



## DIOCESE OF METUCHEN

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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

January 20, 2022

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As we begin a new calendar year, we always make time to recognize our Catholic schools. Unfortunately, again this year we are challenged to celebrate Catholic Schools Week (January 30 – February 5, 2022) in the midst of rising COVID numbers and the disruption that has resulted. But, as always, our schools will rise to the challenge. I was very proud that our schools were able to offer in-person education last year to those families that wanted to have their children in school. In addition, for those families that preferred to have their students remain at home, a very successful virtual learning opportunity existed in every school. It was a great blessing to be able to serve our families, and I am so grateful to the pastors, principals and teachers that made it happen. The students were most cooperative too. Without a doubt, being able to keep our schools open during that challenging time was certainly a blessing.

While we all had hoped that this school year would be a bit easier, that has not proven to be the case. Once again, our schools have adapted to the needs of the school community. They are providing virtual learning to those that must quarantine, being attentive to health and safety requirements, and enjoying as many school activities as possible. There are school Masses celebrated, plays being performed, school clubs have resumed and outreach to others remains a hallmark of a Catholic school.

In my recent Pastoral Letter on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the Diocese of Metuchen, I asked that we embrace three priorities that will enable us to answer the Lord's call even more effectively: increased prayer, works of mercy and vocations. During this anniversary year, I am looking forward to learning how these priorities will be met in the schools. There are many liturgical celebrations during the year in every school, Masses, Eucharistic Adoration, special devotions, and daily prayer.

This year, there will be an increased focus on prayer, the quiet time that our students need to be with God. The campus ministry programs at our high schools have many good activities taking place. Recently, given the number of young priests we have ordained, we are blessed to again have some young priests assigned full time to our high schools as Directors of Catholic Identity and as teachers, who I hope and pray are able to foster the prayer lives of our students and faculties. Our schools are such an important part of our evangelization efforts, as they assist our students in not only learning about Jesus and the Church but in deepening their friendship with Him. I hear from our school parents how grateful they are as our schools not only offer a great education for their children but also enable our families to live Gospel values proudly at a time when that is becoming more and more challenging.

I am always so impressed, too, by the outreach and acts of mercy that our school communities do within their school and parish, but also for others. From Appalachia to Haiti and beyond, students and their families are encouraged to reach out and act in the name of Jesus. This year, I am asking that our students, just like everyone else in the diocese, perform 40 acts of mercy in honor of our anniversary year. So often when students participate in outreach of any kind, the entire family becomes involved, and that is such a blessing.

The third priority we are embracing during this anniversary year is the need for vocations. We must constantly pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life. It is difficult in today's noisy and fast paced world to create a culture that allows young men and women to be able to even hear God's call. Our Catholic schools must be such places. I was delighted to hear that each of our schools has "adopted" one of our seminarians. In some schools, the seminarian has visited, either virtually or in person, to discuss his spiritual journey and vocation with the students. It is good to know that there are so many prayers coming from our students in support of our seminarians and praying for more young men and women to answer God's call to serve as priests and religious.

As a product of Catholic schools, I know what a blessing they are, and am so grateful to my parents for having always sent me to Catholic schools. I was not as aware then of all the significant sacrifices people make for our Catholic schools but have certainly learned that, so I want to thank all those who make our schools possible. We here in the Diocese of Metuchen are blessed by the leadership of Ellen Ayoub who serves as our Secretary for Schools. Her love of our Lord and His Church is evident, and she knows well the value of what our schools do. We are grateful for her dedication to our school families. I am grateful, too, for all our religious sisters and brothers who have taught with our dedicated lay teachers, our principals, administrators and staff and I truly appreciate all the dedicated supporters of our schools.

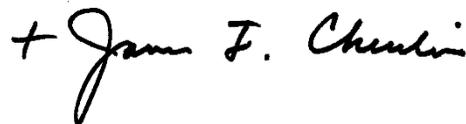
I am very thankful that quite a few of our pastors have told me that in these past two years more people are choosing to send their children to our Catholic schools. I know from my own experience and from what I see, they will not regret it.

While I have the great privilege of learning about our school communities through by visits to them, even now as we are being more careful, I invite you to visit the Office of Catholic Schools' website to learn more about our wonderful schools. Check our social media, too, to see what is happening in the schools.

So, as we journey into a new year, please join me in praying for our youth as well as our schools and all who make them possible. Know of my love and prayers for you always and may all of you have a Blessed 2022.

With renewed best wishes, I remain

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James F. Checchio". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and a cross at the end of the line.

Most Reverend James F. Checchio, JCD, MBA  
Bishop of Metuchen