



Office of the Bishop

Diocese of Richmond

January 2, 2020

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

I am grateful for the opportunity to greet you at this time of year and convey my deepest thanks for the many ways you have endeavored to preserve Holy Cross Regional Catholic School ("Holy Cross"). The recent announcement to close at the end of the current school year has generated a great deal of interest and a request to reconsider the decision to close the school.

Without a doubt, Holy Cross holds a prominent place in our shared history, and it is a well-known fact that the students who graduated from Holy Cross are the beneficiaries of an extraordinary Catholic education that has and will continue to impact the community and future of our Church.

Since my arrival in the Diocese early in 2018, I have been aware of the unique challenges that needed to be addressed for Holy Cross to remain viable. I met with the local pastors to encourage their support for the school and learn all the ways they, and you, have tried to preserve and promote this important part of our diocesan mission. For the past five years the Diocese has actively engaged in many efforts to respond to the numerous needs for improvements to the building, increase the student enrollment, and develop grant funding and other financial aid for scholarships. An Associate Superintendent of Southwest Operations was appointed to oversee and assist with administration. A full-time enrollment coordinator and a development coordinator were appointed. Many volunteers spent countless hours attempting to address these issues including exploring other options for enrollment, yet each option came with a deficit in projected enrollment of students and in financial viability.

The Diocesan subsidy to the school for the last five years totaled over \$940,000. In addition, over \$395,000 was granted for upgrades to the facility including HVAC in the building and gymnasium, front entrance, restrooms, lighting, and telephone systems. In 2017-18, the Diocese funded a \$45,000 year-long process by Meitler Consulting resulting in a comprehensive strategic plan developed in collaboration with the 17-member Strategic Planning Committee for Holy Cross consisting of parents, alumni, board members, administration, faculty, and pastors. This plan provided a road map for the school to increase enrollment, pay down debt of over \$3,000,000, address the operating deficit, and provide an educational space for students to achieve academic excellence.

Unfortunately, even with the diocesan subsidy, the upgrades to the facility, and the training to implement the strategic plan, the goals were not met. Since 2001, there has been a 61% decline in student enrollment. Holy Cross had over 400 students in 2001. Today, even with all of the extraordinary efforts, enrollment is 156 students in kindergarten through 12th grade, far below the necessary goals for the 2019-20 school year. Also, Holy Cross has been operating at a net financial loss for nine consecutive years. These deficits are unsustainable.

On Thursday, December 19th, I met with members of Holy Cross administrative staff, faculty, local pastors, members of the school board and others associated with the school community. I carefully listened to their presentations and heard their desire for a reversal of the decision to close the school. I am grateful to each of them for their dedication and commitment to Holy Cross, the students, and their families, as well as the faculty.

Given all the facts, and having received the input from the pastors, school administrative staff and school advisory board members, as well as the advice of my staff and others, the decision stands to close Holy Cross at the end of this school year.

All of us in the administrative offices of the Diocese are profoundly grateful for the outstanding efforts of everyone involved. We are committed to providing the pastoral support needed to insure a smooth transition for all the students and faculty.

This decision has been difficult not only for the Holy Cross Regional Catholic School community, but throughout the entire Diocese and indeed within the alumni community across the country. This is a heartbreaking decision and one that was prayerfully considered. Any announcement of the closure of a Catholic school comes with great sadness. Yet, our faith assures us that even with the sadness of loss there is always the hope for new life.

Be assured of my prayers and please remember me in yours.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Barry C. Knestout".

Most Reverend Barry C. Knestout
Bishop of Richmond