



ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC SCHOOL

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December 6, 2019

To the Parents and Parishioners of St. Mary's, Canton,

Today I have to make a sad announcement: After extensive consultation, this will be the final academic year for St. Mary's School. The end of June—the end of our 90th year—will be the end of our beloved school.

Much good takes place in a Catholic school. For generations Catholic schools have been important means by which the Church fulfills her mission to proclaim the Gospel and form the minds and hearts of the children entrusted to her care. The closing of a Catholic school is never easy. Current students need to be educated. Parents lose an anchor in their duty to raise Christian children. Pastors lose a valued tool for the faith formation of their children.

Generally, closures of Catholic schools have occurred when there has been a pattern of declining enrollment (resulting in a loss of revenue) and the inability of the school and community members to raise the funds necessary to operate the school. That is what has happened here in Canton.

For most of you, this news does not come as a surprise because you remember what happened last year. We should take comfort in knowing that every possible alternative was explored. We thought we'd have to close last year after the Councils voted to do so in November of 2018, but the school staff and volunteers pulled out all the stops. We increased marketing, including television, mailings, signage, and tabling; we increased initiatives in fundraising, including regional appeals, grant-writing, and the formation of a Parent-Teacher Organization; and we implemented developments to our aftercare program including Brain-Science, crafts, Nature up North, language and music.

Last January the Councils also agreed to set benchmarks that would need to be met to proceed forward after this current year. Despite countless efforts, we will not meet these benchmarks this year. Therefore, on November 14th, it was the unanimous recommendation of all members of the Council that this be St. Mary's final academic year. As the pastor, I in turn brought the recommendation to our diocesan ordinary, Bishop Terry LaValley. We received Bishop LaValley's approval and met on Wednesday to finalize our plans. The teachers were informed yesterday, and our meeting was called and held tonight (Friday, December 6).

What is to happen now? We are currently exploring possible future of Pre-K and/or our after-school programming. Also, we are exploring the future of the facility which is in good condition—particularly noteworthy is our new roof completed a year and a half ago. In the meantime, we plan to complete this year the best way possible. With this being our school's 90th anniversary, we will have a variety of opportunities for the students, faculty, parents, alumni, parish, and greater community to honor those nine decades of excellence.

After 90 years, this is like a death in the family. As such, please pray for each other in our grief—in a special way for our teachers who have dedicated so much to the education of our youth. We also pray in a most special way for the children who will continue their educations outside our hallowed halls. May each of us be giving the grace to see this death through with hope and faith in New Life.

In Christ our Hope,

Father Bryan Stitt

Pastor

Executive Session Members of the Parish, Education, and Finance Councils are:

Russel Backus, Erin Backus, Kevin Feuka, John Gray, Lisa Guccione, Maureen Howard, Sue Law, Katie Murphy, Bernard Proulx, Paul Redfern, Paul Schrems, Devon Sutton, Dan Sweeney, John Taillon, Sharon White, Derek White.