



DIocese OF BRIDGEPORT

238 Jewett Avenue • Bridgeport, Connecticut 06606 • 203-416-1352 • FAX: 203-371-8323

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

November 21, 2019

Dear Friends in Christ:

As we approach Thanksgiving Day, among the many blessings for which we are thankful is the gift of our Catholic elementary schools. As they have done for generations, our schools offer a superior academic education, form our children with critically important values and most especially, offer them a unique opportunity to be transformed in faith.

Over the past few years, this essential mission has been strengthened with the introduction of many new initiatives, and through the great generosity of many who have financially supported all our schools and Foundations in Education. The success of this fundraising has provided much needed scholarships and grants for innovation programs.

While there is much to be thankful for, our schools continue to face some serious challenges. These challenges include the rising cost of tuition that has made Catholic education financially inaccessible for a growing number of families, the diminishing number of school age children who live in our communities and a growing secularism that does not see Catholic faith as an essential element in the formation of our young people. These challenges must be addressed in an honest and comprehensive manner to ensure that our schools remain vibrant places of learning in the future.

Regarding demographics, it is startling to see that over the past 10 years, the number of school age children in Fairfield County has decreased by an average of 10%. In fact, many of the townships in which we have schools have seen population decreases of more than 18%. As a result, while over the past five years the Diocese and many individual benefactors have made investments in our schools, scholarships, and programs totaling well over \$20 million, we have not seen any increase in overall student enrollment. It is clear; the changing demographic and financial pressures faced by many families in Fairfield County will require us to take bold action now to ensure that a vibrant Catholic school system will be affordable, accessible and excellent well into the future.

To address these challenges, I asked the Diocesan Education Commission six months ago, in collaboration with the Office of the Superintendent of Schools, to begin a comprehensive strategic educational planning process. This process will create a plan to be entitled, "To Make all Things New," echoing the prophetic message of hope given to us in Revelation 21:5. This plan will be our roadmap to address the challenges that our schools now face.

Among the principle works for the Commission, in collaboration with local school leaders, will be the review of a variety of school models, governance structures and grade configurations, as well as the current and projected finances and enrollment of each school.

I have asked the Commission to submit their preliminary recommendations to me by February 28, 2020.

While it may be possible that the plan will call for the reorganization or closure of some schools, its paramount goal will be to ensure the long-term stability and vitality of Catholic education. Such vitality will be marked by the optimum utilization of our resources, ensuring appropriate class sizes, and guaranteeing a quality Catholic education for students well into the future. Informed by their recommendations and my personal discussions with school leadership, I hope to share with you this plan for Catholic education in March 2020.

Your principal will soon invite you to a meeting of your local school community, to be held sometime in December, during which you will receive more information about this important diocesan initiative. I also invite you to visit our diocesan website <https://www.dioceseofbridgeportcatholicschools.com/to-make-all-things-new/> for information and updates in the coming months.

I wish to take this opportunity to express my thanks for choosing Catholic education for your family. Please join me in praying for the Commission as it begins this historic work. May its members be guided by the Holy Spirit to fulfill their mandate on behalf of our young people and school communities.

As I visit our schools, I feel the joy and enthusiasm that radiates from our students as they share the many ways by which they have come to know Christ and understand the true breadth of His love for them. It is my hope that the actions we take in the coming months will ensure the long-term viability and vitality of Catholic education in Fairfield County.

Best wishes to you and your families for a Blessed, Joyful and Grace-filled Thanksgiving holiday.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frank J. Caggiano".

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano
Bishop of Bridgeport