

VISION

annual report 2020-21

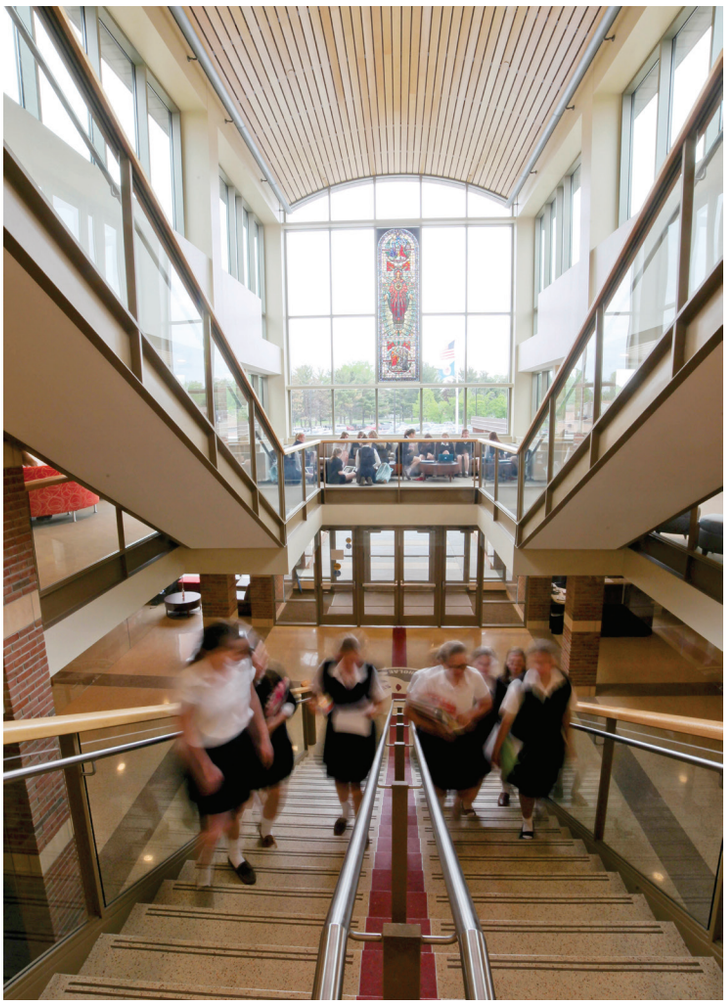
carrying the living legacy of the sisters

For 150 years, Visitation School has educated the hearts and minds of students in the Catholic, Salesian philosophy of the Visitation Sisters. The strength of Visitation's legacy is reflected through the strategic and intentional leadership of the Visitation School Board of Trustees. In 1973, the Sisters established the Board of Trustees to help them govern the school. Today, the Board of Trustees is a robust governing body.

The Board accepts nominations on a rolling basis. Terms are three years with most board members serving two terms for up to six years. According to **Christine Cumming '69**, vice chair of the Board of Trustees and chair of the Governance committee, many board members have a connection to Visitation School either as an alumna, a past parent, a current parent or retired faculty. The Board also looks to include "independents," those people who have no direct affiliation with the school, yet can share special skills and an outside perspective. The board should represent a variety of skills, experiences and perspectives. All board members generally have prior board experience.

"The most important thing is that we have board members who understand and are committed to the mission of the school and want to see it perpetuated and carried forward. That is crucial," said Cumming. "Also crucial is knowing that most of the board's work is done in committees, and most board members serve on two committees. So it's important that a board member genuinely has the time to meet and engage several times a year in both board and committee meetings."

The role of the Board is to provide oversight for the school. "Oversight means being focused on the school's strategy while making sure that things are working and operating well," said Cumming. "Oversight is really different from managing the school – managing day-to-day is the role of the Head of School and the Administrative Council."



In addition to alumnae, current and past parents, others in the Visitation community and independents, the board's 25 members include Visitation Sisters and two members of the HOPE (Help Our Plans Evolve) Committee, a small group that assists the Sisters in their transition. While the board makes many important decisions and contributes substantially to others, such as the search for new board members, the Visitation Sisters have reserve powers which gives them the final word on the most important decisions, such as approval of the head of school and new board members, major financial decisions and any changes to the fundamental direction and character of the school, particularly its commitment to a Catholic, Salesian mission.



Looking to the future

Decades ago, the Sisters, with foresight and intention, began to plan for the future in ways that would secure their legacy. Sustaining the school's Catholic and Salesian identity in the governance structure of Visitation School has been a complicated process – Visitation School is Catholic because it is owned and governed by the Visitation Monastery, a canonically recognized entity. Once there are no more Sisters, no Monastery, how does the school ensure its ongoing Catholic identity?

In 2002, as the Sisters were aging and the number of vocations was diminishing, the Monastery began exploring the canonical option of creating an Association of Christian Faithful (ACF) which would allow the Sisters a way to keep the school operating with a lay structure as a Catholic, independent school into the future. In 2013, the Sisters established a succession committee named the HOPE Committee. Its purpose has been to provide collegial support and leadership, alongside the Sisters, to help them execute their wishes for their own care beyond the Mendota Heights monastery, as well as define how their precious school would be preserved for years to come.

"This allows the school to practice the richness of the Catholic faith, to be vibrantly Salesian as we practice the Gospel message in the manner of our Visitation Sisters and to remain independently characterized," said Administrative Monastic Superior **Sister Mary Frances Reis, VHM '55**.

In the near future, the HOPE Committee will begin serving as an ACF, providing the canonical structure to protect the Catholic, Salesian mission of the School. The ACF will function, as the Sisters did, to ensure the school's Catholic identity and to perform the same function as the Sisters have in relationship to the school for the last 150 years.

Members of the ACF are the original HOPE Committee members who have prayed and deliberated with the Sisters over the last several years. Two members attend Board meetings All ACF members gather for monthly Salesian formation and prayer. The ACF membership will grow over time.

According to Cumming, the ACF will "preserve the Salesian, Catholic nature of the school and carry on the Sisters' legacy." They will not be managing the school, but will work alongside the Board, as did the Sisters, and make the final decision on any major change to the direction and nature of the school, exercising their reserve powers.

Director of Salesian Studies **Anne Eilers Williams '82** added, "Over the past 20 years, I have learned more about how the intentional strength of legacy is poised to show up for this transition moment. And to attest to the many ways the Holy Spirit has been guiding the Sisters and their advisors to accept grace upon grace to continue to embody the gentle presence of the Salesian spirit."



Interested in learning more about the nomination process for the Visitation School Board of Trustees?

Contact Jennifer Sedivy at jsedivy@vischool.org