



ST. MICHAEL
CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

VISION 2025

THE PATH AHEAD

“We can look back and see WHERE WE HAVE COME FROM, but we must also have a way to see WHERE WE WANT TO GO.”

- Most Reverend Thomas J. Rodi





Dear Families and Friends of St. Michael Catholic High School,

It was in 2009 that I called two distinguished professors at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, Dr. John Convey and Dr. Leonard Defiori, and asked them to conduct a study of the feasibility of a Catholic high school in Baldwin. They came to Alabama in 2010 and after considerable effort, concluded that a Baldwin County Catholic high school was feasible. This conclusion supported the hopes of many who had envisioned such a school since the 1970's.

The rest, as they say, is history. Ten years have passed since that study, and five years have passed since St. Michael opened. This is an appropriate time to savor the past. Much has been accomplished. I am deeply grateful to those who in those early years donated to a vision of a school to be built in a cotton field. They supported a school which had no buildings, no principal, no faculty, and no students, but they were confident that it could be done. Thanks also to those families who in early 2016 enrolled their sons and daughters in a school which was little more than a muddy construction site. We are all also indebted to Miss Gwen Byrd, Superintendent, Mr. Faustin Weber, and the faculty and staff of our school who have built St. Michael into a highly respected school of excellent education and Catholic formation.

The past has laid a foundation, but the vision of what St. Michael can become is ever developing. We can look back and see where we have come from, but we must also have a way to see where we want to go. In order to fulfill the potential of what has been started, it is necessary to have a plan. That is the purpose of this strategic plan. I congratulate Mr. Weber and all who have worked together to formulate this plan. It is obvious that this plan is a result of much prayer, reflection and effort.

This plan reflects the ministry of a Catholic school which educates the whole student: academically, socially, athletically, culturally and spiritually. Attention is given to every aspect of the mission of St. Michael Catholic School. There is an explicit commitment to faith formation, academic excellence, and the development of the entire young person as each student discovers their God-given talents and grows into the person God calls them to be.

It took five years from the feasibility study to the opening of our school. Then another five years have passed and we have seen our first graduating classes. Now we plan for the next five years. Let us ask our Mother Mary to pray with us that God will bless our efforts and this outstanding school. With confidence in God we go forward.

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle! Go Cardinals!



+ Thomas J. Rodi

Most Reverend Thomas J. Rodi
Archbishop of Mobile

“Our students are worthy of our BEST EFFORTS and our most NOBLE HOPES.”

- Faustin N. Weber, Principal



Dear parents, friends and supporters,

It gives me great pleasure to present you with our five year strategic plan, “[VISION 2025: The Path Ahead.](#)”

It may seem strange to be talking about a strategic plan so quickly. Didn’t we just open? No doubt, it feels like yesterday, but in reality, we’ve started our fifth year! Though we have been remarkably blessed in these early years, we believe that we must constantly look for ways to improve, re-create, and re-imagine new possibilities for our students. We hope you will agree that [VISION 2025](#) keeps us on such a trajectory.

When Englishman Charles Dickens first visited the Americas in the 1840’s, he ridiculed the locals’ habit to point to a small wooden school house in a clearing and describe the great university that would soon arise from it. He poked fun at Americans for naming the muddy horse paths of New York City or Washington D.C. “avenues” and “boulevards.” “But Americans were not lying,” a newspaper editor wrote in response. “They were not describing things as they were, but as what they must be. The magnificent future was not speculation, but a sure thing that had yet not gone through the formality of taking place.”

We must continue to be bold and optimistic about our future. The plans within [VISION 2025](#) have “not yet gone through the formality of taking place,” but the support of this community and God’s blessings to date suggest that they will occur sooner than we think, provided we remain faithful to Him. We are still a young sapling, but through God’s grace, we will one day grow into a mighty redwood!

I am grateful to so many people who have been part of this planning with us— the St. Michael Advisory Council, our administration, our parents and students through “Focus Sessions,” and the faculty and staff of our school. I remain grateful to the leadership of our Archdiocese— Archbishop Rodi, our priests, Superintendent Byrd, Associate Superintendents Abreo and Koppersmith—for their pastoral care.

Our students are worthy of our best efforts and our most noble hopes. May all of [our planning](#) be aimed at helping them find [His plan](#) for their lives.



Faustin N. Weber

Faustin N. Weber
Principal of St. Michael Catholic High School



WHAT WE BELIEVE: *The “Cardinal Way”*

Our mission statement is to the point: St. Michael exists to form students into “scholars, leaders and disciples of Jesus Christ.” If, with God’s help, we are successful in this mission, we will make a transformational difference in the lives of our students and in the lives of the families and communities of Baldwin County.

Successful institutions operate with a clear set of non-negotiable principles that inform their day to day operations.

We believe these six statements, which we have called “The Cardinal Way,” best articulate the principles which have defined our young school since its founding.

1 OUR FAITH IS THE LENS THROUGH WHICH ALL ELSE IS FOCUSED.

We seek to be a Catholic community of faith that learns, prays, worships and celebrates together. Weekly school mass is the centerpiece of our communal life. We are proud to build this community of faith with students and families from other religious traditions— to “welcome,” in the words of Archbishop Rodi, “all those of other faiths who desire an excellent education, rooted in gospel values.”

2 WE BELIEVE OUR STUDENTS ARE CAPABLE OF GREATNESS.

Students are children of God, capable of becoming “scholars, leaders and disciples” because of the transforming power of God’s grace in their lives. We want students to set bold goals, to stretch and challenge themselves, to seek “more.”

3 WE SUBSCRIBE TO A “RENAISSANCE VISION” FOR OUR STUDENTS, ENCOURAGING THEM TO GET INVOLVED IN MANY DIFFERENT ENDEAVORS.

We believe that students flourish when they develop in many areas—faith, academics, the arts, athletics—without “specializing” exclusively in any one area. We believe a “both-and” emphasis brings balance and wholeness to their lives.

4 RELATIONSHIPS GOVERN.

Students respond well to a culture that “gives them space” to grow up. Of course there are rules, and if the authority of a teacher is challenged, the teacher must invoke his or her authority. But our relationships should be human ones first!

5 WE WELCOME STUDENTS OF VARYING APTITUDES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STANDINGS.

We believe the chemistry and interplay between students of different backgrounds and abilities give our school its authenticity, liveliness, and perhaps even, our “flair.” Though we want our strongest students to be challenged and graduate with the opportunity to attend excellent universities, we do not want to become merely an enclave for the intellectually elite or socially advantaged.

6 WE SEEK TO BUILD A CULTURE OF GENEROSITY AND PHILANTHROPY.

Generosity of spirit and willingness to serve others are at the heart of the gospel; we want our students to recognize and respond to the needs of others with compassion and courage. We also seek to build a school that inspires enthusiasm and generosity in our stakeholders, inviting them to participate in our ministry and to help establish our long-term viability.





WHAT WE WILL DO: *Priorities and Specific Initiatives*

Inspired by these principles, the Council has established six general priority areas for the next five years. These priorities direct the specific initiatives which follow. In some cases, the specific initiatives are more the “what” than the “how,” recognizing the school must evolve organically to address the priorities stated in this document.

THE LIFE OF FAITH

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

STUDENT LIFE

STEWARDSHIP & PHILANTHROPY

FACILITIES & GROUNDS

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

VISION 2025



1

THE LIFE OF FAITH

Catholic schools are called to cooperate with God's grace in the lives of their students to encourage a living encounter with Christ. We seek to form "disciples." Through our liturgies, common prayer, study, and service initiatives, students are immersed in a culture where the life of faith is so pervasive that it is natural and, to a certain extent, unnoticed—almost like breathing.

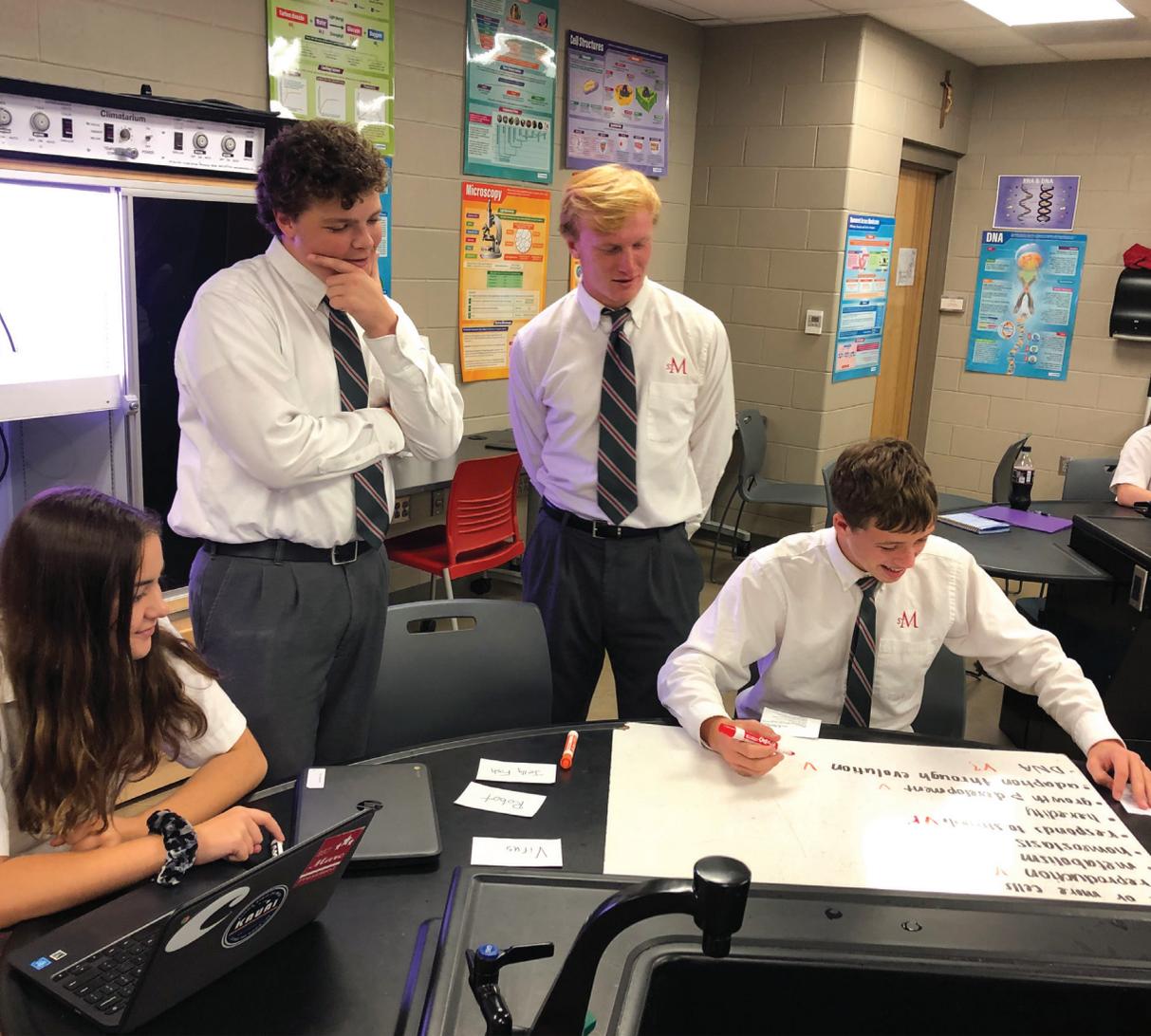
In essence, this is the great gift of a Catholic school: that the practice of faith is not an isolated "Sunday obligation," but an integral part of daily life, providing meaning, direction, and synthesis to the fragments of a teenager's busy life. In this goal, we welcome the participation of students and families of all Christian faiths, united in service to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

■ Service is at the heart of the gospel. We want our students to develop a genuine outwardness and concern for others. For this reason, we will **PHASE IN A SERVICE REQUIREMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS** for each year they attend St. Michael.

■ Once every other year, Campus Ministry will **HOST OR CO-HOST A "MISSION TRIP" FOR OUR STUDENTS**, to serve a disadvantaged population in another country or city.

■ **INCREASE THE SCOPE OF STUDENT OUTREACHES TO LOCAL CHARITIES.** As our service program grows, we want to broaden our outreach to include both religious and secular institutions which serve the needs of others. We believe our students can become a powerful force for good in the communities of Baldwin County.

■ **CONTINUE TO PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH OPPORTUNITIES FOR RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENTS, PRAYER AND WORSHIP**—Our school-wide mass each Wednesday is the anchor for our life of faith together. We will continue to prioritize opportunities for students to deepen their faith life and find creative ways to encourage their active participation in the many sacramental and religious events on campus, through our campus ministry programs, and through our local parishes.



2

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

We are a college preparatory school that seeks to form “scholars.” We do not mean that all of our graduates will attend the most prestigious universities in the nation, though we aspire that some will do so. Regardless of aptitude, “scholars” stretch themselves, work hard, and are curious about learning new things.

We are proud of the diversity of talents and abilities in our student body. We aim to immerse students in a culture of optimism and high academic expectations, so that they develop the habits of mind, the critical thinking skills and the self-discipline necessary for success in college and life beyond.

■ For our more capable students, we are **COMMITTED TO CONTINUING TO DEVELOP A ROBUST ADVANCED PLACEMENT PROGRAM**, emphasizing access and excellence.

■ We will **CREATE A “FRESHMAN YEAR OF STUDIES” PROGRAM** in conjunction with school advisories. The transition to high school is difficult for many students, who are suddenly given more freedom and more responsibility than they’ve ever had before. Many don’t know how to study, or how to prepare for tests, what the mathematical impact of skipping homework is, or how grades are determined. We will develop a curriculum to assist students in this transition, using our weekly advisory periods.

■ Each year, we will **HOST A “COLLEGE BLITZ TOUR”** led by our Director of College Counseling, in which we will take a bus of juniors in their second semester to visit as many schools as possible over five days, to help students consider an array of possibilities for their college choices.

■ We will continue to **BUILD A REPERTOIRE OF ENGAGING, MEANINGFUL ELECTIVES** to supplement the core academic program, including courses like Coding, Analytical Math and English (ACT prep-type courses), A.P. Lab, Statistics, Personal Finance, Creative Writing, Conversational Spanish and others.

■ We will continue to promote the **GROWTH AND VARIETY OF COMPETITIVE ACADEMIC TEAMS**, such as Scholar’s Bowl, Spanish Club, and our Model United Nations team.

■ Reading is the casualty of a culture increasingly addicted to screens, to the great detriment of our imaginations, our reading and writing ability, and our fluency with language. We will **DEVELOP A “SCHOOL-WIDE READING INITIATIVE”** with an emphasis on reading for pleasure.



3

STUDENT LIFE

High schools are a second “home” for teenagers, and as such, must provide a context for their social and emotional development, as well as their spiritual and intellectual growth.

We seek for our students to become “leaders.” In the school’s extracurricular clubs, through its athletic teams, by its dances, competitions, pep rallies and assemblies, the focus should be to create a joyful community, offering “something for everyone,” encouraging our students to become leaders in these activities over the course of their years with us.



■ As we grow, and as the traditions of the school emerge over time, we believe it's important to always keep in mind the perspective of the students. What makes school life interesting, exciting, memorable? How can we foster school spirit? Encourage active participation? Deepen our students' faith? Help them develop more meaningful relationships? Promote kindness? Connect to our middle schools? We must be vigilant and creative in looking for ways to **DEEPEN THE ST. MICHAEL EXPERIENCE FOR OUR STUDENTS.**

■ **RECOGNIZE AND CELEBRATE THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF OUR STUDENTS**, especially those who are engaged in events apart from school teams and clubs, such as local ballet, theater, Boy Scouts, Churches, and other artistic, religious and civic organizations. Often our kids do wonderful things, but fly under the radar because the school doesn't know about these things. We must develop a reliable means to gather information and share their successes.

■ The irony of our times is there are so many people trying to get our attention—through advertising, TV, email, social media, etc—that our natural tendency is to disregard them as noise. As a result, we are communicating less effectively than before. How can St. Michael best communicate with our constituencies? Via our weekly "Cardinal Update," through our online grade books, our social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Athletic Twitter), the school's messaging apps, the school website and our two Google Calendars, and through our weekly "News in the Nest" about the week ahead—we have endeavored to keep our constituencies informed. Yet there are still gaps in what people hear and understand. We must continue to look for ways to **BETTER SCHOOL COMMUNICATIONS.**

■ The purpose of advisories is to deepen and broaden the relationships of students in the school, especially between grade levels, and to pair students with an adult who regularly checks in on them, monitors grades, and makes sure they're doing OK. We need to seek ways to **IMPROVE OUR ADVISORIES** to better and more consistently accomplish these two purposes.

■ **BALANCE LIBERTY WITH CONSISTENCY IN ENFORCEMENT OF RULES**—St. Augustine is reported to have once said: "In essential things, unity. In non-essential things, liberty. In all things, charity." How does a school give teenagers "space" on non-essential things, even while insisting on consistency in that which is essential? And what is essential vs. non-essential? This is the dilemma of every parent and every institution that works with teenagers, and it is our responsibility, through the setting of our policies and in our enforcement of these policies, to walk this line with due reflection and intentionality.



4

STEWARDSHIP & PHILANTHROPY

We ask our stakeholders to participate actively and contribute generously to support our mission. We are a new school, in a beautiful new building, located on an idyllic site in the midst of Baldwin County farmland and pastures. We are grateful for all that God has given us, and must work diligently to develop a pride of place here with our students.

■ **KEEP FINANCIAL AID AS A PRINCIPAL PRIORITY FOR OUR PHILANTHROPY—**

A generous financial aid program allows remarkable kids to attend St. Michael, a blessing for both these families and the school alike. As expenses increase, so too must our philanthropic giving.

■ **PRIORITIZE THE GROWTH OF THE ENDOWMENT FUND THROUGH LEGACY**

GIVING. Legacy gifts can truly transform a school—be they aimed at capital projects, enhanced salaries for teachers, or increased financial aid for students. And because the principal of these gifts is not touched, only the interest off the investment, they have the ability to impact the school in perpetuity.

■ **ESTABLISH A “FACULTY FUND FOR EXCELLENCE”** as a subset of the endowment

fund, so as to supplement the salaries of excellent teachers.

■ **EXTEND AND STRENGTHEN THE GUARDIAN ANGEL FUND APPEAL,** inviting

older Catholics to become “guardian angels” for younger Catholics, making it possible for families with financial need to give their children a Catholic education and to send them to St. Michael.

■ Build a **SENSE OF STEWARDSHIP AND CARE** for our facilities in our students. All persons in our school bear responsibility for tending to the care and upkeep of the gift we’ve been given at St. Michael. It is especially important that our students, who have been given much, appreciate their responsibility to bequeath these beautiful facilities to future Cardinals.

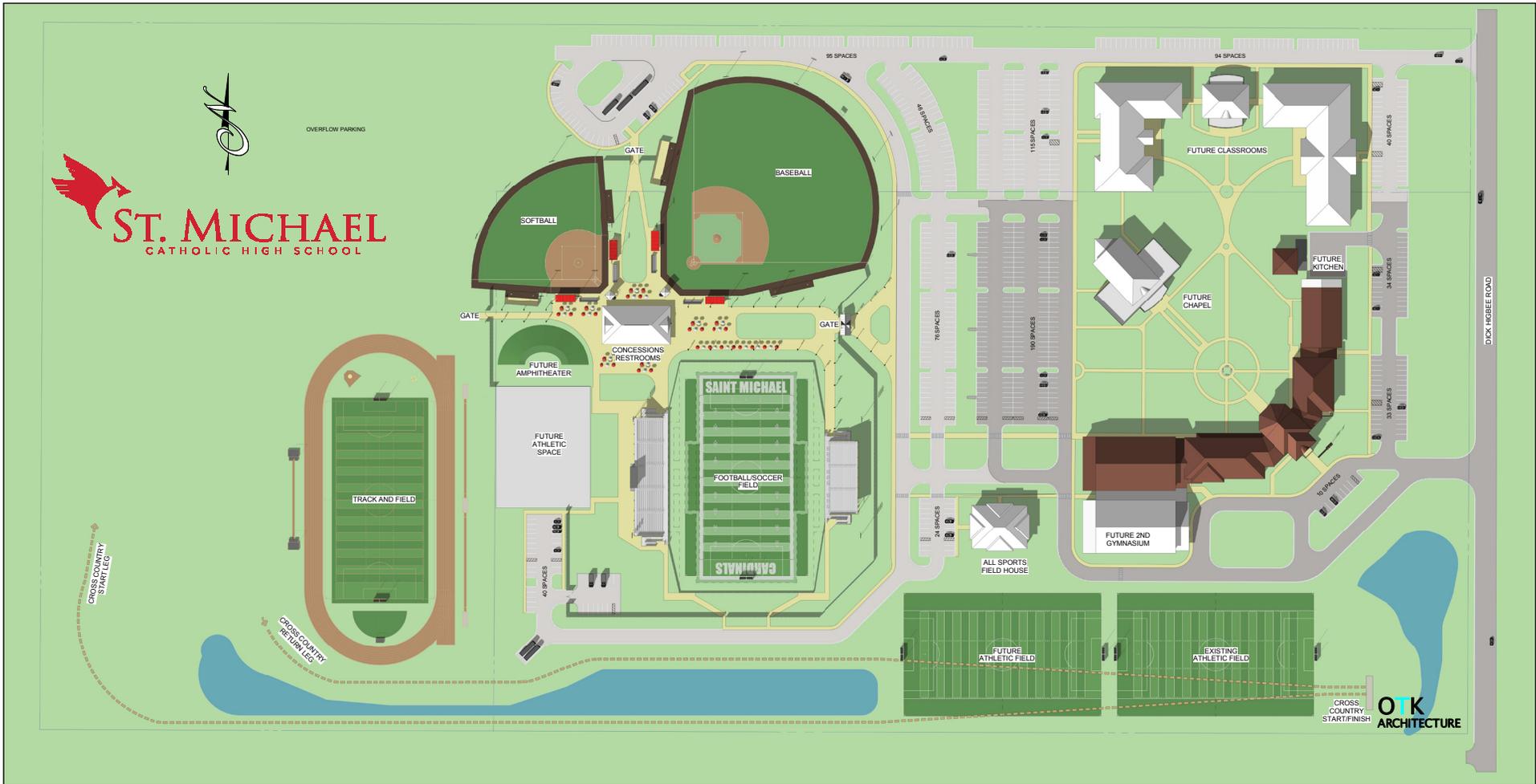


5

FACILITIES & GROUNDS

What the archdiocese and our donors built here to begin St. Michael in 2016 is wonderful. Even so, they understood it was only a beginning—classrooms, mostly, with a gym and cafeteria. We must plan to become, over time, a complete campus. The Advisory Council created a Master Plan in 2017 to guide our future campus development.





M A S T E R P L A N

“Architecture, of all the arts, is the one that acts the most slowly, but the most surely, on the soul.” - Ernst Dimmet



5

FACILITIES & GROUNDS (continued)

As we work to complete each element in the Master Plan, we will be guided by four questions:

1. *Is it necessary to support our mission?*
2. *Do we have the funds “in hand” to build it?*
3. *Is it sufficiently flexible, so that it can be adapted to meet future, as yet unknown, needs?*
4. *Is it beautiful?*

With these four questions in mind, we seek to do the following:

■ **COMPLETE THE ATHLETIC COMPLEX.** The school conducted a feasibility study in 2017 to determine enthusiasm and financial support for the various elements of the Master Plan. On that basis, in 2018, the advisory council proposed a capital campaign for athletic facilities, received approval from the archdiocese, hired an outside consulting firm, and conducted the campaign. The community responded generously, pledging 5.1 million dollars, most of which will be paid within five years. As those monies come in, the school has built/will build in phases, as follows:

***Purchase an additional 40 acres of adjacent land,** bringing our campus to 80 total acres. Provides flexibility for campus development in the future, creates space for athletic facilities and parking, and provides a “buffer” between the school and possible neighborhood development. (completed, May 2018)*

***Create a field house**—designed to include a weight room, locker rooms, bathrooms and showers for both girls’ and boys’ athletic teams, coaches’ offices, a physical*

training room and a multi-purpose room for meetings (to be completed, January, 2021).

***Develop the site:** The third phase will include the site development of the athletic complex proper, including layout and design of fields, seeding, additional parking, and sidewalks.*

***Finish out the complex**—Add bleachers, fencing, lighting, concessions, and bathrooms to give us the ability to host contests.*

■ **BEGIN DISCUSSIONS ABOUT A CHAPEL**—The master plan envisions a chapel in the center of campus, symbolic of the central mission of the school to form students as disciples of Jesus Christ. This is the next priority for building, as determined by the 2017 feasibility study.

■ Teenagers spend an enormous portion of their life here: during the school day, at club meetings or practices in the afternoon, at night during ball games—and all the time in between! In the unfolding of our master plan, priority should be given to **CREATE AND DESIGN SOCIAL PLACES FOR OUR STUDENTS**—places for them to relax, spend time together, and keep track of their possessions.

■ **PRIORITIZE THE SAFETY OF STUDENTS IN ALL FUTURE CAMPUS IMPROVEMENTS.** Video cameras for constant monitoring and secured access points are not optional luxuries. Sufficient safety protocols should be practiced and rehearsed by school administration on an on-going basis.

6

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Even as we grow together, we must remain mindful of the financial realities of our families, careful to avoid becoming merely an enclave for the wealthy. We are not a “private” school. In our capital campaigns, in our tuition-setting, and in our routine spending, we must always be careful financial stewards of God’s gifts to us, aiming at what is necessary to sustain a vital, financially sound school.

- Schools, like many other institutions over time, can too easily become bureaucratic, creating administrative positions that add expenses and drive tuition higher, even as they add layers of “distance” between school leaders and the students they serve. **KEEP STAFFING AT ST. MICHAEL LEAN, PRIORITIZING TEACHING FOR FUTURE GROWTH.**
- Even as the school seeks to build an endowment, **CONTINUE TO PROMOTE THE SCHOOL’S “CARDINAL FUND” AND “GUARDIAN ANGEL FUND.”** Generous annual giving allows the school to offer assistance to families to send their children to St. Michael, even while slowing the rate of tuition increases necessary to hire and sustain excellent teachers. Both the Cardinal Fund (aimed primarily to those already ‘connected’ to the school) and the Guardian Angel Fund (aimed more broadly at Catholic parishioners) support these goals.
- **BUILD PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS OF BALDWIN COUNTY.** Our success is partly determined by their success, and vice-versa. If our middle grades are fully enrolled, our incoming freshman numbers will remain healthy. We should emphasize “win-win” wherever we can: in our advertising, purchasing, in the school programs we offer (such as band) and in the information we share with each other. In all things, we should look for ways to simultaneously support each other.
- As the school approaches maximum enrollment, **PRIORITIZE OPTIMAL EFFICIENCIES OF SCALE** for staffing, class sizes, coaching staffs, and in every other way. Institutionalize these efficiencies for long term spending.
- With due haste, **PAY OFF THE ORIGINAL DEBTS INCURRED TO BUILD AND BEGIN ST. MICHAEL.** Though the original capital campaign to build St. Michael was successful, raising 10.5 million dollars in pledges, the fully completed cost of construction was 15 million dollars, financed through bonds. Start-up costs and operational debt in our first two years totaled 1.5 million dollars. As of August 2020, those debts have been whittled down, and now stand at 3.3 million and 1.0 million dollars, respectively. Paying down these debts in an aggressive but prudent way must remain a priority of our school.



VISION  N 2025

THE PLANNING PROCESS

In the fall of 2018, the St. Michael Advisory Council began a 2-year planning process. It started by articulating the principles underlying our life together at St. Michael, which they entitled the “Cardinal Way.” It then identified six broad areas for emphasis as noted in this strategic plan.

In the fall of 2019, the Planning and Policy committee of the Council hosted a series of “Focus Sessions” with parents and student leaders, asking each group to make recommendations within these areas of emphasis. Then, working with the principal, the committee sorted through these recommendations, many of which were specific to the here and now, grouped some of the ideas together, broadened the scope of others, and created the strategic initiatives contained within this document. Relevant parts of the plan were shared with area pastors and priests for their review and comments, and a draft was sent to Archbishop Rodi and Superintendent Byrd for their review. The St. Michael Advisory Council affirmed this document unanimously in April of 2020.

Rather than place timelines on each of the strategic initiatives, the Council decided instead to conduct an annual audit of the school’s progress to each of the initiatives, recognizing that circumstances of finances, personnel and other variables may affect the timing of the implementation in any given year. Even so, the Advisory Council expects this to be a “living” document to guide school leadership for St. Michael’s immediate and intermediate future.

GRATEFUL

St. Michael is grateful for the time and effort the following individuals put into creating Vision 2025:

ST. MICHAEL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Lad Drago (*President, Christ the King*)

Jen Blanchard (*Vice-President, St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland*)

Reb Bodet (*Shrine of the Holy Cross*)

Brandi Eslava (*Our Lady of the Gulf*)

Larry Mickwee (*St. Thomas by the Sea*)

Roberta Mullek (*St. Patrick*)

Kim Frank (*St. Bartholomew*)

Leanne Murray (*St. Lawrence*)

Lewis Wood (*St. John, Magnolia Springs*)

Tripp Ward (*St. Agatha*)

St. Joseph, Lillian

St. Francis Xavier Seelos

Very Rev. Paul Zoghby, V.F. (*pastor of St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland*)

PLANNING AND POLICY COMMITTEE, ST. MICHAEL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Jen Blanchard

Brandi Eslava

Kim Frank

Roberta Mullek

John Scimeca (*Assistant Principal*)

Kathy Barr (*Director of Finances*)

Marguerite Murphy (*Front Office*)

ST. MICHAEL ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

Faustin Weber (*Principal*)

Paul Knapstein (*Assistant Principal and Athletic Director*)

Jenny Kopf (*Director of Advancement and Admissions*)

TEACHERS AND STAFF OF ST. MICHAEL CATHOLIC HIGH, 2019-2020

ST. MICHAEL PARENTS AND HOUSE COUNCIL (*Our Student Leaders*) of 2019-2020

VISION  2025



*St. Michael Catholic High School is a Roman Catholic, co-educational college-preparatory high school in Fairhope, Alabama. It was established by the Archdiocese of Mobile in 2016. Enrollment for 2020 is 333 students. Its mission is to **"form students into scholars, leaders and disciples of Jesus Christ."***

