

SAINT EDMUND CAMPION PARISH

The merged churches of Blessed Sacrament, Our Lady of Peace, and Saint Christopher

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Dear parents and guardians,

It is my sad responsibility to inform you that Saint Christopher School will be closing at the end of this school year, effective June 30. Writing this letter is the most difficult task I've had to carry out in the 33 years that I've been a priest. I'm sure you feel now, the shock and sadness that I felt when I first learned of this necessary action.

The reasons for it are similar to those that have led to the recent closing of other schools. Primarily, it is the significant drop in enrollment we experienced at the beginning of the school year: 24 students. I'm sure that many of you had to wonder about the future of the school when the size of your child's class declined, in some cases, by as much as 50%.

Some contributing factors have been beyond our control and have led to the closing of even some public schools in Connecticut such as a decline in the population of school-age children. Our school, in particular, has faced strong competition from the magnet schools in the area. Also, our ability to provide services for children with special needs has been limited.

Whatever the reason, closing Saint Christopher's will be a great loss to the East Hartford community. Parents will have one less choice available to them when they search for a quality environment for the education of their children. I, myself, am the product of a Catholic education. The school of my home parish was closed in 2006.

When I first came to this parish more than four and a half years ago, some speculated that the school didn't have much time left. Thanks to the efforts of many friends, we were able to extend the blessings the school provides for five more years.

I've always liked to tell my friends how one visit to our school would dispel all the negative notions they may have had of young people today. I've always been impressed by how polite, hard working, intelligent and motivated our students are.

Sadly, a significant drop in enrollment has serious financial consequences for both the school and the parish. Because of it, we are facing a deficit of nearly \$100,000. This projected loss will have to be reconciled with money from the limited reserves of the parish. The enrollment history of the school for the past ten years has been one of gradual decline. There is no reason to believe that it will be reversed. And it would be irresponsible on my part to risk the financial health of the parish because of future deficits.

Our principal, Mrs. Kathleen Welch, has done heroic work to manage the school finances, to the point where we were able to submit a balanced budget for the past two years. This positive development would have continued but for the drop in enrollment that no one had anticipated. Despite the best efforts of so many parents, parishioners, and friends of the school over the years, we were unable to reverse the downward trend in enrollment. As I often said “It’s about enrolment; it’s always about enrollment.” We tried our best but, sadly, it wasn’t good enough.

To soften the impact of the school closing, I suggested to the archbishop that parents be given the chance to continue the Catholic education of their children by allowing them to enroll, for one year, in another Catholic school in the area at a tuition rate equal to the one our School Board settled on for the next school year: \$4,770. The parish would make up the difference. To my delight and gratitude, the archbishop has agreed to this arrangement for parents who choose it. Those students who currently live in East Hartford or Hartford and qualify for CEO scholarships and those who qualify for FACS scholarships should contact those foundations so that they can transfer their scholarships to another non-public school

Only God knows how many children walked through the doors of our school since they were first opened on September 6, 1963. Many of them were able to build on the solid foundation of learning they received here and went on to have successful lives, always mindful of the fact that they were to be “Christophers” or “Christ-bearers” in the world.

I can’t praise enough the wonderful faculty we have; they are highly professional and their work will live on in the future endeavors of the children who were placed under their care. The help offered by the staff is exceptional. I’m grateful to the alumni who never forgot our school and to the parishioners on whose support we could always rely.

An informational meeting will be held in the school gym today at 6:30 p.m.

Our school was built in a time that is far different from today. The culture in which we live has become secularized and appreciation for Catholic values has lessened. The population of our area is aging and families are smaller. These and other sad realities have converged to the point where our school is no longer sustainable. The days and months ahead will be difficult but not insurmountable. God has been our help in ages past and he will continue to be our hope for years to come.

May God be with you all,

Father John Gwozdz, Pastor

Financial and Enrollment Summary

St. Christopher: East Hartford

Current School Year Budget:

Projected 2019/2020 School Year End
\$(98,535)

Past 3 year Actuals:

Actual 2016/2017 School Year End	Actual 2017/2018 School Year End	Actual 2018/2019 School Year End
\$(28,693)	\$71,395	\$(4,559)

Enrollment:

Actual 2015-2016 Enrollment	Actual 2016-2017 Enrollment	Actual 2017-2018 Enrollment	Actual 2018-2019 Enrollment	Actual 2019-2020 Enrollment
178 students	161 students	152 students	149 students	124 students

Other Considerations:

Budgeted Parish Support for 2019-2020 School Year	Parish Reserves at 12/31/2018	School Cash Balance less Liabilities at 06/30/2019	Unpaid Benefits to the Archdiocese as of 12/31/2019
\$57,000	\$ 1.5M	\$12,965	\$ 0

Comments:

- Budget includes depreciation of \$5,500.
- East Hartford parishes were supporting school with special subsidies through CSSP. Now that the CSSP program no longer exists, neither does this funding. This is a contributing factor to the large 2019-2020 projected deficit.
- School has been perceived as "at-risk" due to large drop in enrollment for 2019-2020 and the loss of multiple parish support, but remaining current on outstanding benefit balances that once were very large.
- Pastor and Parish are very committed to the school.
- Students received 25 CEO Scholarships in 2018-19, totaling \$48,000 in awards.

RATIONALE FOR CLOSING THE SCHOOL:

Enrollment dropped by 25 students from 149 in 2018/19 to 124 in 2019/20.

This resulted in an estimated loss of \$117,000 in tuition revenue.

This loss contributed to a deficit of \$98,535 projected for 2019/20.

Enrollment at the school has declined steadily for the last ten years and earlier (except for a bump in 2012/13):

2010-11	279	
2011/12	232	-47
2012/13	245	+13
2013/14	211	-34
2014/15	207	-4
2015/16	178	-29
2016/17	161	-17
2017/18	152	-9
2018/19	149	-3
2019/20	124	-25

Because of this trend, it is reasonable to project that enrollment is not likely to increase in the future. Among the factors that may have contributed to this decline:

Competition from Magnet Schools in East Hartford and surrounding towns.

Changing demographics of East Hartford in particular and Connecticut in general (it is an aging State, school age population is decreasing).

The enrollment decrease by 25 has put the school in the “high risk” category by the Archdiocesan Office of Evangelization, Education & Catechesis (OEEC).

Schools in the high risk category (any school with an enrollment below 160) can expect to be closed as the Pastoral Planning Process moves from restructuring parishes to restructuring schools.

Because of the downward trend in enrollment, it is reasonable to project that enrollment will not increase in the future and, thus, will result in a growing deficit.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the parish to assume the debt that results from the deficit.

Two years ago the parish paid off a debt of \$125,000 that the school generated in preceding years and this was possible only because of the sale of Blessed Sacrament Church. It would not be good for the parish to assume a new and growing debt generated by continued declining enrollment. It would quickly erode what the parish has in reserve.