



September 15, 2021

Dear Families,

Over the past year, we have undoubtedly struggled as a nation in our battle against the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, our communities and country have also experienced significant social, racial, and political turmoil. The divisions within our society seem to be growing at time when we need to focus on loving and supporting our neighbor. When watching the news or reading the paper, it is evident that the spread of hate within our communities is on the rise.

Our Catholic faith calls us not only to be messengers, spreading the Good News of the Gospel, but also to act upon these teachings and truly live the Gospel message. It has become increasingly apparent our attention must focus on the way our students perceive their communities and the world, through the vision and mission of our faith. Our priority in helping students know and love Christ must also be to manifest this love in their interactions with others.

The tenets of Catholicism have a strong basis in the fundamental understanding of the value and dignity of each person. As we see polarization and discord within our society, it is important for students to discuss and understand the world through the lens of **Catholic Social Justice**. This is why Catholic Academies and Parish Schools are continuing the process of strengthening our incorporation of Catholic Social Justice into their religion curriculum. Catholic Academy and Parish School leaders have already engaged in professional learning over the summer on leading school communities in difficult conversations focused on equity, justice, race, and tolerance. Our leaders are the starting point for changes within the school community and are the foundation with which we will be able to support staff as well as student development

The Catholic Social Justice Curriculum focuses on living the Gospel message, to create a just society considering the trials of modern times. There are several focuses of Catholic Social Teaching including the principles of solidarity, the rights of workers, life, and dignity of the human person, call to family and community, rights and responsibilities, and options for the poor and vulnerable. Each of these themes is rooted in the value of human life and the need to pursue justice and peace throughout the world. Catholic Social Teaching addresses issues of inequality and injustice, by helping students learn about the problem at hand, yet encourages them to consider their role and impact on the world.

To encourage conversations within the classroom, teachers will be provided with suggested texts and activities, which introduce topics in an age-appropriate manner. These lessons will tie into religion, social studies, and language arts standards. The following are example from



various grade levels describing the types of lessons that will be incorporated as well as cross-curricular ties.

- *Kindergarten* students will learn about how holidays are celebrated in other cultures. This theme, based on the teaching of solidarity encourages students to embrace other cultures, identifying similarities across the globe, as well as tying into a social studies standard of learning about other cultures.
- *Grade 2* students will read a story about a young boy with different physical abilities and discuss what makes them unique. This theme reinforces the social studies standard that describes how communities are strengthened by the diversity of its members.
- *Grade 4* students, in a study of the rights of workers, will investigate the importance of farms on food supply as well as the workers that contribute to this. Discussions of farming and farm workers has strong ties to the grade 4 social studies standard which looks at the impact of the farming industry on New York State.
- *Grade 6* students will be building on their understanding of world religions by studying the function of holidays for different religious groups, the connections between celebrations, and the historical context of religious development. This will emphasize the social studies curriculum of origins of world religions.
- *Grade 8* students study the Reconstruction era in the context of challenges freed African Americans faced as part of their social studies curriculum. In continuation of the conversations of injustice, students will also look at slavery through reading and interpreting an African folktale.

Catholic Social Teaching is already a strong part of religion classes and will continue to encourage students to focus on caring for others through their faith. When we consider Catholic education, our goal must be the formation of saints and scholars, in that order. As such, faith development and living the Gospel message must be at the forefront of all that we do.

It is our hope to engage students at all grade levels with the intent of developing deeper conversations as students mature. Students may explore the same topic over the years, gaining a greater understanding and appreciation, as they get older with the overarching goal of developing a generation of servant leaders. We strive to graduate students who are globally focused, community oriented, and civically responsible. We want our graduates to be prepared to bring the words of the Gospel into the world, sharing the message of Christ in their words and actions.

Through the strengthening of our religion curriculum, we are committed to encouraging our students to grow in their faith. I pray for your continued support and commitment to helping your child along their journey of faith.

In Christ,

Thomas Chadzutko

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