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Dear St. Mary's Parents,

Today marks an important step in our vision for renewal at St. Mary's. This afternoon our faculty and I discussed this next step, and this letter is a glimpse of what we talked about.

You've been hearing about mission and our true purpose as a Catholic school for some time, and our past two newsletters cited the *Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools* by Archbishop J. Michael Miller, C.S.B.:

The specific purpose of a Catholic school is the formation of boys and girls who will be good citizens of this world, loving God and neighbor, and enriching society with the leaven of the Gospel, and who will also be good citizens of the world to come, thus fulfilling their destiny to become saints (p.20).

He goes on to say,

Catholic educators should have a sound understanding of the human person that addresses the requirements of both the natural and supernatural perfection of the children entrusted to their care (p. 22).

As Catholic school educators, we are absolutely duty bound to understand and cultivate, to the full, all the human faculties and aptitudes that enable children to flourish freely as human beings created in God's image and likeness. It follows that a Catholic school must maximize how thoroughly the **WHY** (mission/purpose) of education drives both the **WHAT** (content) and the **HOW** (methods) of education. Archbishop Miller says it this way:

All instruction, therefore, must be authentically Catholic in content and methodology across the entire program of studies (p. 44).

To that end, Father Cibelli and I are extremely pleased to announce that our renewed vision for St. Mary Catholic School will embrace the educational tradition known as ***Catholic Liberal Education***.

Catholic Liberal Education, sometimes called Classical Liberal Arts education, points to a distinctive content and pedagogy (method), which was the time-tested system of human formation that produced the greatest minds, heroes, and saints in history.

The word Classical refers to a time and culture in ancient Greece and Rome, and the word "liberal" here refers to human freedom (liberty) rather than a political inclination. St. Paul calls it the "glorious liberty of the children of God." The Liberal Arts equip the human person with all the tools of learning with which we are wired by our Creator. ***Catholic Liberal Education*** develops these tools to lead children on a path to true freedom, freedom in Christ.

Some quick history: For many months Father Cibelli and I discussed the ***Catholic Liberal Education*** vision for St. Mary's with our School Board, before Father went to Archbishop Lori for his blessing. Thankfully, His Excellency shares this vision, and his Office of Catholic Schools has pledged their full

support. Superintendent Dr. Donna Hargens agrees with our desire to move slowly and to leverage resources and guidance from folks like the **Institute for Catholic Liberal Education** (ICLE) and **St. Jerome Academy** (SJA) in Hyattsville, MD, which is the flagship school in this renewal. The **St. Jerome Educational Plan** has become a prototype for numerous Catholic schools in renewal, and St. Mary's will follow suit. The SJA Plan is now available for you to peruse on our Vision Renewal Portal.

What will *Catholic Liberal Education* look like at St. Mary's? Some highlights:

By next year, the St. Jerome Educational Plan will become our main framework for developing our curriculum and understanding the guiding principles of *Catholic Liberal Education*. The SJA Plan uses a historically based curriculum, with specific historic periods as context for cross curricular study at each grade level. At St. Mary's you will see more and more historical fiction, writing activities, and instructional units rooted in these history periods. Changes will be slow and minimal, around 10% in year one.

You will also see increasing amounts of memorization and recitation of poetry, prose, and Scripture, beginning even this year and growing over time. Read aloud in school and at home will be par for the course. Writing and how we teach it will be a more intentional focus beginning this year. *Saxon Math* will continue as a proven, excellent approach. Latin study will begin next year in primary grades, in very simple form, as a foundation for building it through all grade levels. An integrated humanities approach with literature and history will begin to take form next year, and textbooks will gradually give way to primary sources.

By year two, we will explore how to enrich our science program with a "Nature Studies" approach, and Formal Logic will come to seventh and eighth graders.

In about three to five years, we will be mostly in full swing with *Catholic Liberal Education* at St. Mary's. Professional development from the Institute for Catholic Liberal Education will be part and parcel of our growth in this vision.

Numerous Catholic elementary schools nationwide have embarked on this path of renewal with astounding results as shown in the **Case Studies** document on our Vision Renewal Portal. But aside from surging enrollments and soaring test scores, the remarkable common denominator in all these schools is something we all want more than anything else: JOY. It's the first thing visitors always see in these schools, joy for learning in the students and joy for teaching in the teachers.

Come and hear more at upcoming information sessions on November 17th (6:30pm) and 18th (8:30am). We are excited to welcome some of my friends and advisors from the **Institute for Catholic Liberal Education** (ICLE), Ms. Colleen Richards and Dr. Merrill Roberts, as they present an inspiring talk entitled: "*Leading Children to True Freedom in Christ*".

Kindly consider preparing your thoughts and questions for these presentations, especially with our updated [Vision Renewal Portal](#). It has a wide selection of articles, resources, and links that I hope will be helpful. There is even a link to a talk about *Catholic Liberal Education* as the best preparation for STEM. Links to the websites of model schools are provided too, as well as definitions of terms like Classical, Liberal Arts, humanities, etc.

Thanks for listening. I look forward to building this exciting vision of renewal with you. See you soon!

God bless.

Mr. Nicely