



Dear Parishioners,

The Catholic schools in Fort Smith have enjoyed a long and rich heritage, blessed by the presence of the Sisters of Mercy, Benedictine monks and nuns, strong support from the larger community, as well as loyal alumni. Christ the King School, Immaculate Conception School, St. Boniface School, and Trinity Junior High -- faced with continuing challenges -- are now planning to move forward with a bold new Strategic Growth Plan (SGP) process that will begin in October. The solutions and strategies we have used in the past to get our Catholic schools to where we are today will not be the same solutions and strategies we will use to get us to where we want to be in the future. Now is the time for our Catholic schools to pro-actively prepare for the next 25+ years of growth and service. Indeed, these are exciting and challenging times.

One of the factors to be considered is that in the fall of 2021 the Fort Smith Public Schools (FSPS) plan to implement three components that will have immediate interest for us: (1) expanding preschool to make it available to everyone, (2) restructuring elementary schools to extend from kindergarten to fifth grade and create middle schools with grades 6-8, and (3) incorporating ninth grade into high schools.

The pastors and principals met to discuss how these plans may impact our Catholic schools and what changes, if any, our Catholic schools should make. We agreed to consider all possibilities as we move forward in our Strategic Growth Plan process. We also agreed to seek counsel and guidance from a reputable Catholic consulting firm. This Executive Committee for the Fort Smith Catholic Schools Strategic Growth Planning (SGP) has contracted the Institute for School and Parish Development (ISPD) to conduct a ten-month study and planning process to help us chart a strong and sustainable future for Catholic education.

All this is being conducted with the blessing of Bishop Anthony Taylor and will require everyone's participation. As more information is gathered, we will share it with the public. We invite you to maintain a spirit of prayer and optimism as we seek God's will. Our fundamental effort is aimed at moving Catholic schools from a paradigm of surviving to one of thriving.

Your friends in Christ,

The SGP Executive Committee:

Fr. John Antony, JCL, Pastor of Immaculate Conception Parish and Administrator of Trinity Junior High  
Fr. Juan Guido, Pastor of Christ the King Church  
Fr. Mario Jacobo, Pastor of St. Boniface Church  
Mrs. Sharon Blentlinger, Principal of Immaculate Conception Catholic Elementary School  
Dr. Karen Hollenbeck, Principal of Trinity Junior High  
Mr. Zach Edwards, Dean of Academics and Admissions of Trinity Junior High  
Mrs. Rebecca Kaelin, Principal of St. Boniface Catholic Elementary School  
Mr. Jeff Plake, Principal of Christ the King Catholic Elementary School

*May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus, that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Romans 15: 5-6*