ROOTED FORWARD
The Strategic Plan for St. Benedict’s Prep
FY2023 – FY2025
Dear Community,

Adaptation to change is an enduring attribute of St. Benedict’s Prep and Newark Abbey. Through the decades, we have responded to internal and external changes with agility and resilience. As a result, The Hive has developed a national reputation for its distinctive educational model tending to the spiritual, educational and emotional needs of predominantly urban kids.

In the spirit of the Benedictine monks, we are challenged to move ever forward. Looking to the future, we are proud to present Rooted Forward: The Strategic Plan for St. Benedict’s Prep. This foundational strategy identifies five priorities – Ministry, Community, Ecosystem, Endowment and Experience – to respond with coherence and structure to the School’s recent rapid growth, shifting demographics and evolving community needs.

Our vision is to strengthen St. Benedict’s as a world-class 21st Century prep school with firm roots in our community. As the plan unfolds, we will be calling on you to help shape our future. Together, we will recommit our ministry in all that we do to enrich minds, build a sense of belonging and tend to the hearts of those entrusted to our care.

Ever grateful,

Rt. Rev. Augustine J. Curley, O.S.B. ’74
Abbot

Edwin D. Leahy, O.S.B. ’63
Headmaster

Robert. J. DiQuollo ’65
Chairman, Board of Trustees
Introduction

“I hate to lose to the street.”

Fr. Ed’s comment to his mother many years ago resonates with us today. Seven words that express the history, the reality, the Benedict’s dialectic — love, virtue and scholarship vs. the street. Reflecting on St. Benedict’s situation back in 1972, Fr. Albert wrote in his journal that, “The street was teaching our students that there’s nothing more, and that the best they could do is to pursue grimly and recklessly those same worn-out substitutes for meaning that have deluded people for ages: possessions, power, and prestige.” Turning hearts, enriching minds, building a sense of belonging — that is our core competency, that is our answer to the street for families today.

Very few institutions beat the street like St. Benedict’s.

Beating the street on the path to the Divine has been the primary focus of St. Benedict’s for over 50 years. Over those decades change has been the constant and therefore the Benedictine vow of stability and their virtue of adaptability have proven to be steadfast anchors in shifting tides. St. Benedict’s Preparatory School and Newark Abbey have faced down many changes as interdependent Christian champions in the Newark arena. The Second Vatican Council, shifting of abbatial titles, changing demographics and the Newark unrest of 1967 are just some of the well-known challenges to the stability of the Abbey and the School over the years. However, the Abbey’s redesignation in 1968 and the School’s resurrection in 1973 postured St. Benedict’s for an emerging period of community reconciliation, national recognition and rapid growth.

Rooted Forward: The Strategic Plan for St. Benedict’s Prep is a foundational strategy. It has been written in response to internal and external changes that have required rapid reaction and adaptation over many years. Adaptation to change is an enduring attribute of Newark Abbey and St. Benedict’s Preparatory School; it is a quality we embrace. We also recognize that coherence, structure and process must follow if our beloved school is to endure and deliver the kind of student experience we intend.

This strategy lays out five Strategic Priorities: Ministry, Community, Ecosystem, Endowment, and Experience; broad goals for each priority and Lines of Effort for which Action Plans will be developed and executed to implement the strategy and manifest our Vision. If considered in terms of the Gospel story, this strategy might best represent John the Baptist, announcing and describing the nature of what is to come and that the fulfillment promised will follow in subsequent Action Plans.

Rooted Forward illuminates the need to recommit to our ministry in all that we do. It recognizes the critical importance of our alumni, our neighbors, our partners — our community — and identifies where investments might best be made. It points to the need for a definable and recognizable organizational structure that meets the needs of a world-class, 21st Century prep school and it energizes the development of a succession plan for the Head of School and key faculty. The strategy lays out infrastructure needs and importantly, prioritizes the retention, care and professional development of our faculty, coaches and staff. The strategy includes initial vectors for growing the endowment and setting St. Benedict’s on a solid foundation for the future. There will be key tasks for student leaders and new ideas for innovating within our curriculum, what we might look to next, and many other things besides. The perfect complement to the early “start-up” years, this is a plan of coherence, structure and resilience for the future.

Stability and adaptability — being rooted yet progressing — will endure as the touchstones of St. Benedict’s success in tending to the needs of the community it has built and the one it will grow into. In the end, this strategy is a testament to St. Benedict’s ability to meet new challenges and invest in new opportunities — it is, simply, our next clever move for beating the street.

The Rooted Forward Strategy Team
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This strategy effort was undertaken in October 2021 to identify areas of the St. Benedict’s “ecosystem” that need attention, areas that can be leveraged and areas that offer opportunities for growth.

Rooted Forward: The Strategic Plan for St. Benedict’s Prep is based on internal assessments; faculty, board, and alumni input; an institutional climate survey; and research performed by the Joseph C. Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies at Rutgers University. The Cornwall Center’s research provided information and insight on population projections over the next 10 years for Newark and its surrounding communities — Essex County, Newark, East Orange, Union County, Hillside, and Elizabeth — the communities from which most St. Benedict’s students matriculate. The Key findings of the Rutgers research follows below.

Key findings – Rutgers University Cornwall Center

- Consistent with national trends, the Latinx child population is projected to increase significantly in most major areas from which SBP draws enrollment, even when overall population decreases are projected.
- The Black child population is projected to remain substantial, though decreases are expected.
- SBP is estimated to have a share of the school age population in Newark which is comparable to 2019 levels but shrinking.
- Among several vulnerability areas in Newark, educational attainment, unemployment, and limited English fluency (in some areas) stand out as key target issues.

This project also encouraged a reflection and return to first principles to revisit the School’s purpose, vision and mission. The product of that reflection is manifest in our statements of purpose, vision and mission that follow.

**Purpose**

To provide a path to the Divine, by announcing the Gospel through the care, education and preparation of the young to succeed as leaders in faith, family and society.

**Vision**

A fully endowed Catholic school in the City of Newark that functions with a committed and talented faculty, within a safe neighborhood and a supportive community, and adheres to the Rule of Benedict to fully meet the 21st Century needs and aspirations of a diverse, multi-racial population of children, young men and women and adults.

**Mission**

Guided by the Gospel and in service to Newark and its surrounding communities, St. Benedict’s Prep builds community, tends to the heart, educates the mind and develops leaders.

Rooted Forward: The Strategic Plan for St. Benedict’s Prep outlines five priorities with a designated goal for each. These priorities will guide our future investment of time, effort and resources. They are intentionally, broadly descriptive in nature but include Lines of Effort, subject areas within each strategic priority to focus our follow-up detailed work.

### Strategic Priorities

| Ministry | Announcing the Gospel Through Prayer and Work |
| Community | Deepening and Expanding Our Relationships and Connections |
| Ecosystem | Ensuring Structural and Operational Effectiveness |
| Endowment | Preserving Legacy Through Endowment Growth |
| Experience | Advancing Excellence in Teaching and Student Outcomes |

For each Strategic Priority, the Strategic Planning Committee will join with the Abbey and the SBP faculty, coaches and staff to designate Project Leads and Volunteer Teams for each Strategic Priority. These teams will develop detailed plans of action to execute each Line of Effort, define Key Performance Indicators and synchronize implementation.
Strategic Priority #1

MINISTRY

Announcing the Gospel Through Prayer and Work

GOAL: Conduct our ministry effectively in every aspect, action and activity.

“Things have indeed changed.” As Abbot Martin wrote over 60 years ago, we, Newark Abbey and St. Benedict’s Prep, again find ourselves in the midst of change, opportunity and transformation. Emerging from the constraints and the limitations of the pandemic, preparing to thrive from the clarity and structure of the new fiduciary board and welcoming young women into the School, we are excited and inspired about the possibilities that lie before us. St. Benedict’s Preparatory School remains the central focus and primary catalyst of our ministry.

During our research for this strategy, we were reminded that Newark Abbey is the bedrock and wellspring of our ministry and that we exercise our ministry daily and in many different forms, through the common work of St. Benedict’s Prep and through engagement in our surrounding neighborhood and beyond. The Rule of St. Benedict, the Benedictine vow of stability and the virtue of adaptability will continue to advantage our efforts to deepen our commitment to a community reemergent. We look forward to evolving our interdependent ministry in three important ways.

LINES OF EFFORT:

1.1 Monastic Involvement
We look forward to involving the Monastic brotherhood more fully in St. Benedict’s educational, athletic and experiential offerings in ways that increase the presence and interactions of monks with students. We intend to increase the use of St Mary’s Church and broaden, importantly, the familiarity and transparency with which our students view monastic life, ministry and brotherhood.

1.2 Cross-Functional Integration
It is essential to integrate the School’s Christian character and story across our academic, athletic and experiential offerings. As our educational experiences have grown and multiplied, we need to ensure that our ministry keeps pace. We hope to find new innovative ways to announce the Gospel more fully in every functional area of our ministry, within St. Benedict’s Prep and beyond.

1.3 Neighborhood Engagement
We intend to engage more broadly within our surrounding neighborhoods through existing means and programs and through other aspects of neighborhood life that serve as opportunities to minister to the heart, mind, body and human dignity of our fellow citizens.
Strategic Priority #2

COMMUNITY

Deepening and Expanding Our Relationships and Connections

**GOAL:** Enrich, strengthen and multiply our relationships and our ministry within our existing community and increase the numbers and the diversity of our partners, supporters and friends.

“Community is the most important thing we do.” Consistent with the Benedictine commitment to place, community is revered as both the intended outcome and as the precursor to a successful ministry. St. Benedict’s Prep not only thrives on the existence of its community, but actively generates and sustains that community in many ways. A community emerges when people find common meaning and common purpose in their proximity and in their interactions. Community exists only if valued relationships and connections exist — past, present and hoped for — between people and between people and places. However, relationships and communities will atrophy and dissipate if not attended to. Like gardens, the community relationships we hold dear must be husbanded, continuously engaged, invested in and understood.

Community is the bulwark of our ministry and our mission. It is the alternative to the street, it is the ‘campfire’ to which we invite the willing, the respite to which we recruit the embattled. Community provides the support, coherence and a safe foundation for living and growing. Community is sustained from the inside out. Knowing ourselves, and fostering an internal atmosphere of safety, support and opportunity is primary as we continually cultivate relationships outward. It remains our commission, to make the St. Benedict’s community stronger, more resilient, more appealing and more competitive than the street. Therefore, we have committed to strengthening our community in the four ways outlined here.

**LINES OF EFFORT:**

2.1 **Community Awareness**

Cultivating community starts with understanding ourselves. Internally, we will explore options for remaining more aware of internal and external changes and trends that affect the wellness and readiness of our faculty, coaches and staff and, likewise, our student population. Externally, we will continue monitoring the community characteristics that our Rutgers/Cornwall Center team found valuable for our planning.

2.2 **Board Diversity and Representation**

As we move forward, we continue to adapt to the changes we have experienced and accommodate those we have welcomed over the past few years. Keeping pace with change, it is only appropriate that as we select new members of our new fiduciary Board of Trustees that we do so mindful of representing our student population. Women, people of color and alumni who graduated in the 90s and 2000s are an opportunity for board diversity. As our student community changes and as the Newark-area “market” for students continues to see a rise in female and Latino students, a board that is more reflective of today’s students will keep St. Benedict’s leadership on pace.

2.3 **Civic Relationships**

St. Benedict’s has long held strong supportive relationships with Newark’s City government. Therefore, we intend to explore the value of deepening those relationships and multiplying our contacts with City Hall, the Newark police department and with Newark social services. In addition, we intend to assess the value of pursuing similar relationships with surrounding city governments, especially those in which our students live or are contiguous to our area of interest. Strong, healthy relationships with civic government will keep us more aware, allow us to shape development activities and afford us a variety of opportunities to support our mission. Civic engagement is simply good for business and we will build upon the great work done so far.

2.4 **International and Domestic Partners and Exchanges**

St. Benedict’s enjoys many partnerships in the United States and overseas. These relationships vary across a long list of religious, educational, athletic, civic and commercial institutions. These partnerships afford us academic and athletic opportunities, a variety of funding sources and support and guidance that serves us well year after year. Therefore, we will develop an action plan for assessing and expanding the number and type of institutional partners that might contribute to the well-being, development and aspirations of our faculty, coaches and staff, our endowment and our student experience.
Strategic Priority #3

ECOSYSTEM

Ensuring Structural and Operational Effectiveness

**GOAL:** Gather, emplace and establish the right people, structures and processes that allow St. Benedict’s to deliver its world-class student experience.

As a living and breathing organism, St. Benedict’s has emerged from the time of the pandemic as an even more complex and diverse ecosystem of people, places and things. Our young women, our experiential endeavors (the Water Adversity Challenge, the WILD expedition and Building Bridges program), the establishment of our corporate entity and fiduciary board and our continually evolving exchanges with domestic and international partners have all added wonderful new facets and structures to our student experience. It is all a blessing and a challenge that we have worked for and welcomed.

As St. Benedict’s embarks on its 155th year, special attention must be paid to several operational imperatives. The *inside-game* is changing. The growth and makeup of our student population over the past several decades, aging infrastructure and our continuous pursuit and retention of talent encourages — demands — our continued innovation and investment. In-depth internal assessments identified that the following five areas require attention to ensure the Benedict’s experience is delivered effectively and efficiently.

### LINES OF EFFORT:

**3.1 Faculty Retention & Recruitment**

Outlined further in Strategic Priority #5, *Advancing Excellence in Teaching and Student Outcomes,* it is evident that SBP must redouble its efforts to retain and recruit faculty, coaches and staff, all of whom are asked to take on more responsibility at The Hive than they would elsewhere. With Newark and other public schools now offering starting salaries in the $60,000s or more, an analysis and competitive compensation scheme must be developed. There is no question, the mission of St. Benedict’s Prep is the primary motivation for new teachers to join our Benedict’s family. However, it would be naive to think that salary and benefits do not influence SBP’s ability to retain and attract talented and devoted faculty. In addition, a recruitment campaign is needed to attract more alumni to teaching positions. Alumni are frequently among the School’s best instructors.

**3.2 Organizational structure**

With 50 years of leadership under his belt, Fr. Edwin is committed to defining and shepherding a new organizational structure that will ensure St. Benedict’s Prep will continue its mission long after his tenure concludes. In concert with the Board, senior administration and other stakeholders, new structures will be devised, both with and without Fr. Edwin at the helm. The growing demand for philanthropic support requires that the head of school devote a significant amount of time to this task.

**3.3 Facilities Master Plan**

With enrollment soon to surpass 1,000 students, addressing deferred maintenance, identifying new classroom or athletics space and exploring the possibility of property acquisition must be cogently outlined in a facilities master plan. The action plan must determine our optimal number for our student population (male-female). It is a crucial planning factor for determining requirements for classroom space, locker rooms, rehabbing Shanley Gym, better utilization of Munsee, parking, security infrastructure, and storage, among other considerations.

**3.4 Connecting with the Monastic Community**

Safeguarding our Benedictine character and atmosphere is essential to accomplishing the St. Benedict’s mission. Though Newark Abbey and SBP are now separate legal entities, each is positively codependent on the other. A deliberate plan is required to work more closely with the monks of Newark Abbey and its third abbot, Abbot Augustine Curley, O.S.B. ’74, in and out of the classroom, on the court and on the pitch.

**3.5 Security and Maintenance Infrastructure**

A growing student population and the emergence of a second Newark location to house the Elementary Division necessitates a thorough review of security and maintenance requirements. Personnel, cameras, vehicles, access control and our crisis response plan must be closely examined and revised.
Strategic Priority #4

ENDOWMENT
Preserving Legacy Through Endowment Growth

GOAL: Grow St. Benedict’s endowment to $100 million to secure the School’s financial future and ensure the Benedict’s experience remains viable and available to all who seek it.

A well-managed endowment is a prime indicator of a school’s financial health. Consisting of funds invested to provide annual returns, St. Benedict’s endowment generates income for scholarships, supports our exceptional faculty, and ensures the School’s unique educational experience will thrive for generations to come. Giving to the endowment enhances the School’s financial position and creates a legacy that impacts lives year after year.

Presently situated at approximately $36 million (August 2022), St. Benedict’s aims to grow its portfolio to $100 million over a five-to-10-year period. Annual returns will be primarily allocated to the School’s operating budget. (The impact will be enormous.)

Today, more than 60% of the School’s budget must be raised through philanthropy each year to bridge the gap between total expenses and tuition revenue. A larger endowment will yield larger annual investment returns, which will significantly reduce this required fundraising lift. Of course, there will be no pumping the brakes on fundraising. Instead, the Advancement Office will focus more energy on further growing the endowment and on the Annual Fund, capital projects and special initiatives.

Bolstering the St. Benedict’s Prep endowment will be a signal to families that the School invests mightily in its students. It will be a sign to faculty, coaches and staff that Benedict’s invests in its people and in what they need to be successful and fulfilled. And it will be an indicator to alumni, donors and the world that St. Benedict’s is a community like no other, worthy of their investment.

LINES OF EFFORT:

4.1 Endowed Giving Marketing Campaign
Targeted at high-net-worth individuals, but open to donors of any capacity, an endowed giving-specific initiative must be marketed to inspire transformational gifts. The campaign will educate constituents about why an increased endowment is critical for St. Benedict’s and messaging will be delivered primarily through personal discussions, though direct marketing and digital communication will be included, as well. Named endowed giving opportunities (programs, chairs, capital, etc.) will also be solidified and communicated.

4.2 Donor Identification and Recruitment
New and existing donors with the capacity and inclination to invest in endowment growth will be identified. Donor capacity screening tools along with personal referrals from Board members and other key stakeholders will be essential to this vital exercise. The ability to lead us to potentially significant donors will be emphasized as new Trustee candidates are vetted.

4.3 Advancement Office Staffing Review
Tripling the investment portfolio will require both positive market gains and significant philanthropic giving. Additional fundraising staff may be needed to identify, cultivate and solicit donors capable of transformational investments. A staffing review will be required to ascertain what, if any, staffing changes are required.

4.4 Endowment Portfolio Management Review
Prudent fiscal management necessitates a review of endowment portfolio managers every three to five years to ensure investment growth is maximized. In concert with the Investment Committee of the Board, the Office of Business will issue a request for proposal to potential endowment managers (including our current managers), and select the appropriate choice by the close FY24.
Strategic Priority #5:

EXPERIENCE

Advancing Excellence in Teaching and Student Outcomes

GOAL: Continue to deliver the experience that has made St. Benedict’s Prep a national model for urban education and innovation.

The goals of a St. Benedict’s Prep education extend well beyond the intellectual, (which can be achieved in the traditional classroom). Crucial areas like moral and spiritual growth, leadership and the development of important character traits such as self-confidence, self-esteem, self-reliance and perseverance in the face of adversity are central aspects of a St. Benedict’s education. Real life experiences that challenge students to lead and take risks, in the face of difficult challenges are what differentiates Benedict’s from any other school.

The expectations placed upon students, faculty, coaches and staff at The Hive are what make St. Benedict’s Prep the one-of-a-kind place that it is. The standards established in the classroom and beyond set Benedict’s apart. Continuing to deliver on our commitment to the community requires a deep assessment of several mission-critical areas.

LINES OF EFFORT:

5.1 Faculty, Coach and Staff Care and Development

Our faculty, coaches and staff remain the backbone of the SBP experience. The dynamics of social media, the centrifugal forces on families and the post-COVID mental health crisis have placed unprecedented demands on our educators. Therefore, we intend to create an action plan for listening to our faculty, our coaches and our staff, engaging their concerns for themselves and each other and designing an innovative care and professional development approach to address their challenges and aspirations. This faculty, coach and staff engagement program will be designed in close collaboration with them to create the world-class professional experience they deserve.

5.2 Academic Differentiation

Building community, developing leaders and tending to students’ hearts remain the most essential aspects of a St. Benedict’s education. We also benefit from the early integration of experiential learning that continues with many new and exciting programs. Blended with the academic component of our mission, we are blessed with a gifted faculty, coaches and staff, many of whom are alumni who bring their heart and experience to the classroom. Are there ways to enhance our curriculum? What would differentiate Benedict’s classroom experience from that of our peers? Might specialized programs in leadership, financial literacy, or other subjects reinforce our already unique program? An evaluation of internal competencies and market demands should be conducted to answer these questions.

5.3 Faculty Recommitment to School Life

Reconstituting our community — post-pandemic — must begin with our faculty. Adults must recommit themselves to being present for students both during and after school. This includes attendance at Convos, participation in Group, or coaching or moderating an activity. Successful student outcomes are most often tied to adult involvement outside the classroom. Faculty recruitment and retention efforts must prioritize candidates willing to play this essential role.

5.4 Student Recommitment to Community Standards

There are two ways to do something at Benedict’s: the right way, or again. This ethos must be reinforced to students as we continue to climb our way back from the effects of COVID-19. A plan — developed by students with adult input — must be crafted to address issues such as behavior, appropriate interaction between students of the opposite sex, attendance, activity accountability and dress code, among others.

5.5 Leahy House

For more than two decades, Leahy House has been home to hundreds of students who have needed a more stable residence or who lived far from St. Benedict’s Prep. While it has no doubt had a positive impact on most residents, Leahy House is also an exceedingly expensive and, at times, inefficient operation. An evaluation is needed to ascertain how it may best be utilized to serve our students most efficiently.
Conclusion

“We are here. We are nowhere else. We are aware of a real need around us for schools that treat kids as human.”

Fr. Albert’s statement of the purpose behind a “possible school,” back in November 1972, expressed beautifully the Benedictine vow of stability and a preparedness to adapt to meet the needs of a changing world. Now 50 years later, these needs remain and — thankfully — St. Benedict’s Prep remains here to meet them. Therefore, it is again time to consider a “possible school,” a transformation of St. Benedict’s Prep to meet the current challenge of growth and change. Rooted Forward: The Strategic Plan for St. Benedict’s Prep is designed to do just that.

We will work through these 21 Lines of Effort in detail and with specificity and ownership, placing a priority on our care for our faculty, coaches and staff as they work to create the student experience that is our ministry. We will expand our community, mindful of the need to garden our old and new relationships with attention, investment and love. A new organizational structure will provide the clarity, coherence and efficiency to vastly improve our capacity to function successfully across a distributed urban campus and across the eventual threshold of succession. New campus infrastructure will not only undergird this transformation but facilitate an even richer teacher-coach-student experience. Finally, our endowment goal will place St. Benedict’s on solid ground for the 21st Century and beyond.

We are excited. Our strategy work has not only served as a framework for moving forward but a process for honest self-reflection. That self-reflection, accompanied by our research and our brainstorming illuminated our way forward. With an inside-out approach, we are confident that St. Benedict’s will remain stable, adaptive and rooted forward into the future.

Acknowledgments

Rooted Forward: The Strategic Plan for St. Benedict’s Prep was shaped by numerous members of the St. Benedict’s Prep community. Special thanks to Robert “Gus” Gusentine, US Navy (Ret.) for spearheading the project and to Abbot Augustine Curley, O.S.B. ’74, Jim Duffy H’16 and Michael Fazio for serving on the Committee. The Committee is grateful to Fr. Edwin Leahy, O.S.B. ’63 for his assistance throughout the effort and to the Board of Trustees for its involvement and encouragement, in particular, Bob DiQuollo ’65 and Ray Caprio ’63. Numerous faculty members, staff, students and parents participated in discussions, focus groups, surveys and brainstorming sessions. The Committee is beyond grateful for their participation. Special thanks, as well, to Vandeen Campbell, Charity Anderson and the entire team at the Joseph C. Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies at Rutgers University for their demographic data research and analysis. To read their report, go to sbp.org/rootedforward.

“Of all the organizations we fund, St. Benedict’s is the only one that cannot be replaced.”

Curtland E. Fields
President & CEO, Turrell Fund