



**Thursday, October 21, 2021**  
*Memorial of Saint John of Bridlington*

Dear Holy Rosary Academy Families, Faculty, and Staff,

We are saddened to have to write and let you know that, for the first time since the founding of Holy Rosary Academy in 1987, the local bishop has indicated that he may rescind recognition of HRA as a Catholic school in our archdiocese. We will hold a pair of Town Hall meetings at 5:00 p.m. on both Thursday, October 21 and Friday, October 22 so that we can answer your questions and discuss the implications of this situation for HRA.

For now, we want to make sure you have the background on this unfortunate turn of events. Last April, Father Patrick Travers, Vicar General for the Archdiocese of Anchorage-Juneau, sent a letter to the HRA Board, signed by Archbishop Bellisario, specifying that HRA would have to agree in writing to nine new points of business and legal procedures in order to maintain the recognition HRA has previously enjoyed. The letter also stated that our compliance with these points would be proof of our being sufficiently Catholic to be so designated within our archdiocese. None of these matters involved visiting the campus or meeting with any faculty, staff, alumni, benefactors, students, or families to assess how deep our Catholic identity runs at HRA.

However, one of the required stipulations would have granted complete control over the curriculum of Holy Rosary Academy to the Archdiocese. Other points would necessitate strict conformity with all health and safety protocols promulgated by the Archdiocese, require approval of presentations and speakers on our campus, and involve creation of a hold-harmless indemnification between HRA and the Archdiocese. The Archbishop is the undisputed head of the Church in this archdiocese, with authority to determine which institutions are officially considered Catholic. Since, in the past, HRA has been considered not only Catholic, but exemplary in the education and formation that we offer our students, we are mystified that the current Archbishop and Father Travers appear totally unwilling to recognize HRA's existence as an independent and Catholic school. We do not understand why they would suddenly require complete compliance in academic, legal, and business matters that would

necessitate altering the identity, mission, curriculum, and charter of the school. Holy Rosary Academy is doing everything it always has while not asking anything more than it ever did in the way of recognition. This sudden change on the part of the Archdiocese is therefore as disappointing as it is puzzling.

After much prayer, consultation with experts in civil and canon law, and reflection, members of the Board requested a meeting with the Archbishop in mid-August to discuss how Holy Rosary Academy could maintain its status as an independent and Catholic school while also demonstrating our Catholic orthodoxy to the Chancery. We sought to collaborate with the Archbishop in honoring the spirit of the requirements sent to us under his signature. Alarming, one of the assertions of the Archbishop in that conversation was that all but day-to-day operations at Holy Rosary Academy would be under archdiocesan control—including personnel, curriculum, and business matters. Nevertheless, out of a desire to demonstrate obedience in all areas of legitimate archdiocesan authority and out of courtesy to the office, we made another attempt to stand with the Archbishop on our historic common ground. Following the meeting, we indicated in writing our concessions to many of the Chancery's specifications and highlighted areas for further cooperation in an additional effort to bring mutual harmony.

Unfortunately, in a letter of October 4, 2021, the only options presented to us by the Archdiocese were to acquiesce in full to all of the new legal and business procedures, or to no longer be officially designated a "Catholic school." In addition, this same letter sent to us by Father Travers and signed by the Archbishop states that the withdrawal of this privilege would also entail the prohibition of having the sacraments celebrated on campus for any non-emergency circumstance, along with the removal of the reserved Real Presence of Jesus from the tabernacle in our chapel.

This is a bewildering and disheartening situation for all of us. As you are well aware, the Catholic identity of Holy Rosary Academy has been assessed and endorsed by the *Cardinal Newman Society* since 2004; by our accrediting body, the *National Association of Private Catholic and Independent Schools*, for over 15 years; and the *Institute for Catholic Liberal Education*. After long and prayerful consideration, the Board of Trustees is now seeking further understanding and clarification from the Archbishop.

Please know that if our recognition by the Archbishop as an official Catholic school should change, it does not affect our accreditation, curriculum, or the regular academic operations of the school. Our mission, identity, and commitment to serving Catholic families and forming Catholic students will remain unchanged. We did not seek this conflict and are unsure why the current Archbishop would contemplate not extending the same privileges HRA has enjoyed under three previous Ordinaries while permitting us to continue to have control over our own hiring, curricular, legal, and business affairs.

Rest assured that the Board and leadership team of the school will work to preserve HRA's distinct mission and identity every way that we can, including appeals under Canon Law, if necessary. We will have more information to share with the community as the situation unfolds, but wanted to ensure that all of you knew the essentials of this most unfortunate turn of events. We invite you to join us for regular Friday rosary devotions where we will be asking Our Lady to preserve the sacramental presence of Her Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the campus of Holy Rosary Academy and to give us the continued grace of having Mass celebrated here.

Please add your intentions to ours as we ask, "Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary, suffer the little children of Holy Rosary Academy to continue to come unto you, and prevent their becoming sacramental orphans."

In Christ, through Mary,

Holy Rosary Academy's Board of Trustees and Headmaster

## Essential Questions and Answers

*Q. Will Holy Rosary Academy lose its accreditation if the current Archbishop decides to rescind recognition of HRA as an official Catholic School?*

**A.** No. Holy Rosary Academy was founded as a lay operated, independent Catholic school. Our accrediting body, the *National Association of Catholic and Independent Schools* (NAPCIS) remains in full support of Holy Rosary Academy, and attests to the authenticity of the Catholic formation we provide to all our students. NAPCIS is the accrediting body for many other Independent Catholic schools across the United States.

*Q. Will Holy Rosary Academy lose its endorsements by outside associations and agencies if the current Archbishop decides to rescind recognition of HRA as an official Catholic School?*

**A.** No. Holy Rosary Academy continues to enjoy the accolade of an Honor Roll School from the *Cardinal Newman Society*, and Member School status from the *Institute for Catholic Liberal Education* (ICLE). Both the Newman Society and the ICLE have full faith in the strength and depth of the Catholic identity of Holy Rosary Academy. Holy Rosary Academy remains the top private high school in the state of Alaska, according to *USA Today* and *Niche*.

*Q. Will Holy Rosary Academy cease to offer students a Classical and Catholic education if the current Archbishop decides to rescind recognition of HRA as an official Catholic School?*

**A.** No. Our goal in this process has been working to cooperate with the Archdiocese while not sacrificing the Catholic, lay charism of self-governance of Holy Rosary Academy that we have been afforded under Canon Law. The Archbishop's decision to withdraw the official designation of "Catholic school" to Holy Rosary Academy does not affect our accreditation, and enables us to ensure that we continue to provide students with an education that combines the wisdom of the classics with a firm foundation in Catholic faith and morals. If we had consented to let the Archdiocese make unilateral curriculum decisions for HRA, we could not have maintained this commitment to our families.

*Q. Thank you for working to cooperate with the Archdiocese while not sacrificing the Catholic, lay charism of self-governance of Holy Rosary Academy. How much reflection time was given to the decision to remain an Independent Catholic School?*

A. Weeks of fervent prayer and a host of conversations and consultations over the past seven months have been dedicated to this process of discernment. Since last March, Father Patrick Travers has regularly asserted that Holy Rosary Academy must come under the administrative direction of the Archdiocese. The major events and timeline are as follows:

1. March 24, 2021, meeting with Father Patrick Travers, Vicar General of the Archdiocese, who demands to have control of HRA's self-governance, pursuant to his understanding of canon law. Board Members' concerns over self-governance were dismissed by Father Travers, on his assertion that Board Members are not canonists like himself.
2. April 20, 2021, Archbishop Bellisario sends a letter to HRA, demanding control over HRA's self-governance and accusing HRA of incomplete Safe Environment audit demands.
3. April - June 2021, HRA consults with canonists, all of whom affirm that a local ordinary's jurisdiction does not extend to health, hygiene, staffing, and curriculum in a lay-run, self-governing association.
4. June 30, 2021: HRA sends Archbishop Bellisario a letter, with opinions from canonists and requesting a meeting with his Excellency.
5. After several actions by the HRA Board and staff that moved us towards the Archbishop's position, on July 1st, we were granted the temporary right to continue the public use of the term 'Catholic' in our presentations with the proviso that we agree to the remainder of the terms.
6. July 16, 2021: Archbishop Bellisario demands compliance with Safe Environment directives before "scheduling a meeting concerning" self-governance issues; HRA readily does so.
7. August 6, 2021, HRA schedules a meeting with the Archbishop for August 16, 2021. HRA tells Kim Bakic, Executive Assistant to the Archbishop, that it will have a canonist present.
8. August 15, 2021, HRA's canonist flies to Anchorage.

9. August 16, 2021, Father Travers emails HRA six hours before the meeting, refusing to allow our canonist to be present, but making it clear that he, Father Travers, will be present. HRA responds, stating that 1) the canonist is here; 2) the request for a canonist was timely (10 days prior); 3) Father Travers is a canonist; 4) all the issues of Archbishop Bellisario's authority stem from Father Travers' interpretation of canon law. Father Travers emails three hours before the meeting, stating now that he will not be present at it. HRA Board meets with Archbishop Bellisario for 90 minutes, and our canonist is forced to wait outside. Archbishop Bellisario makes it clear that he believes he can and should control health, hygiene, curriculum, and hiring at Holy Rosary Academy.

10. September 20, 2021, HRA sends letter to Archbishop Bellisario, thanking him for meeting and offering him a memorandum of understanding that clearly defines, per canon law, the scope of Archbishop Bellisario's authority, and HRA's willingness – historically and in the future – to cooperate within the scope of the applicable canons.

11. October 4, 2021, Archbishop Bellisario sends a letter, demanding compliance with his April 20, 2021 letter or he will revoke the name "Catholic," remove the Holy Eucharist, and forbid the celebration of the Sacraments on campus for any non-emergency circumstance if we had not returned the signed letter by Oct. 25th.

*Q. What can I do to help ensure that Holy Rosary Academy is treated with justice and fairness?*

**A.** Tell your story about the ways that your faith has been strengthened through your association with HRA. Join us in praying regularly: "Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary, suffer the little children of Holy Rosary Academy to continue to come unto you, and prevent their becoming sacramental orphans."