

# St. Monica's Parish Information Night

January 26, 2012

Some Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) not on the [www.faithinthefuture.com](http://www.faithinthefuture.com) website:

## 1. Why did St. Monica school close?

The Blue Ribbon commission looked at educational programs offered at each school, current and historical enrollment figures, overall finances for the schools and parishes, current and projected capacity, facility improvements that would be needed and overall demographic trends in our diocese.

Our current and historical enrollment figures do not meet the criteria for sustainability. In the last 10 years ('01-'11) our enrollment dropped 35% from 237 to 155.

Overall the parish has had a deficit 5 of the last 6 years. Finances for the school and parish are not sustainable.

Fiscal Year	Net Parish Surplus/Deficit
2006	-\$12,120
2007	-\$138,750
2008	\$21,191
2009	-\$111,090
2010	-\$160,499
2011	-\$170,477

Currently, there are 309 registered families with school age children (K-8) and 74 (24%) send their children to St. Monica School.

Demographically, our baptisms have declined from 49 in 2006 (this year's kindergarten class) to 35 the last two years, so the potential pool of students just from St. Monica's parish shrunk by 14. That is not the only pool of potential students, but it is the largest.

## 2. How did St. Norbert's stay open? What is the difference between them and us?

St. Norbert's enrollment in 2010 was 198 students and it had that enrollment level (-/- 5 students) in four of the last six years. St. Norbert's weekly collections are higher than ours and the parish overall is not running a deficit. Their infant baptisms have declined in the last 5 years, but are still much higher with 51 in 2009, so a significant portion of their future student pool is larger than ours.

### **3. Can we appeal this decision?**

There is an opportunity for parish and school administrators to ask that the recommendation four of a closure, merger, or regionalization be reconsidered if they can present fact-based evidence in support of their position. We started the appeal process by requesting the data that the Blue Ribbon Commission reviewed. We reviewed the data to make sure it was accurate and complete, and compared it to the financial reporting that the Finance Council released to the parish several weeks ago. Unfortunately, the facts used to evaluate our school are correct, effectively removing the primary basis required by the Blue Ribbon Commission for further appeal.

### **4. Do I have to go to the new school on the Malvern campus? What if I want to go to a different Catholic school?**

Under the new diocesan guidelines shared on January 10, 2012, students can only go to the school associated with their parish. So parishioners of St. Monica's parish who want a Catholic school education can send their children to the new school on the Malvern campus. We hope all parents of St. Monica school children will choose that option so we can make the new school as special an experience of faith and education and community as St. Monica's school is.

If you decide that attending a different Catholic school will bring your child and your family closer to Christ, under the new guidelines you must join that other parish. Father Trader and the other pastors have agreed that they will not get in the way of your relationship with Jesus and if you request a letter of release from St. Monica's parish for that reason, it will be given.

For St. Monica School (SMS) students who come from another parish, if they are currently SMS students, they must go to the Malvern campus. Children in the same family who are not already enrolled in SMS may choose where they go. The guiding principle of doing what is best to draw your child and your family closer to Jesus would still apply.

### **5. Who is the Transition team?**

One of the first steps in the transition process was to create a Transition Team. As the Blue Ribbon report states, this team should include the pastor, school principal, a member of the Finance Council, and three school parents. After soliciting nominations from the school community and seeking the input of a number of parishioners and both Councils, Father Trader selected Chuck Ladner from the Finance Council, and Tracey Barausky, Nicole Elguicze, and Pat O'Brien to serve on the Transition team with Mrs. Hoban and him.

**6. What will happen with our CYO sports teams?**

We don't know yet. The CYO Board from St. Monica's will need to work with the CYO Board from St. Patrick's to understand the diocesan guidelines for parishes in regional schools and suggest the sports solution that will best serve the youth from our parish.

**7. What can I do to help make this transition as easy as possible on my children?**

Be extra mindful that we are the first teachers of our children and remember they will decide how to approach this transition most influenced by how we choose to approach this transition. Given the decision is final, we should do whatever we need to do to find a way to accept and embrace our new reality and guide our children to the same place. We would also encourage you to continue to work with HASA to make the last six months of St. Monica's school the best six months of St. Monica's school.

**8. What can I do to ensure the success of our new school?**

Bring your gifts and talents, your passion and your prayers, your ideas and your enthusiasm and be a part of building the best Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia at our new site in Malvern.

**9. Why was St. Patrick's chosen as the site for the new regional school?**

St. Patrick's school had similar sustainability issues caused by declining enrollment, fewer infant baptisms and an overall parish deficit. The school building has capacity for 590 students. The 2010 enrollment at St. Patrick's school was 298 students, which would allow them to absorb all St. Monica students and still have excess. In addition to the school building visible from the street, they built four classrooms, a library, and a 2<sup>nd</sup> cafeteria on the ground floor of the Church for the youngest children.

**10. What is the name of the new school and how was that determined?**

The new school has not been named yet. The children from St. Monica's school and St. Patrick's school have been asked to submit a list of potential names to the Transition team, who will assist the pastor's in making the final decision. We are praying the Holy Spirit will inspire both sets of students and the same name will show up on both lists as the obvious choice.

**11. When will we know the tuition rates for the new school?**

No later than March 25. The Transition Team and Finance Councils from both schools are gathering the information to create a tuition schedule that complies with the Blue Ribbon Commission guidelines for a sustainable school model. As has always been the case, St. Monica's parish is committed to providing a Catholic education for any parishioner who would like that option. Tuition assistance will continue to be available and families wishing to explore that should contact Father Trader.

**12. What will happen to the current St. Monica school / religious education building?**

St. Monica's school and education center is owned by St. Monica parish and it is up to us as a parish to determine how we will use the building next year. The real estate and property sub-committee of Finance Council will work with members of Pastoral Council to explore all options and make a recommendation to Father Trader. Any ideas or suggestions should be sent to [parishoffice@saintmonicachurch.org](mailto:parishoffice@saintmonicachurch.org).

**13. How does the change in Confirmation age to 8<sup>th</sup> grade impact this year's students?**

There is no change to the Confirmation plans for this year. Our 6<sup>th</sup> graders will still be confirmed as planned on Saturday, April 21, 2012. We are working with the Archdiocese of Philadelphia to understand the changes and timing of changes to move to this new model of formation for our young people and will share it as soon as we have that information.

**14. Does the closing of the parish school eliminate the parish deficit?**

No, not necessarily. According the guidelines in the Blue Ribbon Commission, the parish will still subsidize the tuition of students attending the new school, although the recommended rate of subsidy (\$1155 per student) is less than the current levels. There are still costs to maintain and use the existing building and the potential impact of the closure on parish offertory is an unknown. Preliminary analyses by the Finance Council show that the closing of the school will reduce parish expenses over the current levels, but may still leave a significant and unsustainable parish deficit. We must increase parish giving and find other sources of revenue if we wish to continue the level of services provided at St. Monica Parish. Finance Council and Parish Council will continue to work with Father Trader on strategies to improve the overall financial health of our parish.

**15. Does the closing of the school mean the parish will also close?**

No. There is a separate parish planning process that has begun for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. We are part of one of 44 Parish Planning Areas in the Archdiocese. Our planning area is in the first stages of its work.

Members of Pastoral and Finance Council are currently completing a required assessment of the parish ministries and services. Much of the work had already been done in the Envision Process a year ago and is just being translated into the diocesan format. Our understanding is that PPA will meet this summer as a group to develop recommendations that will be sent to the Archbishop for a decision in the first half of 2013.

Our PPA includes Our Lady of the Assumption, St. Isaac Jogues, St. Monica, St. Norbert, and St. Patrick parishes. As soon as we get more information on this process, we will share it with the entire parish community.

**16. What are the criteria for Parish Mergers and Parish Merger Plans:**

According to the diocesan website, [http://archphila.org/conversion/conversion\\_index.htm](http://archphila.org/conversion/conversion_index.htm) the need for mergers will be determined by a combination of the following criteria:

- Demographic shifts in Catholic population;
- the density of parishes in a limited geographic area;
- a history of declining sacramental activity (e.g. baptisms, marriages, funeral, and Sunday and weekly Mass attendance);
- unsustainable parish debt; and
- the decreasing availability of clergy to staff parishes.

**17. What can we do to make sure that St. Monica parish is not merged?**

The biggest thing everyone can do is get involved. Fifteen months ago we began the process as a parish community to re-envision St. Monica's. We discerned that We are One – enthusiastic disciples of Jesus Christ who bring God's love to all. We identified three pastoral priorities as a parish: Our Youth, Our Formation, and Our Community. We have made several changes as a parish and have made some initial progress on all three priorities. As a result, we have seen a modest increase in Mass attendance and in parish giving.

But the opportunity to do more in the name of Jesus Christ exists for every one of us. Every one of us, no matter how involved we are, should ask themselves if they can take another step. Can you volunteer an extra hour a month in service to the parish community? Can you invite one other person in your neighborhood to a parish event in the hopes of reconnecting them with the Church? Can you increase you the percent of your annual income you contribute to the parish by one point so the work of the parish can continue and expand? That is, if you give 2% of your annual income, can you take another step and give 3% this year? If you give 5%, can you take another step and give 6% this year?

There are no guarantees of anything. The Archdiocese of Philadelphia, like most dioceses in the country, simply does not have the number of priests to continue to provide pastors for every parish into the future. However, healthy, vibrant, active parishes that “bring God's love to all” should be able to continue their work and remain open.

If we act as One in God who unites us, and we offer whatever gifts and talents we have to serve the Lord through the parish community of St. Monica, our parish vision can be realized – and that will be the best argument that our parish should remain for another 115 years.

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As a reminder and a resource, the following questions about the Blue Ribbon Commission are all answered on [www.faithinthefuture.com](http://www.faithinthefuture.com)

### **Decision Making Process**

- How did the Blue Ribbon Commission come to their decisions?
- What were the criteria used to evaluate what schools would be combined and/or closed?
- Was the Blue Ribbon Commission process modeled after any other dioceses?
- How does the restructuring plan help to ensure Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia?
- How will my child's education be improved by the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendations?

### **Inner City Education**

- Did the Blue Ribbon Commission take special care to ensure that Catholic education is available to inner city and other underserved communities?
- Are the inner city and other underserved communities affected in a disproportionate way in the Blue Ribbon Commission's restructuring plan?

### **Recommendations**

- Did the arrival of Archbishop Chaput change the mission or scope of the Blue Ribbon Commission's work?
- Are these recommendations really meant to bolster the Archdiocese's bottom line?

### **School Partnerships & Closings**

#### **Partnering Process**

- My child attends a school that is "partnering." How will the partnering process work?
- My child attends a school that is "regionalizing." How will the regionalizing work?
- My child attends a high school that is closing. How will he or she pick a new school? What is the transition process?

#### **School Choice**

- Why was my school chosen to regionalize, partner or close when other Archdiocesan schools in the area remain open?
- Why must my child go to the assigned "partner" elementary school? Why can't I just pick the school I want my children to attend as they do for high schools?

### **Financial & Logistical Questions**

- Will tuition decrease since schools are partnering, regionalizing or closing? Efficiencies in operating costs should cause tuition to go down, right?
- What kind of assistance are you prepared to offer families affected by the school closures?
- My child is in PREP. How is my child's PREP program affected? Will PREP continue at my current parish or at the new school?
- How will CYO activities and specific programs like sports teams be affected?
- How will preparation for the sacraments be handled? Will my child receive his or her First Communion or be Confirmed in my parish?

### **School Facilities**

- What will happen to the closed school buildings? What about their contents, such as books, desks, computers, etc?
- What measures are being taken to preserve the identity of the schools that will be closing? What will happen to all of the trophies, awards, statues, historical effects, etc.?

### **Parental Input & Appeals**

### **Notifications**

- When were the school communities notified that their school will be closed or partnered?
- My pastor feels our school should not have been involved in this process. Isn't the school his responsibility?
- What gives the Archdiocese the right to close my school without having first involved families more directly in the process?
- Why was I not included in the decision making process?

### **Feedback**

- Where can I send comments?
- Will there be any forums available for families at affected schools?

### **Appeals Process**

- Are these decisions final?
- If we can raise the money to keep our school open, will anyone listen?

### **Teachers & Staff Decisions**

- How many people have lost their jobs because of this restructuring?
- How is the Archdiocese prepared to assist those who are losing their jobs?
- How are teachers, administrators and support staff being chosen for the newly formed parish schools?
- Will staff decisions be made based on seniority?

### **Miscellaneous**

- What is a "mission school"?
- Can we expect this to be the last school closing announcement for a while or will there be more coming soon?
- Will stakeholders be kept current on the effectiveness of this strategic plan over the next few years? If so, how?
- Are the legal fees and settlements related to the priest abuse scandal affecting the schools' finances, which is why the Blue Ribbon Commission is recommending this restructuring?