



## Auxiliary Bishop Archdiocese of Philadelphia

June 2, 2023

Dear School Families and Friends of Catholic Education,

I write to share information about the evolving landscape for the assignment of school ministers in Archdiocesan high schools.

Historically, Archdiocesan priests have been assigned to serve as full-time school ministers at each of our secondary schools throughout the five-county region. In this role, they cultivated opportunities for students and faculty to deepen their relationship with Christ and to proclaim the message of the Gospel boldly in all aspects of their lives. These priests also provided for the sacramental life of the school communities they served.

Over the last several decades, the number of active priests in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia has declined. In recent years, a large number of priests have reached the retirement age of 75. With the 2023 Clerical Appointments, there was a decrease in the number of priests available for assignment to our high schools. Many who recently served as full-time school ministers will transition into new roles in parishes who would not otherwise have had priests. Those changes will take effect June 19, 2023.

Archbishop Pérez is committed to having a priestly presence in our schools and to utilizing every means possible to ensure that Catholic mission is at the heart of our educational system. That strong commitment is shared by the Office of Catholic Education.

Plans are already in place to ensure that a qualified lay school minister is assigned to each of our 15 high schools. Those individuals will be in place and ready to serve their school communities prior to the next school year. In addition, priests will be available for all of our schools for the celebration of Mass and to attend to other sacramental needs.

In order to support the work of those individuals, I am pleased to share that a newly established position, Director of Spirituality and Mission, has been created within the Office of Catholic Education. A comprehensive search is already underway to identify and hire the best qualified candidate for this post. This leader will collaborate with the Vicar of Faith Formation for Youth and Young Adults along with the Superintendent of Secondary Schools and Schools of Special Education to cultivate a culture of Missionary Discipleship within our secondary schools and schools of special education.

The Director will also build and maintain a strong, mission-focused network of leaders who are champions for Missionary Discipleship and work within our secondary schools to expand and

enhance the student and faculty experience of encountering Jesus Christ through prayer, service, and faith in action.

Over the next year, we will conduct an in-depth study based on these new arrangements and adapt our plans to meet the needs of our schools.

We remain committed to excellence infused with the zeal of the Holy Spirit and forming a culture of missionary disciples. Changes are being made to the Ministry Office and we are making investments that will help form school communities as missionary disciples. There will be more opportunities for lay leadership in ministry and a priest will be linked to each high school.

Please know of my deep gratitude for all of the sacrifices you make to provide the lifelong gift of a Catholic education to the young people attending our schools. Be assured of my prayers for you and your families in these closing days of the academic year and always.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Michael J. Fitzgerald". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Michael J. Fitzgerald  
Auxiliary Bishop of Philadelphia