



## Saint Raymond of Penafort Church & School

### Statement Regarding Blue Ribbon Commission Report & Parish Pastoral Planning – Jan. 8, 2012

Archbishop Chaput wrote a December 8<sup>th</sup> Pastoral Letter describing efforts to “renew our local Church with Christian charity, justice and zeal.” The challenges, he wrote, would be painful. But through the power of God’s love for us, we will find the strength to meet these challenges and fulfill God’s mission for our local Church. Among these challenges is the need to restructure and revitalize Catholic Education in the Archdiocese. As the Archbishop noted, any plan would likely involve the closing or merging of a number of our schools as well as parishes. The results of a Blue Ribbon Commission were released on Jan. 6<sup>th</sup>. Although **our parish school will not be directly affected by these plans**, it is important that we understand the difficult process that some of our friends, neighbors and family members in other parishes are experiencing as we move forward. A website dedicated to providing the latest information about the transition plan – [www.FaithintheFuture.com](http://www.FaithintheFuture.com) – will be continually updated. On December 30<sup>th</sup> the parishes in our area received a letter from the diocese proposing some changes that **will have a direct impact on the life of our parish** and the life of the parishes that are our neighbors.

Things to keep in mind as we reflect on the monumental decisions that are taking place on the part of the Archdiocese:

- In the past 10 years the Archdiocese has provided over \$750 million to parish and regional elementary schools in subsidy. The difference between tuition and actual cost per pupil increased (on average) from \$950 in 2001 to \$1475 today.
- Church attendance has declined in many parishes. This impacts the parish’s ability to subsidize a parish school. In addition, the number of children being baptized has decreased significantly in the past 10 years (at some parishes more than 40%).
- Many of the parishes in our immediate area are struggling financially and are having difficulty maintaining their property. In addition, attendance at Mass continues to decline at many parishes.
- The number of priests available to serve parishes across the Archdiocese is sadly in decline. In addition, the Vincentians who staff 3 of our parishes will be reducing the number of priests they are able to commit to these parishes in the years to come.

A brief summary of schools that are impacted (the complete list is available upon request):

- High School being closed: West Catholic, Bonner-Prednie, Conwell-Egan, St. Hubert
- Montgomery County:
  - St. Anthony, Ambler, St. Catherine, Horsham and St. Alphonsus combine at Maple Glen
  - Our Lady Help of Christians, Abington and St. David combine at Willow Grove
  - Immaculate Conception, Jenkintown and St. Luke combine at Glenside
- Philadelphia:
  - Holy Cross and Mother of Consolation combined at Chestnut Hill
  - St. Bridget and Holy Child combined at Hermitage Street
  - Incarnation and St. Helena combined at 5<sup>th</sup> & Godfrey
  - St. William and St. Cecilia combined at Rhawn Street
  - Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament and St. Donato combined at 65<sup>th</sup> Street

- St. Malachy and Visitation combined at Lehigh Avenue

The impact of the Blue Ribbon Report Recommendations at Saint Raymond Church & School:

- **Academic Excellence:** we will continue to implement the Core Curriculum and seek to integrate what is necessary for our becoming a “Model School”
- **Religious Education:** we will seek to strengthen our Parish Religious Education for children attending non-Catholic Schools so that they receive adequate formation in the faith; we will transition to students receiving Confirmation in 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- **The Foundation for Education:** we will seek support from the newly created Foundation which will provide a variety of funding opportunities for teacher scholarships, technology improvements and physical plant improvements
- **Advocacy for Governmental Support:** we will advocate along with other school communities for increased funding from the State and Federal Government (ie – “vouchers”)

Regarding the **proposed** changes in parish structure in the area:

- St. Raymond Church remains open
- St. Therese Church is closed (with members joining Holy Cross or St. Raymond)
- St. Madeline Sophie Church is closed
- Holy Cross Church remains open
- St. Francis Church is closed (with members joining St. Vincent)
- St. Vincent Church remains open
- Immaculate Conception Church is closed (with members joining St. Vincent)
- St. Athanasius Church remains open
- St. Benedict Church is closed (with members joining St. Athanasius or St. Vincent)

I cannot stress enough that this is a **proposed plan by the Archdiocese**. In the next few weeks each Pastor, after consulting with members of the parish, needs to send a written response to the Archbishop regarding the proposal. The Archbishop will make a final decision at some point in March and the new plan will go into effect on July 1, 2012.

In order for our parish family to have the opportunity to share their thoughts about this plan and assist me in preparing our response, we will have a **Parish Meeting on Saturday, January 21<sup>st</sup> at 10am** in the Church. All are welcome to attend and share in this moment of grace. I anticipate the meeting lasting one-hour.

As you are aware, our neighboring parishes are impacted much more than ourselves. Please reach out to them with prayerful support as they experience this difficult time. Let us seek the grace of remaining focused on God’s plan as we continue to walk with Jesus in the Father’s love. May we always be a community that glorified God and seeks His sanctification!

Father Christopher M. Walsh  
Pastor