



# THE SPIRIT OF '76

The Newspaper of Local 1776  
The Association of Catholic Teachers

*60 Years Strong*  
1966-2026

3070 BRISTOL PIKE, BLDG. 2, SUITE 101, BENSALEM, PA 19020– 215-568-4175 – VOLUME XXXXVI-NO.5  
Fax 215-568-8270 – email ([act@act1776.com](mailto:act@act1776.com)) - website ([www.act1776.com](http://www.act1776.com)) **JANUARY 2026**



## From the President's Desk

### Gearing Up for Negotiations

As we begin a new calendar year, it's hard to believe how quickly the school year is moving along. January is always a time for fresh starts—and for the Association of Catholic Teachers, it also marks the beginning of preparations for our next contract negotiations scheduled for the spring of 2026.

Under our Labor-Management Agreement, the Association has the ability to notify the System of its intent to open negotiations. At the direction of the Executive Board, I sent along our request to the System asking that they consider using an Early Bird format.

An Early Bird is a more focused approach to negotiations that concentrates primarily on salary and benefits, with the goal of reaching an agreement in time for members to vote before the end of the school year. If an agreement is not reached by then, traditional bargaining would begin in the summer with the full contract open.

This approach has worked well in the past. Early negotiations provide clarity and stability, allowing members to head into the summer knowing where things stand and giving schools the ability to plan responsibly for the year ahead.

(Continued on Page 2)

Before the holidays, we reached out to you seeking volunteers for the ACT Negotiating Team and inviting you to complete a contract survey prioritizing what is important to you—both professionally and personally. We are happy with the number of responses received to date. We have decided to leave the survey open a little bit longer to ensure everyone has had the opportunity to share his/her input.

At its December Meeting, the Executive Board selected the 2026 Negotiating Team. I look forward to working with the Team, and I will be announcing the members of your 2026 Negotiating Team prior to the opening of negotiations. Know that we will be working hard to bring back a contract that is in the best interest of our members.

Once negotiations start, we hope to get the process finished before the end of the school year. At that point, a General Membership Meeting will be scheduled so that you can review and vote on the proposed contract. While the team will give their reasons for why they believe the proposal should be approved or rejected, the final decision on any agreement will belong to you, the members.

Please remember: YOU are the Union. Your participation and engagement are essential as we prepare for the 2026 negotiations and work together to shape our shared future.

*James*

## CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK

**January 25–January 31, 2025**

*The Association of Catholic Teachers would like to thank our dedicated teachers for your commitment to Catholic Education and for all that you do each and every day to provide a faith-filled, excellent education to your students. Know that you are making a difference in the lives of these young people.*

## A Brief History of the Association of Catholic Teachers

---

The Association of Catholic Teachers is the oldest Catholic Teachers' Union in the country. **The Association's Constitution was ratified in March, 1966.** The Union came into existence when lay teachers in the Secondary Schools of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia realized that unless they banded together, they would have little chance of improving their conditions of employment. The struggle to achieve recognition brought some hectic and trying times, including the first strike by Catholic school lay teachers in the United States.

In May, 1967, the Association of Catholic Teachers voted to affiliate with the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO. On February 28, 1968, ACT won a representation election and was formally recognized by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia as the sole and exclusive bargaining agent for high school lay teachers.

In October, 1968, the teachers at Holy Cross High School in Delran, New Jersey voted, overwhelmingly, to affiliate with ACT as a separate bargaining unit. The relationship was a healthy and productive one resulting in strong negotiated contracts, up until the school closed in June of 2018.

In June, 1978, ACT disaffiliated from the American Federation of Teachers. The first Catholic Teachers' Union in the country to affiliate with AFT became the first to disaffiliate.

The reason given was a history of insensitivity to the problems of Catholic School Teachers. Also cited was AFT's all-out campaign against Tuition Tax Credits.

In October, 1978, the Association of Catholic Teachers formally affiliated with the **National Association of Catholic School Teachers**, an organization which ACT helped found. Rita C. Schwartz, ACT's *President Emeritus*, served as **NACST** President until December 31, 2023. Rita served as ACT's President for 36 years, until she retired in December of 2020. Irene Tori, ACT's Vice-President, was elected to the Presidency and took over the reins in January of 2021 and held that office until December 31, 2024.

(Continued on Page 4)

## A Brief History of the Association of Catholic Teachers

(Continued from page 3)

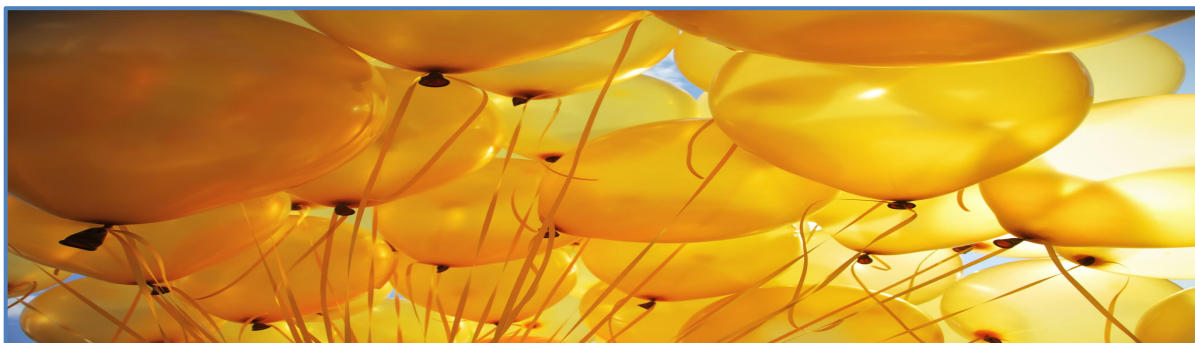
---

ACT's current President, James Vernon, was elected to the Presidency in November 2024 and took office as of January 1, 2025. James is the fifth president to take office in ACT's 60-year history.

The Association of Catholic Teachers still considers itself part of the labor movement and maintains very close ties with the Philadelphia Council AFL-CIO. The Association currently represents approximately 500 lay teachers employed in the 15 Archdiocesan high schools.

In addition to contract negotiations, grievance handling and problem resolution, the Union annually sponsors Critical Issues Seminars for juniors and seniors in high school. One of the Association's other important activities is lobbying for educational vouchers for students attending Catholic schools.

---



ACT will be celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in March.

The first event planned is on March 5<sup>th</sup> at  
the Philadelphia Flyers vs. Utah Mammoth Game!



## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR NEWEST RETIREE



The Association of Catholic Teachers wishes to congratulate  
**Edward Dormer**  
on his retirement from Archbishop Ryan High School  
after 31 years of service to the students in the  
Archdiocese of Philadelphia!

*Best wishes for a happy and healthy retirement!*

---

## WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST UNION MEMBERS

John Casalino  
Hannah Grover  
Katherine Kavanagh  
Ann Tracey  
Joseph Worstall  
*Thank you for Joining Us!*

## 2026 ACT EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

James R. Vernon  
Kathleen Toenniessen-Innes  
Matthew McShane  
Christine Hanley Maldonado  
John Corrigan  
Bridget Mierzejewski  
Michael Fischer  
Eric Wahl  
Rosanne Betham  
Robert Dill  
Ellen O'Hara  
Anthony Polselli

President  
Vice President  
Executive Secretary  
Treasurer  
Legislative Representative  
Area Vice President (Central)  
Area Vice President (Northeast)  
Area Vice President (Northwest)  
Area Vice President (Southwest)  
Member-At-Large  
Member-At-Large  
Member-At-Large

## 2025 TAX INFORMATION

### Union Dues for 2025

January 2025 – June 2025 = \$390.00  
(For those who resigned or retired as of June 2025)

January 2025– December 2025 = \$649.84

## 2026 ACT SENIOR DELEGATES

Matthew McShane – Bonner/Prendergast  
Anthony Polselli – Archbishop Carroll  
Christine Hanley Maldonado – Conwell-Egan  
John Masluk – Saint Hubert  
Mark Zataveski – Father Judge  
Michael Clymer – Little Flower  
Melissa Hart – Lansdale Catholic  
Karen Elitz – SS Neumann-Goretti

Ellen O'Hara – Cardinal O'Hara  
Eric Wahl – Pope John Paul II  
James Flannery – Roman Catholic  
Michael Gallagher – Archbishop Ryan  
Joseph Aquilante – Bishop Shanahan  
Bridget Mierzejewski – West Catholic  
Joe Webb – Archbishop Wood

# **UNION NIGHT AT THE PHILADELPHIA FLYERS**

THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2026  
7:00 PM  
FLYERS VS. UTAH MAMMOTH

**Lower-Level Seats: \$65; Upper-Level Seats: \$45**

Are you a Flyers Fan? Here is an opportunity to celebrate ACT's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary during Union Night at a Flyers game. Come celebrate with family, friends and colleagues. If you are interested in purchasing tickets for the March 5, 2026 game, you have two options for payment.

You can send a check payable to the Association of Catholic Teachers to Association of Catholic Teachers, 3070 Bristol Pike, Suite 2-101, Bensalem, PA 19020, or you can go to Zelle in your banking app and scan the QR code below. **Ordering has been extended through February 6, 2026.**

Scan in your banking app  
to pay

**ASSOCIATION OF  
CATHOLIC TEACHERS**  
at [act@act1776.com](mailto:act@act1776.com)



When paying through Zelle, you must list your name, Flyers Tickets, the number requested and upper level (UL) or lower level (LL) in the memo line. If you have any questions, contact Ginny at [ginny@act1776.com](mailto:ginny@act1776.com).

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Submitted by ACT's Legislative Rep, John Corrigan, at the November 20, 2025 Executive Board Meeting via Zoom.

1. PA passed the state budget for 2025 - 2026 after a 4-month delay. Funds for education resources under Act 90/195 should become available.
2. The US Federal Government shutdown has ended but not without impact to the Department of Education, particularly, in the area of Special Education and other educational programs which may have an impact on our high schools.



*Rest in Peace.  
Amen.*

+ *Donald Bell, Retired, Archbishop Prendergast High School* +  
+ *James Gildea, Retired, SS. Maria Goretti-John Neumann High School* +  
+ *Peter Meczniak, Retired, Roman Catholic High School* +

*“For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” John 3:16*

## Top Ten Shakespeare Plays About Negotiations

*(In memory of Ed Stehle)*

- 1) A Midsummer Night's Scream
- 2) All's Well that Ends
- 3) The Taming of the Crew
- 4) One Hundred And Twelfth Night
- 5) The Ten Pest
- 6) The Merry Lives of Win/Win-ers
- 7) Oh – hell – no!
- 8) Much Ado About Something
- 9) Love Labor's Cost
- 10) Remedy of Errors

There were no entries in our December Ugly Sweater Contest because *our* members don't own ugly sweaters! *They have class!*



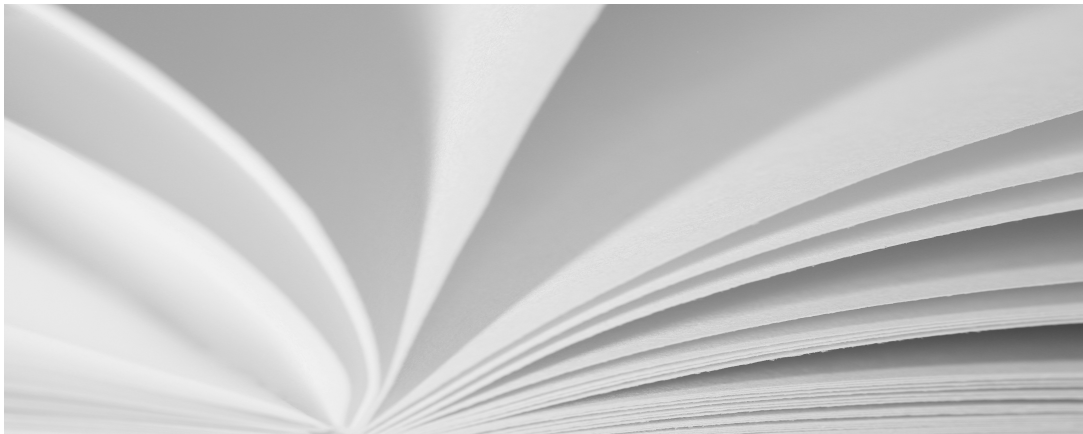
## JANUARY'S CONTEST

### The Missing Article Contest

Our present contract goes from Article I through Article XXI. There is always room for another Article. To win first prize in this contest you must come up with the most creative new Article for the contract.

**First Prize - \$25.00.** Email your entry to [act@act1776.com](mailto:act@act1776.com) with "*The Missing Article Contest*" in the subject line.

The Association of Catholic Teachers  
wishes you and your family a  
happy, healthy, and blessed new year!



Welcome 2 0 2 6!