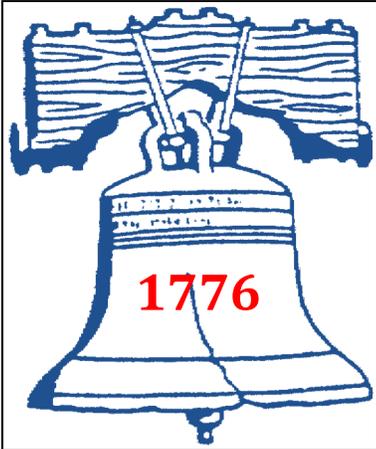


THE

The Newspaper of Local 1776
The Association of Catholic Teachers



SPIRIT

OF '76

50+ Years Strong
1966-2016

3070 BRISTOL PIKE, BLDG. 2, SUITE 101, BENSALEM, PA 19020- 215-568-4175 – VOLUME XXXXI-NO.5
Fax 215-568-8270 – email (act@act1776.com) - website (www.act1776.com) **FEB-MARCH 2021**



From the President's Desk

A MOST UNUSUAL YEAR

As I listened to the President of the United States speak to the nation on Thursday night, I couldn't help but think of all that our teachers have experienced in the last year. It was at this time last year that the schools were shut down, supposedly for just two weeks until the virus was under control. Then those two weeks were extended until after the Easter break. Then, the Governor closed the schools for the remainder of the school year. We were never face-to-face with our students again.

Literally overnight, you had to become entirely different teachers. You transformed your homes into classrooms, you became experts in Zoom and Google Meet, and you found so many creative ways to connect with your students, all while continuing to provide the best education possible. Your dedication to your students and to your profession really shone through. We all finished the school year very strongly, knowing that we had done the best we could for our students in most unusual times.

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When schools opened in September, you, again, adapted to the impact that Coronavirus placed on our lives and the schools. The hybrid model of instruction has become part of your everyday work life. You learned how to teach and talk while wearing masks and/or shields all day long. (Who would have thought that masks would become a fashion statement!) And then there was even more technology to learn. Once more, each and every day, you have risen to the challenge of a very different school year. It hasn't been easy for anyone.

After all the challenges we faced last school year and are facing in the current school year, as well as the losses we and our students have suffered, November dumped another loss in our laps—the Archbishop's announcement that John W. Hallahan and Bishop McDevitt High Schools would be closing at the end of this school year. The question asked then and still being asked is how do you do something this devastating in the middle of a pandemic? When the rationale for not being able to do normal activities or for missing deadlines is the pandemic, why announce school closings during the pandemic? When the students' and teachers' lives have already been so disrupted, when they have experienced so many missed milestones and significant events, how does the Archdiocese compound all the losses by taking these schools away from their communities?

The Association began to seek an answer to these questions in December. After two letters to the CEO of the Faith in the Future Foundation in which the Association requested a copy of the feasibility study for all 17 Archdiocesan high schools, not just for Hallahan and McDevitt, went unanswered, a third letter with the same request, this time written to the Archbishop, finally elicited a response.

While the Archbishop acknowledged that
"The recent decision to close Bishop McDevitt High School and John W. Hallahan High School for Girls was both a difficult and sad one."

and that

"Our teachers are the heart of our schools in many ways. I consider our school (sic) blessed by the dedication and commitment of our fine teachers every day. In no time prior to now have our teachers been asked to do so much for our students."

the Archbishop goes on to say that the "comprehensive Strategic Assessment Report" (feasibility study)

"was confidential in its entirety and was not intended to be a public document. It is an internal and proprietary document."

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The Archbishop continues

“Our OCE representatives who regularly work with you and your team will continue to provide data, assistance and guidance in the best interest of our teachers particularly through this important transition period.”

A few comments about these quotes.

1. The school's name is John W. Hallahan Catholic Girls' High School.
2. The Association is not getting a copy of the study/report. Neither are any of the high schools. None of the high schools will ever know how close they are to being on the chopping block. They will only find out when the Archdiocese lowers the boom on them.
3. The first time that OCE representatives reached out to the teachers at Hallahan and McDevitt was on Thursday, March 11th, in a Zoom meeting with both schools. Prior to March 11th, no one at the Archdiocesan level had communicated with the teachers since the November 18, 2020 announcement, which you may remember was done via email. The March 11th meeting only happened because the teachers asked to speak with their employer, in this case the Human Resources Director for Secondary Schools. More meetings will be scheduled to help the teachers through this very difficult time.

This school year continues to be a year of uncertainty, but, as vaccines become more readily available, everyone is beginning to breathe a little bit easier, while still adhering to all of the health and safety protocols. In September, none of us could imagine all the ups and downs we would experience in this most unusual school year. However, we are almost to the end of the third quarter. June 18th is getting ever closer. We can stay the course. We can make it to the finish line. WE CAN DO THIS because we have each other's backs.

Please keep each other in your prayers as we finish out the school year, especially your colleagues who will be saying goodbye to their schools in June.

Know that the Association of Catholic Teachers is always here to support you and to help you in whatever you need.

Have a very Blessed Easter.

Stay safe.

Irene

NOTICE OF ELECTION

By ACT Constitution, the 4 Area Vice Presidents are to be elected in May of odd numbered years by the active membership of their area.

ELIGIBLE MEMBERS WHO WISH TO RUN FOR OFFICE SHALL FILE A PETITION WITH THE NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE BY **April 10th** AND IT SHALL BEAR THE SIGNATURES OF **TWENTY-FIVE (25) REGULAR MEMBERS AND THEIR SCHOOL DESIGNATIONS.**

THESE PETITIONS SHALL STATE:

"I (NAME OF CANDIDATE) WISH TO RUN FOR THE OFFICE OF (NAME OF AREA) AREA VICE PRESIDENT, AND WILL SERVE IN THAT OFFICE IF ELECTED."

The areas and schools each represents are as follows:

NORTHEAST: Conwell-Egan, Father Judge, Saint Hubert and Archbishop Ryan

NORTHWEST: Lansdale Catholic, Bishop McDevitt, Archbishop Wood, and Pope John Paul II

CENTRAL: John W. Hallahan, Little Flower, Saints John Neumann and Maria Goretti, Roman Catholic and West Catholic

SOUTHWEST: Monsignor Bonner-Archbishop Prendergast, Archbishop Carroll, Cardinal O'Hara and Bishop Shanahan

IN THE EVENT THAT NO PETITIONS ARE RECEIVED FOR NOMINATIONS TO A PARTICULAR OFFICE BY APRIL 10, ONLY IN THIS EVENT SHALL THE NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE MAKE ANY NOMINATIONS. IN THIS EVENT THEY SHALL NOMINATE AT LEAST TWO (2) ELIGIBLE MEMBERS FOR THE SPECIFIC OFFICE(S) BY APRIL 16.

BALLOTS MUST BE SENT OUT NO LATER THAN MAY 1 AND MUST BE RETURNED NO LATER THAN MAY 15, 2019.

ANY MEMBER WHO WISHES TO HAVE HIS OR HER NAME PLACED IN NOMINATION MUST USE THE ABOVE PETITION AND MUST **RETURN THE PETITION WITH THE SIGNATURES OF 25 REGULAR MEMBERS BY April 10, 2021.**

ADDRESS ALL PETITIONS TO:

NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

C/O ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC TEACHERS

3070 BRISTOL PIKE, BUILDING 2, SUITE 101,

BENSALEM, PA 19020

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The following Legislative Report was submitted by ACT Legislative Representative, David Sommers, at the ACT Executive Board Meeting held via Zoom on February 17, 2021.

I. Act No. 1 (of 2021): Emergency COVID-19 Fiscal Response

An act (formerly known as Senate Bill 109) providing for emergency relief to nonpublic schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Approximately \$197 million (of the total \$900 million approved) is to be distributed to private schools and educational institutions that have not received prior federal COVID-19 aid.

The relief money in Pennsylvania Act No. 1 (of 2021) is mostly from federal aid allocated and approved by Congress in December 2020. The application process should be ready by March. The federal money must be spent by September 30, 2021.

Last action: Signed into law by the Governor on February 5, 2021 as Act No. 1 (of 2021)

II. PA House & Senate Joint Education Committee Meeting

Tuesday February 9, 2021 Meeting highlights include: state of higher education in the Commonwealth. The state system is expected to begin a merger of schools in the future.

III. Biden Administration: “The American Rescue Plan”

The proposed federal stimulus relief bill is for \$1.9 trillion in aid to assist with the effects of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The use of the reconciliation process to pass the legislation triggers automatic cuts in other federal programs as mandated by Congress.

Proposed additional stimulus including \$130 billion for K-12 schools for increased staffing; improvements/modifications to ventilation systems; PPE purchases; extended learning opportunities for students academically left behind. An additional \$5 billion for individual governors to spend on elementary and high schools if they desired.

The "markup" process began on Wednesday February 10, 2021. Drafts may be amended at this time by respective sections per committee for budget reconciliation.

IV. The “1776 Commission”

As of January 21, 2021, the Biden Administration has disbanded the “1776 Commission” created under the previous Trump Administration. The educational program was designed to promote the history and legacy of the country’s founders in a more traditional style. Critics argued the program did not fully cover topics including slavery, Progressive Era politics, and civil rights.

Recently there has been several legislative attempts at both the federal and state levels to increase/promote civics in American classrooms.

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V. CDC School Opening Report

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released a report January 26, 2021 supporting the reopening of K-12 schools. Data from schools that have reopened for in-person instruction for the Fall semester have shown “little evidence that schools contribute meaningfully to the spread of COVID-19.”

The CDC has stated their data demonstrates that rapid spread has not been reported in educational settings.

The report also details the evidence regarding social, emotional, and academic toll that remote learning (virtual) has had on students.

The full report may be read on their website.

2020 TAX INFORMATION

Union Dues for 2020

January 2020 – June 2020 = \$348.40
(For those who retired or resigned as of June 2020)

January 2020 – December 2020 = \$563.84

CONTACT INFORMATION

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THE CHARLOTTE DRUMMOND FOUNDATION

Memorial Scholarship

The Charlotte Drummond Memorial Scholarship is a legacy scholarship that keeps the spirit of Charlotte Drummond and her dedication to Catholic education alive. In 2021-2022 we are awarding one \$2,000 scholarship and two \$1,000 scholarships. We are also awarding one \$500 CD Alumni scholarship for a student who is a legacy of Cardinal Dougherty (a student whose grandparent, parent, or sibling attended Cardinal Dougherty High School.)

Charlotte taught for forty years at the former Cardinal Dougherty High School in the City of Philadelphia and she taught for another five years at Cardinal O'Hara High School in Springfield, Delaware County. Charlotte had a lasting impact on hundreds of students and alumni from both schools. Charlotte passed away on March 23, 2016 after fighting a courageous battle against Parkinson's Disease.

Eligible candidates must be rising juniors or seniors attending a Philadelphia Archdiocesan High School, and must have a recommendation from a teacher or guidance counselor that speaks not only to their ideal candidacy for the award through involvement in school, but also speaks to their financial need.

An application for The Charlotte Drummond Foundation Memorial Scholarship is posted on the homepage of the ACT Website at www.act1776.com.

The deadline for submission is April 2, 2021 by 11:00 P.M.

IMPORTANT DEADLINES

National Association of Catholic School Teachers John J. Reilly Memorial Scholarship

An application for the John J. Reilly Scholarship can be found on the home page of the ACT Website at www.act1776.com.

Deadline for submission of all applications is March 19, 2021.

The Charlotte Drummond Foundation Memorial Scholarship

Deadline for submission of all applications is April 2, 2021 by 11:00 p.m.

VOLUNTARY TRANSFER, TEACHER SWAP, TEMPORARY TRANSFER APPLICATIONS

Teachers interested in applying for a voluntary transfer, teacher swap, or temporary transfer should file their application **no later than April 1, 2021.**
Applications will be posted in the schools on March 1, 2021.

FSA REMINDER

If you were a participant in the 2020 FSA Program, please remember that all monies in your account should have been exhausted by December 31, 2020. Any funds that remained in your account after December 31, 2020 will be lost. However, this does not mean that all your eligible expenses had to have been submitted by December 31, 2020. You have 90 days after the close of the calendar year in which to submit eligible expenses for 2020.

All eligible expenses for 2020 must be submitted by March 30, 2021.

IN MEMORIAM



STACIA FICARRO
1971 - 2021

Our friend Stacia Ficarro passed away on February 3, 2021 after a long-fought battle with cancer. When talking about Stacia, you can't help but smile remembering her energy, her competitive nature, and her enthusiasm. She didn't do anything half-way; she gave everything at all times. Whether it was Blue & Gold Day, homeroom decorating contests, or a student/faculty basketball game at a pep rally...she wanted to win.

She coached basketball and taught (both Math and Theology) with the same goal - to help the kids get better and be better. Many former players and students have said that her lessons weren't just about how to make a smoother layup or how to solve a math problem; Stacia taught her students about life, about how to do your best in every situation, and how to be the best you as we've been called to be by God.

For those of us who spent time with Stacia outside of school, it was difficult to go anywhere with her without running into three or four people she knew from teaching, college, coaching basketball, playing sports, or many other places. She always seemed to know people and they were always so happy to see her (try then dragging her away from these reunions because you had to get back to school for parent/teacher conferences...it was next to impossible). Stacia saw all of these people as part of her extended family, and she had many "families" (Pius, PJP, Villanova, Ursinus, her touch football team, her dragon boat crew team, etc.). All of those families feel the loss of such a beloved mentor and friend.

When she was diagnosed with cancer, she still tried coming to work and teaching despite feeling sick, being in pain, and having to schedule her chemotherapy sessions. She was able to keep up with it for a while, and fortunately the summer came and allowed her a break. She was back in school in September, but the pain became too much and she had to go on leave. It was perhaps the toughest decision she ever made. Being in the classroom and working with students was what she looked forward to. She was a teacher through and through, and to give that up was the very last thing she wanted the cancer to take from her.

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STACIA FICARRO IN MEMORIAM

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At her memorial service, held at PJP, former students and players shared stories about how Miss Ficarro encouraged them, challenged them, and cared about them. Many of them spoke about how they felt her genuine love for them in the classroom and out, as she was often cheering them on whether they were performing on stage in the school musical or at their basketball/volleyball/softball/baseball/football game (you name it, she was there to cheer for them).

Stacia loved her nephew and nieces, she loved her students, and she loved her many families. She is missed dearly.

*Written by
Melissa Hart and Heather Timmons
Pope John Paul II High School*



Happy Saint Patrick's Day!



IN MEMORIAM



ROBERT FITZSIMMONS
1935 - 2021

The first day of high school can be a day filled with much tension especially when coming to a school the size of North Catholic. Many incoming freshmen enter the doors for the first time with fear and trepidation. Not at North Catholic, they immediately felt welcomed, especially by the Freshman Class Moderator, the “Grand Wizard”, a graduate of the Class of 1953, who rolled out the red carpet and inducted incoming freshmen into the North Catholic community. He took the freshmen under his wing and was most responsible for instilling in them school spirit, teaching them the Munchkin Salute and, of course, the Alma Mater. During the ceremony, they began to realize that these next four years would be very special indeed. How could it not be when they had been welcomed by the “gentleman” of Northeast Catholic, the man who embodied all the good that exemplified North Catholic and the Salesian Spirit, Mr. Robert Fitzsimmons.

Bob gave 51 years of faithful, dedicated service to North Catholic. He was the longstanding chairman of the Business Department but also taught in the Social Studies Department as well as maintaining the school grounds. Bob was devoted to his faith, his family, and whenever the need arose, to aiding the Carmelite Nuns. For many years, he directed the successful career days, giving students the opportunity to explore future possibilities. He was honored as the Distinguished Catholic Educator by the Archdiocesan Board of Education and the Business Leaders Organized for Catholic Schools (BLOCS) and received similar honors from the Fathers’ and Mothers’ Association of North Catholic. He taught and gave witness to thousands of alumni in his quiet, cheerful, and faith-filled way. Many say that he taught more powerfully by example, especially by his charity, gentleness, and humility. Fittingly, these are the hallmark virtues of Saint Francis de Sales.

Whenever a member of the alumni would visit North Catholic, they would invariably ask to see “Mr. Fitz” as he was commonly called.

Bob had a commitment to get to Mass every day. As things turned out, he continued to teach (at Father Judge High School) one year past the closing of his beloved North Catholic. On retiring, Bob and his loving and caring wife, Renee, could often be seen attending the afternoon Mass at Saint Joseph Manor.

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Many of Bob's colleagues had been students at North Catholic during Bob's tenure. They all agreed that Mr. Fitz was a big reason that North Catholic was such an exceptional place. Below are a few of their comments:

... Let's all pray for a true North Catholic Saint, Bob Fitzsimmons, a man who touched so many lives at North with his kindness and Salesian spirit, he truly made every person he met feel better.

...We had a wonderful community at North and Fitz was the best of us.

... I believe that we all have had the pleasure of working and knowing a Saint on earth. Mr. Fitz was kind, humble, gentle, sincere, and literally incapable of saying something bad about another.

*Written by
Anthony Costantino, Retired
Northeast Catholic High School for Boys*

Welcome Spring!



IN MEMORIAM



JOHN RENYE
1948-2021

When I first came to Father Judge way back in 1990, I was assigned to a study hall. John Renye was the study leader. I was observing him and learning from him. One day he came running into the study hall waving his hands saying: "We got problems, we got problems," I thought "the building was on fire." I said, "What's wrong?" He said, "There's going to be a fire drill this period!" It didn't seem like the end of the world, but what did I know, I was only a rookie.

Finally once he figured out that we were going to have the kids exiting out the back of the auditorium, he started to calm down. This scenario, just about sums up John. He worried about everything. He wanted to have everything planned down to the last detail, and if something happened that he wasn't expecting, it was a disaster.

Anyone who participated in any of our Father Judge 8th Grade Visitations, is very familiar with John barking commands over the PA: group TRE go to the auditorium. Group BRA report to the cafeteria: Move, Move, Move. I imagine that this is what Eisenhower felt like at the D-Day Normandy invasion. Every second of every minute was planned out.

So, I knew what I was getting when I asked him to help me out with Robotics. John was there every step of the way. He was the students' biggest Cheerleader. I have never worked harder in my life than I did for the 8 years that I ran the FIRST Robotics Program. Unlike many of the teams, we were very small and had to do quite a bit of work for ourselves. I don't think I would have been able to accomplish what we did, without his constant presence. Any time I needed him to be there to help out with anything, he was there.

We would spend many nights at the shop (sometimes as late as 11:00pm), waiting for the last kid to be picked up by his parents or trying to get the robot finished on time.

One of the most maddening things about FIRST Robotics is that no matter how much planning and preparation you do, it is always the tiniest and seemingly most insignificant thing that you would forget and that would trip you up. That is why John was so valuable. He would always be remembering and checking on those little details, so that I didn't have to worry about them.

Being as neurotic as John was, I know how hard it must have been for him to be driving a van full of students to an event, 30 miles away and almost always during a blizzard. At any time, he could have just said, "No it's just not worth it." But he was always there ready to help out in any way that he could.

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At all of the events, he was in the stands cheering on our team and watching the leader board with intensity. ("Hey Mike, we're in 8th place." "Hey Mike do you think one of the other teams will pick us or the playoffs?" He wanted so badly for us to get into the playoffs at any of those events. Because of circumstances beyond our control, we never did get picked. John was so disappointed.

For me, one of the most disappointing things was when he told me that he couldn't do it anymore. After many conversations with him, I realized why. It was obvious, even then that his mind was starting to go. That Gray Matter Disease was taking over.

The following year, after he retired, a miracle happened. Not only did we get picked by one of the other teams, but our Alliance was so good that it went all the way and won the championship of that event. I felt so great for our kids that had worked so hard, but I also felt so bad that John was not there to see it.

What makes me even sadder is that I never visited him after he retired. I never got to show him the trophy that the kids won. It's hard to believe that 4 years have gone by since his retirement. Visiting him was always on my to do list, but, obviously, never at the top of my list.

I think what you can say about John, more than anything else is that he truly cared about people. He always worried about how they were doing and if there was anything he could do to help. He loved his family very much. He was always telling us stories about his children and how proud he was of them.

Father Judge lost a true ambassador when John retired, and we all lost a great friend and colleague with his passing. Rest in Peace John. Rest in Peace.

Sincerely,
Mike Fiocco,
Father Judge High School

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen. O Lord, your sorrowing Mother stood by your cross; help us in our sorrows to share your sufferings.
