



Notre Dame Catholic School

Situation Analysis
September 2018

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History of Enrollment, Financials, and Facility

Twenty years ago, Notre Dame Catholic School was near the peak of its enrollment with a total student population of 511 students for the 1998-1999 school year. That was the first year of a new Principal and the beginning of a downward spiral in which enrollment, finances, and the condition of the physical plant of Notre Dame would all suffer. Over a period of five years between the 1998-1999 school year and the 2003-2004 school year, enrollment declined by 40%. This included a one year loss of 95 students, or 20% of the student population, between the 2000-2001 school year and the 2001-2002 year. Despite having a new Principal for the 2001-2002 school year, a severe blow had been dealt and an institution built to support roughly 480 students was generating income from only roughly 390 students. Notre Dame then entered an extended period where the budget would be cut, improvement projects shelved, personnel positions would be removed, and other cost saving measures would be executed in an effort to stabilize the school financially.

To further frustrate efforts to stabilize Notre Dame, in the months following a December 2003 letter in which the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth noted concern about the “financial crisis” facing Notre Dame, the parish subsidy from Our Lady Queen of Peace to Notre Dame Catholic School was cut by 10%. Without any outside support to help stabilize the school, the result was a cycle in which declining enrollment led to further financial cuts in personnel and facilities, which likely led to further declining enrollment. This was witnessed between 2001-2002 and 2011-2012 with an average enrollment loss of 6.2% per year. This was the period in which facilities were largely left to deteriorate, the positions of facilities/maintenance and administrator at the Lower Campus were eliminated, and the interest that is eligible to be collected off the growth of the endowment was included as a part of the operating budget.

It was during the 2011-2012 school year that Meitler Consultants conducted a study of Notre Dame Catholic School in order to assess its viability. The study offered significant conclusions regarding enrollment, finances, advancement, and governance. Regarding enrollment, the 2012 study concluded that there was a significant enough population of school-aged children in Wichita Falls to support a Catholic elementary and high school. The report also concluded that one of the results of declining enrollment was reduced investment in the quality of the educational program and it “could become a self-fulfilling prophecy that leads to the closing of the school.” Notable conclusions in the area of finances were the need to develop a comprehensive and multi-year financial plan along with the statement that, “Current and future facility needs are not being addressed, which could cause a financial crisis in the years to come.” Of the 14 conclusions and 8 recommendations offered by Meitler in 2012, very few of the conclusions resulted in action and only one of the recommendations was acted upon by 2015.

It should be noted that between the 2011-2012 school year and the 2015-2016 school year, enrollment did increase by 54 students, or 27%. That increase can largely be attributed to unfunded tuition assistance. So while there was an increase in enrollment, it did not benefit finances to a large extent. This was clearly illustrated between the 2015-2016 and the 2016-2017 school year in which revenues decreased by about \$120,000 despite a growth in enrollment of roughly 12 students. As corrections have been made to ensure that unfunded tuition assistance is manageable for the long term and changes in policies, procedures, and school culture have been enacted, Notre Dame Catholic School has witnessed a decline in enrollment of about 20% which puts the school back where it was in terms of enrollment when the Meitler Study was conducted.

In order to secure the future of Notre Dame Catholic School, bold changes and investments are needed. What follows is a plan which will highlight the progress that has been made since 2016 to address school finances, enrollment, and facility needs as well as the action steps needed to move forward in securing a future for Notre Dame Catholic School as a PreK-12 school serving the needs of the Catholic community of Wichita Falls and the broader Northwest Deanery of the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth.

The Plan

Area 1: Financials

As illustrated by the brief narrative history of Notre Dame over the last twenty years, there is rarely one problem that alone accounts for the difficulties currently faced. Numerous of these issues are systemically rooted in the operations of the school but have, over the last two years, begun the process of being addressed and redirected through the implementation of new processes and procedures based upon standard best practices in conjunction with local experience.

Most apparent in the realm of financials is the projected \$170,000 - \$200,000 deficit for the 2018-2019 school year. While this appears to place the school in a much more dire financial position than it has been over recent history, the reality is that the financial situation of the school is fairly static compared with where it has been. While making budget cuts and cutting personnel in the previous 15 years, the school went without personnel that is vital to the operation of a well run, or even generally operational, Catholic school. It is necessary to have a second supporting administrator as a presence when you operate two distinct buildings separated by hundreds of yards. It is also necessary to have a full time facilities manager when operating two buildings and caring for grounds that cover vast acreage. Finally, it is considered best practice in Catholic school operations to not include any interest off of investments as a part of the operational budget in order to preserve that item for capital investments in the future. If, at the current moment, Notre Dame Catholic School were to eliminate the position of Assistant Principal and Facilities Manager and include the interest eligible for withdrawal from the Endowment Fund as a part of the school budget, then the projections for 2018-2019 would be much closer to balanced. To do so, however, would cover up the reality of the financial situation at Notre Dame.

In regards to progress already made as it concerns the finances of Notre Dame Catholic School, it is noted that since June of 2017, deficiencies in basic billing for Extended Day and Cafeteria have been corrected as well as procedural deficiencies for billing entry and journal coding remediated. The local cafeteria program has been eliminated and replaced with a catered lunch service due to the fact that the school had lost close to \$20,000 in one year on lunches. Consistent with developing better policies and procedures, needed systems for tracking and filing have been created, accurate and authentic tracking of unfunded tuition assistance has been generated, and long held local budgetary practices have been changed so that the school budget is an accurate reflection of income and expenses.

Action Plan for Area 1: Financials

Objective 1: Notre Dame will continue to seek and grow financial assistance in the form of grants and donations to help cover unfunded tuition assistance.

Notre Dame Catholic School has increased revenues from grants and other donations to the school to support tuition by 117% since 2015. More opportunities exist and will be pursued through the application for gifts from the Kremer Foundation and from local community foundations with a goal of increasing those revenues by an additional 50% over the next three years.

Objective 2: Notre Dame will grow its fundraising efforts to meet the goal of providing 10% of the annual budget through monetary donations.

Notre Dame Catholic School has, in consideration of the recommendations of Catholic School Management, created the position of Director of Institutional Advancement in order to manage both Enrollment & Marketing as well as Fund Development & Advancement. This position was created in January of 2018. Prior to this time, the staffing of personnel for Fund Development & Advancement was inconsistent and often relied upon volunteers. By not relying on volunteers and directing these efforts from an administrative level, Notre Dame will be able to create a more cohesive plan for fund development as well as seeing to more successful implementation. Strategies have already been developed and are being put into practice to grow contributions to the Annual Fund as well as to further maximize the gala dinner/auction known as the Extravaganza. The target goal of 10% funding of the budget is based upon best practices in Catholic schools.

Objective 3: Notre Dame will continue to budget based upon proper essentials and correct data.

Notre Dame Catholic School has made significant progress in operating according to established norms and best practices over the last two and a half years. The administration has taken steps to account for appropriate staffing, personnel, and facilities needs in preparing the budget by offering proper assumptions and narratives to the school Finance Council and pastors. To continue to progress, it will be necessary for the Finance Council to assume a more collaborative role in the budgetary process and become problem solvers as opposed to operating as gatekeepers for the finances of the parish. This was identified in the assessment of Catholic School Management and the transition of the Finance Council is ongoing.

Objective 4: Notre Dame will develop a three year financial plan in collaboration with the school Finance Council and Advisory Council.

Notre Dame Catholic School has overhauled the school Advisory Council in the last year and is now situated to move forward as a school with a functioning and supportive advisory body. As a recognized best practice in Catholic schools, it is important that the Finance Council support the work of the Advisory Council as they collaborate with the administration and pastors to chart the future of the school. To that end, it is important that the Finance Council create a three year financial plan that supports the objectives and needs of the school. This is consistent with the standards for Operational Vitality offered in the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools. Building a three year financial plan will require quality data and budgeting, as indicated in Objective 3, as well as a Strategic Plan that identifies the direction and goals for the school. The Strategic Plan for Notre Dame is in progress and scheduled to be completed in the spring of 2019.

Area 2: Enrollment

The position of Director of Enrollment was created at Notre Dame in 2012 in consideration of the recommendation that came from the Meitler study. That position was staffed for a little over two years before a change occurred and the current Director of Enrollment was hired in October of 2014. There was very little training or direction offered to the personnel staffing that position. One of the conclusions of Catholic School Management in 2017 was to roll the responsibilities of that position into the new position of Director of Institutional Advancement and to provide training for that position. The new position was created in January of 2018 and training has been undertaken through attendance at the NCEA Conference in the Marketing & Enrollment track as well as through consultation and review of numerous materials and best practices shared by organizations such as Catholic School Management. Significant progress has been made in practices involving enrollment management in the last year by way of the creation of an contact tracking spreadsheet to monitor inquiries, tours, applications, and other contact points with potential families. In addition to learning and implementing standard best practices in enrollment management, Notre Dame Catholic School has been working to find innovative ways to reach potential new families through starting “Youth Group Nights” at Notre Dame with our local parishes, by reaching out to our parish R.E. families to find out why they do not choose Notre Dame for their children, as well as through forging into the arena of direct digital online marketing strategies. Finally, recognizing that retention is also a key to enrollment management, Notre Dame conducted parent satisfaction surveys in the spring of 2018 and is recognizing and responding to the voices of the school’s internal constituencies.

Action Plan for Area 2: Enrollment

Objective 1: Notre Dame will develop a comprehensive, documented enrollment management plan.

Notre Dame Catholic School has not previously had a clear, documented, and comprehensive enrollment management plan. It is standard practice in modern Catholic schools to have a documented enrollment management plan that addresses marketing strategies, enrollment strategies, and retention strategies as well as a schedule for targeted enrollment/marketing events and actions. This enrollment management plan is in process and will be completed by November of 2018.

Objective 2: Notre Dame will improve the ‘value proposition’ that it presents to potential families.

Notre Dame Catholic School is a part of a long history of Catholic education in Wichita Falls dating back to 1904. However, the long history and attachment that has sustained the school generationally is no longer sufficient for a vibrant Catholic school. Steps must be taken to improve the ‘value proposition’ to both Catholics and non-Catholics so that parents feel confident in investing their significant tuition dollars in a Catholic school education at Notre Dame. In order to improve the value proposition, Notre Dame can differentiate itself in the marketplace by identifying the school as the only classical model of school in Wichita Falls. Classical education is a growing market segment in private school education and even among public charter schools. Placing Notre Dame within that context is a good strategy to grow enrollment. To further improve the value proposition, Notre Dame will encourage

students to apply to a variety of universities and will use those college admissions, along with testing and other data, to highlight the temporal benefits of a Catholic school education. Finally, to improve the value proposition, Notre Dame needs to continue to develop the faculty in quality teaching practices and recruit high quality new teachers when positions open. Almost forty years of school history show that teacher recruitment and retention has been an issue of concern dating back to the 1980s. One option that should be considered by the Finance Council and Advisory Council is the teacher salary scale and/or signing bonuses for teachers paid out over their first 18 months of employment.

Objective 3: Notre Dame will develop strategies for student retention with a goal of 85% retention from year to year.

Notre Dame Catholic School has experienced vast swings in enrollment throughout its history. Creating effective strategies for student retention will help to ameliorate some of these issues. Steps have already been taken to address the issue of retention with further development of retention strategies needed. Steps taken include scheduled days for 5th grade students to spend the day at the Upper Campus so that they can picture themselves as 6th graders as well as other fun activities designed for 5th graders to encourage retention. Being able to retain 85% of students from year to year will help stabilize the school since the current elementary school population is a stable foundation to build upon with 14 students in 4K, 22 in Kindergarten, 14 in 1st Grade, 21 in 2nd Grade, 10 in 3rd Grade, 19 in 4th Grade, and 13 in 5th Grade. The target of 85% is based upon the standard best practice of 90% retention with consideration given to our local population which is comparatively transient in no small part due to the population of Sheppard AFB. Another key part of retention is focusing on internal constituencies and reminding them of the value proposition that they have already committed to. This is currently done through social media groups that parents subscribe to as well as community building events such as “Movement with Moms” and the numerous extracurricular events that our families attend.

Objective 4: Notre Dame will continue to collect data to guide decisions regarding enrollment targeting and marketing.

Notre Dame Catholic School will continue to collect data from current families for the purposes of, not just retention, but also long range planning. As a part of the current strategic planning process, surveys have been sent out to families asking for their feedback as to why they chose Notre Dame but also asking, at the elementary level, if they plan to send their children to Notre Dame for middle school and/or high school. This data, and other information and data sets that we can collect, will help with planning and with marketing. In addition, Notre Dame will survey the homeschool community of Wichita Falls. While hard numbers are not kept, there is known to be a robust homeschool population in Wichita Falls. This includes multiple parent co-ops and more than one Classical Conversations organization. By defining Notre Dame as a classical model of school and reaching out to that homeschool community, Notre Dame can examine whether opportunities exist to expand enrollment on a part time basis at any level.

Objective 5: Notre Dame will form an Enrollment/Marketing committee.

As a part of the growth and functionality of the Advisory Council, numerous sub-committees need to be formed in order to help the administration carry into execution the needed actions of an effective Catholic school. One of the first sub-committees that needs to be formed and made operational during the 2018-2019 school year is the Enrollment/Marketing committee. This committee will, in consultation with the Advisory Council and the Director of Institutional Advancement, help generate ideas and carry out specified actions that help the overall enrollment efforts of Notre Dame Catholic School.

Area 3: Facilities

As has been identified previously, one of the areas to suffer from a lack of investment and care during the years of declining enrollment and budget cuts was the physical plant of Notre Dame Catholic School. Not only was there a lack of serious investment in the physical plant but the school started to accumulate a significant amount of deferred maintenance over that time. This was noted in every study and school accreditation report over that time period. Those projects and improvements that were accomplished, such as the renovation of the bathrooms at the Upper Campus and the addition of new computers, projectors, and interactive whiteboards, were all completed thanks to grant monies awarded. However, budgetarily, nothing was ever allocated for the maintenance of these gifts and as they aged out, as has been witnessed with the technology pieces, there are no replacement funds. In addressing facilities, it is important to re-emphasize the issue that the school was without a facilities manager for roughly 15 years. School records indicate that in the 2003-2004 school year, there were two part time maintenance personnel scheduled for 10-15 hours per week each. Shortly thereafter, maintenance was reduced further to one part time position at about 10 hours per week. With the responsibility to maintain two distinct campuses and the vast grounds that need to be cared for, having one staffed position at ten hours per week devoted to maintenance of the facilities speaks to the drastic and unreasonable levels that Notre Dame resorted to in order to try and maintain solvency on paper.

With this clear need present, the decision was made for the 2017-2018 school year to employ a full time facilities manager in order to care for both the physical plant and the grounds and to start the process of remediating some of the long time deficiencies due to deferred maintenance. In that time, the school has seen substantial improvement in a number of the most basic yet needed areas such as grounds maintenance, simple repairs being addresses in a timely and more cost efficient way, and starting some needed updates to the Upper Campus building such as fresh design and painting along with modern light fixtures. As stated in the section on enrollment, increasing the value proposition is very important to successfully attracting new students and families. Being able to offer a facility that is appears clean, well cared for, aesthetically pleasing, and appropriately modern is an important part of securing the future success of Notre Dame Catholic School. In fact, research done in this area shows a correlation between facilities and recruitment. A 2006 study conducted by the Center for Facilities Research focused on a correlation between facilities and a student's decision to attend a particular college. A summary of the research findings stated, "While academic issues were at the top of the list when it came to choosing an institution (that is, the institution had to have a strong program in their field of interest, have excellent teachers, and so on) an attractive campus and quality facilities did play a role in the decision process, ... the survey results suggested a significant number of respondents rejected an institution because important facilities were missing, inadequate, or poorly maintained." (Facilities Manager, 27) In the current situation of having two competing private schools in Wichita Falls, Christ Academy and Wichita Christian School, both of whom have newer facilities with nicer amenities, it is important that Notre Dame find ways to address these deficiencies.

Action Plan for Area 3: Facilities

Objective 1: Notre Dame will continue progress in simple and cost effective improvements to the school campus, especially the school's Upper Campus.

Notre Dame Catholic School has undertaken simple and cost-efficient projects with the addition of a facilities manager that is improving the outward appearance and appeal of the school. It is important that Notre Dame continue these projects, such as the completion of the replacement of old light fixtures, the completion of the new Student Union, the completion of the new Technology Center, and continuing improvement of the appearance of the grounds.

Objective 2: Notre Dame will seek opportunities to maximize the facilities and space to the benefit of the school.

Notre Dame Catholic School has vast grounds and facilities that can be utilized to bring people who are not currently associated with the school onto the campus and that can be used for the benefit of the Diocese of Fort Worth in the northwest part of the Diocese. By offering our athletic fields and grounds to youth organizations for practices and competition, provided that they meet the requirements of insurance and facility use agreement, the school can bring positive exposure to those that are not currently associated with the school and use the grounds as a marketing tool. In addition, some of the current empty space at the Upper Campus could be utilized by the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth to house offices or materials that are of benefit to the Diocese. This currently includes the establishment of an IT backup server on the Notre Dame campus and could also include in the future the establishment of remote offices that serve Diocesan needs in the northwest deanery.

Objective 3: Notre Dame will gain assistance from the Diocese of Fort Worth, the parishes of Our Lady Queen of Peace and Sacred Heart, and/or philanthropic organizations in order to invest in the repair and updating of the facilities.

Notre Dame Catholic School will need to invest in the facility in order to help with the enrollment and retention of students and families. Numerous reports highlighted the need to attend to the facility and to the deferred maintenance that accumulated over the years. In a competitive educational environment, facilities can either attract potential families or discourage them from attending. When looking at the correlation between finances, enrollment, and facilities, it is apparent that the recent history of Notre Dame has been one of decreased enrollment, followed by financial troubles, followed by neglect of the facility, which further contributed to decreased enrollment. This cycle can be reversed by addressing the needs of the facility in order to attract new students to increase enrollment which will benefit the school financially. In reality, human beings are attracted to beautiful things at their best and, at their worst they are attracted to shiny objects. Major renovations and improvement to the facilities at Notre Dame will create an excitement and a "buzz" about a school that is moving boldly into the future. That kind of excitement can spread quickly in a smaller community such as Wichita Falls. Updating the facilities at Notre Dame will need to include both unobserved needs, such as new air conditioning units and a new roof at the Upper Campus, as well as clearly observed and marketable needs, such as new lighting, floors, fixtures, landscaping, and a renovated chapel. The most recent parent survey conducted in the spring of

2018 highlighted that “Facilities” was the issue of greatest concern to current families. Further data is currently being collected to ascertain what is most at issue for current parents when they say “Facilities” in order to direct the most immediate attention to these areas, as appropriate, to help with retention and recruitment.

A Lack of Operational Vitality

In referencing the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools, one can look back to 2015 to see that in terms of Governance/Leadership and in terms of Operational Vitality, Notre Dame Catholic School was operating ineffectively at that time.

- Standard 5 : An excellent Catholic school has a governing body (person or persons) which recognizes and respects the role(s) of the appropriate and legitimate authorities, and exercises responsible decision making (authoritative, consultative, advisory) in collaboration with the leadership team for development and oversight of the school's fidelity to the mission, academic excellence, and operational vitality.
- Standard 6: An excellent Catholic school has a qualified leader/leadership team empowered by the governing body to realize and implement the school's mission and vision.
- Standard 10: An excellent Catholic school provides a feasible three to five year financial plan that includes both current and projected budgets and is the result of a collaborative process, emphasizing faithful stewardship.
- Standard 11: An excellent Catholic school operates in accord with published human resources/personnel policies developed in compliance with (arch)diocesan policies and/or religious congregation sponsorship policies, which affect all staff (clergy, religious women and men, laity and volunteers) and provide clarity for responsibilities, expectations, and accountability.
- Standard 12: An excellent Catholic school develops and maintains a facilities, equipment, and technology management plan designed to continuously support the implementation of the educational mission of the school.
- Standard 13: An excellent Catholic school enacts a comprehensive plan, based on a compelling mission, for institutional advancement through communications, marketing, enrollment management, and development.

Standards 10-13 are those that address Operational Vitality and, as such, one can see the correlation between not being effective in addressing those standards and not attaining operational vitality. In terms of addressing those standards, much progress has been made and/or is currently targeted to be addressed.

- Standard 5: Observations from 2015 found a governing body that was practically non-functioning. Members were not committed to showing up for meetings and the meetings resembled more of a dysfunctional Parent-Teacher Organization than those of a governing body tasked with looking after the macro-level and long term interests of the school. Beginning in the summer of 2017, members of the governing body (advisory council) have been trained and given direction in the proper role and function of an advisory council in a Catholic school of the Diocese of Fort Worth. The School Advisory Council is now an active and highly functional body, continuing to grow in membership, that is contributing to and supporting the administrative vision and direction for the school.
- Standard 6: The leadership team at Notre Dame experienced rapid and significant turnover between 2014 and 2017. With the exception of the Athletic Director, every administrative level position turned over in that time period. Every single one of those administrators entered into a new role that they had never previously occupied in a Catholic school, if at all. Through formal

training, informal training, and the establishment of policies, defined responsibilities, and procedures, Notre Dame now has a highly functional leadership team for the administrative management of a PreK - 12 Catholic school covering two campuses.

- Standard 10: Observations from 2015 found no existing financial plan for the school and time has revealed that even those financial records were not always accurate. As indicated with Objective 4 under Finances, Notre Dame is currently taking the steps that will enable the creation of a three year financial plan.
- Standard 11: Observations from 2015 found that the school was not in compliance with various personnel policies of the Diocese or of state accreditation standards. This lack of compliance was affirmed by the school's accreditation visit in 2016. Notre Dame is now in a strong position as it regards compliance with these policies and continues to work everyday to ensure continued compliance.
- Standard 12: Observations from 2015 found no management plan for facilities and a significant amount of deferred maintenance. This has been shared in Section 3 on Facilities. With a facilities manager currently on staff, Notre Dame now has the ability to create a facility management plan in coordination with the financial plan.
- Standard 13: Observations from 2015 found only a staff position for enrollment and marketing and no position for development. In consideration of the recommendations from Catholic School Management, the position of Director of Institutional Advancement was created in 2018 to address this need. Education and training for this position is ongoing.

Conclusion

The current financial dilemma that Notre Dame Catholic School finds itself in has developed over the last fifteen to twenty years and can not be corrected in a matter of two years. Changes in policies, procedures, and practices have been made over the last two years with still more to come as indicated in the objectives listed. Any conclusions to be made concerning the long-term viability of Notre Dame Catholic School, at any level, would likely be premature at this point because Notre Dame is not the same school currently that it has been for the last two decades. The function of school governance, the leadership model and leadership team, and the educational, personnel, and business operations have all changed moderately to significantly in the last two years. A foundation has now been laid to set a new trajectory for the future of Notre Dame Catholic School. There is no way to know for sure whether, given the changes already undertaken and those planned, that Notre Dame Catholic School has long-term solvency in its current form but any judgement for or against that solvency would be premature.

At the conclusion of this document, different options will be offered for consideration of the future of Notre Dame. Every one of those options, however, will require significant immediate assistance from either the Diocese of Fort Worth or from the sponsoring parishes. If that assistance needs to come from the Diocese of Fort Worth, Notre Dame Catholic School does have a \$2,000,000.00 investment that is a part of the Diocesan Endowment fund that could be accessed. In consideration for the spirit of that investment, in which the people of Wichita Falls invested money to secure the future of Notre Dame Catholic School, it would be just to expend a portion of that investment, even a fairly sizeable portion, in order to fairly assess whether Notre Dame has a future in its current form and structure or if conditions have changed in Wichita Falls to the degree that a PreK-12 Catholic school is no longer viable.

In a worst case scenario, even if Notre Dame Catholic School needed to expend \$200,000 per year from the Endowment investment for the next three years in order to work through the plan for the future and authentically see if the school is sustainable in its current form, only to find out that it is not, then Notre Dame would still have over a \$1,000,000.00 investment in the Endowment to support a newly organized and structured Catholic school. That worst case scenario option would also respect the people of Wichita Falls and their wishes that their investment be allowed to support sustaining Notre Dame Catholic School.

In a best case scenario, Notre Dame Catholic School would likely need to expend \$200,000 per year from that Endowment investment over the next two to three years in order to allow the new direction for Notre Dame to bear fruit and for enrollment to start to increase, especially at the Upper Campus level. Increasing enrollment, especially at the Upper Campus level, to ensure financial solvency for Notre Dame provides not just great immediate benefits for the Catholic population of Wichita Falls but also provides long term benefits for the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth and the Catholic Church at large. Research shows that young people who went to catholic schools are ten times as likely to attend Mass on a weekly basis and are even more likely to do so if they completed a Catholic high school education. In a purely temporal sense, the existence of Notre Dame Catholic School and the maintenance of a high school, if proven financially feasible, helps secure the future of our parishes and our Diocese as these graduates are much more likely to remain in the pews as adults and more likely to financially support their parishes. That reality is much more stark for a community such as Wichita Falls in which family ties run deep and those generations of families tend to stay close to home. The success of the evangelizing mission of the Church to the people of the northwest reaches of the Diocese of Fort Worth is aided by the existence and maintenance of Notre Dame Catholic School.

Wichita Falls is the embodiment of an American frontier community. Brash, rebellious, embracing independence and glorifying individualism. The great American historian, Frederick Jackson Turner, wrote that the frontier is where “savagery meets civilization” and that the frontier was where the marginalized of society were relegated to so that ‘proper’ society did not have to be inconvenienced by their problems. As a community, Wichita Falls carries that sense of marginalization with it. Even, and especially within the Catholic community of Wichita Falls, there is a great sense that they exist on the margins within the Church itself. Bishop Olson himself has offered a history of marginalization and neglect for Wichita Falls stemming all the way back to the creation of the Diocese of Fort Worth. To paraphrase, when Fort Worth was separated out as its own Diocese, those in Dallas sent the less desirable priests to establish the Diocese of Fort Worth and the least desirable among them went to Wichita Falls. This sentiment may be a bit hyperbolic but even at the highest levels in our Diocese, there is a recognition that the Catholics of Wichita Falls feel marginalized. As such, they passionately resist change, partly out of pride and that frontier mentality of answering to no one, and partly out of fear of being forgotten about and pushed aside. This unique culture must be accounted for if anyone is to consider both the history and future of Notre Dame Catholic School.

Since 2015, there has been substantive change brought to Notre Dame Catholic School. Much of it has been desperately needed for a long time but this spirit of change met great resistance. It is only of recent that trust has been earned by the leadership of Notre Dame Catholic School and time is needed for that trust to build further outward, into more of the school community and into the broader community. That slow growth of trust has enabled Notre Dame to build a small but vibrant advisory council, a relatively new but increasingly effective administrative team, and enabled generationally connected faculty members and school families to accept changes in policies, expectations, and responsibilities. There is a reason that research shows that it takes five to seven years for a new principal to have a beneficial and lasting impact on a school. (Education Northwest, 3) All the more so in a community such as Wichita Falls and at a school such as Notre Dame.

In whatever form the future of Notre Dame Catholic School takes, the success of Notre Dame will be dependent upon the full investment and commitment of all parties. School governance and leadership, sponsoring parishes, and the Diocesan offices all have to be committed without reservation. The success of any business requires a number of things which include quality leadership, the ability of leadership to execute a plan, a high quality plan, and the strong commitment of those invested in the enterprise. If one is to assume that the record of leadership since 2015 shows both quality and ability, then success becomes more determined by the plan being offered and by commitment. Any commitment that is half-hearted or is unwilling to make significant sacrifices, both parish level and Diocesan level, in order to see to the success of Notre Dame Catholic School as it currently exists will only conclude with failure. To will the good of the other is the act of charity and when doing so, there is always great risk assumed by the person extending themselves in a spirit of charity. In offering love, there is no guarantee of a reciprocal extension of love. As it is with this school, there is no guarantee that by extending these needed resources that the future changes. However, the following point is known and has been, hopefully, made clear in this document. Notre Dame Catholic School has been treading water for over more than 15 years. Any survivor, left in the ocean to tread water for an extended period of time, will eventually drown if they are not thrown a life belt.

To formally conclude, there is a message of hope. Bishop Olson always calls us to the cross because it is through the cross, by the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ, that we find hope. It is

poetic that in this moment of decision for Notre Dame Catholic School, we find clarity and consistency in that message both with the current Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth with the words of Blessed Basil Moreau, founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, the order which helped establish the current Notre Dame in 1966. The motto that Blessed Basil Moreau gave to the Congregation of Holy Cross was *Ave Crux, Spes Unica*. “Hail the Cross, Our Only Hope” As it concerns this school specifically, there is great hope in the words that Blessed Basil Moreau wrote in his Circular Letter 179.

“The many different trials to which we have been subjected are the indubitable marks of God’s will in our regard, and of the presence of the Lord in our midst. No one but God could have carried this institution through it many financial and moral crises.”

Future Options for Notre Dame

Option 1: Support Notre Dame for the current school year and two more years with defined plans proving successful.

With the commitment from the Diocesan offices and parishes to support Notre Dame for the current year plus an additional two, the opportunity to put into practice the plan outlined and see through the changes in direction for Notre Dame allow for observable growth in enrollment and improvement in the financial standing of the school. While the Endowment fund may have been accessed for sustainability and facility improvements, the school is situated to continue growth by attending to its strategic plan and by maintaining best educational practices and sound judgments of leadership. This positions the school to launch a capital campaign in the future to build back up the endowment fund after having earned the trust of the local community that the invested funds will be allocated for the preservation and benefit of Notre Dame.

Option 2: Support Notre Dame for the current school year and two more years with defined plans proving not successful.

With the commitment from the Diocesan offices and parishes to support Notre Dame for the current year plus an additional two, the opportunity to put into practice the plan outlined and see through the changes in direction for Notre Dame do not result in an increase in enrollment or a stabilizing of the school's financial position. At this point, good faith efforts have been made to ensure the sustainability of a PreK-12 Catholic school for Wichita Falls but there is not the authentic demand from the population to continue to support it. As such, one of the following options must be executed.

Option 2(a): Decision to discontinue high school and maintain K-8 at Lower Campus.

The school community would be informed that the current freshman class at that time would be the last high school class of Notre Dame Catholic School. Costs for the high school would come down dramatically in direct relation to the decreasing number of classes being offered which relates to payroll and loss of extracurricular activities as the student population graduates out. During that time period, renovations and upgrades to the Lower Campus building could be made to accommodate the moving of grades 6-8 to that building. This would include renovations to bathrooms as necessary, upgrades for spaces such as the science lab and a computer lab, the construction of a gym and track for middle school sports, and other such investments as would be necessary.

Option 2(b): Decision to maintain small non-traditional high school at alternative site and maintain K-8 at Lower Campus.

The school community would be informed that the maintenance of a traditional Catholic high school is no longer financially viable in Wichita Falls but that a non-traditional Catholic high school will be made available for those families who still desire a Catholic school education for their students. Grades 6-8 would move to the Lower Campus building as needed renovations and upgrades could be made. This would include renovations to bathrooms as necessary, upgrades for spaces such as the science lab and a computer lab, the construction of a gym and track for middle school sports, and other such investments as would be necessary. As for the non-traditional high school, the possibility exists to create a liberal arts model high school which would necessarily employ fewer faculty and staff since teachers

could teach across disciplines, beyond traditional accreditation standards, and athletics would assume a smaller role in the school. Locations that could be considered for this non-traditional high school include office buildings in downtown Wichita Falls or the old school classrooms located at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Wichita Falls. The Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth would then be left with an unused high school building with all grounds and athletic facilities that could prove difficult to sell as there is currently an old public school building on the market that has been abandoned for close to seven years.

Option 2(c): Decision to discontinue Upper Campus and maintain PreK-5 at Lower Campus.

The school community would be informed that the demand for a Catholic school education for both high school and middle school students does not exist in a way that is financially feasible for this community. No financial investment would need to be made at the Lower Campus. The Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth would then be left with an unused high school building with all grounds and athletic facilities that could prove difficult to sell as there is currently an old public school building on the market that has been abandoned for close to seven years.

Option 3: Support Notre Dame for only the current year, discontinue high school, and maintain K-8 at Lower Campus.

The Diocesan offices and/or parishes are not committed to supporting Notre Dame Catholic School beyond making sure that all bills and employees are paid for this year. The school community would be informed in the early spring that the high school is being discontinued and that the middle school will be moved to the Lower Campus. Needed renovations and upgrades for the Lower Campus would need to be planned and move forward in earnest in order for construction to take place in the summer months. This would include renovations to bathrooms as necessary, upgrades for spaces such as the science lab and a computer lab, the construction of a gym and track for middle school sports, and other such investments as would be necessary.

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