



DIOCESE OF WORCESTER CATHOLIC SCHOOLS OFFICE

49 ELM STREET
WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS 01609

December 18, 2019

Dear parents and families,

I write today with news pertaining to the future of Catholic secondary education here in the Diocese of Worcester.

When I was appointed Superintendent of Catholic Schools by Bishop McManus in 2017, the single most important goal set before me was to ensure the long-term vitality of our Catholic school system as challenged by declining enrollments.

From an historical perspective, the past fifteen years have seen this trend play out both regionally and closer to home – and most notably among our two diocesan high schools in Worcester. St. Peter-Marian Central Catholic Junior/Senior High School has experienced a nearly 66 percent decrease with enrollment falling from 1,043 students in 2004-05 to 358 in 2019-20. The enrollment decline at Holy Name Central Catholic Junior/Senior High School has been less precipitous with a decline from 876 students in 2002-03 to 507 in 2019-20, a decrease of 42 percent over the same period. A further review of student data reveals that the slope of enrollment declines at both schools would be even steeper were it not for the increased reliance on international students.

In response to these enrollments trends, I initiated an organizational leadership restructuring of our secondary schools in 2018 with the appointment of Mr. Michael Clark as Associate Superintendent of Secondary Schools. Working as a key member of my leadership team, Mr. Clark has directed the overall management of our Diocesan secondary schools. His work has yielded tangible and immediate results, improving our system with increased efficiency across schools. I am most appreciative of his counsel and efforts to render our secondary schools more collaborative and successful.

Innovative and caring educators have faithfully served at Holy Name and St. Peter-Marian over these challenging years, blessing this Diocese as faith-filled stewards of Catholic education. Still more, the generous support of benefactors, alumni, and friends has made it possible to sustain each school despite the all too real demographic shifts that present themselves. We must now come to terms with the reality that continuing to operate two Catholic high schools in the same city is no longer prudent. If we are to not just provide for but improve upon the rigorous, high quality, and faith-

centered experience for which our Catholic schools are known, then we must actively respond to the signs of the time. That time is now.

Therefore, in consultation with the Catholic Schools Board of the Diocese, and with the blessing of Bishop McManus, I am announcing plans to join Holy Name Central Catholic High School and St. Peter-Marian Central Catholic High School together into a newly formed school community for the 2020-21 school year.

Joining Holy Name and St. Peter-Marian into a single Catholic junior/senior high school allows us to educate and prepare students more effectively than we could by continuing to operate two schools. By being proactive, this transition will provide greater opportunities for our students by:

- reinvesting in our mission of catechesis and evangelization through a robust proclamation of the Gospel;
- better meeting the individual needs of students with a revised program of studies;
- increasing compensation levels in order to attract and retain the best educators;
- offering a more competitive and diverse array of extracurricular activities;
- enhancing the physical plant, learning spaces and amenities available to students;
- continuing to prepare students for higher education and professions with a strong character and solid work ethic that is well-grounded in our Catholic values; and
- providing students with an authentically Catholic education that prepares them to pass on their faith to others.

Next steps

Along with my leadership team and the Catholic Schools Board, my office has engaged the professional services of nationally known and experienced industry consultants to assist with this important work. During the Christmas break, we will deploy a team of engineers and building specialists to conduct site assessments at both Holy Name and St. Peter-Marian. The purpose of this work phase is to determine which present campus should serve as the future site of the new school in light of both short and long-term facility needs. A decision on the permanent school site will be made in early March, at which point our intention is to market the remaining property for the sake of reinvestment in the new school.

I understand that the selection of either campus location may present a challenge for some families, and perhaps, be a determining factor in choosing to register for next academic year. When the permanent site announcement is made in early March, we will also provide information about any interim steps that families may need to consider in making a decision. As is my intent with this letter, my office will move forward in keeping all stakeholders as fully and accurately informed as possible.

After the site selection, the usual process of accepting applications for financial aid through FACTS "Grant & Aid" will begin. With a 30-day review and approval window in place, we anticipate that families will have aid award notifications by early April 2020.

In the early months of 2020, we will engage many stakeholders - including parents, faculty and staff, students, clergy, alumni, friends and supporters – in special listening sessions designed to provide

opportunities for input and the positive exchange of ideas. It is important to all of us for there to be dialogue on how this transformation will unfold, including input about the name of the merged school.

Permit me to share a closing thought with you. As part of the Holy Name or St. Peter-Marian community, you have already made the conscious choice that you value a Catholic education, trusting in the great opportunity of what may come of that decision. The friendships, experiences, and joys born of that choice have hopefully exceeded your expectations. As we embark on a new chapter in the life of Catholic education here in the Diocese of Worcester, I ask for you to sustain that hope, trusting in the great opportunity of what may come through our collective efforts and prayer.

Please keep our Central Catholic School community in your prayers during this transition. Advent is a season of preparation for the joys and hopes that Christmas brings with the birth of Jesus Christ. May this season of preparation also provide a brighter vision filled with hope for Catholic secondary education in Worcester.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "David Perda".

David Perda, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools