



July 30, 2025

It's getting to be that time again! While we're all sad to see the summer winding down, there's also excitement for a new year. New teachers, new classrooms, and some new staff.

Let's start there:

- Jennifer Wallwey has been hired to replace Mrs. Barnes to teach elementary music. With her responsibilities as Development Director for our parish, she will be able to meet with each grade school class once per week. We are so grateful to Mrs. Wallwey for taking this on, and we think she will be an amazing addition to our staff. Did you know that before she was our Development Director, she taught PreK-6 music before, and was a preschool-6th grade choir director for churches for 15 years? She did - in the Omaha area!
- Mrs. Kari Boettcher will stay on in a half-time position. She will be available for substitute teaching, classroom projects, grading, small group instruction, classroom coverage, organizing materials, making copies, prepping activities, or other needs that may arise. Even though we're still defining exactly how she'll be best utilized, we know her presence will make a meaningful difference in our classrooms and for our students and teachers.
- Mrs. Patty Bauer has been hired to replace Miss Tricia in the office. Miss Patty comes to us from Greeley, Nebraska and she is over the moon to be part of our St. Mary's family. She has spent most of her work life in offices—as the Greeley County Deputy County Clerk and as a bookkeeper for Bosselman, Inc.
- Miss Tricia will be moving to the preschool room to help Mrs. Chohon. She is also excited to try something new, and it's nice that we'll still see her around St. Mary's in the halls and on the playground!
- Mr. Jacob Domayer will be replacing Mr. Carlson in the social studies department. Mr. Domayer comes to us from St. Thomas More in Omaha and is eager to experience small town life! He will teach 6-12 social studies.

Now—on to the handbook! We haven't made too many changes from last year.

- Earlier in the year, we added a section on student privacy, the Archdiocese Restraint and Seclusion policy, and our policy on Dating Violence to our online version of the student handbook. These policies will be part of the printed version this year.
- We have made some necessary changes to our cell phone policy due to the passing of LB 140 on May 20, 2025. High school students will check in their phones each morning and collect them at the end of the day. Phones will no longer be allowed to be kept in lockers, as students are not allowed access to them at all during the school day. This also includes SMART Watches and other electronic communication devices—we ask that students not bring those to school at all. If students are found using a SMART watch (or similar device) during the school day, it will be confiscated. **For GS students**, it is preferred that students not bring their phones or other personal devices (if they have them) to school. However, if it's necessary that they do, they must check them into the office in the morning with Miss Patty and they may collect them after school.
- We've added a Parental Covenant to our handbook, and you can find this in the beginning pages. Please take some time to read the covenant before you sign the handbook agreement at the start of the year. The purpose of the covenant is, in essence, to serve as a commitment to work together to provide a holistic, faith-filled education for Catholic school students. It was approved by the St. Mary's Advisory Board at their April meeting for inclusion in our handbook.

- Our school uses **Flocknote** for immediate communication with families. Important announcements, including school cancellations or urgent updates, are sent through this platform. Please ensure your contact information is up to date to stay informed. To sign up for **Flocknote**, visit the SM website (stmarysoneill.org). On the left panel, choose '**Current Students**' and then click on '**Flocknote Sign Up**'.
- We implemented this last year, but as a reminder—**on Cardinal Pride days, students who wish to wear shorts must wear their uniform shorts**. This saves teachers and administration from having to police whether shorts are the appropriate length for school.
- You may have heard that our Mass day is moving to Fridays. **It is not**. We considered it, but we couldn't get it to work out with Northeast Community College and their Fridays at Northeast program, which some of our high school students participate in, so **Mass will stay on Wednesdays**, and **Cardinal Pride Days will remain on Fridays**. Two exceptions to this: Grandparents' Mass for the elementary celebration will be on Friday, September 12, and our Homecoming Week Mass will be on Friday, October 3. Both will be all-school Masses.
- With our sports season right around the corner, we want to remind our families of our handbook policies regarding athletic contests to avoid some of the problems we've had in the past:
 - Elementary students must be accompanied by a parent or a responsible adult when attending games or school events. If a parent is unable to attend, another trusted adult may supervise—however, junior high or high school students (including siblings, cousins, etc.) should not be considered the primary supervisors for younger children. Please do not leave your elementary-aged child unattended or drop them off at events without appropriate adult supervision.
 - Elementary students must sit either with their parents or in the designated student section during games. Those seated in the student section are expected to follow the directions of staff and administration supervising the area. Students who do not follow instructions will be required to rejoin their parents for the remainder of the event.
 - If your child is not yet school-age (not in Kindergarten or older), they must sit with a parent—even if seated in the student section. This is primarily a safety concern, as younger children often have difficulty staying seated and may begin climbing on or playing under the bleachers on the stage, which can be dangerous.
 - For the safety and supervision of all attendees, it is essential that everyone remain in designated areas—the gym or the Commons—during games and events. All other locations, including the second floor, Parish Hall, stairwells, the Grade School, and the connecting link, are off-limits.
 - Please remember that school staff and administrators are present to help ensure a safe and enjoyable event for everyone, but they are not responsible for supervising individual children. We kindly ask that parents actively supervise their children during games and events. Your support helps create a positive experience for all families and fans.
- **This next topic IS new.**
 - In response to Grade School staff concerns regarding student safety during after-school pick-up times, we are implementing new procedures that we hope will improve traffic flow and reduce risk. We ask that all parents access Benton Street—the street in front of the grade school—from the east and travel west **for after-school pick-up only, and only for Grade School students**. To maintain a smooth flow of traffic, long-term parking will no longer be allowed along Benton Street or 3rd Street. If you expect a significant wait for your child, please use the parking lot rather than parking on the street. Once your child is in the vehicle, you may proceed south on 3rd Street. This one-way traffic pattern will help eliminate two-way congestion and create a safer environment for students.

- **Please note that this traffic change applies only to after-school pick-up.** In the mornings, when students typically wait on the playground, we will continue to allow traffic from both directions on Benton Street to accommodate students reporting to the playground.
- Additionally, **the west entrance to the parking lot will be closed during the week** unless there is a funeral at St. Patrick's. At the time of this writing, Jim Gokie and Co. are working on a 'gate' type of mechanism to facilitate this. All parking lot access and exits should be made through the east entrance. This adjustment is intended to reduce congestion directly in front of the school and address a significant safety concern. In the mornings, students line up on the playground near the west entrance to the parking lot, and the proximity of vehicles to that area has raised serious concerns about the potential for accidents.
- To support these changes, we will have crossguards stationed at both crosswalks for pick-up, and all elementary teachers will accompany students outside at dismissal and remain with them until they are safely in their vehicles.
- Please remind your children to use the crosswalks, follow crossguard instructions, and avoid running into the street. The accident in Crofton last year involving two young girls has been a sobering reminder of the importance of stricter safety measures. We appreciate your cooperation as we work together to keep our students safe.

Some updates to the work being done at school:

- At this time, we are still optimistic that we will have A/C to start the school year. Fr. Starman has assured me that the guys from Kayl will be working 7 days a week to make that happen.
- You may have noticed that two trees were removed from the front of the elementary school. Unfortunately, they had become a safety hazard and posed a risk to our building's roof.
- A committee is working on having playground turf installed on the area of the playground where we keep trying and failing to grow grass. The goal is to have this installed before school starts.
- While the explosion last year created many problems for the school buildings, we are slowly recovering. Due to ongoing construction and HVAC upgrades, and the 'mess' that results from all of that, the school campus may not look its best at the start of the year. It was always the goal to have the school 'back to normal' by August 18th, but as everyone knows, sometimes there are unforeseen delays—especially in older buildings. We appreciate your patience as these important improvements are completed, and we're excited about the long-term benefits they'll bring to our schools.

We will have an Open House at both schools on Thursday, August 14 from 6:00-7:00 pm. This is an opportunity to bring your students and reacquaint them with their teachers and classmates. It's also a great opportunity to bring some school supplies so the backpack isn't quite as heavy on the first day of school! Please pick up your family folder at the office when you arrive. There are some beginning of year forms to fill out that need to be returned on the first day.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call the school office (402)336-2664 and Miss Patty will help however she can, or send you on to me. We look forward to another amazing year at St. Mary's.

Our Mother of Perpetual Help, Pray for Us!



Mrs. Jennie Schneider, St. Mary's Elementary Principal