sense of local accomplishment and enhanced parochial identity.

The pastor's presence in his local school means everything to its Catholic identity. As all experienced pastors have come to understand, the ministry of presence is among the most powerful elements of ministry in which we are privileged to engage!

Rev. Arthur Mastrolia  
Pastor  
St. Clare Parish & School  
Staten Island, NY



# PREPARING STUDENTS FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS, ONE CHILD AT TIME

Preparing Archdiocesan students for success in the 2020–21 school year began in the Summer, when more than 3,000 students continued their learning in the Extended Learning Year program. For the Fall semester, a successful virtual model of this program was replicated, offering students three hours of small group teacher lead instruction, to build and strengthen mathematics, literacy and STEM skills. The purpose of this program is to give students the opportunity to extend their classroom academic learning and social-emotional development in a convenient afterschool and weekend virtual space.

In alliance with our mission of educating the individual child, the Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of New York's academic and curriculum-planning team continue to collaborate with every region to focus on the Archdiocese Academic Goals while working to help facilitate regional conference days as an example. These approaching conferences focus on the needs of each individual region, with topics such as efficient use of digital platforms, best practices in the realm of hybrid teaching and learning, content standards and strengthening feedback between teachers and students, to name a few.

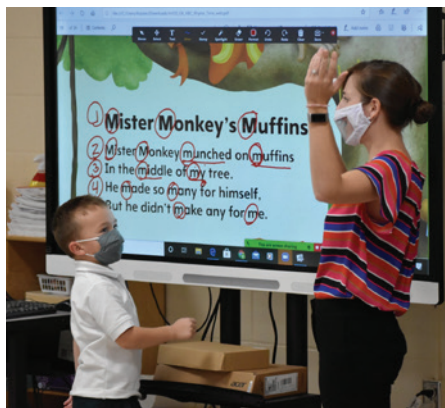
The teachers in our schools are the most direct support for students, and they are the vehicles through which children learn and experience educational development the most. For this reason, we invest in our teachers by continuing to provide a multitude of professional development sessions. Coaching specialists are provided to support teacher innovation, helping them to continue to improve their craft. Additionally, we understand that parents are the primary teachers in each of their children's individual growth; therefore, we have established parent-facing workshops revolving around four main areas: technology, social-emotional learning, English

Language Arts and mathematics. We also continue to provide regional-focused materials that are delivered during easily accessible times for parents.

Educators establish teaching strategies for each individual child through data-driven instruction, bolstering the academic success of our students. We obtain such data through programs such as the NWEA MAP-Measures of Academic Progress. This Fall, nearly 2,000 students across the Archdiocese of New York successfully participated in MAP program, which sought to gather information on the student, teacher and leader testing experience, both in-person and remote. The Winter MAP program will add further assessment to the quality of teachers, teaching and students learning, with the goal of exponential improvement to an already successful relationship within our Catholic schools.

In February, teachers and leaders will be able to use data gathered from the January MAP assessments to provide personalized, tailored instruction to each individual student, maintaining the mission of teaching one child at a time. On the technical front, Archdiocesan-wide platforms like Discovery Ed have been enlisted for easy-to-use Google-syncing access by teachers and students alike. Likewise, convenience and consolidation has been reinforced in developing the Teaching and Learning site, a one-stop shop where educators can find any information they may need, from curriculum to testing, and so much more.

Led by the Instructional Specialists, our teachers and principals continue to deal with adaptations to the culture and content of this changing world. The focus is always to make sure students are learning and teachers are teaching, both armed with the latest advances in technology and development to continue to exceed academic expectations.







SOMETHING GREATER THAN OURSELVES



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