



February 21, 2020

Dear Senator,

***First and foremost, I want to thank you for your commitment to supporting all of Maryland's children!***

This past Monday, I had the honor of testifying before the four General Assembly committees in support of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future. As a Catholic, I am proud that our Church, through Archbishop Lori and the Maryland Catholic Conference, is supporting the Kirwan plan not only for our Catholic children who attend public schools but for the good of all of Maryland's children in all types of schools. This transformative legislation seeks to push Maryland towards a more just and equitable system of education that continues to try to really address the effects of poverty, racism, and the challenges faced by immigrants and other marginalized groups.

I particularly want to share with you my support for the Blueprint's plan for universal access to Prekindergarten for all of Maryland's children. **For the last five years, Saint Francis International School has been part of the Maryland State Department of Education's Pre-K Expansion Grant program. We are proud that in that time, with help from state and federal funds, we have provided free Pre-K education for over 100 kids whose family face poverty.** Our school, with roots to 1954, has been providing licensed, high quality early childhood education since 1985 and we are so proud to be able to use our expertise and resources to help expand access to publicly funded Pre-K for four-year-olds.

**The vision of the Blueprint to empower high quality, community-based early childhood education providers across the state to be part of our publicly funded system of world class education is groundbreaking and will make Maryland a national model.** Please take a moment to read the enclosed testimony that I gave this past Monday about our support for the Pre-K portion of the Blueprint.

**I also want to take a moment to urge you to support the continuation of the BOOST Scholarship program. SFIS currently has almost 450 students from age three through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Over 80% of our students are the children of immigrants and 62% of them qualify for free or reduced-price meals ... our community has a concentration of poverty and need for academic resources that exceeds many of Maryland's public schools.** Nonetheless, our community of parents and faculty partner with the Catholic Church, donors, and the government to nurture each and every one of students to be their absolute best. Our alumni, despite their poverty and seeming disadvantages, go on to the best Catholic high schools in our nation and many of the most elite public school specialty and honors programs.

This year, over 100 of our students in grades K through 8 are recipients of the Maryland BOOST Scholarship. This funding coupled with other state and federal support like the school nutrition program, the aging non-public school buildings grant, and the textbook and technology loan program allow us to do amazing things for our students because their parents and our Church contribute too. While the BOOST Scholarship program is a tiny fraction of funding compared to the general public school budget, we are able to magnify the effect of those few million dollars and really transform children's lives. Please take a moment to read the enclosed article about the impact that Saint Francis International School has had over the last 10 years. I am sure you can see the good that we do, which is reflective of so many religious and secular non-public schools throughout the state.

**Our community, which includes families from your district, urges you to support the following:**

- Enacting the Blueprint for Maryland's Future including the Pre-K amendments proposed by the Maryland State Child Care Association and the Maryland Catholic Conference.
- Sustaining the existing Pre-K Expansion Grant program during the transition
- Continuing the Maryland BOOST Scholarship program for children in grades K-12
- Growing state support for the federal school and community nutrition programs, including Maryland Meals for Achievement
- Fully funding the Textbook and Technology Loan Program for non-public schools
- Fully funding the Aging Non-Public Schools Buildings Grant and the Non-Public Schools Security Grant

Our students will be visiting Annapolis on March 4<sup>th</sup> to advocate for themselves and children like them, we hope to see you then! Feel free to stop by our school any time to see the good work we do!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tobias A. Harkleroad". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'T'.

Tobias A. Harkleroad, M.Ed.  
Principal / Chief Administrator

## CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK

## St. Francis International School celebrates 10th Catholic Schools Week

By Josephine von Dohlen  
Catholic Standard

**I**n celebration of Catholic Schools Week, St. Francis International School honored the individuals who helped establish the school one decade ago at a Mass with Washington Archbishop Wilton Gregory at St. Camillus Church in Silver Spring, Maryland on Jan. 29.

Born from a joint effort of leaders at St. Camillus and St. Mark the Evangelist Catholic Church in Hyattsville, St. Francis International School opened for its first day of school in August of 2010. Co-founders Toby Harkleroad, the founding principal; Father John Dillon, former pastor at St. Mark the Evangelist; Tom Burnford, former secretary of education for the Archdiocese of Washington; and the Catholic Schools Office of the Archdiocese of Washington were recognized for their contributions to the school that today provides a Catholic education to more than 440 students.

Franciscan Father Chris Posch, pastor at St. Camillus, shared the story of the school's founding, emphasizing the efforts of the community to make the dream a reality.

"Ten years ago, leaders of St. Camillus and St. Mark's schools and parish communities took on the challenge of finding new and creative ways to ensure that a diverse array of families would continue to have access to Catholic education for generations to come," Father Posch said. "Both communities knew the value of having Catholic schools at the heart of their parishes thanks to decades of commitment from pioneers here in Maryland by religious sisters."

He added that the two parishes were committed to reaching out to the children who might not have a Catholic education otherwise.

"Both communities knew the power of Catholic schools to nurture young people, especially those facing struggles like financial challenges, immigration status, and marginalization due to social factors like race and abilities," Father Posch said.

Today, in addition to the two original founding parishes, the school is also sponsored by Our Lady of Vietnam Parish in Silver Spring and St. Catherine Laboure' Parish in Wheaton.

Archbishop Gregory congratulated St. Francis International School for "10 years of reflecting God's goodness." He added his congratulations to the St. Camillus community for helping support Catholic education for 65 years, noting the community's commitment to parochial education since 1954.

The archbishop also spoke to the strength of the school's community, grounded in its diversity and reflecting unity and peace.

"God likes to see the great diversity of His creation," Archbishop Gregory said. "So I am pretty sure that God is very pleased with St. Francis International School because you reflect a wonderful diversity of God's creative goodness. You are all most beautiful when you are put together as one family."



The student choir at St. Francis International School in Silver Spring led the congregation in worship for the school's 10th anniversary celebratory Mass with Washington Archbishop Wilton Gregory. (CS photo/Andrew Biraj)

God looks down at St. Francis International School and He says, 'That's how I like it'."

Burnford, now the president of the National Catholic Educational Association, shared with the students that as he visits many of the 6,200 Catholic schools around the country, he often shares the story of St. Francis International School.

"I do that because this school came out of the vision of two parishes, two communities working together," he said, adding that St. Francis International School is "a vibrant Catholic school that is diverse and faith-filled, and a light to the nations."

Not only is St. Francis International School a product of multi-parish collaboration, but Harkleroad, the chief administrator of St. Francis International, said the school also receives significant support from various government programs.

"We are not just a partnership of two parishes... but we have made an intentional effort to be a partner with the government and the community around us," he said. "100 percent of students receive some type of support from the state, the federal, and the county governments."

He added that 100 St. Francis International School students are Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST) scholarship recipients, the largest of any Catholic school in Maryland.

Also attending the celebratory Mass was Montgomery County Councilmember



Washington Archbishop Wilton Gregory accepts offertory gifts from students during a Jan. 29 Catholic Schools Week Mass for St. Francis International School's 10th anniversary. (CS photo/Andrew Biraj)

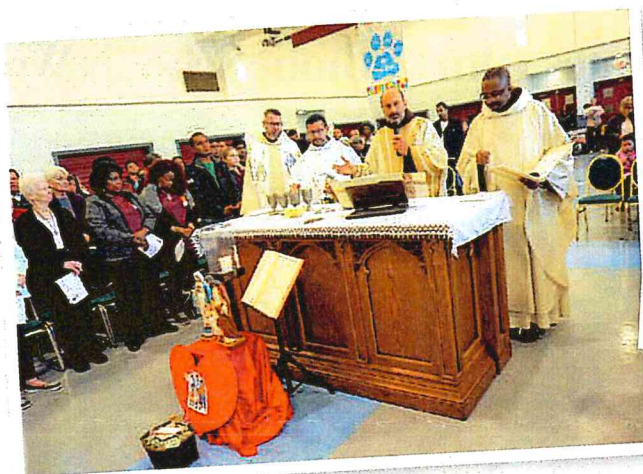
Tom Hucker, who has been supportive of St. Francis International School and St. Camillus Parish for many years.

"I am proud to be a partner with this school," he said.

He presented a proclamation from the Montgomery County Council, recognizing the school's 10 year anniversary.

"We have many challenges in front of us, but I know with the great work being done at St. Francis, your commitment to raising the next generation of leaders in this commitment of your commitment to raising adults who live for others... We'll be able to address those challenges together," Hucker said.

# 65 Years on These Sacred Grounds



Abpve. One of the first and one of the most recent Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur who have served at St. Camillus accept recognition as "co-founders" of the parish. At left, the St. Camillus community gathers around the same altar that the Sisters and the founding pastor celebrated the first mass in the building 65 years ago.

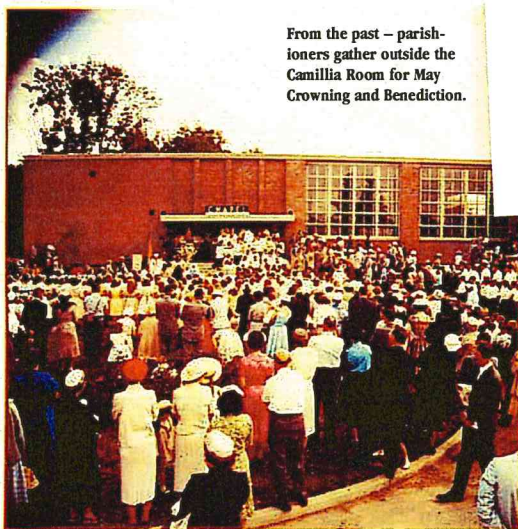
**S**t. Camillus parish was established in 1951 and its first pastor, Fr. James Grace, led the parish in an aggressive and innovative effort to move from a decree from Cardinal O'Boyle to a vibrant community as quickly and as creatively as possible. This ethos and mission is still at the heart of St. Camillus parish today!

The parish began operations in a large house on Carroll Avenue in Takoma Park. Fr. Grace celebrated the first baptism in the parish immediately after the first Sunday mass on November 25, 1951. Fr. Grace and parishioners scoured the new neighborhoods along University Blvd. and New Hampshire Avenue as their first priority and found at least 875 Catholic families with over 1,200 children already living within the new parish boundaries.

Quickly, there was not enough space for Sunday masses in the large house. For Christmas in 1951 the parish borrowed the brand new 973 seat movie theater in Langley Park for Midnight Mass and six masses from 7 am to 1 pm on Christmas Day. By March of 1952, St. Camillus parish began celebrating mass in the Langley Theater every Sunday!

It was clear that this parish needed space to grow. Land was found a little further up New Hampshire Avenue and plans were drawn up to build a building that could serve as a school and a worship space. Already in the fall of 1953, the parish borrowed a classroom at Our Lady of Sorrows School and a lay

From the past – parishioners gather outside the Camillia Room for May Crowning and Benediction.



teacher convened the parish's first class of 2nd graders. Meanwhile, the parish broke ground for their new home in Silver Spring on February 20, 1954.

Even though the convent was not yet complete, St. Camillus School opened on September 23, 1954, with 456 students in Kindergarten through 4th grade. The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur commuted every day from Trinity College and were joined by a lay teacher until on October 18, 1954, they moved into the finally completed convent attached to the school. The priests would not move to the property until 1956. Over the coming years, the building would be expanded several times and when the final wing was completed in 1960 there were 1,277 students enrolled in St. Camillus School.

On the morning of October 19, 1954, Fr. Grace joined the Sisters of Notre Dame in their new convent chapel and together they celebrated the first mass ever on the sacred grounds which have now served as the home of St. Camillus parish for 65 years.

On October 19, 2019, Franciscan Fr. Chris Posch, the current pastor,

gathered with priests, sisters, brothers, and hundreds of parishioners in the Camillia Room around the altar believed to have been the same altar from convent chapel that Fr. Grace and the Notre Dame Sisters surrounded exactly 65 years earlier. The Camillia Room is the space that from November 1954 until the church was completed in 1970 served as the primary worship space for the parish.

After the 9 am anniversary mass on October 19th, which included a children's choir, a symbolic procession led by families from several different cultures, and prayers and songs in seven different languages, the daily mass goes hosted a coffee lounge as they do most days. The celebration moved into the original wing of the school for an open house featuring the major ministries that currently use the school building along with displays about some of the cultures which make up the parish. Meanwhile, cultural dances and a fashion show kicked off a block party on the road in front of the entrance to Saint Francis International School. Parents from Saint Francis International School and St. Camillus' family cateche-

sis program came together to provide a multicultural feast while the Knights of Columbus grilled hot-dogs and hamburgers and the St. Camillus Youth Ministry and SFIS Student Council provided games and face painting for children.

The big anniversary day ended with a Founders Dinner in the Camillia Room on the evening of October 19th during which many co-founders of the parish were honored including long-time parishioners, the first permanent deacon in the parish, and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. Each of the founders was given a certificate and a brick that had been part of the building for 65 years. Each of the memorial bricks were hand painted by Saint Francis International School students and decorated with the year "1954."

This special day served to inaugurate the "Remember-Renew-Rebuild" campaign, which will last through the parish's 70th anniversary in 2021. In addition to remembering the history and the heroes of the parish's past, leaders within the community are calling on current parishioners and school families to commit to renewing and strengthening their relationships with the parish.

For the last eight months, parishioners have worked to restore a statue of Mary that stood outside of the Camillia Room since 1954. In the spring a parishioner repaired and refinished the 65 year old concrete statue of Our Lady of Grace and another parishioner built a new wooden pedestal for the statue. That statue is now in the church where it can be kept safe from the

weather and be available to parishioners. Meanwhile another group of parishioners with trade skills have been rebuilding the area where the original statue had been to turn it into a beautiful shrine with professional paving and landscaping. Through a grassroots fundraising effort, a very similar concrete statue of Our Lady of Grace was obtained for the shrine in time for the anniversary weekend.

On Sunday, October 20, Bishop Mario Dorsonville celebrated a special multicultural mass that included prayers and songs in the major languages of the parish, an African procession of the Scriptures, and a Bangali dance as part of the offertory. St. Camillus has celebrated masses in multiple languages since 1970. In the homily, Bishop Dorsonville urged the parish, one of the largest in the Archdiocese of Washington and one of the most diverse in the country, to keep building and welcoming in Christ's name.

While the new shrine is not yet complete, after mass Bishop Dorsonville prayed a blessing and sprinkled the statue of Mary with holy water that mixed with the pouring rain. Inside the Camillia Room, surrounded by many parishioners, Bishop Dorsonville completed the anniversary weekend by rededicating the building built between 1954 and 1960 as the St. Camillus Parish Life and Education Center and praying that God will continue to use the people, the ministries, and the resources of St. Camillus parish to build up the Kingdom of God for many years to come.

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## St. Francis International School

[www.saintfrancisinternational.org](http://www.saintfrancisinternational.org)

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Principal

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*Saint Francis International School is regional Catholic school of the Archdiocese of Washington located in Silver Spring, Maryland, which serves nearly 450 students age three through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade who are primarily the children of immigrant and low-income families.*

*The legacy of Saint Francis International School serving children from Montgomery and Prince George's Counties goes back to 1954 and has included licensed, high quality early childhood education since 1985.*

*Saint Francis International School has participated in the federal and state Pre-K Expansion Grants since 2015.*

*Tobias Harkleroad has been a certified teacher and administrator in public and non-public schools since 2003 and has been the founding principal of Saint Francis International School since 2010. Today, SFIS provides high quality early childhood education for 100 students age three and four with 30 of those students funded by the Pre-Kindergarten Expansion Grant.*

**Testimony:  
Senate Bill 1000/HB 1300  
Blueprint for Maryland's Future  
February 17, 2020**

I am Toby Harkleroad, the principal of Saint Francis International School in Silver Spring. We have extensive partnerships with both Montgomery County Public Schools and MSDE in providing services and support to Maryland's children. We believe that funding flowing THROUGH MSDE to the eligible private providers is the most thorough and efficient model for administration of prekindergarten expansion.

The Department already has a system in place for doing this. My school in particular has experienced this firsthand as a participant in the existing Pre-K Expansion Grant since 2015. Our students, who reside in both Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, are the children of immigrant parents from 50 different countries and 62% of them face poverty under the federal FARMs guidelines. I am a member of the Maryland Early Childhood Advisory Council and was part of the Kirwan prekindergarten workgroup. That workgroup agreed that money flowing through MSDE for prekindergarten expansion was the most effective model. I am here to tell you, it's a model that's currently working in expanding access to prekindergarten for a diverse population of Maryland's children.

