



Growing DISCIPLES

Issue No. 12 | Summer 2025

2025 Convocation: You Are God's Beloved

The gathering wasn't typical professional development. Over two days, approximately 575 Catholic educators gathered at St. Boniface in Waukee and St. Albert Catholic School in Council Bluffs for the Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools' annual convocation with a theme that promised something deeper: "You are God's Beloved—Living Joyfully in Christ Jesus."

Tom Quinlan from the St. Joseph Evangelization Center delivered identical messages to both audiences, creating a unified experience across the diocese.

"We know it, but we don't *know* it—how precious each of us is to God."

It was a paradox that resonated deeply. Here were teachers and administrators who daily taught students about God's unconditional love, yet who struggled to fully embrace that same love for themselves.

Quinlan structured the day around three movements: Healing, Gratitude, and Joy. But first, he challenged the self-reliance that permeates both American culture and education.

"You can't heal yourself. You can't form a profoundly grateful heart, and you cannot give yourself joy," he said. "God initiates, and we cooperate."

The presentation took a deeply personal turn as Quinlan shared his own journey through anxiety, loss, and moments of despair. From his struggles came a powerful truth about the resilience that joy provides.



Tom Quinlan
St. Albert Catholic School

"The pilot light that is joy deep within me, knowing the love of God for me, will not be extinguished, and that it will rise again and will rise in meaningful flame again, regardless of what happens."



Tom Quinlan
St. Boniface Catholic Church

Participants appreciated the spiritual foundation this preparation provided. Jeremy Hulshizer, who teaches 8th grade theology and STEM, captured the uniqueness of the approach.

"This sends a message that this starts with Jesus," he said. "You're a Catholic school educator. We're not here for the nuts and bolts, how to make the copier work, and that sort of thing."

As educators departed, they carried more than new insights. They bore the fruit of honest reflection about their identity as beloved children of God—returning to their schools with fuller tanks for the year ahead.

[Read the full story in our Discover the Difference blog at dmdiocese.org.](https://dmdiocese.org)

A Family Legacy: The Loffredos' Deep Roots in Catholic Education

For the Loffredo family, the connection to Catholic education in Des Moines runs deep—so deep that the land beneath Christ the King School was once part of their family's sprawling Loffredo Gardens. The family's legacy began in 1936, when their great-grandfather enrolled at Dowling Catholic High School, and continues today as the fourth generation of Loffredo children attend Sacred Heart Catholic School.

Gene Loffredo, who was part of Christ the King's inaugural class in the late 1950s, remembers watching his father and grandfather work the gardens from his classroom window. He and his four brothers, all of whom also attended Christ the King and Dowling, were raised on a foundation of faith and family. For the Loffredo boys, attending Catholic school wasn't a choice; it was simply what their family did.

"Going to a Catholic school definitely shaped my life. We were and are a very tight-knit family, and the Catholic schools kind of were the solidifying glue, being that going to a Catholic school is like one big family going to church," Larry Loffredo said.

This strong tradition has extended to the next generations. Though many of the family members had access to excellent public schools, they continued to choose Catholic education for their children. Gene and his wife Diane, for example, never questioned where they would send their kids. The choice to continue this tradition, even for those who married into the family, speaks to the recognition of the values and community that Catholic education provides.



The Loffredo family consistently points to this sense of community as one of the greatest strengths of Catholic education. The strong bonds have created a network that spans generations. Gene cherishes that his daughter-in-law, Bailey, not only sends her children to Sacred Heart but also teaches there. As his son, Brian, notes, the school community is faith-based, so they "share so many life experiences together, more than just schooling."

The Loffredo family's commitment to Catholic education has extended beyond state lines, as one family member who moved to Kansas City has enrolled her children in Catholic schools there. It's a testament to the fact that the roots Eugene Loffredo Sr. planted—in both the soil and a commitment to faith—continue to bear fruit generations later.

The Diocese of Des Moines will celebrate the Loffredo family as honorary chairs at the 2025 Bishop's Celebration of Catholic Schools on September 13.

[Read the full story in our Discover the Difference blog at dmdiocese.org.](https://www.dmdiocese.org/discover-the-difference)

Six Catholic Schools Receive Nearly \$130,000 in Community Betterment Grants from Prairie Meadows

Six Catholic schools in the Diocese of Des Moines have been awarded \$129,129 in Community Betterment Grant funding from Prairie Meadows, significantly exceeding previous years' awards.

"We are profoundly grateful to Prairie Meadows for this exceptional level of support," said Superintendent of Schools Donna Bishop. "This year's grant of nearly \$130,000 will be truly transformative for our schools. Prairie Meadows continues to be an invaluable partner in strengthening Catholic education and the entire central Iowa community."

These vital funds will address critical needs such as enhanced school security, improved IT infrastructure, and the development of safe and engaging playgrounds.

This year's total grant amount represents a substantial increase from the historical average of \$77,000 to \$99,900 previously received by Catholic schools through Prairie Meadows' generous grant programs. The funding demonstrates Prairie Meadows' continued commitment to educational excellence and community well-being in central Iowa.

Six individual schools will benefit from these awards, enabling crucial projects that directly impact student safety and their learning environment:

- \$25,000 to Christ the King Catholic School to enhance school security.
- \$25,000 to Holy Family Catholic School for both safety and IT infrastructure.
- \$25,000 to St. Anthony Catholic School for playground improvements.
- \$25,000 to St. Joseph Catholic School, also for new playground equipment.
- \$15,000 to Dowling Catholic High School for safety enhancements.
- \$14,129 to St. Luke the Evangelist Catholic School, also for safety upgrades.

These grants will directly enrich the daily lives of students and staff, providing safer environments and fostering opportunities for healthy development.

The projects align perfectly with Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools commitment to offering a holistic and secure educational experience rooted in faith and academic excellence.



Faster Network, New Technology Coming to Des Moines Region Schools

This school year, all 12 Catholic schools in the Des Moines metro are being supported by a joint Region Business Office for the first time, which means all schools and staff get the same high-quality IT, HR, and financial services support while maintaining the cultures that make each school unique.

One of the Region Business Office's primary projects over the summer was technology upgrades. It replaced outdated systems with a unified, secure, and high-performance infrastructure that will benefit students and staff for years to come.

A key part of this work has been a comprehensive overhaul of school technology. Previously, schools used a variety of different brands and systems, which often led to inconsistent performance and slow internet connections.

That's all changing with a centralized network planned for all schools. Upgrades are already complete at Holy Family and St. Augustin, which now have enterprise-grade fiber internet and a consistent, reliable network. This means faster speeds, fewer outages, and a system that can handle modern learning tools.

All K-8 schools have also refreshed at least 25% of their student devices. Christ The King, St. Theresa, and Holy Family have refreshed their staff devices too, and Christ The King even installed new interactive displays in all classrooms.

To improve cybersecurity, the Region Business Office is implementing advanced security measures like CrowdStrike and email filters at Holy Family, Christ The King, and St. Theresa.



DES MOINES REGION CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

By mid-September, these tools, along with vulnerability scanners, will be installed at all K-8 schools. All schools will also be transitioned to a new content filter, Deledao, as their old contracts expire.

Moving forward, the Region Business Office plans to upgrade all schools to paid Google Workspace environments and use Microsoft Entra ID and Intune for device management.

Beyond technology, the office has been busy on other fronts:

- To ensure compensation and benefits are competitive, fair, and supportive of a great work environment, the HR team sent out an anonymous survey to all full-time employees to gather their input.
- The finance team are in the final stages of a FY2025 audit, which is on schedule to complete it before the end of September.
- A new committee is being formed to explore ways to use technology to improve classroom instruction. School staff are encouraged to participate.

By bringing schools together to complete strategic projects like these, we'll continue building a stronger and more secure future for all Catholic schools in the Des Moines metro.

Fr. Mike Mahoney: When God's Plans Come Full Circle

Fr. Mike Mahoney initially wanted to be a teacher, but after a year of teaching middle school, he decided it wasn't the right path for him and entered the seminary. He believed he was leaving education behind forever. However, after his ordination, his first assignment was a surprise: he was sent back to school, not as a teacher, but as the pastor of both St. Theresa's parish and its school.

While his friends were concerned about his assignment to go back to school, Fr. Mike was genuinely excited. He realized that his brief time as a teacher had given him a unique perspective.

"I think that it's helped me have an insight into the struggles of teachers in particular, and also just what students are like. I know what it's like to be in their shoes," Mahoney said.

This insight was immediately noticed by the faculty. Teacher Michelle Cortlandt remarked that Fr. Mike "hit the ground running" with a "teacher's heart."

The school chapel soon became his new classroom. Almost every Tuesday, he celebrates Mass for the sixth through eighth graders—the same age group that had once left him questioning his calling. He saw that his educational background wasn't a detour from his priestly vocation but rather a preparation for it.



Fr. Mike Mahoney
St. Theresa Catholic School

A pivotal moment occurred during a field trip to see a religious relic. Fr. Mike watched as eighth graders spontaneously began teaching second graders about saints and miracles. He realized his role was not to control the classroom but to create a space where grace could work, where students could learn from each other and grow spiritually. He understood that God had led him through that difficult year of teaching to prepare him for this different kind of classroom.

Fr. Mike now makes it a priority to have lunch with students, who found him to be quite relatable after learning of his affinity for fantasy football.

The unexpected assignment has been a blessing. The frustrated first-year teacher couldn't have imagined that he'd become a priest who revels in education. As he looks to the future, he hopes to expand the chapel Masses to more grade levels. God's plan, which once seemed like a detour, was the most direct route all along.

[Read the full story in our Discover the Difference blog at dmdiocese.org.](#)

Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools

The Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools includes 16 schools serving 23 counties in central and southwest Iowa. Catholic schools in the Des Moines Diocese build Christ-centered, collaborative, inclusive partnerships with parents, students, and parishes to provide innovative academic excellence and inspirational faith formation. To learn more about the Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools, visit dmdiocese.org/catholic-schools or email grow@dmdiocese.org.

Growing Disciples is a quarterly publication of the Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools Office. Content may not be reproduced without the expressed written consent from the Diocese of Des Moines. To submit a story idea, email grow@dmdiocese.org.



St. Francis of Assisi, West Des Moines

Countless pictures were taken Aug. 25 as students returned to school for the 2025-2026 school year. Welcome back!

DIOCESE OF DES MOINES CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE
601 Grand Avenue . Des Moines, IA 50309 . 515.243.7653