

Hello Families of St. Mary Parish School:

It's with great excitement that I join the extraordinary faculty and staff to serve as school principal starting July 1. It's an honor to do so not only because St. Mary has been my home parish for the past 10 years, but I have the amazing opportunity to continue to build upon the exceptional hard work and legacy of Mrs. Schram's leadership. To work alongside such an outstanding faculty and staff, excellent parish staff, and countless dedicated parent committees is an immense privilege. I can't wait to meet everyone and be of service to you.

Though I look forward to the months ahead when we can get to know each other more, here is just a little about me in addition to what Fr. Brian shared in his letter in April. I was born and raised in Milwaukee and attended St. Stephen School, Thomas More High School, and Marquette University. My wife, Juliann, and I have four adult children and two grandchildren. My hobbies include drum corps, running, and landscaping. I'm beginning my 36<sup>th</sup> year as an educator in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, serving as teacher and principal at both the elementary and high school levels. I also taught at Alverno College in both their undergraduate and graduate programs where I additionally presented on several educational topics throughout WI. I have built a strong reputation of maintaining high standards and expectations when it comes to quality curriculum, engaging instruction, effective assessment, and successful professional development.

As you already know, getting ready for this upcoming school year will be like no other year. I can't help but think of the line from Charles Dickens in A Tale of Two Cities, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..." It somehow seems fitting as we continue to contend with the many restrictions and inconveniences surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. And, to recite the rest of the passage from Dickens is even more applicable, "...it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair." Yes, it's easy to get frustrated and discouraged with all that encompasses our current health situation. But, we must be a people of faith. We will in fact get through this. We have no choice but to work together in a smart and safe way.

As you have perhaps already heard from the news, The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction issued earlier this week, Education Forward. This document provides guidance for school leaders as they plan for a safe and efficient return to school for the 2020-21 school year amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which remains highly contagious. The information is meant to provide various options and necessary guidelines for educators and school officials as they

make decisions regarding school operation in order to keep all students and staff as safe as possible while in the learning environment. The main consideration is for everyone's health and safety.

This guidance document is designed to be used in consultation with local school districts and health departments. Working closely with them will provide us the opportunity to make the best decisions for our parish school and community. As soon as I'm on campus next week I will be in contact with the Hales Corners Health Department and the Whitnall School District to assess their plans. Additionally, I will immediately convene an ad hoc committee representing faculty, parish staff, and school parents. It is prudent to get input from various perspectives. We will carefully look at the Education Forward document and determine protocol options that are reasonable and appropriate for us to implement at St. Mary Parish School. As soon as this committee is able to make determinations, we will quickly share that information with the entire school community.

In the meantime, keep the faith strong. God-willing, this is still a temporary situation. We have reasons to be encouraged when we hear Dr. Anthony Fauci state (cautiously and optimistically) that a vaccine could come by late 2020. Like I said earlier, we will get through this. We have no choice but to work together in a smart and safe way. Being indifferent or giving up are not options.

My pledge to everyone is to continue to do all that I can to help the school program run safely and smoothly. If along the way you have ideas, concerns, or questions, please feel free to stop by my office or send me an email ([joerresm@stmaryhc.org](mailto:joerresm@stmaryhc.org)). I truly look forward to a healthy future, free of so many worries and restrictions. May God abundantly bless you, your family, and your friends.

Pace e bene,

Mark Joerres