



DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

Office of the Bishop

January 26, 2025

Dear students, faculty, and staff of Harmel Academy,

National Catholic Schools Week will be observed from January 26 to February 1 this year. This week provides us with an opportunity to celebrate the value of Catholic education, recognizing how it shapes lives and nurtures hearts through faith, learning, and service to others.

With 31 Catholic elementary and secondary schools serving more than 6,400 students, nearly 1,500 students enrolled at Aquinas, and your growing Harmel community, families in West Michigan have a wide range of opportunities to experience Catholic education from preschool to higher education. Our young people are being prepared to encounter Christ and fulfill God's purpose for their lives.

I encourage each of you to consider the role you play in proclaiming our Catholic faith. Your studies, service, and witness at Harmel and in the greater community serve as a light of faith in a world often clouded by confusion and division. Whether in the classroom, at service sites, or in your daily encounters, you have the opportunity to spread the message of Christ to those around you. The intentional Catholic education offered at Harmel Academy prepares you to engage the world with the love and truth of the Gospel.

May you continue to be witnesses of Christ, spreading the Gospel of our Lord among the Harmel community and beyond. Please know of my prayers for you—may the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit be poured out in your lives and in your mission over the coming year!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak
Bishop of Grand Rapids



January 27, 2025

Dear Bishop Walkowiak,

On behalf of the students, faculty, and staff of Harmel Academy of the Trades, I extend our deepest gratitude for your kind and encouraging letter in honor of National Catholic Schools Week.

Harmel Academy was launched five years ago with a small cohort of young men seeking something new — a new way to be formed in skill, insight, and holiness in and through the skilled trades. From the very beginning, your support, encouragement, and prayers for this initiative have been essential to us growing into what we've become: a community of prayer, work, and study for young men looking to live out and proclaim what St. John Paul II called "the Gospel of Work."

We are blessed and honored to be able to do this work in the Diocese of Grand Rapids, a diocese with a demonstrated commitment to faithful, innovative, and deeply Catholic education. We are so encouraged to be part of a community of schools born truly *ex corde ecclesia*. May our Lord continue to bless the availability of all our schools to His work in drawing young people closer to his Sacred Heart, in every school and in every vocation.

In our very first year, you were kind enough to speak on Harmel Academy's behalf to a gathering of leaders in Grand Rapids. On that occasion, you said that you believed in "letting your dogs run." Thank you for your trust in and encouragement of our young community of working men, and for "letting our dogs run" in pursuit of this new opportunity to apprentice these men to Jesus Christ. We will continue to work hard to honor that trust in our own small corner of the Lord's vineyard here in Grand Rapids.

Thank you for your leadership, prayer, and support. You remain in our prayers, and I hope we will continue to remain in yours.

With Gratitude, and In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Michael Phelps".

David Michael Phelps

President, Harmel Academy of the Trades