



## MONROE CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

November 9, 2011

Dear Parents and Parishioners of St. John the Baptist, St. Michael the Archangel and St. Mary:

I write this letter to the school families and parishioners of St. John the Baptist, St. Michael the Archangel, and St. Mary to share with you the news that our three parish schools will enter a new and exciting phase of existence in the coming year.

The brochure emailed to school families this week outlines the vision and direction for our shared ministry of Catholic education in the city. This vision brings us back to the mission statement formulated four years ago when the first conversations between our three parishes began. That charge had us seeking to ensure the effective stewardship of our shared resources as we provide quality Catholic education to the students of our schools. This mission was borne out of our parishes' shared commitment to continue the tremendous Catholic educational legacy we have inherited.

Our pastors wrote to you in November 2008 to announce the formation of the Monroe Catholic Schools Commission. The members of the Commission, led by Jack Ready, worked diligently for a year and a half at gathering information on local demographics, enrollment trends, and parish and school finances. They also spent time investigating other Catholic school models from around the country. The Commission published several preliminary findings and suggestions in May 2009. Their membership was expanded in the fall of that year. They hosted several listening sessions open to the public and conducted parent, parish, and faculty surveys on critical questions. The Commission concluded its work in the summer of 2010 and provided the pastors and principals a set of six recommendations aimed at building a more collaborative model for our Catholic schools. We thank the members of the Commission again for their efforts and dedication to this cause.

The pastors and principals began acting on several of the recommendations and continued to meet over the next year exploring the specific models and proposals, all while in dialogue with the Schools Office at the Archdiocese of Detroit. In June 2011, the pastors invited me to serve as the Executive Principal and charged me with overseeing our three campuses. We also welcomed Michelle Sontag and Jacqueline Mojeske as new principals at our schools. Working together, we have brought a whole new level of collaboration and innovation to our Monroe Catholic schools in five short months.

This school year has seen our three campuses, along with St. Mary Catholic Central High School, share faculty, facilities, knowledge, and talents in a way previously unseen in our community. Our families have begun to witness the tremendous benefits that a more collaborative model can have for the education and formation of their sons and daughters. Their response, and our experience, has brought us to the decision to take the next step in changing the structure of how we educate and form our students.

Some have questioned the timing of this effort and raised concerns that this is being done because one or more of our schools was facing impending closure. In fact, our three city schools can boast of total enrollment increases in the last two years of 22%. The overriding concern that remained was whether the existing structure and model of delivery offered us the best vehicle to provide an exceptional Catholic educational experience to all those who seek it and whether that model would be economically sustainable over the long term. We came to the conclusion that a better option existed, one that fulfills our

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original mission and ensures that the tradition of Catholic education will continue for generations ahead in our community.

Moving toward this even more collaborative model in the coming year will bring greater financial stability to our educational program. Our three parishes will continue to invest in our schools, but will be able to do so in a more managed and predictable fashion. We will also be in a position to share resources, manage costs, and handle the non-educational operations of the school in an efficient and effective manner.

The new structure creates for us a more scalable model, one that is able to weather fluctuations in enrollment with greater ease and less disruption. We currently educate approximately 740 students on our three campuses. This new configuration positions us to grow our enrollment by another 24% and significantly expand the services we can provide, something that was not attainable in the one parish, one school model.

This new model also enables our educators to continue to utilize and introduce best practices at all levels of learning. An integrated middle school will allow our families to take full advantage of the resource sharing and curricular enhancements that they have begun to experience this year. It also will serve to better prepare our students for the academic demands they will face when enrolling at St. Mary Catholic Central for high school.

Our new configuration opens up opportunities for us to meet the needs of our youngest families in providing year round infant and toddler programs, educational preschool and other early programs, as well as childcare and latchkey services. Meeting the needs of our youngest families in these ways is not simply about providing a needed service, but rather is an act of evangelization and formation, something that we are all called to as a Church.

American Catholic schools have undergone tremendous change over the past forty years. Those that have struggled, and in some cases ultimately failed, have done so in large part because the well-intentioned people supporting them waited too long to ask the critical questions and consider other alternatives. Those that have flourished have demonstrated a competency to see and the courage to confront tough challenges well in advance.

Tradition is an important concept, one that is especially valued in our community. However, it is not found in simply doing the same thing we've always done. Today's educators do not teach our children using the same tools and methods used long ago. Society and the discipline of education have consistently given us better ways of teaching and learning. The genius of Catholic education is that we have consistently been able to keep what is good, add what is better, and always have Christ at the center of what we do.

At its core, tradition is about personal relationships and a commitment to something larger than one's self. We are firmly convinced that this new structure, and the administration, faculty and staff that will serve in it, will bring us and our parish communities to new and even greater levels of faith formation, academic achievement, and commitment to a life lived in and for Christ. That is the tradition that we seek to pass on to succeeding generations, namely sharing Christ in and through our schools and meeting the needs of our families in the best way possible.

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Much more information will be forthcoming in the months ahead. Open and clear communication is the key to ensuring a positive transformation. I invite you to review the brochure that describes our new structure as well as visit our website at [www.monroecatholicschools.com](http://www.monroecatholicschools.com). The *Frequently Asked Questions* page may answer many of your concerns. If not, I invite you to use the tool on the site to submit your questions directly to us.

As we begin this exciting new journey together, we ask for your prayers and support. We also ask that during this Thanksgiving season, you join us in giving thanks for all those who serve the Lord through our outstanding schools. May the peace of Christ be with them and all of you in the days ahead.

Disciples First,

Mrs. Melody M. Curtis  
Executive Director  
Monroe Catholic Elementary Schools

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