



Church of Saint Mary

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Feast of Saint John Vianney

Dear Parishioners of the Church of Saint Mary,

It is with a heavy heart that I must relay the decision of the Archdiocese of Newark to include our beloved Academy at Saint Mary [formerly Saint Mary Elementary School] among the schools which will not reopen this fall. This is in addition to the other 10 Catholic Schools the Archdiocese announced would be closed a few months ago. These are, indeed, very sad times. While I am overjoyed that Saint Mary High School, which is a separate school from the Academy, will remain open and is currently financially secure, an increase in enrollment is also needed for its future solvency.

The main reasons for the closure of the Academy are: an almost \$500,000 budget deficit in the 2020-2021 academic year; an even worse projected 2021-2022 budget deficit - even with another increase in tuition; an enrollment of only 92 K-8 students with a projected continual decline in enrollment; and the devastating economic impact of the coronavirus. While the 8th Grade is slated to have 28 students, only 2 students are registered for the 5th Grade, and over half of the other grades have fewer than 10 students, with no sizable, foreseeable new registrations. It is not possible to provide a quality education for classes with so few students.

Even the optimistic must be realistic: the Academy needs 175 students to be viable; after we graduate 28 in 2021, we would need 111 new students to replace them - assuming every presently enrolled student returns! And while Saint Mary Church was willing to gift the Academy with a sizeable donation from our savings to meet 2020-2021 budget deficit, it would only delay the inevitable; it would be like putting a new roof on a crumbling house. And our resources are better spent on other means of faith formation for children and adults.

Please know that I am most grateful to all who, for the past 104 years, provided a quality Catholic Education at our Academy, which the Archdiocese took over 6 years ago in the Archdiocesan Catholic Education Services (ACES) agreement. Special thanks to all the

Dominicans Sisters who dedicated their life to Catholic Education, and to the Lay Administrators, Faculty and Staff who chose to work for far less pay than those who work in public or private schools. May God bless them for their faithful, dedicated service.

When I became the 8th Pastor of Saint Mary Church in 1997, the Archbishop and other Archdiocesan Schools Office officials bluntly told me that both our Elementary School and High School were in their final days, and that I should prepare everyone for this reality. However, because of the generosity of so many people, and the unflagging toil and commitment of our current principals, Ana Maria Castaneda and Tara Brunt, and their predecessors, we proved the skeptics wrong. But no one could have envisioned what coronavirus would do to our Schools, our Church, our Country, or our world. Even our Parish Finance Committee who project a 30% reduction in Parish income, acknowledge the Archdiocese's assessment of the sad situation. And I know many of you are struggling as well.

As a minister of the Gospel, I must also state that all Catholics share some responsibility for this sad turn of events. With fewer parents fulfilling the promise they make at their child's Baptism to have their children properly formed in the faith, all faith-based activities for our young people have fewer and fewer participants, from Vacation Bible School, 'CCD' events, Youth Groups, and parochial schools. Had more Catholics and people of good will respectfully requested that our tax monies be used to support Catholic and Private Schools via vouchers and by other means, we would not be in such a dire financial situation. May this serve as a 'wake-up call' to more actively support legislation and policies that uphold our Christian values and ideals.

There are, however, some glimmers of joy: we are working on plans to incorporate the 8th Grade class of 28 into Saint Mary High School so they need not find a new school in their final year of Elementary School, and can earn a well-deserved 'Saint Mary' diploma. The Archdiocese will also assist those who wish to enroll in an area Catholic School, including tuition assistance, and to help our faculty and staff, who also need our prayers, to find employment.

In 1916, Saint Mary Elementary School began with an enrollment of slightly less than 100 students; ironically, today we have slightly less than 100 students. The differences are stark. In 1916, we began an upward trend that reached its peak in 1965 with 1,350 students; sadly, it has been in a downward spiral ever since - with no reasonable signs of an upswing.

May our Blessed Mother, Patroness of our Parish and Schools under her title Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, pray for us. May we never lose faith or hope in the Lord, who never allows one door to close without directing us to other open doors.

With God's love and my prayers,



**Very Reverend Michael J. Kreder, V.F., KCHS
Pastor**