

February 13, 2018

Dear Parishioners and Friends of the Cathedral,

When the Lord Jesus founded the Church on the rock of Saint Peter's faith, he promised that she would endure to the end of time. And while we hold to that promise for the Church as a whole, we know from history that not every aspect or component of the Church lasts forever. I am writing today to inform you of a significant change concerning an important aspect of our Cathedral Parish. With the conclusion of the 2017-2018 school year, the Cathedral School will end its programming and close its doors. Coming to this decision has been extremely difficult and painful, and it has been preceded by much study, prayer and consultation.

As many of you know, the Cathedral school has faced declining school enrollment. As of this year, 2017-2018, total school enrollment stands at 126 students from Pre-K 3 through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. It has become impossible to achieve a balance between setting a proper tuition scale and achieving enough assistance through fundraising while having a residual deficit that the parish is able to afford. The fiscal year of 2016-2017, which had an enrollment of 146 students, saw a school deficit of \$335,476.98 while the parish had a net income of only \$39,606.46, leaving us with an overall deficit of \$295,870.52. The projected overall deficit for the end of this current fiscal year of 2017-2018 is approximately \$385,000 yet may end up exceeding \$400,000.

As I have said in each state of the parish address since becoming pastor in August 2014, the parish has been in a state of deficit spending since at least 2011. In spite of budget cuts and reduction in staff, this trend has not been broken. Parish offerings have been flat or declining over several years with Mass attendance declining also. The parish's financial savings have been gradually depleted over the years in underwriting the school deficit and will be totally depleted by the end of this fiscal year. The parish has also been accumulating debts (diocesan assessments and other liabilities) with the diocesan finance office. In July 2014, the parish's accumulated debts with the diocese was approximately \$650,000. While the rate of growth in these debts has diminished and some have been paid, the debt still continues to grow. At present, the parish has accumulated debt of approximately \$750,000 with the diocese. The fiscal reality of the parish is such that the parish can no longer afford the school's deficit.

Beginning in November, I brought the issue to Bishop Paprocki, the vicar general, and the diocesan finance officer. Bishop Paprocki and I held consultations with the pastoral and finance councils and the school board. We also held an open meeting with the parish. The love for the school was clear at these meetings, but what was and continues to remain unclear is any viable way forward given the gravity of the school's financial situation. Parishioner and donor giving has also been analyzed to see if there was a new direction that could be taken or if a fundraising solution existed. In examining the school's sustainability, the parish's capacity for

supporting it must be taken into account. Overcoming the year-to-year budgetary shortfall would be unattainable and unsustainable. As pastor, I am the chief financial steward of the parish and, as such, after much consultation, I felt that I had no alternative then to recommend to Bishop Paprocki that the school be closed.

Many people - parishioners, school families, and other friends of the parish and school - have given much to support the mission of the Cathedral School through the years. I am especially mindful of the Dominican Sisters of Springfield who have been a part of our school since 1890. I wish to thank our dedicated faculty and staff, past and present, especially our current principal, Mr. Tony Cerveny. I am also grateful to the Cathedral ministries, the Cathedral Council of Catholic Women, the Men's Club, the Father Augustine Tolton Council of the Knights of Columbus, and so many others who have poured their time and treasure into the School. To all, I express my gratitude for what they have done to support our students and I pray that the Lord will give them the reward of their goodness. This is the end of a significant chapter in life of the Cathedral Parish but it is not the end of our story. While the Cathedral is a parish she is also the mother church of the diocese and we will offer new formats for faith formation, both for children and adults, as well as exploring other opportunities for advancing the Kingdom of God in our community and in the diocese at large. Our mission has always been about the Kingdom and, while the manner in which we achieve that mission may be different now, our mission remains the same.

These next few months will be a time of transition in the life of the Cathedral Parish. I ask for your prayers for everyone involved: for our families as they make new educational choices for our students and especially for our faculty and staff as they seek new employment. Our school staff will help all families who will be seeking to find a home in another Catholic grade school for their children. For Cathedral Parish families who continue to seek a Catholic grade school education for their children, the parish will offer assistance and more information as to how that will happen will be forth coming.

Psalms 34 tells us that *the LORD is close to the brokenhearted; and those who are crushed in spirit he saves*. The Church now stands at the beginning of the Lenten season when she is especially mindful of the mystery of the Lord's Cross. This mystery will be especially pronounced in the lives of many in our school and parish this Lent. The Cross always comes with the promise of resurrection and new life. It may be difficult to see that at present, but it will come to pass. May the Lord look upon all of us tenderly and uphold us with his love.

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

Very Reverend Christopher A. House  
Pastor