



School of St. Mary
Meeting of the School Advisory Council (SAC)
November 19, 2025
Minutes

Council Members Present: Natalie Agostinelli, Katelyn Belcore, Courtney Bott, Brooke Bohnker, Kate Burke, Mandy Castle, Erica Cook, Maeve Curran, Derek Sarmas, John Hancir, Diana Hand, Jimmy Griffin, Kelly Graham, Liza Jessen, Sabrina Jerina, Michelle Kijek, Ashley Madsen, Maria Monroe, Margaret Hogan, Christine Porter, Brittany Ruef, Chris Schenkel, Emily Sturges, Kathy Thompson, Eileen Weber, Jen Zeit

Council Members Absent: Fr. Andre Beltran, Rob Busam, Kathleen Brill, Justin Fisk, Peter Hartman, Meredith Leggitt, Kristina Madsen Lowery

SOSM Visitors Present: Decan Bob Thomas, Janice Krakora-Looby, Mike Reardon

Agenda Highlights:

1. Opening

- Council Chair Eileen Weber called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM.
- Vice Chair Michelle Kijek led the Council in an opening prayer.
- Chair Weber welcomed visitors, including Deacon Bob Thomas, who was named Administrator of the meeting per the by-laws.
- Approval of Minutes: The October 15 meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

2. Pastor Administrator Report (Fr. Andre Beltran)

- Fr. Andre was unable to attend the meeting. In his absence, Chair Weber distributed the *Church of St. Mary Investment in the School of St. Mary* financial summary, as requested.
- During Council discussion, members expressed appreciation for the recap of past capital investments, and emphasized the importance of moving forward as one unified parish community. Members noted how collaboration among parishioners, parish leadership, and the school is essential for shared success.

3. Principals Report (Kathy Thompson and Maria Monroe)

- Report Cards: Kudos to Isa Dewar and the entire teaching staff for successfully using Blackbaud to create meaningful and comprehensive report cards for the first time. This transition will streamline the process and reduce staff workload moving forward.
- Teacher Retention: Monthly 1:1 meetings with all new teachers continue to go well, and participants have expressed appreciation for the mentoring program. The administration is considering extending the program to a two-year model.
- Discover Catholic Schools Week: Appreciation was expressed for the volunteers who organized and ran both the Family Mass and Open House. One note for next year—more donuts will be needed!
 - Fr. Andre would like to establish a monthly Family Mass in the UGC gym during the church closure. SAC members and Elizabeth Hitt have volunteered to assist in any way needed.
- First Grade Thanksgiving Show: The annual tradition was held last week under the leadership of new PGC music teacher, Allison Blomeke, who helped make the show a great success for all involved.
- Music Program Donation: Dr. Janice Krakora-Looby generously donated \$5,000 to the music program for new instruments, some of which were already featured during the First Grade Thanksgiving Show.
- Deacon Bob's Pilgrimage to Africa: In September, Deacon Bob co-led a pilgrimage to Africa. The group visited the Fraja School for children with special needs in Tanzania (serving 100 students), celebrated Mass with the community, and committed to sponsoring a 7-year-old student named Naomi.
 - At the December 2–3 school Masses, Deacon Bob will share Naomi's story and launch a fundraising goal of \$1,500 to sponsor her schooling. Support will include a SOSM Bake Sale and Casual Day.
 - Council members suggested additional revenue opportunities, including the PGC School Store.
- A council member requested that the Principals Report be submitted in writing, consistent with other committee reports. The principals will consider this request, as time and schedule allow.

4. Faculty Comments (Natalie Agostinelli and Margaret Hogan)

- Faculty from both PGC and UGC shared that, as we enter the holiday season, students across both campuses are participating in numerous service projects that emphasize the importance of giving back. Current initiatives include:
 - Assembling 22 Roberti House Thanksgiving baskets
 - Feed My Starving Children service field trips (three grades participated)
 - Packing care packages for Lurie Children's Hospital
 - Veterans Day activities
- The faculty also expressed appreciation to the Parents Association for their continued support and for keeping the teachers' lounges well-stocked. A new coffee maker, toaster, and tea kettle were recently added, which have been a welcome upgrade.

5. Committee Reports

Catholic Identity (Erica Cook)

- New to the Council, committee lead Erica Cook introduced herself and shared her vision for identifying existing SOSM traditions and fostering liturgical life throughout the school year — not just during sacrament years, which naturally receive more attention. Her goal is to highlight what makes SOSM unique and to deepen the school community's religious identity.
- Erica presented the need for simple, sustainable ideas that can complement existing religious education curriculum, including:
 - Las Posadas (classroom caroling/"room at the inn" tradition)
 - Linking Student of the Month or the Heart of the Crusader Award to a featured saint
 - Emphasizing Marian virtues, celebrating key feast days, and creating bulletin boards dedicated to Mary at each campus
 - Fr. Andre is also interested in increasing Marian studies, as outlined in his email sent in conjunction with these minutes
- The Council encouraged Erica to collaborate with the religious education faculty (Elizabeth Hitt and Joy Pacheco) to explore implementation of these ideas. She will also consider options for a SAC retreat (potentially during Lent) in partnership with parish staff.
- Additionally, Erica will work with Elizabeth Hitt to evaluate usage of the Hallow app and develop a user survey for teachers and staff.

Family Retention (Sabrina Jerina and Brittney Ruff)

- Discover Catholic Schools Week Open House (Nov. 16): The event was a great success, showcasing the warmth of the SOSM community. Thanks to everyone who helped organize it in just three weeks. Feedback will be collected to highlight successes and identify opportunities for improvement.
 - Seventeen teachers and staff attended and received \$150 gift cards courtesy of the PA for their time.
 - Girl Scouts and other SOSM students led tours. Council members with children who participated noted that students enjoyed the experience and the chance to proudly represent their school. The Council agreed to look for ways to continue to utilize current students in the tour process.
 - 10 new/prospective families attended, along with many current PGC families who had the opportunity to see the UGC for the first time.
- Committee Recommendation: Make this an annual November event, aligning with both Discover Catholic Schools week as well as other private schools' open houses in the area. The committee also suggested hosting a PGC-specific Open House, potentially after St. Patrick Masses.
- Catholic Schools Week: Administration approved a school Mass on January 25 to coincide with Catholic Schools Week, followed by a spring open house.
- Prospective Family Outreach: The committee shared a new process for following up with prospective families:

- o Website and Blackbaud inquiries are now directed to a shared admissions inbox for timely responses.
- o A new tracking system ensures quick follow-up; all 10 families from the Open House have already been contacted.

Marketing & Enrollment (Mandy Castle)

- Current SOSM enrollment: 378 students, with two potential students starting January 2026.
- Kudos to the team that planned and worked at the Open House. Attendance of potential new families tripled compared to prior events. In addition to the opportunity for so many PGC families to see the UGC for the first time.
- Re-enrollment for 2026-2027 is underway. Shifting to a per-student enrollment fee (vs. per-family) due to the Blackbaud system.
 - o Nov 30 is the last day for priority re-enrollment.
 - Council members asked that communication be sent to clarify the new enrollment fee structure and how it will apply to families with multiple students.
 - o New student enrollment starts December 1.
- A Council member asked about the 2026-2027 enrollment goal. No formal goal has been set by the Administration, but all agreed 400 students next year is attainable.
- A Council member suggested the school bring back a referral program for friends and family of current families to help boost enrollment.
- Council members posed a long-term strategic question: Could SOSM grow to 500 students within five years – noting the school had previously included more than 500 students 10 years ago?

Finance (Chris Schenkel)

- The Committee reported that updated financials were not provided by the Parish Office despite a formal request that was submitted last week.
- As the 2026–2027 budgeting process begins in January, timely access to financial information was emphasized as essential for the Committee’s work.
- SAC members Kelly Graham, Rob Busam, and Liza Jessen have been appointed to the newly reformed Parish Finance Council.

6. Other Committee Highlights

Development:

- Thank you to our corporate donors, below. Additional donor talks are in the works.
 - o Graham C Stores committed to \$15k.
 - o LF Bank and Trust committed to \$12,500.
- Save the Date: Local Lake Forest Holiday Shopping Event, December 7, babysitting will be provided and 15-20% proceeds will go to SOSM
- First Rosati’s Dine and Donate event hosted in November was a huge success with over \$1,000 worth of pizza sold. Another event is scheduled for December.

Legislative Action Committee:

- Emily is seeking more information on the Endowment Fund / Parish Education Fund to complete necessary research.

7. Next Steps

- Chair Weber reminded the council to be present and help build community
- All Committees: Continue independent work and collaborate with the Executive Committee, Kathy, and Maria as needed.
- Next SAC Meeting: January 21, 2026, at UGC MPR.

8. Closing

- Sabrina Jerina closed the meeting with prayer.
- The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted by: Kate Burke, SAC Secretary