

October 14, 2009

Dear Members of St. Hugh of Grenoble Parish and School:

I want to put in your hands a copy of the presentation I made at last night's consultation with the school families and parishioners.

We have worked very hard, for a long time, to boost our enrollment and raise additional funds to keep St. Hugh's operating as a one-parish supported school. Unfortunately, it just isn't working out.

The presentation below sets forth a number of possible options. It also contains a recommendation from the school advisory board, the parish pastoral council, the parish finance council and myself for a plan for us to regionalize next year with St. Joseph's School in Beltsville as a viable way to secure the future of Catholic school education for our St. Hugh's school family. Regionalizing will make us more secure financially, plus open up new opportunities and possibilities for our school community. Significantly, it will enable our children and families to stay together.

Discussions with St. Joseph's parish are in their preliminary stages. I hope to get a task group together in the near future to develop a more detailed plan of how we might proceed toward regionalization.

Even as we explore possibilities for the future, our faculty and staff at St. Hugh's are committed to the present day to day task of giving our children a quality Catholic education. I trust we will make it a great year for our children.

Sincerely in Christ,

Father Tappe

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Dear School Families and Parishioners:

Good evening and thank you for coming.

We held a consultation last March 31, 2009 in this very room to inform the parish and school communities of the low enrollment at the school (at that point it stood at 121) and of its financial implications for the parish.

From that meeting we came up with a plan: to ask parishioners how much they would be willing to pledge to the school stewardship collection over a one year period; and to ask school families to make a commitment to enroll for the 2009-2010 academic year.

From the pledge drive we received \$54,095 in pledges plus \$20,482 in outright gifts for a total of \$74,577. This number, however, did not represent a real increase in the amount of money the parish was already giving to the school stewardship collection prior to the consultation. That indicated, the parish was already giving as much as it could. This year we estimate the parish will bring in less than \$60,000 through the school stewardship collection for the 2009-2010 fiscal year compared to \$79,000 for fiscal year 2008-2009. The poor economy probably helps to explain this decrease.

Regarding the appeal to school families to re-enroll for the 2009-2010 academic year, only a handful of families who had yet to re-enroll at school at the time of the March 31 consultation responded favorably. Some families, who had already re-enrolled at the time of the consultation, subsequently decided to enroll their children at other schools.

In consultation with the parish pastoral council, the parish finance council, and the school advisory board, I made the decision in late April to keep the school open for the 2009-2010 academic year, principally for two reasons:

First reason: the consultation generated a lot of positive energy in support of the school. A very positive development that came out of the March consultation was the formation of a group of volunteers composed of both school families and parishioners. Over the spring and summer, this group of committed volunteers worked with the school and parish in numerous marketing, fundraising, and community-building activities, with the goal of raising funds and encouraging new families to attend our fine school. I am most grateful for all of those who participated in events such as the school open houses, the July fun fair, the Sunday bake sales, the Texas BBQ, the Oktoberfest, the Berwyn Heights Community Festival, the distribution of leaflets and flyers throughout our community, the targeted mailing to families in our area with school age children, and the all school years alumni reunion this past weekend.

Second reason: we received in early April a bequest of \$171,756 from the estate of Mrs. Kathleen McTiernan, which nearly doubled our parish savings and cash on hand.

Despite the many efforts we have made to attract new families to the school, we opened the present school year with an enrollment of 129 students, down from 174 students at the beginning of last year.

And despite the many efforts to raise additional funds to support the school, including an appeal to the St. Hugh School alumni, we have fallen far short of the monies needed to cover this year's deficit at the school, which will run \$285,000 as compared to \$82,000 last year.

If we had not received the bequest from Mrs. McTiernan, the parish would have exhausted its entire savings to cover this year's school deficit. As it is, we estimate we will be left with somewhere around 50 to 100 thousand dollars in savings to meet future operating expenses and capital improvements for both the school and parish.

Since it is unlikely that our enrollment numbers will significantly increase any time soon, the school will face another quarter of a million dollar plus deficit next year, that is, the 2010-2011 school year, and for subsequent school years thereafter.

*That is simply not tenable.*

So what do we do? I know these are difficult matters and since March we have been working very hard to look to the future. I have been working closely with the parish pastoral council, the finance council and the school advisory board to look at options and possibilities. It seems to me there are three possibilities.

1) Fundraising: In order for the school to open next year I will need to receive *at least \$250,000 by November 30* so that I can be certain we have enough money to cover the cost of school operations for the 2010-2011 academic year. And then, on December 1, we will need to begin to raise *another quarter of a million dollars* by the following November so that I can be certain we have enough money to cover the projected deficit for the following year, the 2011-2012 academic year.

*Quite frankly, this does not seem feasible.*

2) We close our doors at the end of the school year and families choose to send their children to neighboring schools.

There are certainly plenty of available seats at neighboring Catholics schools for all our children, as one of the handouts indicates. *But that would mean the end of our parish school and school community.*

3) *Here is the option I recommend which holds the brightest hope for the future.* We end the school program here at St. Hugh's parish at the end of the school year—that is, in June—but continue as a school community in a new and official partnership with St. Joseph School in Beltsville, which would then become our regional school.

Since September 15<sup>th</sup>, I have been in informal discussions with Fr. Michael Quill, the pastor of St. Joseph Church in Beltsville, about whether he would be willing to convert St. Joseph's School to a regional school that would serve both his parish and ours, and perhaps other parishes that might be interested in joining. He has expressed interest and a real willingness to work together with us.

Here are the advantages of a regional school:

i.) St. Joseph's is able to take all our students next year. All students and families could stay together and would not have to be dispersed.

ii.) We would have a vastly improved economy of scale. The new school would have an enrollment of approximately 280-290 students, and would be supported financially by two (possibly more) parishes.

iii.) There is the possibility that there would be some openings at the new school for some of our St. Hugh's faculty and staff.

iv.) St. Hugh's would continue to support a parish school.

v.) St. Hugh's and St. Joseph's would administer the school collaboratively. The school advisory board would consist of members of both parishes. Both pastors would share the pastoral care of the school.

vi.) A regional school is a more efficient use of scarce resources. Our families and students wouldn't have to worry every year, Is this the school's last year? They could be more confident and secure.

vii.) Our present marketing and fundraising efforts would not be discontinued, but redirected toward the new regional school.

viii.) I discussed this option with the parish pastoral council, finance council and school advisory board, and in recent weeks each group has given me their recommendation that we do indeed pursue a regional relationship with St. Joseph's. This option truly allows our school community and our parish love for Catholic school education to continue.

Of course, there is a fourth possibility that one no one has thought of or brought forward since our consultation on March 31—we are most open to ideas that we may not have thought of so far, though I do believe the options I have presented—especially the option regarding the regional school—reflect the fruit of a lot of work and prayerful reflection.

At this point, I open the floor to your comments and suggestions.

Whatever the future may hold, this school year has started in a wonderful fashion and I feel we should all work to have it end that way as well. It is good news that the Archdiocese of Washington has instituted a new policy eliminating mid-year transfers from schools undergoing a consultation to other schools within the archdiocese. This should provide our children with the consistency that they will dearly need this year.

Please keep me and our school in your prayers. Thank you for coming out tonight.