



Diocese of Joliet

Office of the Bishop

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January 28, 2010
Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas,
Doctor of the Church

Dear Friends in Christ,

In the fall of 2008, the Diocese of Joliet began a strategic planning process to determine the current situation of its Catholic schools and develop a comprehensive plan to ensure their continuing Catholicity, excellence and availability. The services of Meitler Consultants were engaged to direct the planning initiative. Our planning process has involved a large number of people from across the diocese who have served on the Planning Committee (comprised of diocesan staff, school board members, school administrators, pastors, community leaders, and parents with a demonstrated commitment to Catholic education); the Steering Committee (comprised of the bishop and key diocesan administrators); the Joliet Diocesan Board of Education (comprised of educators, pastors, and lay representatives from across the diocese); and the Catholic community at large, through a number of public consultations and a professional survey.

We have titled our plan, "Lighting the Path to Our Future: Strategic Plan for Catholic Schools."

Through long hours of very hard work on the part of these many dedicated people, a plan for our schools is emerging. When completed and published in its final form, the plan will encompass the following areas:

- A mission statement for Catholic schools in the Diocese of Joliet
- A vision for thriving Catholic education
- Catholic identity
- Academic excellence
- Leadership for schools
- Marketing/enrollment management
- New Directions and restructuring
- High Schools

- New schools and expansion
- Governance of schools
- Facilities
- Financial issues

Although most of the issues listed above are present in a draft of the plan, the plan will not be published in its entirety until all sections are complete. In the weeks ahead, work is being done on setting priorities and developing timelines for many aspects of the plan. However, most of the issues involving “New Directions and Restructuring” and “New schools and Expansion” are being announced now, in light of the fact that some of them involve immediate action which will affect particular schools in the coming academic year.

Catholic schools are a treasure in our country and in our diocese. They have educated generations of faithful Catholics, involved citizens, and leaders of business, government and Church. Catholic Schools are at the core of the Church’s mission to hand on the Catholic faith, and thus first and foremost we proclaim that Jesus Christ is the reason for our schools. Their proven academic excellence has not only prepared students for a successful life but also helped lift the poor out of poverty. These and many other blessed benefits of Catholic education will continue well into the future.

At the same time, many Catholic schools have struggled through the years because of enrollment decline, demographic shifts, financial strain, aging facilities, and other factors. Our planning process takes into consideration the importance of strengthening our schools now and for the future; recognizing the need for schools to be present in certain areas of our diocese because of our mission; and the realities of demographic changes reflected in smaller populations of school-age children in areas where once their numbers were much larger.

Thus the decisions announced in this letter include several mergers; benchmarks for certain schools to remain open; the closure of several schools; and plans for new initiatives, some mission-driven and some responding to population growth.

I am very grateful to the hundreds of people who have participated in our discussions and consultations as well as the thousands who have participated in surveys and other means of contributing their ideas. Their work is truly bearing fruit. Some of our new directions involve the painful decision to close schools, and I keenly recognize the sadness this brings to families and parishes as well as the disruption and transition for students. At the same time, with hope and joy we look forward to the overall strengthening of Catholic education in our diocese, the growth of certain schools and even studies of possible new schools. Just as we have been bequeathed a system of wonderful schools by those who came before us, we have a responsibility to do the same for those who come after us.

I would like everyone to know that we are engaged in this process in a faith-filled and prayerful manner, and it has been my prayer all along that we walk by God's Light and do as He desires. I am confident that He has been with us in this process and will continue to guide us moving forward.

I am very excited to announce a new partnership between the Diocese of Joliet and two of Notre Dame University's excellent Catholic Schools projects: the Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) and the Institute for Educational Initiatives (IEI). This new partnership, now at its formation stages, will offer a number of benefits to our Catholic schools, particularly those that serve our extremely large Latino/Hispanic population. "To Nurture the Soul of a Nation: Latino Families, Catholic Schools, and Educational Opportunity," a study of the Notre Dame Task Force on the Participation of Latino Children and Families in Catholic Schools, will be an important resource and guide.

Details about this new partnership will emerge in the next few months. However, it is important to mention now that we recognize that in certain areas of our diocese (especially the east side of the City of Joliet and West Chicago, but also many other communities with large immigrant populations) an entirely new model for Catholic education is called for. From what I have learned through priestly ministry and by studying the critical issue of responding to the educational needs of Hispanic families, I know that we must create new educational models, new leadership approaches, new communications efforts, new cultural awareness, new funding sources, and new forms of teacher education which correlate intentionally with the lives of our Hispanic parishioners. Expanding the availability of Catholic school education to our Hispanic sisters and brothers is a vital part of our mission as the Catholic Church, but it will be addressed adequately only when we create new educational approaches and resources which we simply do not yet have in the form truly needed. It is my hope and prayer that our partnership with Notre Dame University will have a profound effect on our mission to immigrant families.

Before I go into specifics, I would like to mention several important matters relating to the fact that some outcomes of this plan will disrupt the lives of families and their children as well as dedicated staff:

- Regarding children currently enrolled in schools slated for closing at the end of this academic year, the Catholic Schools Office will offer its assistance to ensure that those children find a place in other Catholic schools. Such assistance would include but not be limited to arranging multiple opportunities for the parents of students from closing schools to meet representatives of neighboring schools and providing an understanding of the incentives available for their children to attend other schools (see below).
- The Diocese of Joliet will offer a scholarship of \$500.00 per child transferring from a closing Catholic school to another Catholic school within the Diocese of Joliet, for a period of two years. These funds would

be provided directly to the school enrolling the child upon verification of enrollment. Insofar as possible, students from closing schools should be given first priority of entry into neighboring schools with openings. Schools receiving children from closing schools will be asked to receive those children at the same rate of tuition they were paying at the closing school, if that tuition was less than the new school, for a period of two years (adjusted by an inflation factor of 3-4% in year 2).

- Regarding administration and faculty currently teaching in schools slated for closing, the Catholic Schools Office will make every effort to assist them in finding positions in other Catholic schools. We recognize with deep sensitivity that these dedicated professionals will feel the impact of these changes in a significant way.

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I would now like to offer information regarding “New Directions and Restructuring.” More detail will be offered in the final version of the plan.

Kankakee area

1. Begin planning for the relocation of Aquinas Catholic Academy to updated facilities at St. Martin of Tours Parish. The relocation should take place no later than the fall of 2012.
2. The administration and board of Aquinas Catholic Academy will be committed participants in the partnership between the Diocese of Joliet and Notre Dame University’s ACE and IEI programs.
3. Conduct a formal study to investigate the feasibility and benefits of opening a 7th/8th grade junior high program at Bishop McNamara Catholic High School.
4. Plan for long-term growth in the region of Kankakee by studying the feasibility of opening a new school or expanding Maternity BVM School. Several long-range options should be considered and are mentioned later in this report.

Momence

Close St. Patrick Academy at the end of the 2009-2010 school year. Insofar as possible, use parish resources currently invested in school operations to provide transportation for students to other Catholic schools and for financial assistance to parishioner families who desire a Catholic education for their children.

Park Forest and Steger

Merge St. Mary School in Park Forest with St. Liborius School in Steger to create a new multi-parish school at the Crete campus. During the transition period, the facility at St. Mary in Park Forest and St. Liborius in Crete may both be used until a capital investment is made to provide adequate facilities at the Crete site.

Study options to maintain pre-kindergarten programs at St. Mary Parish in Park Forest for the long term.

Wilmington

St. Rose School will reinvent and promote itself as the Catholic school for Wilmington, South Wilmington, Braidwood, Coal City, Elwood, Diamond, Custer City, and Essex, and as a ministry shared by area parishes. Parish and school leadership will develop a plan to establish stronger, meaningful and ongoing relationships with all area Catholic parishes.

Will County – City of Joliet

1. In the fall of 2010, in partnership with Notre Dame University's ACE and IEI programs, begin a study of the feasibility of establishing a new Catholic school on the east side of the City of Joliet to serve the specific needs of the large immigrant population in that area of the city. Models such as the San Miguel Schools and Nativity School, which specifically address the educational needs of families in impoverished neighborhoods, will be given strong consideration. Common elements in such schools are support services for students and their families, exceptional academic programs with small classes, an extended academic day and longer school year, and in-depth awareness of critical cultural and language issues. These schools have depended largely on the generosity of donors to support their mission.
2. Close St. Joseph School at the end of the 2009-2010 academic year and assist families in enrolling in another Catholic school in Joliet. Encourage St. Joseph parish to assist parish families with tuition at a new school by use of earnings from its education endowment.
3. St. Mary Nativity should continue as long as it is able to provide quality Catholic education and is financially viable according to benchmarks to be developed by the Catholic Schools Office and the Diocesan Finance Office.
4. St. Patrick School should continue in accordance with its proposal/report, which commits the school to academic excellence, financial stability, and repayment of debt. However, within 30 days of this letter, a more detailed plan regarding quality education, marketing, enrollment and financial initiatives must be submitted and discussed with the Catholic Schools Office and Diocesan Finance Office. A further report should be made to me at the end of the 30 day period regarding these discussions. An evaluation will be conducted and completed no later than February 1, 2011, to determine if the proposal has made sufficient progress to continue school operations in the 2011-2012 school year.
5. St. Jude School should continue as long as it is able to provide quality Catholic education and is financially viable according to benchmarks to be developed by the Catholic Schools Office and the Diocesan Finance Office.

6. The pastors, administration and boards of St. Mary Nativity, St. Patrick and St. Jude Schools will continue to work together to evaluate options to best provide Catholic school education in their areas of the city. Furthermore, they will be committed participants in the partnership between the Diocese of Joliet and Notre Dame University's ACE and IEI programs.
7. Establish an effective structure to promote and coordinate collaborative initiatives among all the parishes and schools in the City of Joliet.
8. Continue to develop the partnership between St. Francis University and schools in the City of Joliet to enhance student and teacher learning opportunities.

Will County – Bolingbrook, Lockport, and Romeoville

1. St. Dominic School in **Bolingbrook** should continue as long as it is able to provide quality Catholic education and is financially viable according to benchmarks to be developed by the Catholic Schools Office and the Diocesan Finance Office. The long-standing relationship between St. Dominic School and St. Francis of Assisi parish should continue and be formally documented with agreed-upon terms. Such agreement should include financial considerations; meaningful participation by St. Francis Parish in the life of St. Dominic School; and marketing St. Dominic School as a ministry of both parishes. The pastor and administration of St. Dominic School will be committed participants in the partnership between the Diocese of Joliet and Notre Dame University's ACE and IEI programs.
2. Continue Pre-K through 8 education at St. Dennis School and St. Joseph School in **Lockport**. Each school remains a parish school and will collaborate with the other as much as possible for the greater mission of Catholic education in Lockport. The schools will work together to build relationships with other Catholic parishes in Lockport and Homer Glen.
3. St. Andrew the Apostle School in **Romeoville** should continue as long as it is able to provide quality Catholic education and is financially viable according to benchmarks to be developed by the Catholic Schools Office and the Diocesan Finance Office. The pastor, administration and board of St. Andrew the Apostle School will be committed participants in the partnership between the Diocese of Joliet and Notre Dame University's ACE and IEI programs.

DuPage County: Addison, Bensenville, Itasca, Wood Dale, Downers Grove, Lombard, and Villa Park

1. Operate three schools to serve the **Addison, Bensenville, Itasca, Wood Dale** area: St. Philip the Apostle School (Addison), Holy Family Catholic School (located at St. Charles Borromeo Parish, Bensenville) and a multi-parish school created by the consolidation of Holy Ghost School (Wood Dale) and St. Peter the Apostle School (Itasca).

2. Consolidate St. Peter the Apostle School and Holy Ghost School into one multi-parish school at the Holy Ghost site, starting with the 2010-11 school year. Begin discussion immediately regarding a new name for the school, school administration and faculty, and school board formation.
3. Holy Family Catholic School, currently operating at two sites, should consolidate to one site at St. Charles Borromeo Parish, beginning with the 2010-2011 school year. Holy Family Catholic School should continue as long as it is able to provide quality Catholic education and is financially viable according to benchmarks to be developed by the Catholic Schools Office and the Diocesan Finance Office. The pastors, administration and board of Holy Family Catholic School will be committed participants in the partnership between the Diocese of Joliet and Notre Dame University's ACE and IEI programs.
4. Parish and school leadership at St. Philip the Apostle, Holy Family, St. Peter the Apostle and Holy Ghost will collaborate in planning intentional ways for these school communities to work together.
5. Parish and School leadership at St. Joseph School and St. Mary of Gostyn School will create opportunities to work together in formal ways to strengthen Catholic education and share resources in **Downers Grove**. They will work together in a unified effort to build relationships with the leadership and parishioners of Divine Savior Parish. The two schools will continue to function with two classes per grade but monitor enrollment trends so neither school starts down a path of funding small classes at high cost.
6. Continue to provide Pre-K through 8 education at St. Pius X School and Sacred Heart School in **Lombard**. Continue Christ the King Early Learning Academy in Lombard as a Pre-K3, Pre-K4 and kindergarten program. Continue to operate each school as a parish school.
7. St. Alexander School in **Villa Park** should continue as long as it is able to provide quality Catholic education and is financially viable according to benchmarks to be developed by the Catholic Schools Office and the Diocesan Finance Office. An evaluation will be conducted and completed no later than February 1, 2011, to determine if the school's proposal for continuance has made sufficient progress to continue school operations in the 2011-2012 school year.
8. Parish and school leadership in Lombard and Villa Park will create opportunities to work together in formal ways to strengthen Catholic education and share resources in this area of the diocese.

DuPage County: Warrenville, West Chicago and Winfield

1. Close St. Mary School in **West Chicago** at the end of the current academic year and assist families in enrolling in other Catholic schools, especially St. John the Baptist in Winfield and St. Irene in Warrenville.
2. In the fall of 2010, in partnership with Notre Dame University's ACE and IEI programs, begin a study of the feasibility of establishing a new Catholic school at the St. Mary West Chicago site to serve the specific needs of the large immigrant population of the parish. Models such as the San Miguel

Schools and Nativity School, which specifically address the educational needs of families in impoverished neighborhoods, will be given strong consideration.

3. St. Irene School in **Warrenville** should continue as long as it is able to provide quality Catholic education and is financially viable according to benchmarks to be developed by the Catholic Schools Office and the Diocesan Finance Office. These benchmarks will include issues of enrollment, facilities, and funding.
4. St. Irene School and St. John the Baptist School in **Winfield** should examine how they can better serve the Hispanic community as well as other minority groups in the region. The pastors, administration and boards of these schools will be committed participants in the partnership between the Diocese of Joliet and Notre Dame University's ACE and IEI programs.

DuPage County: Elmhurst

Immaculate Conception High School will continue to operate as a parish high school governed by a board of trustees granted limited jurisdiction by the pastor. Several adjustments to the governance model are recommended, and financial reporting between the parish and high school will begin to properly identify and allocate costs associated with use of shared facilities.

New Schools and Expansion

The following recommendations are long-range and do not have specific timelines associated with them at this time:

1. Study the feasibility of opening a school in the **Channahon/Minooka** area to serve St. Ann and St. Mary Parishes.
2. Study the feasibility of opening a school in the **Frankfort** area.
3. Study the feasibility of building a new school in the **Homer Glen** area.
4. Plan for long-term growth north and west of Kankakee by studying the feasibility of opening a new school or expanding Maternity BVM School (already mentioned in this report). Other options to consider: Expand Maternity BVM School at the present site; move Maternity BVM School to a new and larger site; or build a new school at St. Joseph Parish, **Manteno**, or at St. George Parish, **St. George**.
5. Study the feasibility of opening a second school in **Kendall County** to serve the fast-growing population.
6. Study the feasibility of expanding St. Joseph School in **Manhattan**, perhaps at a new site if the current site proves to be landlocked.
7. Study the feasibility of expanding St. Jude School in **New Lenox** and/or building a new school if a second parish is eventually established in the New Lenox area.
8. Holy Family School in **Shorewood** should study the feasibility of doubling the number of classes from one class per grade to two classes per grade as well as expanding the Pre-K program.

9. St. Mary Immaculate School in **Plainfield** should study the feasibility of expanding; alternatively, if plans eventually develop for the establishment of a new parish in Plainfield, consider the establishment of a Catholic school at that parish.

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As you can see, our many planning participants have done a great deal of work – and the report above represents only two sections of the entire plan to be published in a few months. I am grateful to all who continue to give generously of their time, competence and creative ideas to make this plan a success, and I ask for your continued prayers, that we will do the work of the Lord and walk always in His Light, Jesus Christ.

Sincerely in Christ,

+J. Peter Sartain
Bishop of Joliet