

**St Mary of Mt. Carmel
Parish & School**

**Evangelization and Educational
Mission and Vision:**

Creating a Plan for the Future

**January 2022 Parish Meetings
Long Prairie, Minnesota**

Dear Parishioners:

The \$800,000 St. Mary's Community Matching Grant (SMCM) and \$25,000 Schulze Family Foundation Challenge Grant (SFF) are tremendous, unexpected blessings, opening opportunities to us that can impact our community for generations to come. Such a gift allows us to dream and think deeply about what we can do as a community to expand and revitalize the evangelizing and educational mission of our parish. I hope you will join me as we prayerfully consider these blessings and how God is calling us to work with and for Him to do our part to build the Kingdom of God in Long Prairie.

In Christ, Fr. Omar



QUICK INSIGHTS:

- The SMCM Grant is an unexpected blessing. Input is sought from parishioners on how to match the \$800,000 AND what to do with those funds for our parish and school. Funds become available over the next three years: \$100,000 in 2021; \$250,000 in 2022; \$250,000 in 2023; \$200,000 by April 30, 2024.
- The parish and school community do not intend to hire an outside organization to run a campaign, which normally receive 8% of the funds raised for their work and expertise.
- The SMCM Grant is accepting all donations to the SFF Grant and the accompanying matching funds as a match for their grant. Thus a \$1,000 donation to the SFF Grant will be matched with \$1,000 by the Schulze Family Foundation, and that \$2,000 will be matched with \$2,000 from the SMCM Grant for a total of \$4,000.
- The parish and school community will be forming new committees to oversee fundraising initiatives, prioritize needs as expressed by parishioners, school families, and parish organizations and work to develop plans.
- Building projects that had been proposed for the 2018 Capital Campaign are not under consideration for this new initiative.
- Roughly 50% of the space in the Family Center has been made practical for parish use as we adapted the original residential design. There are several costly items in need of replacement: roof, gutters, furnace, wiring.

**ST. MARY'S PARISH VISION:
A Welcoming, Supportive Campus for All Ages
in Service to God and One Another**

St. Mary of Mt. Carmel Parish is a blessed community! We have a beautiful church, rectory and school that are well maintained, a welcoming, blended community of committed English and Hispanic Catholics, the blessing of an Adoration Chapel, a vibrant school with a dedicated staff, and an effective Religious Education and Faith Formation program. Over 100 years ago, our predecessors planned and built well! We do face challenges, however.

- The rectory and old convent (Family Center) were designed as residential spaces. Consequently, our parish offices (priest, deacon, Religious Ed and Faith Formation) are not handicap accessible.
- The Adoration Chapel is not handicap accessible.
- We have limited gathering or meeting spaces for small or medium-sized groups.
- The parking lot is poorly configured and also needs to be resurfaced soon.
- The Family Center has several expensive issues to resolve.

Listing all of these challenges is not meant to bring worry! We have faced challenges before and carried out many improvements in our history and, God willing, we will continue to do so. With the offer of the matching grant, it is time to honestly assess our campus, pray, ignite an evangelizing flame in our community, and discern God's will for the future of our parish. With that vision, each person must then sincerely ask themselves how God wants them to respond.

Our over-arching vision is to create a welcoming, supportive campus for all ages, on fire for Christ and reaching out to all: to young families looking for childcare and a Catholic education for their children; to young families whose children attend Religious Ed instruction; to our aging parishioners whose prayers and contributions support our community in countless ways; to the unchurched or fallen-away Catholic in need of a spiritual home. It is for all of these groups, and most importantly, in service to Jesus Christ, that we ask you to prayerfully help us discern the possibilities.

**ST. MARY’S SCHOOL VISION:
All-Day Montessori for Pre-K and Kindergarten; 7th & 8th Grade Program**

“If we really aspire to better things, at spreading the light of civilization more widely in a given populace, it is to the children that we must turn to achieve these ends.” Maria Montessori

Why Montessori and how is it different from conventional education methods?

Over the past few years, the staff of St. Mary’s School has recognized growing challenges as we work in our vocations as educators, guides and catechists of the children entrusted to us. We recognize the critical importance of two areas:

- 1) meeting each child where they are at academically, socially, spiritually and physically, and helping them grow and mature in each area; and
- 2) creating and sustaining a school environment and culture that grounds our students in a life of Christian virtue, respect for others, an appreciation of truth, beauty and goodness, and an ever-deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

It is in the early years of life that we lay the groundwork for future academic success, social responsibility, and a life of Christian virtue. For the three to six-year-old child, the most effective educational method for laying this critical foundation was developed by Dr. Maria Montessori over 100 years ago. She revolutionized education through a combination of scientific observation and her deep understanding of the human person through the lens of her Catholic faith. Montessori’s ultimate goal was to help each child reach their fullest potential as a child of God.

1. **Montessori students are supported in becoming active seekers of knowledge.** Teachers provide an environment filled with materials that encourage natural curiosity and enable individual students to pursue answers to their own questions. By design, Montessori education moves away from teacher presentation of material and worksheets. Instead, hands-on materials inspire student-initiated learning driven by natural curiosity and their developing “periods of sensitivity” (readiness for learning). Learning is therefore paced by and for the individual. In the Montessori classroom, one might find two 5-year-olds fully engaged in math at the same time, even though one is learning the fundamentals of the Hundreds Grid while the other is beginning to learn multiplication concepts.

2. **Students learn to live the principals of freedom and responsibility under the directing presence of a Montessori Guide.** Working within parameters set by their guide (teacher), students are active participants in deciding what their individual focus of learning will be. They are responsible for choosing their own work, completing that work, and restoring it where it belongs, ready for the next person to use. The hallmarks of a Montessori classroom (called a Children’s House) are a well-ordered environment where students work quietly and independently, learning through exploration and self-correction with scientifically proven materials and the support of the Montessori-trained guide.
3. **Beginning at an early age, Montessori nurtures order, concentration, independence, courtesy and respect for others and the environment.** Intentional classroom design and daily routines support the students’ emerging “self-regulation”. The guide models grace and courtesy and reinforces it throughout the year. For example, as part of the routine in an all-day Children’s House (combined 3, 4 and 5-year-olds in one classroom) students set tables and chairs for lunchtime in the classroom, complete with tablecloth, plates and silverware. They quietly eat while the teacher reads out loud or they visit with their table mates. Students alternate responsibilities for cleaning up after lunch before returning to academic work.

Why does St. Mary’s need an all-day program for 3 and 4-year-olds?

Currently, St. Mary’s School can only offer half-day preschool options for 3 and 4-year-old children because the school building is limited by room size, configuration, and amenities needed for a state-approved, all-day childcare facility. Because typically both parents work outside of the home, a mid-day pick up or drop off is problematic for many. Unfortunately, we are losing preschool enrollment because of this. This in turn has a negative impact on kindergarten enrollment and the rest of the school.

Building the capacity for all-day preschool and our Montessori program go hand-in-hand as the critical steps needed to not only address the two challenge areas identified earlier, but also are key components for school vitality and sustainability into the future:

1. All-day preschool will meet the needs of our young families for childcare.
2. Students from preschool will feed kindergarten enrollment.

3. All-day preschool is the norm for Montessori Children's Houses which combine 3 to 5-year-old children in a multi-age classroom (parents of 3 and 4-year-olds have the choice of half or all-day school).
4. We believe that as young families become aware of the advantages of Montessori education for their young children, more families will be attracted to St. Mary's School.
5. Montessori encourages a deeper involvement of parents with the child's education as the child brings this way of learning and being into home life. It also increases contact with parishioners because the program encourages an intergenerational presence for the benefit of all.
6. A Montessori Children's House/classroom typically has the capacity for 20 to 28 children. The ideal would be two rooms with 16 to 26 students.
7. Two Montessori classrooms with a combined 32 to 52 students would produce an average kindergarten class of 15 to 18 students. Our goal is to have an average of 15 students in kindergarten through 6th grade.

Why consider offering 7th & 8th Grade?

Every year, a few parents ask, "When can we have 7th and 8th grade at St. Mary's?" While it would be a big undertaking, there are several reasons why we should consider it that have only become more pronounced in recent years. In some ways, these reasons mirror and fulfill the groundwork laid during Montessori education and the teaching and reinforcement that occurs from 1st to 6th grade, in effect "polishing off" that formation in the young adolescent.

1. **Seventh and eighth grade students need to be supported and guided as they become more active, independent thinkers.** The ages from 12 to 14 can be very challenging. It is a time of rapid physical, social and emotional changes. This is the age that almost all Catholic elementary school students must enter the secular school environment. While many of our local school employees live a devoutly committed Christian life, due to the separation of church and state, they are prohibited from sharing that faith with their students. It is at this juncture that a Christian educational environment can engage students as young adults, ready to grapple with the deeper questions of who they are in the light of faith.

2. **During the early adolescent years, students begin to question tenants of their faith in a healthy way which can lead to a committed faith of their own.** Grounded in the principals of freedom and responsibility from a young age at St. Mary's, they have reached an age where frank discussions about the challenges of living as a Christian in today's world can be explored within the guiding principles of Catholic faith and morals.

3. **As a product of Catholic education, 7th and 8th grade students can be challenged and encouraged to live a life of virtue that blesses, edifies and sanctifies the world and those around them.** Having educated, encouraged and supported their maturing faith, the 8th grade graduate can be ready to witness to the joy of following Jesus Christ.

In many ways it is heartbreaking to see our students leave after 6th grade to be challenged by the secular world, rather than remain at St. Mary's to be challenged by their teachers and peers to dig deeper into their faith and mature in virtue, better equipped to maintain their faith in high school and beyond. It remains to be seen if enough parents are interested and if the school should pursue this further, but we certainly believe it would be worth the work and expense.

Summary

We've given you a lot to ponder and pray about! If you have any questions, concerns, ideas or comments, we encourage you to contact Fr. Omar, trustees Bob Clasemann or Tom Sellnow, or Linda Dinkel. We will have some of the answers, but we, like you, are waiting on God for His direction.

May Jesus be glorified with our efforts and may He multiply the work of our hands!

“Then, taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he said the blessing, broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; he also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied. And they picked up twelve wicker baskets full of fragments and what was left of the fish.” Mark 6:39-43

GRANT INFORMATION SUMMARY

SCHULZE FAMILY FOUNDATION (SFF) CHALLENGE GRANT:

GUIDELINES: Meet SFF focus areas; Raise total matching amount by deadline or lose the grant. Qualifying donations must come from either new donors to the school or an increased amount from a previous donation. (Donations to the 2018 Capital Campaign are considered a donation to the parish, not the school).

DEADLINE: The grant amount of \$25,000 must be matched by March 31, 2022.

EXPENDITURES: Must be spent during the year following the grant award.

This grant is exclusively offered to the school. The expenditures proposed by the school were required to fall into two areas specified by SFF: to drive school excellence or to enhance marketing and initiatives that address enrollment and school sustainability. A \$50,000 budget was submitted to SFF and approved with the following focus areas:

1. Marketing: develop an alumni list (this will also benefit the Community Matching Grant); improve the school website; develop marketing and informational materials for current and potential families; research and application for state licensed childcare facility; establish an Enrollment Committee.
2. Montessori Expansion (School Excellence): purchase furniture and materials for equipping Montessori Children's House.
3. Bi-Lingual Teacher's Aid (School Excellence): a 22 hour per week position focused on supporting language acquisition for 3, 4 and 5-year-old English Language Learners.
4. STEAM Curriculum Purchases (School Excellence: Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math) K-6th STEM kits; Art Curriculum; Guided Reading/Literature Study Books

ST. MARY'S COMMUNITY MATCHING GRANT

AMOUNT: \$800,000

GUIDELINES: Any donor may qualify, regardless of whether they have previously donated to the school or parish before; Donations accepted in the form of cash, check, stocks.

DEADLINE: April 30, 2024

At present, this couple wishes to remain anonymous. They are both alumnus of Catholic elementary schools and one is a graduate of St. Mary's. They are passionate about the importance of Catholic education. Funds are to be used for the development of facilities that address the educational and evangelizing mission of St. Mary's School and Parish with specific emphasis on implementing Montessori early childhood education, all-day preschool, and building a welcoming environment for parishioners and young families.