

Our Lady 
of the Elms

**BOLDLY GROWING:
Strategic Road Map to 2023**

Strategic Plan FY 2019-2022

INTRODUCTION & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1923 a small band of the Dominican Sisters from Caldwell, N.J., soon to be known as the Sisters of St. Dominic of Akron, purchased Elm Court, the Arthur Marks estate on West Market Street in Akron, OH. The estate home was rededicated as our Lady of the Elms convent on October 14, 1923 and opened as a day school for students in Grades one through 12. As Dominican women committed “to praise, to bless, and to preach the truth of the Gospel,” they saw the active ministry of education as the best way of carrying out their dedication.

The Sisters of St. Dominic of Akron, a congregation of strong and visionary women, created, nurtured, and sustained what we know today as Our Lady of the Elms School – educating girls through Grade 12 and boys in Pre-School through Kindergarten. In 1999 the school was separately incorporated and became known as a sponsored or founded ministry of the Sisters of St. Dominic of Akron.

On Easter Sunday, April 12, 2009, the Dominican Sisters of Peace were established after several years of planning and preparation to form a new congregation. The seven congregations who formed the Dominican Sisters of Peace were: the Dominican Sisters of St. Catharine, KY; Sisters of St. Dominic of Akron, OH; Dominican Sisters of St. Mary of the Springs, Columbus, OH; Dominican Sisters of Great Bend, KS; Dominican Sisters of Oxford, MI; Dominican Sisters of St. Mary’s, New Orleans and the Eucharistic Missionaries of St. Dominic, New Orleans, LA. In 2012, the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine de’ Ricci merged with the Dominican Sisters of Peace.

As the only all-girls school, Kindergarten-Grade 12, in the Akron area, Our Lady of the Elms School serves as a leading advocate for girls’ education. As reported in a national study by the National Coalition of Girls’ Schools (*Steeped in Learning: The Student Experience at All-Girls Schools*), all-girls schools instill confidence, foster academic excellence, enhance aspirations, and encourage engagement in the classroom and extracurricular activities. *Niche.com* ratings rank Our Lady of the Elms School as the strongest Catholic school in Summit County.

The curriculum, teaching, and learning strategies are designed to capitalize on the strengths of girls, allowing them to find the courage to be themselves, explore new ideas, discover new interests, and grow as young women. Woven into the experience of every Elms girl is *Veritas*, the pursuit of truth and justice built on the four pillars of Dominican Charism—study, preaching, community, and prayer. For almost 100 years at Our Lady of the Elms School, students have been held to the highest expectations and have been encouraged to speak confidently, lead eagerly, and live comfortably in their own skin. Students come to see themselves as they are—impressive young women, ready for the world.

In 2016, with new executive leadership in place and a board willing to engage, several factors contributed to the shared perception that a multi-year strategic plan needed to be developed to guide the school in the years ahead. Primarily, there was strong feeling that school leaders (both board and staff) needed to [a] create a much clearer and shared understanding of the future direction for the school, [b] develop goals which could be measured for success, and [c] engage

in a process that would further strengthen the working relationships between leadership and the school’s multiple stakeholders.

Boldly Growing provides a strategic road map to guide Our Lady of the Elms School for the fiscal years 2019 through 2022. In addition to refinement of the mission statement, along with newly created vision and core values statements, the plan encompasses eight strategic initiatives that will be pursued over the next four years.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The strategic planning process was carried out during 2016 – 2017. Following the selection of Deborah Farquhar Jones as the president of Our Lady of the Elms School, a Strategic Planning Task Force was established in the Fall, 2016. This task force included the following members:

- John Stoner, Chair
- John Anderson
- Christine Curry
- Cathy DuBois
- Diane Evans
- Deborah Farquhar Jones

During 2016 – 2017 the Strategic Planning Task Force engaged key stakeholders of Our Lady of the Elms School through a series of focus groups to gain information regarding [a] the school’s perceived strengths and weaknesses, [b] issues that needed to be considered when planning for the future of the school, [c] major external trends likely to impact the school over the next several years, and [d] the strategic initiatives the school should pursue over the next four years.

Some 252 key stakeholders participated in eight focus groups as indicated below:

- Parents [3 meetings with 20 parents at each meeting]..... 60
- Students [2 meetings with 50 students at each meeting] 100
- Alumnae [1 meeting of 25 alumnae]..... 25
- Faculty/Staff [1 meeting with 50 faculty/staff]..... 50
- Board [1 meeting with 17 board members]..... 17

During this period of time, the Strategic Planning Task Force convened for 24 planning sessions. In Summer, 2017 John Stoner was selected as Chair of Our Lady of the Elms School’s Board of Trustees. The Strategic Planning Task Force was reconstituted as the Strategic Planning Committee, a standing board committee with the following membership:

- John Anderson, Chair
- Christine Curry
- Cathy DuBois
- Deborah Farquhar Jones
- Mary Padula
- John Stoner

In the Fall, 2017 the Board of Trustees affirmed and approved the strategic initiatives that should be pursued. Given these strategic initiatives, the Strategic Planning Committee revisited the proposed revisions of Our Lady of the Elms School’s mission statement and the newly developed vision and core values statements. Final board approval of these statements occurred on February 12, 2018.

MISSION, VISION & CORE VALUES

Mission

Our Lady of the Elms, a private Catholic school rooted in the Dominican tradition, educates girls and young women to live their lives boldly with purpose, confidence, kindness, resilience, and faith.

Vision

Elms girls become confident leaders, accomplished professionals and advocates for justice and the common good. Prepared to succeed in life, they possess a spiritual, educational, global, and experiential foundation shaped at the Elms.

Core Values

Leadership

By this we mean:

- We provide opportunities for girls and young women to accept responsibility and accountability for planning and implementing group and organizational activities
- We encourage all members of the Elms community to share peaceful and prayerful leadership skills that lift up rather than tear down to move forward.
- We acknowledge that all girls and young women can be leaders whether quiet or loud, seen or unseen.

Respect

By this we mean:

- We value, honor, and accept others’ heritage and culture.
- We recognize and uphold the dignity of each person in a spirit of love and civility.
- We believe in and value the human potential of all people.

Creativity

By this we mean:

- We foster an environment where girls and young women can express their unique perspectives.
- We encourage girls and young women to experiment—in a safe environment—with what they didn’t think possible.
- We believe in a community of shared, creative energy.

Compassion

By this we mean:

- We form girls and young women who are deeply empathetic and who accept diversity with love and forgiveness.
- We pay attention to and respect the personal needs of others.
- We do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

Humility

By this we mean:

- We believe in the quality of being humble.
- We behave in a manner that does not think less of oneself, but rather to think of oneself less.
- We encourage Elms girls and young women to “preach without ego” and help their peers to succeed.

Kindness

By this we mean:

- We embrace a way of thinking that leads to doing thoughtful deeds for others.
- We form girls and young women who are thoughtful, generous, and aware of the dignity of others.
- We treat others’ faults as gently as our own.

Faith

By this we mean:

- We believe that we serve as living examples of Christ’s life and love.
- We believe that faith is reflected when students, staff, and teachers reach out to those in need.
- We demonstrate faith in our choices and commitment to live out responsibilities to self and others.

Joy

By this we mean:

- We embrace joy as one of the fruits resulting from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
- We experience great joy in doing justice.
- We rejoice and celebrate the success of our girls and young women.

With these statements of the mission, vision, and core values as the foundation, the strategic initiatives and strategies in the next section of ***Boldly Growing*** provide the strategic road map moving forward for Our Lady of the Elms School.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES & STRATEGIES

Quality Product/Service

Strategic Initiative 1: Ensure the Elms' academic standards, educational experiences, spirituality, and life skills programs are excellent, exhibit academic freedom, and reflect the evolution of the educational process as articulated through the Dominican charism.

Strategies

- 1.1 Build students' understanding of the four Dominican Pillars (study, prayer, preaching, and community), instilling a culture of respect for self, the community, and the environment.
- 1.2 Inculcate Life Skills and the Building of Resilience—Self-Care/Nutrition; Relationships; Creativity; Purpose: Growth Mindset—in the academic and experiential programs.
- 1.3 Identify and provide specific leadership opportunities for the girls.
- 1.4 Define and establish the Center for Dominican Enrichment of Girls.
- 1.5 Establish a staff development program focused on the best practices in the education of girls, including a focus on building resilience and project based learning.
- 1.6 Develop a parent education program.

Strategic Initiative 2: Create an excellent Middle School (Grades 6-8) by simultaneously focusing upon academic, social, spiritual, and emotional health and providing girls the opportunity to excel at the appropriate academic level across all disciplines.

Strategies

- 2.1 Develop year-long, hands-on experience opportunities to supplement academic rigor.
- 2.2 Employ a Middle School staff solely devoted to age-appropriate learning, grades 6-8.
- 2.3 Provide an optimal blend of extracurricular activities that enhance the overall educational experience.
- 2.4 Prepare girls to advance to the 9th grade with a toolbox enabling an Elms girl to thrive as she prepares for college.

Strategic Initiative 3: Strengthen the co-curricular opportunities for all Elms girls.

Strategies

- 3.1 Offer an enhanced performing and visual arts program that encourages girls to compete locally, nationally, and internationally.
- 3.2 Increase the opportunities for participation and excellence, i.e., elementary school choir, upper school orchestra, and AP classes.
- 3.3 Continue emphasis on Power of the Pen, Academic Challenge, and Speech & Debate.

Strategic Initiative 4: Field an athletic program that is competitive, fun, and sportgirlship-like wherein every varsity athletic team has a JV program and every varsity athletic team has a feeder stream through the Elms' Lower and Middle School programs.

Strategies

- 4.1 Improve the student-athlete experience with the addition of team summer camps, leadership workshops, year-round strength and conditioning activities and an internship program.
- 4.2 Develop Middle School sports teams in line with varsity programs.
- 4.3 Develop relationships with parish school athletic directors to increase Elms' enrollment.
- 4.4 Develop an Elms' athletic fundraising program.
- 4.5 Create a business plan to add swimming/diving as a varsity sport.

Marketing

Strategic Initiative 5: Position Our Lady of the Elms School as the preferred all-girls choice in Northeast Ohio.

Strategies

- 5.1 Develop an effective and transcendent value proposition for the school.
- 5.2 Develop and execute a best in class communications plan that differentiates Our Lady of the Elms School and yields an increasing level of awareness and preference within our determined markets.
- 5.3 Incorporate the Elms' uniquely treasured Dominican heritage as a distinction in promoting the school.
- 5.4 Increase school enrollment to 350 by Fall 2023, including the following:
 - High School – 160
 - Middle School – 60
 - Primary School (K-5) – 90
 - Pre-School-Pre-K – 40

Fundraising/Fund Development

Strategic Initiative 6: Design and implement fundraising activities to diversify and increase philanthropic giving.

Strategies

- 6.1 Assess present development activities and establish the appropriate structure for a development plan aligned with the school's mission, vision, and values.
- 6.2 Conduct a needs assessment to prioritize development/fundraising activities.
- 6.3 Assess the viability and construct statements for land and school purchase, scholarships, and professional development.
- 6.4 Establish a framework for setting campaign goals.
- 6.5 Conduct prospective donor research.
- 6.6 Evaluate the need for and desirability of a Foundation.

Property & Facilities

Strategic Initiative 7: Pursue the optimal property and facilities arrangements for the Elms' future.

Strategies

- 7.1 Renew the Lease Agreement for the school and property.
- 7.2 Develop a plan to attain ownership of the school and other property, if and when amenable, currently owned by the Dominican Sisters of Peace.
- 7.3 Foster a pact with Crown Point to utilize this resource for educational programs.
- 7.4 Develop a plan to attain ownership of the athletic complex at Crown Point.

Governance

Strategic Initiative 8: Strengthen Board governance, composition, diversity, and performance.

Strategies

- 8.1 Evaluate, and modify as appropriate, the school's Articles of Incorporation and Code of Regulations.
- 8.2 Reconfigure as appropriate the committee structure of the Board.
- 8.3 Pursue having Our Lady of the Elms alumnae constitute 1/3 of the Board's membership.
- 8.4 Develop a skills set matrix to achieve a professional balance of backgrounds, taking into account time, talent, and treasure.
- 8.5 Ensure diversity of the Board members is reflective of the student population.
- 8.6 Develop and institute Board education and evaluation programs.

CONCLUSION

Our Lady of the Elms School has a long history of making a difference in the lives of those girls and women it serves. The next several years hold much promise for continuing this history of matching passion with purpose. This strategic plan will help the school focus its human and financial resources to build on the capacities developed since its inception. The conversion of these strategies into tactical steps will breathe dynamic, new energy into the plan. Further, implementation will provide the framework through which the board and staff can forge even stronger working relationships in pursuit of the school's mission and vision.

To successfully carry out this strategic plan, there must be a spirit of shared accountability. In the continually changing environment in which Our Lady of the Elms School operates, board and staff leadership must share the responsibility for implementing, monitoring, and modifying the plan as circumstances dictate. To be most helpful, the plan should be revisited and modified annually to reflect changes that will occur in the school's internal and external environments. While the challenges facing the organization will be significant, opportunities for growth exist. ***Boldly Growing*** provides the direction and foundation for Our Lady of the Elms School to take full advantage of these opportunities as they arise. In so doing, the organization will be—and be recognized as—a leader in preparing girls and women for current and future leadership roles.

By consistently keeping ***Boldly Growing*** in front of the board, staff, parents, students, and alumnae and modifying it annually to reflect achievements and environmental changes, the plan will continue to be relevant, exciting, and responsive to the needs of and opportunities to serve the school's girls, women, and the larger community.

Our Lady of the Elms School extends appreciation to
Ann Amer Brennan '51
for her generosity in funding this report.

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Unanimously Endorsed by
Our Lady of the Elms School
Board of Trustees
January 28, 2019