

## STATEMENT

Catholic Diocese of Peoria

February 28, 2023

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Statement from Bishop Louis Tylka regarding Catholic schools and Growing Disciples**

PEORIA, IL: As we continue to engage in the Growing Disciples pastoral planning initiative for the Diocese of Peoria, our core leadership team has learned that addressing the matter of sustainable, mission-driven schools merits a dedicated process undertaken in conjunction with our parish-focused pastoral planning work. To ensure that we dedicate the appropriate time and resources in a thorough and strategic process, and allow schools ample time to implement any changes, I have decided that the current funding approach for schools will remain in place throughout the 2023-24 school year.

With 36 parochial elementary schools, six diocesan high schools and two independent high schools, Catholic education is a significant ministry in our diocese. In partnership with our parishes, the mission of Catholic schools is to educate and form young people to live as disciples of Christ. I am grateful for the dedication of our school leadership, staff and families in providing a quality Catholic education to students. However, significant challenges remain as we look to ensure the integrity of our schools' Catholic identity and financial sustainability for the future.

I am pleased to note that progress has been made in enhancing the stability of our Catholic high schools as we begin to implement the results of our ongoing Partners in Mission strategic planning work. This past year, we began shifting governance to allow more local leadership in our Catholic high schools. I am hopeful that we will see the fruit of current efforts as additional aspects of the Partners in Mission process unfold.

Regarding our elementary and secondary schools, we recognize that the number of students and school families who identify as Catholic and who are engaged in the

life of the local parish continues to decline. If the true purpose of our schools is to form young people as disciples of Christ, we must evaluate the effectiveness of each school in serving this mission. Where possible, we wish to provide access to all families who seek a Catholic school education.

In addition to Catholic identity, the financial stability of our schools directly impacts their ability to support the overall mission of the parish and the goals of Growing Disciples. Currently, there are few upward limits on the amount of subsidy that each parish is expected to provide to its local Catholic school. While Catholic schools are an important ministry of parishes, if left unchanged, this approach may restrict a parish's ability to fund and expand upon many additional important ministry efforts.

Arriving at a sustainable funding model for Catholic schools is no easy task and must be done in a way that allows schools sufficient time to implement it. The Diocese of Peoria is in the process of hiring a new school superintendent this year. It is my intention that he or she, alongside his or her team and a task force of pastors, principals, and lay leaders, will address the areas of financial stability and Catholic identity. This will inform the next steps of the Growing Disciples planning process for schools, and how we as a diocese will continue to become an even more sustainable, mission-driven Church.

I realize that this statement will not answer every question about the future of our Catholic schools. Our Growing Disciples core leadership team will continue to provide updates as they occur.

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