



Diocese of Pittsburgh

111 Boulevard of the Allies, Pittsburgh, PA 15222-1618

Phone: 412-456-3010 • Fax: 412-456-3185

E-mail: dzubik@diopitt.org • Website: www.diopitt.org

Office of the Bishop

July 15, 2019

Dear Parishioners of Saint Sylvester Parish, School Families, Faculty and Staff:

For the better part of this last year, there has been a passionate discussion on the future of Saint Sylvester School. On February 20, 2019, I wrote to you granting permission for the school to remain open for an additional academic year. At the time of my letter, there were 89 students registered in the school. I also shared with you news that “as part of the diocesan elementary school regionalization plan, the formation of a South Hills Region is planned for 2019-2020. This follows the establishment of the North Hills and Pittsburgh East Regions. This process will look at how best to provide viable, sustainable Catholic elementary education within the South Hills.”

Since that letter, I have received a number of emails and letters from Saint Sylvester School parents that both supported and opposed my decision. Most significantly, your priest administrator, Father Steve Kresak, informed me that the number of enrolled students has dropped so dramatically that he had no choice but to renew his request to close the school.

As recently as last Tuesday, I met with parents who are strong proponents for keeping the school open. During the most recent meeting, I shared with them my serious concerns about the viability of the school, which have surfaced in light of an enrollment of 57 students. The major question that I posed at that meeting and which I share with you now is: “What is in the best interest of our students?”

Of greatest concern to me is our ability to provide a school environment that nurtures academic, spiritual, social and emotional formation at every grade level. Repeating what I shared with you above, the current school enrollment for the 2019-2020 year at Saint Sylvester School is 57. Overall class sizes are very small, as indicated below:

- Kindergarten: 3 students
- First grade: 0 students
- Second grade: 1 student
- Third grade: 7 students
- Fourth grade: 11 students
- Fifth grade: 9 students
- Sixth grade: 2 students
- Seventh grade: 7 students
- Eighth grade: 17 students

These enrollment figures, reflecting the sharp decline of students since my earlier letter to you, have raised serious questions about the ability to continue to offer the quality Catholic education that students have received at Saint Sylvester. In addition, there must be concern about growing operating expenses and whether it is a wise use of financial resources to support such a small program. The issue of responsible stewardship is of no small concern, especially given the overall needs within the Brentwood community.

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Given the size of the enrollment and the concerns for the overall well-being of the students, I must share with you that I grant permission for Saint Sylvester School to close, effective immediately. As one who benefitted from Catholic education as a student for 24 years and 13 years on the other side of the desk as a teacher and administrator in secondary education, I truly feel the pain of this loss.

One of the concerns raised by the parents with whom I met last week was about whether it was possible to enroll their children at this late date in another Catholic school. I can assure you that Mrs. Michelle Peduto, director of Catholic schools in our diocese, will work with you to enroll your students in another Catholic school.

As a follow up to my decision, Father Steve Kresak has committed Saint Sylvester Parish to do the following:

- Any student who was enrolled in Saint Sylvester School for the 2018-2019 school year will receive a \$1,000 scholarship to any other Catholic elementary school in which that student enrolls for the 2019-2020 academic year;
- Additional need based scholarships from the Saint Sylvester Angel Fund will continue to be available for students enrolled in another Catholic elementary school;
- Saint Sylvester eighth graders who graduate from any Catholic elementary school in June 2020 will receive a graduation certificate from Saint Sylvester School;
- As needed, assistance will be provided for families to purchase new uniforms;
- A special celebration will be planned to honor the legacy of Saint Sylvester School and all that it has meant to the students who have passed through its doors, and to Saint Sylvester Parish.

Given the importance of a Catholic school education and your proven commitment to support it in the past, it is my hope that you will enroll your daughters or sons into a Catholic school.

With this news, I recognize the dedicated contributions of the teachers and staff who have committed themselves to the education of your children at Saint Sylvester School. I am grateful, too, for the many parents and parishioners who have worked consistently over the years to support the school.

Thank you for the commitment you have shown over many years to raising your children in the Catholic faith by providing them an opportunity for academic, spiritual, social and emotional formation at Saint Sylvester School.

Whether you agree or disagree with this decision, I hope that you can receive it in the manner with which I send it – as a bishop who has a genuine concern for the welfare of all, and most importantly, the hope that I can, in some way, help you to get to heaven.

Thank you for being such an important part of the Church of Pittsburgh. May we always strive, in good times and in difficult times, to be a Church that is Alive!

Grateful for our belief that “Nothing is Impossible with God,” I am

Your brother in Christ,

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Most Reverend David A. Zubik
Bishop of Pittsburgh

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