



School of St. Mary
Meeting of the School Advisory Council (SAC)
October 15, 2025, Minutes

Council Members Present: Fr. JoAndre Beltran, Kathy Thompson, Maria Monroe, Eileen Weber, Michelle Kijek, Kate Burke, Katelyn Belcore, Natalie Agostinelli, Brooke Bohnker, Courtney Bott, Rob Busam, Erica Cook, Maeve Curran, Justin Fisk, Kelly Graham, Jimmy Griffin, Diana Hand, Peter Hartman, Margaret Hogan, Sabrina Jerina, Liza Jessen, Christine Porter, Brittany Ruef, Derek Sarmas, Chris Schenkel, Emily Sturges, Jen Zeit

Council Members Absent: Kathleen Brill, Mandy Castle, John Hancir, Meredith Leggitt, Ashley Madsen, Kristina Madsen Lowery

SOSM Visitors Present: Rebecca Quakenbush (Operations Director), Andrew Bohnker, Jessica Damrat, Bill Dewar, Melissa Haak, Janice Krakora Looby, Jana Nickele, Jillian Sehgal

Agenda Highlights:

1. Opening

- Council Chair Eileen Weber called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.
- Fr. Beltran led the Council in the CoSM 150th Anniversary Prayer.
- Chair Weber welcomed new Council members: Erica Cook (Catholic Identity), Emily Sturges (Legislative Action), Derek Sarmas (Security), Jen Zeit (Security), and Katelyn Belcore (Security), who each introduced themselves.
- Conflict of Interest Disclosure: Emily Sturges disclosed she is married to UGC teacher Mark Stanwood and will recuse herself of any discussions related to staff matters.
- Secretary Kate Burke distributed updated Council rosters and SAC binders to new members. All new members are required to submit their Conflict of Interest, Code of Ethics, and Confidentiality agreements by the end of the month. The SAC website will also be updated with Council members bios; members are asked to send bios to Kate by October 31.
- Approval of Minutes: The September 17 meeting minutes were approved with two amendments to the Marketing and Enrollment section:
 - Via email, Mandy Castle clarified that a strategic growth plan for the Early Childhood program is a long-term goal, not an annual goal.
 - Liza Jessen requested clarification that SOSM enrollment at the start of the 2025–2026 academic year was 377 students.

2. Pastor Administrator Report (Fr. Beltran)

- **Parish Stability:** A letter has been requested from Bishop O'Malley affirming the parish's stability and clarifying Fr. Michael Nacius's good standing. Once received, this letter will be published in the bulletin and read at all weekend masses to bring calm and clarity to the community.
- **Priest Assignments and Weekday Schedule:** Weekday communion services will be held when priests are unavailable; a guest priest schedule is under review.
- **Deacon Roles:** Deacons Jack, Bob, and Pablo will continue to serve as liaisons to Parish Staff, Finance Council, and Parish Pastoral Council to strengthen collaboration.
- **Finance Council Restructuring:** Now organized into four subgroups—Budget & Planning, Facilities & Maintenance, Stewardship & Development, Audit & Compliance—with broader parish representation.
- **Parish Pastoral Council Renewal:** Revitalized with four commissions—Worship & Liturgy, Faith Formation, Parish Life, Human Concerns—to unify parish, school, and Religious Education initiatives.
- **Church Beautification:** Project led by Fr. Beltran and Operations Director Rebecca Quakenbush, in collaboration with the Archdiocese project manager; church will be closed from January through summer 2026 (approximately 6–9 months) for renovations, and an arrangement for holding masses and ministries at St. Patrick's and Woodlands is being developed. This project is funded by the Generation-to-Generation Campaign and overseen by the Office of Divine Worship, with an Archdiocesan project manager assigned.
 - Contracts over \$40,000 require Archdiocesan approval.
 - Council members requested updates on final design renderings and a project management timeline for contractor accountability. Rebecca and Fr. Beltran will provide updates as this information is available.
 - Rebecca confirmed UGC masses will be held in the school gym during construction.
 - Council members requested communication to the parish and school families about the church closure and its impact on faith formation for several months. Rebecca noted this information would be shared when plans for the alternate mass schedule are finalized.
- **Volunteer Formation:** APEST Charism Workshop on Oct. 27 to help volunteers discover and apply their spiritual gifts.
- **Vatican II 60th Anniversary (Dec. 8, 2025):** Celebrating "Empowerment of the Laity – Called, Gifted, and Sent" to foster co-responsibility between clergy and laity.
- **Laity Sunday (Oct. 25–26):** Recognition and blessing of all parish volunteers from the school and Religious Education program.

3. Principals Report (Kathy Thompson and Maria Monroe)

- Expressed appreciation to Fr. Beltran for his leadership and support
- **mySOSM Update:** Report cards and parent/teacher conferences will now be managed through mySOSM for improved efficiency. Special thanks to Mrs. Isa Dewar for leading implementation.

- 8th Grade Activities: Students participated in a Carmel High School event with 257 8th graders from surrounding schools; an upcoming trip is planned to Holy Name Cathedral for mass and a private tour.
- Parent/Teacher Conferences:
 - UGC: Meetings underway this week to address student needs early in the term.
 - PGC: Conferences scheduled for November to allow for additional developmental growth.
- Appreciation shared for the newly formed St. Michael's Dads Group and their involvement at mass and other events.

4. Faculty Comments (Natalie Agostinelli and Margaret Hogan)

- PGC:
 - Assistant Principal Maria Monroe's consistent presence (three days per week) continues to be a valuable resource for teachers.
 - Donuts with Dad: Over 100 participants and great feedback on the event
 - Gratitude to the St. Michael's Dads Group for their presence at weekly mass.
- UGC:
 - Teachers express strong appreciation for parent support.
 - 6th Grade Update: Though smaller in size, the class benefits from a close-knit environment, with unique experiences such as CROYA team-building, a Loyola field trip with upper-grades, and upcoming participation in the 4th Grade Native American field trip.

5. Committee Reports

PA (Kelly Graham)

- Crusader Annual Fund: The PA goal is set at \$380,000 this year (approximately \$1,000 per family), with contributions of financial resources, time, or talent all being equally valued. The Crusader Chase has raised \$55,000 so far this year, with an additional \$10,000 raised from corporate partners to-date.
- Fund Allocation: \$250,000 of the \$380,000 supports school operating costs for the 2025-26 school year, bridging the gap between tuition and actual costs to operate a Blue-Ribbon School; \$130,000 is allocated by the PA for financial aid, classroom materials, and teacher bonuses to support retention.
- Parish Support: The Parish has budgeted a \$230,000 subsidy for the 2025-26 school year, and covers all capital expenses over \$10,000.
- Upcoming Events: Trunk or Treat will be held next Friday, October 24 in the UGC parking lot; Gala tickets go on sale November 7, with Maria Vernon, Christina Nugent, and Ali Zelenuich serving as Co-Chairs.

Security (Derek Samas)

- The new Ad Hoc Committee met with Kathy and Maria to align on key goals for the year which include:
 - Develop a comprehensive Physical Security Plan for each campus
 - Evaluate a Security Control Integrator

- Rebecca Quakenbush noted the current system in place is used by the Lake Forest School District.
- The committee requested to meet with Rebecca and the Lake Forest Police Department contact for more information.
- Establish Security Protocols for the St. Michael's Dads Group
- Coordinate with School Resource Officers from Lake Forest Police Department
- Assess Public Address System as immediate security improvements. The current system needs replacement at the PGC, in particular.
 - Rebecca Quakenbush stated there is a backup system that remains operable but limited.
 - A council member noted that Rebecca Quakenbush's tone and manner of communication with council members lacks professional respect and a willingness to collaborate.

Marketing & Enrollment (Melissa Haak spoke on behalf of Mandy Castle)

- Current Student Enrollment: 375 students
- School Clubs: Families can view and manage club sign-ups through mySOSM. Additional communication is needed to clarify how families can view what they have signed up for.
- Enrollment/Tour Availability: Council members stressed the need to improve scheduling and availability of school tours for prospective families; delays are not acceptable and impact enrollment growth.

Family Retention (Sabrina Jerina and Brittany Ruef)

- To support the goal of increasing student retention, an Open House for the entire Lake Forest/Lake Bluff community is planned during Discover Catholic Schools Week in November. SAC members and their students are encouraged to volunteer to help with the event.
- Retention initiatives from last year will continue and need to be scheduled on the calendar. These include: 3/4th grade teacher swap day, 4th grade parent "fly-up" night, and 4th and 5th grade classroom supply drop off day.
- A new initiative, 3rd/4th Grade Companions, will pair 4th graders with 3rd-grade "buddies" to show them the UGC and help ease the transition.
- Fr. Beltran shared that the parish will begin quarterly family masses with opportunities for both students and parents to participate.
- Vice Chair Michelle Kijek emphasized that SAC members can help serve as ambassadors to support a positive and fact-based culture, helping to clarify inaccurate information and address rumors whenever possible.

Student Life (Peter Hartman)

- Campus Crossovers: Expanding opportunities for PGC and UGC students to connect beyond Mass. A December event is planned. Margaret Hogan recommended adding a service project to the event.
- Heart of the Crusader Award: Launching this month; a recognition program to celebrate kindness and the values of SOSM at both campuses

- Guild and Church Circles: Exploring new service projects and experiences for students
 - Council member Liza Jessen confirmed a SignUpGenius for Guild events throughout the rest of the calendar year has already been created. Sign-ups are open and can be added as needed (e.g., First Communion).
- Athletic Committee: Aiming to strengthen school culture through enhanced sports offerings. Moving forward, each sport will have a designated Committee Chair to lead. Opportunities for summer camps and clinics to build skills and engagement to come.

Finance (Chris Schenkel and Rob Busam)

- The monthly financial report was sent from the Parish Office to the Principal and forwarded to the Committee this afternoon (10/15) for review. Updated numbers are requested to be provided to the Finance Committee by the 15th of each month.
- Revenue Gap: Rebecca Quakenbush reported the school is running at a \$300,000 deficit due to lower enrollment (375 students versus the planned 400).
- Budgeting Process: The Archdiocese budgeting process begins in February 2026. The Finance Committee is optimistic that, with planned structural changes to the Parish Finance Committee, a school representative will now have a seat at the table during the initial budget development process to best support strategic planning.
- Teacher Club Compensation:
 - Previously, club fees were charged via FACTS once rosters were submitted from teachers to the Parish Office.
 - With the move to mySOSM, fees are now processed through payroll as services are rendered:
 - One-day clubs are paid in full the next payroll period.
 - Ongoing clubs are paid during the weeks the club operates.
 - Teachers have requested clearer visibility into the timing and amounts of these payments from the Parish Office and School Administration as this data is not provided with their pay stubs/statements.
 - While teacher labor fees go through payroll and are taxed, materials needed to run clubs (paint, slime, clay, etc.) should not be taxed.
 - Fringe Benefits and HR Questions: Council members had additional questions regarding fringe benefits and club compensation. Fr. Beltran requested that all HR- and payroll-related questions be directed to Archdiocesan HR.

Teacher Retention (Liza Jessen and Courtney Bott)

- The Committee met with Kathy and Maria to discuss teacher retention, with a goal of achieving 100% teacher retention this year. Efforts will focus on ensuring appropriate administrative and faculty staffing based on school needs, enrollment numbers, and Archdiocesan best practices for student-to-teacher ratios, as well as exploring ways to increase teacher compensation.
- In partnership with the Administration, the Committee is evaluating the addition of key support roles, including 2nd, 4th, and 5th grade aides, a permanent substitute/floater, and admissions support. Ongoing collaboration with the Administration and Finance

Committee will be essential to determine the financial feasibility of these positions given the current revenue deficit.

- Future staffing considerations include expanding administrative capacity with roles such as a second Assistant Principal (to ensure full-time coverage across both campuses), Dean of Students, Athletic Director, and Marketing support.
 - It was noted that the Athletic Director salary is currently funded through athletic program fees rather than the school budget.
- The Pastor and Committee will meet in the coming weeks to review the December 2024 Teacher Retention Report as well as historical staffing models.
- Chair Weber emphasized the importance of developing a long-range strategic plan with clear metrics, benchmarks, and actionable goals.
- The Committee confirmed with the Administration that teachers are eligible to coach UGC sports and be compensated for doing so, providing an additional opportunity to enhance teacher compensation and support school spirit (as students enjoy having their teachers involved with activities).

4. Visitor Comments

- Jillian Sehgal shared that she is a new family to the school and is interested in ways to get involved in the classroom and broader school community. She suggested a lunchroom helpers program, which was successful at her previous Catholic school.
- Bill Dewar noted that the current staffing model is not effectively meeting the needs of existing staff, highlighting an opportunity to make improvements.

5. Next Steps

- Food Service Committee: Committee leads will distribute a parent survey to gather feedback on current offerings and input on potential changes for next year.
- Catholic Identity Committee: Erica will meet with Fr. Beltran to discuss strengthening faith formation and will also survey teachers regarding Hallow app usage.
- All Committees: Continue independent work and collaborate with the Executive Committee, Kathy, and Maria as needed.
- Next SAC Meeting: November 19, 2025, at UGC MPR.

6. Closing

- Ericka Cook closed the meeting with prayer
- Meeting adjourned at 9:15 PM

Respectfully submitted by: Kate Burke, SAC Secretary