

# Letter to Families and Staff at the Beginning of the School Year

Dear Parents, Guardians, Teachers, and Staff of Immaculate Heart of Mary and St. Gabriel's Schools,

I hope this letter finds you well. I am Fr. Gregory Merkley, pastor at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Stoney Creek, and I wanted to take a moment to reach out to all of you. I've had the joy of being here for just over a year now, and it has been a wonderful experience getting to know many of you within our vibrant community. I feel privileged to follow Fr. Bill Trusz, the previous pastor, and to serve alongside so many dedicated people who make our parish a place of welcome and growth.



**Fr. Greg Merkley, Pastor**

First, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the teachers and staff at both schools. Your dedication to Catholic education and to the families whose children you serve is very inspiring. You are making an incredible difference in the lives of our young people, helping them to grow not only in knowledge but also in faith and character. Thank you for all you do, often behind the scenes and with great sacrifice, to nurture their hearts, minds, and souls.

As many of you know, in my youth, I lived practically as an atheist, rather far from God. But God, in His love and mercy, drew me back to Himself. As I learned more, I realized that God loved me and had a beautiful plan for my life. I truly believe that He loves each of you, and your students, and has wonderful plans for all of you. Catholic education is a unique opportunity to help our young people thrive in mind, body, and soul, equipping them to make the world a better place by sharing their God-given talents with others. I deeply enjoy my visits to both of our schools, where I hope to draw everyone closer to God and His love for them. Some of the students may have mentioned that I also enjoy rapping, and it's always a joy for everyone when I'm asked to share a rap!

If any of you ever wish to meet with me or chat over the phone, please feel very welcome to reach out. Whether you have questions about the Church, the Bible, or our parish, I am always here to talk about anything that is on your mind. Please don't hesitate to contact me if there is anything I can do for you.

I also want to invite you to some upcoming events at the parish. This Friday night, September 13th, we will be hosting an "Ask Father" night at 7 PM in the parish hall. It's an informal gathering where anyone can come and ask questions—about the Bible, the Church, or anything else you might be curious about. Our past gatherings have been very fun and extremely interesting. One can ask questions either by raising their hand or putting it in a box.

We have also recently continued to improve our digital outreach through social media. If you haven't already, I encourage you to follow us on Instagram or Facebook.

On October 6th, at the 11 AM Sunday Mass, our Bishop Douglas Crosby will be coming to install me officially as pastor of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish. He will preside over the ceremony, and following a beautiful celebration of Mass, we will have a reception in our parish hall. You and your families are warmly invited to attend; it might also be a wonderful opportunity to see what is new at our church. It will be a beautiful celebration, and I would love for you to be a part of it to experience this special occasion.

Please know that all of you—parents, guardians, teachers, and staff—are always very welcome here at our church. If you ever want to get more involved or learn more about the Bible, feel free to join us for one of our regular celebrations. Our Mass schedule and more information are available at [www.ihmchurch.ca](http://www.ihmchurch.ca).

Thank you for being such an important part of our community, and please know that you and your families are in my prayers.

May God bless you,

Fr. Gregory Merkley

*Pastor, Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish*