



November 21, 2022

Diocese of Joliet announces future of Catholic schools in Lombard

Bishop Ronald A. Hicks of the Diocese of Joliet has accepted the unanimous recommendation of his targeted restructuring committee regarding Sacred Heart Catholic School and St. Pius X Parish School in Lombard.

This unanimous, joint decision comes after a deliberate process involving parents of children attending both schools; pastors, principals, faculty and staff of both schools; and the respective school boards, parish councils and parish finance councils.

This thoughtful process began in late July, shortly after the diocese had streamlined its own operations at the Blanchette Catholic Center by reducing staffing from 99 to 70 employees and updating its organizational chart to reflect an outward-focused, effective and efficient approach. On July 27, Bishop Hicks convened the inaugural meeting of the diocesan targeted restructuring committee to begin a review of the vibrancy and sustainability of parishes and schools in specific geographic areas of the diocese – hence the term of “targeted restructuring.” The team he assembled consists of himself; the eight pastors who serve as deans of the diocese’s eight deaneries; and senior diocesan staff. General Counsel Maureen Harton directs and oversees meetings of the targeted restructuring committee.

Over the subsequent weeks and months, members of the committee first reviewed diocesan-wide statistics – such as trends in number of clergy, Mass attendance, school enrollment, school and parish financial health, structural maintenance needs, etc. – before asking the eight deans for recommendations of schools and parishes that require further scrutiny. The targeted restructuring committee then categorized the recommendations into three stages: urgent; in the next year; and in two to three years. Bishop Hicks wrote of this process in his [October column](#).

Sacred Heart Catholic School and St. Pius X Parish School, both located in Lombard, were placed in the urgent phase due to the following trends over several years: the combined enrollment of both schools has remained mostly static or declined; overall structural maintenance needs have increased in both frequency and cost; and staffing needs have struggled to be met amid an unrelenting nationwide educator shortage.

Harton met with the pastors and principals of each school regarding the urgent status. Principals notified faculty, staff and school board members on or about October 11, when a letter was sent from the diocese to school parents, informing them of their school’s urgent status and the need to evaluate the future of Catholic education in Lombard. On October 28, the diocese sent a letter to the faith communities of both schools and their respective parishes, inviting them to a November 7 meeting, at which diocesan representatives would share enrollment trends and financial and structural needs data, as well as listen to parent and community input on three scenarios determined by those trends and data:

- One combined new school is created using both campuses.
- One combined new school is created at the St. Pius X Parish School campus.

- Sacred Heart Catholic School is merged into St. Pius X Parish School, and St. Pius' identity is maintained.

This letter also contained a Q-and-A for parents, faculty and staff, and a link to a survey asking for input on the three scenarios.

Before the meeting, diocesan representatives from the Catholic Schools Office, parish and diocesan finance, buildings and properties, legal services, human resources and communications read the more than 400 survey responses, as well as input from school boards and parish finance councils. These same representatives, as well as school and parish leadership, attended the November 7 meeting. They shared enrollment trends and financial and structural needs data, and listened to every individual who wanted to speak, taking extensive notes so that every thought was heard.

The survey results, input from school boards and parish finance councils, and notes from the meeting were shared with the targeted restructuring committee, which met on November 16 to discern a recommendation for Bishop Hicks on Catholic education in Lombard. After thorough and prayerful consideration of the various data and stakeholder responses, the committee unanimously decided that Sacred Heart Catholic School should close at the end of the 2022-2023 academic year. St. Pius X Parish School would retain its current status.

This recommendation varies from the three original scenarios because stakeholder input revealed that each school has its own valid yet vastly different Catholic identity, indicating that a forced merger or combination of the two schools by the diocese would most likely be unsuccessful.

The targeted restructuring committee sent the unanimous recommendation to Bishop Hicks. After prayerful discernment, he accepted the recommendation.

The Catholic Schools Office will work with leadership at Sacred Heart Catholic School to assist parents in finding a diocesan Catholic school that meets the academic and religious needs of their children. The diocesan office of human resources will support faculty and staff in finding placement in other diocesan Catholic schools.

The diocese is sincerely grateful to the various stakeholders for their patience and thoughtful input throughout this process. We pray for a pastoral transition to this new era of Catholic education in Lombard as we continue to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
