



THE

**The Newspaper of Local 1776
The Association of Catholic Teachers**

SPIRIT

OF

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1966-2016*

3070 BRISTOL PIKE, BLDG. 2, SUITE 101, BENSALEM, PA 19020- 215-568-4175 - VOLUME XXXXV-NO.4
Fax 215-568-8270 - email (act@act1776.com) - website (www.act1776.com) **JANUARY 2025**



From the President's Desk

Happy New Year to all of our members! As you all begin to get back in the swing of things and prepare for the end of the first semester, I have been working toward my transition out of the classroom and into the role as your union President.

I want to start by expressing my sincere thanks for the support I've received both before and after the election. The trust many of you placed in me means a great deal, and I am committed to ensuring that everyone's voices are heard, and your needs are met while I am in office. The election itself was very close and this reinforced one very important fact-I have a great deal to prove during this term as ACT President.

That is my first goal for the second half of the school year; to show all of our teachers that I can be someone you can rely on and trust moving forward. Once settled into the ACT Office, I look forward to working closely with all of you to ensure that our Union remains a powerful force for positive change. Your feedback, ideas, and concerns will always be welcomed, as they will be the foundation of the work we do together. With a negotiating year coming up in 2026, it will be important that I get an accurate portrayal of what is going on in all of your schools, as well as what

(Continued on page 2)

your concerns are for this and the next few years. I will be visiting each of the schools during the second semester so that I can better connect names with faces and urge you to take advantage of those opportunities to voice your opinions.

Once again, I want to thank you for your trust and for the opportunity to serve you, the members of the Association of Catholic Teachers. Together, we will continue to fight for better working conditions, fair compensation, and the resources needed to provide the best possible education for our students. I am truly looking forward to this journey with all of you as we work toward a brighter future for our teachers and our students.

James

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK *January 26 - February 1, 2025*

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

ACT CONTACT INFORMATION

Association of Catholic Teachers

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President: James R. Vernon, E-mail: james@act1776.com

Vice President: Kathleen Toenniessen-Innes, E-mail: katie@act1776.com

Office-Benefits Manager: Ginny Crowther, E-mail: ginny@act1776.com

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New Year – New President

As of January 1, 2025, the Association of Catholic Teachers has a new President.

James R. Vernon took over the reins from Irene Tori, making him the fifth president in the Association's 59-year history.

James, a seventeen-year teacher at Monsignor Bonner-Archbishop Prendergast High School, will finish out the current semester with his students, and then, beginning on February 3, 2025, James will be in the ACT Office full-time, serving the needs and interest of the ACT Membership.

The Association of Catholic Teachers and its members
extend a warm welcome to

James R. Vernon

*The Association of Catholic Teachers thanks outgoing President, **Irene Tori**, for her many years of service to the members of the Association of Catholic Teachers and wishes her a happy and healthy retirement with her husband, Carl.*

“And suddenly you know: It’s time to start something new and trust the magic of beginnings.” – Meister Eckhart

2025 ACT EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

James R. Vernon	President
Kathleen Toenniessen-Innes	Vice President
Matthew McShane	Executive Secretary
Christine Hanley Maldonado	Treasurer
John Corrigan	Legislative Representative
Bridget Mierzejewski	Area Vice President (Central)
Christine Hanley Maldonado	Area Vice President (Northeast)
Eric Wahl	Area Vice President (Northwest)
Rosanne Betham	Interim Area Vice President (Southwest)
Rosanne Betham	Member-At-Large
Michael Fischer	Member-At-Large
Ellen O'Hara	Member-At-Large

2024 TAX INFORMATION

Union Dues for 2024

January 2024 – June 2024 = \$384.54
(For those who resigned or retired as of June 2024)

January 2024 – December 2024 = \$624.54

2025 ACT SENIOR DELEGATES

Matthew McShane – Bonner/Prendergast	Ellen O'Hara – Cardinal O'Hara
Anthony Polselli – Archbishop Carroll	Eric Wahl – Pope John Paul II
Christine Hanley Maldonado – Conwell-Egan	James Flannery – Roman Catholic
John Masluk – Saint Hubert	Bill Finnegan – Archbishop Ryan
Mark Zataveski – Father Judge	Joseph Aquilante – Bishop Shanahan
Michael Clymer – Little Flower	Bridget Mierzejewski – West Catholic
Melissa Hart – Lansdale Catholic	Joe Webb – Archbishop Wood
Karen Elitz – SS Neumann-Goretti	

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

The following Legislative Report Fall Update was submitted by ACT Legislative Representative, John Corrigan, at the [December 19, 2024](#) ACT Executive Board Meeting via Zoom.

EITC

In August, Jay DeFrusco, Chief Operating Officer for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia Schools, was interviewed by the PA Catholic Conference. Jay spoke about the huge benefit provided by the Educational Improvement Tax Credit Program. He stated that 35% of the current financial need is being met, and there remains a need for an additional 65%.

Legislative Update

The PA General Assembly continued with the enabling legislation to implement the 2024-2025 state budget until adjourning on November 30, 2024. The new GA will return to session in January following the November general election.

PA Secretary of Education

PA Secretary of Education Dr. Khalid N. Mumin resigned on November 22 and stepped down on December 6, 2024. His tenure was marked by significant investments in K-12 education and improvements to the professional licensing system. Governor Shapiro has appointed Angela Fitterer, Executive Deputy Secretary for the Department of Education, to serve as Interim Acting Secretary while the Commonwealth conducts a search for a new secretary.

General Election

The General Election on November 5, 2024 included races for President, US Senate, US House of Representatives, PA statewide offices, PA General Assembly House, Senate.

Federal Elections

At the federal level, the Republican candidates won the executive race for President and Vice President, and Republicans also won a majority in both chambers of Congress: House and Senate. Campaign rhetoric included the possible elimination of the Department of Education by the incoming administration which could have potential widespread effects to the educational infrastructure and funding resources nationwide (in particular special education).

In Congress, PA has a new US Senator elect Dave McCormack (R) who defeated Senator Bob Casey who has served for 18 years. Senator Casey consistently supported Catholic education.

In the House, PA has a delegation of 10 Rs and 7 Ds. In our local area: Fitzpatrick (R PA-1), Boyle (D PA-2), Evans (D PA-3), Deane (D PA-4), Scanlon (D PA-5), Houlahan (D PA-6).

PA Elections

In Statewide Offices, Dave Sunday (R) elected Attorney General, Timothy DeFoor (D) elected Auditor, Stacy Garrity (R) elected Treasurer.

PA General Assembly

Senate – There are 50 state Senate seats with 4 year terms. There were 25 state Senate seats up for election. Republicans maintained the 28-22 majority they held prior to the election.

PA House All 203 state House seats were up for election. Democrats maintained a 102-101 majority in the House following the election. The state continues to have a divided government with Democrats controlling the governorship and Republicans holding a majority in the Senate and Democrats hold a majority in the House, respectively.

INSURANCE INFORMATION

Dental Plan: As of January 1, 2025, you and each of your family members have \$1,000 in dental benefits to use for covered services in calendar year 2025. A list of your dental benefits is listed on the ACT Website at www.act1776.com.

Medical Plan: A reminder that you will need to meet your annual \$100 individual deductible and/or \$200 family deductible for calendar year 2025. You may begin receiving bills for services requiring that a deductible be met before payment can be made. **These services include the following:** Outpatient laboratory and pathology, home health care and/or hospice, skilled nursing, chemotherapy, radiation, dialysis, outpatient Private Duty Nursing, and physician/surgeon charges that require a deductible.

Voluntary Vision Plan: All ACT members who signed up for the Davis Voluntary Vision Plan will be receiving new identification cards in the mail. Once you receive your new card, please destroy your old card. You will need to give your provider your new identification number. If you have not received your card yet and need your ID number, please contact Ginny at the ACT Office and she can get that for you. You can also logon to www.ibx.com and create a username and password. Once you do that, you should be able to see your coverage and download a digital copy of your Vision card. If you have any questions, please give Ginny a call at 215-568-4175 or email her at ginny@act1776.com.

FSA REMINDER

If you were a participant in the 2024 FSA Program, please remember that all monies in your account should have been exhausted by December 31, 2024. You have 90 days after the close of the calendar year in which to submit eligible expenses for 2024.

Rest in Peace



- + *Vincent Cancro, Retired, West Catholic High School* +
- + *John Cramutolo, Father Judge High School* +
- + *Edward Godfrey, Retired, Little Flower 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

If anyone would like to submit an *In Memoriam* article, you are most welcome to do so. You can submit your article to act@act1776.com.

In Memoriam - Vincent Cancro

Vince Cancro walked into the library at West Philadelphia Catholic High School for Boys in September, 1977 and introduced himself. I was new to the Catholic schools and one of very few women in the building. We soon discovered we shared a passion for movies, literature, and theater and became fast friends. That friendship proved to be a major force in not only my life, but my family's as well, for the next 47 years, until Vince died on Dec. 14 at age 80. He was an exemplary teacher, dad, and friend.

Vince taught English at West Catholic for most of his career, save for a two-year stint in the Peace Corps in the 1960s where he served in Afghanistan, a life affirming experience for him. He was a true Master Teacher, devoted to Catholic education. In addition to his classroom duties, where he taught all levels from freshman to senior, he was heavily involved in the myriad other aspects of high school that impact so many students. He served as the yearbook moderator; led the English Department as Chair; organized and ran book fairs; drove for Operation Santa Claus on Christmas Eve, delivering gifts to needy families in West Philadelphia with his own children in tow; chaperoned countless dances and was my senior prom date for many of them; and arranged theater trips for his students to professional productions in Philadelphia, a first-time opportunity for most. He was a mentor to many young teachers, and a role model to literally thousands of students, some of whom became life-long friends. His intellectual curiosity and passion for his craft were evident in all he did.

Tragedy struck Vince's life when his first wife died of breast cancer in 1985 at age 38. Their three children were 9, 6, and 5. He proved a true inspiration to me in raising his children by himself, determined that they would have as normal a childhood as possible. He immersed himself in their lives, being both mom and dad as they grew up. They spent many summers in Ocean City, where Vince managed a boardwalk arcade, and he served several terms as the CYO president at Sacred Heart Manoa, where his children attended school. All three graduated from college and launched successful careers. Vince found love again and married his wife Donata in 2003. Eventually they welcomed seven grandchildren.

During our long friendship, Vince was kind and generous beyond measure to me and my family. My children were a bit younger, but we did many things together over the years- visiting their home in Ocean City in the summer to enjoy a day at the beach and boardwalk, attending musicals in Center City, enjoying dinners at Carmine's in New York City, and we alternated hosting pre-Christmas dinners in our homes, complete with gifts for all. In later years we attended each other's children's weddings. In any critical situation, like when my husband was seriously injured several years ago, Vince was a rock I knew I could count on and did.

We will never again ruminate over Level H vocabulary words and the five paragraph essay or discuss the movies we saw and the books we were reading or share our plans for upcoming trips to New York. From the mundane to the silly to the profound, we tried to cover it all. One of his favorite playwrights, Anton Chekhov, said, "Life is given only once, and one wants to live it boldly, with full conscious and beauty." Vince lived his life exactly that way. Rest in peace, my friend.

*Written by:
Carol Tulba, Librarian
West Catholic High School, retired*

In Memoriam - Barbara Cowley

Remembering Barbara Cowley, a Dynamic Foreign Language Teacher

The education world lost a truly dedicated teacher with the recent passing of my colleague, Barbara Cowley. I first met Barbara in the early 1980s when I transferred to Archbishop Ryan High School language department. Barbara immediately impressed me with her energy and enthusiasm for teaching Spanish. She was not only a talented, well-liked classroom teacher with an engaging teaching style, but was much more to students, organizing several class trips to Spanish-speaking countries.

Over the years, Barbara would share photos and stories from these wonderful educational adventures. Her hard work provided students with an enriching experience in culture, opportunity to speak Spanish abroad and, no doubt, lasting memories.

Barbara also attended many extracurricular sporting events in support of students. She made a positive impact on students and faculty in her career. She faithfully upheld high professional teaching standards and devoted herself to Archbishop Ryan High School as if it were her second family. Barbara's legacy will live on in the many students and coworkers whose lives she touched.

*Written by: Joseph Muto, Retired
Archbishop Ryan High School*

Barbara Cowley was truly an inspiring teacher for so many students and colleagues at Archbishop Ryan High School. For fifty years she taught Spanish in our World Language Department. As a department chairman and colleague of hers for so many of those years, I was fortunate to have known her and witnessed her enthusiasm and boundless energy as she fulfilled her teaching responsibilities to thousands of students. Barbara's knowledge of her subject was extensive and captivating. Her classes were filled with the understanding and witness of a teacher who loved her students and subject matter, and she was delighted when they were able to learn and speak Spanish. Indeed, it was an honor and delight for me to have known this friendly and professional woman who touched the lives of so many.

*Written by: John Kurek, Retired
Archbishop Ryan High School*

In Memoriam - Barbara Cowley

Barbara Cowley was a quiet, reserved but determined woman. She taught 50 years at Archbishop Ryan High School. She always gave her best to her students and developed life long friendships with faculty members. She was stylish in her Talbots outfits. She enjoyed going out with her friends and her time with the “Ryan Dinner Club” which visited posh restaurants in the area.

Barbara tirelessly worked on many activities at Ryan especially Ryan Responds. For seventeen years at the end of the school year, Barbara was a prolific “trash picker” for Ryan Responds. She would rescue all the text books, school supplies and clothing for recycling for the poor. Tons of supplies went to Haiti and Nicaragua over the years with her help.

Barbara was game for any outing or adventure. Her love of travel was evident by the many trips she took in the United States and Europe. She enhanced her students’ experience of Spanish language and culture by taking them on trips to Spain and Mexico. Many good times and memories were made.

Barbara enjoyed nature. She liked to garden and visit scenes of nature especially the fall colors. She was an avid reader and could be found with her nose in a book at the beaches of New Jersey and Hawaii.

Barbara showed great fortitude in battling her final illness. Those friends closest to her were amazed by her strength as she continued to defy the constraints of her illness. She fought to remain as independent as possible until her final days.

Barbara will be deeply missed by her family and friends. She was a blessing to all who knew and loved her.

Written by:

*Mary Edwards, Sharonmarie Biasini and Anne McAllister, Retired,
Archbishop Ryan High School*



“Let us be grateful to the people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom” Marcel Proust

In Memoriam – Charles Wieners

Charlie Wieners was born to be a Catholic School teacher. He began his education in the Archdiocesan elementary schools before graduating from LaSalle College High School. From there, he went on to St. Joseph's University. While at SJU, Charlie was the Vice President of the student body and, most proudly, the fourth Hawk ever at the university. His pride in his Hawk status was lifelong – evident in his customized license plate, season tickets to SJU Basketball games, various computer passwords and countless SJU Hawk gear! With his passion for history, politics, and government most people assumed Charlie was destined for a career as either a lawyer or a politician. However, after earning his master's degree at Miami University of Ohio in 1968, Charlie and his wife, Mary, moved back to the Philadelphia area and he began his 45-year career as a Catholic School teacher in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia at Cardinal Dougherty High School. After almost 20 years at Dougherty, Charlie moved to teaching at Archbishop Prendergast in 1985 – a school near and dear to the family as Mary and much of her family were graduates. His two daughters would also graduate from Prendie, and his son is a proud Bonner alum. Charlie remained there after the merger and continued to teach at Monsignor Bonner and Archbishop Prendergast until 2016 when he transferred to Cardinal O'Hara High School and remained there until his retirement. Ultimately, Charlie's grandchildren – the center of his universe – would also attend Archdiocesan high schools with his three granddaughters graduating from Bonner & Prendie, his one grandson graduating from Archbishop Carroll, and his youngest grandson currently a student at Cardinal O'Hara.

Throughout his career, Charlie was a beloved teacher and fierce advocate for his students, tirelessly working in and out of the classroom to provide them education and support not only in History but in life. Charlie headed up the CSC program for his entire 45 years in the Archdiocese, bringing his passion for helping others to every school and instilling in the young people he mentored a lifelong passion for helping those in need. A sports fanatic, Charlie never said no to any students who needed a coach. Although his expertise centered around softball, there would often be a knock on his door from students asking Mr. Wieners to *please* coach their sport or they may not have a season. Without hesitation, he would buckle down to learn a new sport – including tennis, cross country, and bowling, to name a few! Charlie also dedicated himself to supporting his colleagues as both a union rep and an administrator at different points in his career, although his heart was always in the classroom with the students. A true testament to the vision of St. John Neumann, Charlie will be remembered as a teacher who provided a quality education to his students while instilling in them a strong foundation of their Catholic faith and a dedication to the service of others.

*Written by: Tracey A. Rush
Charlie's Daughter, and former Principal of
Monsignor Bonner-Archbishop Prendergast High School*

**THE ACT EXECUTIVE BOARD &
OFFICE STAFF**

WISH ALL OUR MEMBERS

**A HAPPY, HEALTHY, AND BLESSED
NEW YEAR.**

