



July 18, 2024

Dear Catholic School Leaders,

The Sustaining the Mission Reimagining Committee has been actively working this spring and summer to redesign this critically important program for Catholic schools. The process of creating new faith formation and religious education certification programs that annually serve over two thousand Catholic educators will take two full years. The Office for Schools expects that the redesigned Sustaining the Mission program will be completed for the 2025-2026 school year. This upcoming school year will be a transition year where teachers will experience some, but not all the new Sustaining the Mission programs. The Office for Schools will pilot additional Sustaining the Mission initiatives for a limited number of school communities to gain feedback before a broader launch the following year.

The Reimagining Committee and the Office for Schools are excited to share more about this new direction for Sustaining the Mission. This letter is intended to provide a brief snapshot of where we are headed and to provide school leaders with important details about what to expect this fall. School leaders will also learn more about these changes at the Opening Day for School Leaders on August 8<sup>th</sup>.

### **Sustaining the Mission's Impact on Catholic Schools**

Sustaining the Mission is critical to the mission of Catholic education. Catholic schools are called to be an evangelizing ministry of the Church that fosters an intentionally Catholic culture of faith, service and academic excellence. Catholic school leaders need an effective, vibrant and impactful program of religious education and faith formation to have a staff that is ready to serve this unique mission. Sustaining the Mission is essential to supporting teachers as they develop as intellectual, spiritual and pastoral leaders serving the needs of Catholic school students.

Archbishop ListECKI and the Wisconsin Catholic Conference are committed to a policy of required religious education certification for all Catholic school teachers. Sustaining the Mission serves as the religious education certification program for Catholic educators in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

### **Goal of Sustaining the Mission's Redesign**

The Office for Schools is committed to redesigning Sustaining the Mission so that it can meet the evolving needs of Catholic schools and their teachers. The Reimagining Committee has focused on improving program content, expanding program scope, and offering additional flexibility to schools. The evolution of Sustaining the Mission will initially focus on three new initiatives, a New On-Line Learning Model, a New Teacher Program, and Faith Formation Retreats.

*On-Line Learning Model* Sustaining the Mission is moving its theology course sequence to an on-line learning model beginning this year. By partnering with Franciscan at Home, school leaders will be granted significant flexibility in scheduling Sustaining the Mission dates. Franciscan at Home is the largest Catholic learning management system and currently used by over 120 Dioceses and Archdioceses in the United States. Franciscan at Home is supported by the Catechetical Institute of Franciscan University of Steubenville and offers over 200 individual catechetical and theology workshops.

## **OFFICE FOR SCHOOLS**

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All Catholic school teachers in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee will be provided with a personal account where they can access workshops and track individual progress. Sustaining the Mission will establish a required curriculum for Archdiocesan educators to pursue in Franciscan at Home. You can learn more about Franciscan at Home at <https://franciscanathome.com>. Franciscan at Home will be available to Catholic Schools beginning on October 15, 2024.

*New Teacher Program* The New Teacher Program is being designed to dramatically improve the formation experience for newly hired Catholic school teachers. The program will bring together first- and second-year teachers from across the Archdiocese for vibrant in-person faith formation and theology conferences twice per year beginning in 2025-2026.

*Sustaining the Mission Retreats* A new retreat program will offer teachers the opportunity to personally encounter Christ and grow their knowledge and love for our faith. Retreats will bring together teachers and school staff for an annual faith development experience designed to root our teachers more fully into the evangelizing mission of Catholic education. The Retreat Program will offer individual school or multiple-school retreats beginning in 2025-2026.

### **Changes for Fall of 2024**

As 2024-2025 is a unique transition year for Sustaining the Mission, there will be some one-year adjustments to the program. The most significant change for this year is the roll out of on-line learning through Franciscan at Home. To support this transition, *the Archdiocese will offer required training sessions, either an in-person session at the MMCP on October 3rd, or through an on-line webinar series.* Each Catholic school will designate a Franciscan at Home coordinator. A school's coordinator may be the principal, a teacher or other staff members. Please note, more than one staff person from a school may attend training sessions.

Following the required training sessions, Franciscan at Home will be available to Catholic schools beginning on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024. *There will be no Sustaining the Mission content available to schools this fall from August 9<sup>th</sup> until October 15<sup>th</sup>.* Any schools with Sustaining the Mission dates scheduled before October 15<sup>th</sup> will need to make alternative professional development plans for those dates. Following the Franciscan at Home training sessions, schools will have the opportunity to determine the specific schedule and format for how their school will complete their two required Franciscan at Home workshops over the course of their professional development year.

*For this year only, all Catholic school teachers will receive the same Sustaining the Mission program offerings. Teachers will not be divided into levels 1, 2 and 3 based on years of service.* The purpose of this one-year adjustment is to create the most effective platform for successfully transitioning to our new on-line model, Franciscan at Home. By having all teachers pursue the same on-line learning course at the same time, we can effectively support school leaders in managing the transition. All teachers will be given the opportunity to provide an evaluation of Franciscan at Home this spring. Program levels will be reinstated in 2025-2026 once all the redesigned programs are available.

Additional information about the changes for Fall of 2024 will be discussed with school leaders on August 8<sup>th</sup>.

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## **Pilot Programs for Spring of 2025**

The primary Sustaining the Mission requirement during this transition year will be for schools to complete the two required Franciscan at Home workshops. The Reimagining Committee is actively developing additional programs to be piloted to limited school communities in the Spring of 2025. The New Teacher program will bring together first- and second-year teachers from across the Archdiocese for vibrant in-person faith formation and theology workshops twice per year beginning in 2025-2026. Sustaining the Mission will pilot a limited number of sessions in spring of 2025 to assess the scheduling, structure and content for the proposed new program. The Faith Formation Retreat program will bring together school staff communities for the opportunity to personally encounter Christ and grow their knowledge and love for our faith. Sustaining the Mission will offer limited pilot retreats in spring of 2025 to assess the initial retreat program and improve the experience before the program launches the following year. School leaders can anticipate that their teachers will all receive Franciscan at Home programming in the spring of 2025 and a limited number of schools will receive a second Sustaining the Mission event. Sustaining the Mission will confirm all spring dates and the limited pilot programs by November 1<sup>st</sup>.

## **Adjustments to Billing**

Sustaining the Mission recognizes that the transition year may see a reduction in program offerings for some schools in 2024 – 2025. To reflect an accurate assessment of services, some schools can anticipate a reduced billing for the upcoming year. School leaders will receive more information on changes to billing on August 8<sup>th</sup>.

## **Religious Education Certification and Tracking**

The Archdiocese of Milwaukee will recognize teacher participation in Sustaining the Mission programs during 2024-2025 as a full year of participation toward Religious Education Certification. The transition year programming will allow teachers to advance on schedule toward Basic, Advanced or maintenance certification. During this transition year, teachers will not be divided into levels 1, 2 and 3 based on years of service as all teachers will participate in the same Franciscan at Home programming. Program levels will be reinstated in 2025-2026 once all the redesigned programs are available to schools.

The Reimagining Committee is still reviewing new program options for experienced teachers who have earned Advanced Religious education certification. These teachers, previously called Level 3 teachers, are expected to complete some programming toward program certification maintenance. Experienced teachers, who previously earned Advanced Level certification, will not be required to complete Basic or Advanced level programming in 2025-2026. The Reimagining Committee is committed to offering teachers with advanced status additional program options for on-going maintenance.

The Franciscan at Home system will allow teachers and school leaders to utilize a learning management program that tracks their certification progress beginning in 2024-25. Once teachers enter the Franciscan at Home system with an individual account, schools and teachers will no longer need to record to store other attendance records.

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School leaders are encouraged to come to the August 8<sup>th</sup> Opening Day for School Leaders event with questions about Sustaining the Mission. The Associate Superintendents are also available to answer individual school questions about how the transition year may impact individual schools. Please do not hesitate to ask the Office for Schools team any questions throughout the summer.

I am very excited to share more about this new direction on August 8<sup>th</sup>.

Yours in Christ,

**EDWARD FOY**

*Superintendent, Office for Schools*

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