

**Lancaster Catholic Elementary School Advisory Boards**  
**Joint Meeting at St. Mark Parish**  
**Minutes      May 4, 2011**

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Attendance:

Bishop Frederick Campbell

Diocesan Staff: Cia McQuaide (Superintendent of Schools), Jannette Kam  
(Planning and Development), Bill Davis (Finance Director)

Pastors of the Fairfield/Hocking Deanery: Monsignor William Dunn (presiding),  
Father Donald Franks, Father Peter Gideon, Father Thomas Kessler,  
Father James Walter

Principals: Pamela Eltringham (St. Bernadette), Carlton Rider (St. Mary)

Saint Bernadette School Advisory Board: Zach DeLeon, Jason Leach, Sheryl  
Maynard, Kerry Sheridan-Boyd

Saint Mary School Advisory Board: Cindy Albert, Benedict Boyden, Kellie  
Boyden, Jamie Bryant, Tom Crook, Eric McCrady, John McGraw, Mary  
McLoughlin, Angie Seimer, Diane Flowers Stuckey, Kathy Wotruba

Opening prayer and welcome by Father Gideon, the meeting host.

Welcome and introductions by Father Dunn, the meeting chair.

Bishop Campbell explained that he had asked Father Franks, Father Kessler, Father Gideon and Father Walter (as Dean of the Fairfield / Hocking Deanery) to meet with him at the beginning of April. The diocese had notice that over the past three year there was a significant decline in enrollment at St. Mary School and a significant decline in the number of St. Bernadette fifth grade students going into St. Mary sixth grade. This has a significant impact on the parish schools and on Fisher Catholic. The Bishop wanted to talk to the priests about the possible ways to approach this decline in enrollment. The Bishop sees the decline as a serious question and wants to address the decline before it becomes a critical one. They talked about a number of possibilities and a number of things that they could do. The Bishop did ask the pastors to do two things. The first was to organize, on the deanery level, a group of people to get together to begin to address this issue, look at all the data and suggest some solutions. The diocese is willing to help, but it is important to start at the deanery level. The second thing was to begin the process of common and coordinated marketing. Determine how we get to the people the value and significance of Catholic education on a coordinated level.

No decision was made at the meeting nor did the bishop say what he wanted to happen. Bishop Campbell thinks it is important that all the possibilities be discussed. It is his responsibility to make us aware of the decline in enrollment, to try to direct us to address the issue and come up with solutions that are lasting. In addition, we must understand that we are all in this together. Successful planning processes begin with collaboration

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because we are all seekers of the truth of Christ. A successful process begins by assuming that everyone is doing this out of goodwill.

A third element is what does it mean to maintain a Catholic school? Why is the Church involved in education? At the heart of Catholic education is an institution in which the whole of the child is addressed and formed. It is a place where parents are involved. There is no substitute for a Catholic education. Bishop Campbell will do everything to maintain and enhance Catholic education. Collaboration is necessary to ensure continuity and to broaden the availability of Catholic schools beyond individual parishes. He shared an example of Tuscarawas County and their collaboration.

Bishop Campbell has a vision of collaboration, a common understanding and support of a Catholic education, and a necessity to begin to spread the good news of a Catholic education. The Columbus diocesan schools were in the top 25 districts for AP courses. We should be proud.

Jason Leach expressed that people were upset because it was believed that there was only one option to address the decline. Bishop Campbell stated that he believes we must list all the options, and, as school and parish leaders, we must be a conduit of good information – this is essential. The Bishop has prepared a letter that explains what he talked about tonight. It was agreed that it would be valuable for the Bishop to send the letter.

Bishop Campbell indicated that the diocese is willing to help. We can contact Cia McQuaide and Jannette Kam with our questions. For finance questions, contact Bill Davis. For increase in grace, contact Bishop Campbell. Keep in mind the bottom line issues: affordability, Catholic identity, and sufficient enrollment.

Data for analysis is available from our schools. We can get comparative data from the diocese. The Bishop's Elementary Planning Guidelines are also available from the diocese. The process should include what are the issues, what are the possible solutions, and how do we collaborate. Keep in mind demographic and economic issues. What are the baptismal rates? Newark is a possible comparable, with two K-8 schools and one high school. We should think about the appropriate size of the group, and it should include individuals from Fisher Catholic. While Fisher Catholic currently has a balanced budget, it is important that the decline in enrollment be addressed now before it is a problem. Doing nothing is not an option. Bishop Campbell does not want to lose any Catholic schools.

Bishop Campbell was thanked for his visit, and he departed.

Monsignor Dunn continued the meeting. He stressed that we need to look forward. The future is growth and change. The priests and lay people meet to talk and form committees; that includes Fisher Catholic. We need to gather census data, look at baptism and potential enrollment. The analysis must include where we are going to be in 2020 and so forth. Board members do not need to be the only ones involved. Get parents to help.

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Pam Eltringham provided the St. Bernadette enrollment, including preschool (handout was provided). Enrollment for 2010-2011 was about 140. Projected enrollment for 2011-2012 is 120-125, without preschool. Preschool enrollment for 2011-2012 is 24.

Carlton Rider provided enrollment statistics for St. Mary:

Year	Total Enrollment	Non-Catholic Enrollment
2010-2011	318	43
2009-2010	364	46
2008-2009	430	59
2007-2008	467	62
2006-2007	462	62
2005-2006	430	49
2004-2005	414	38
2003-2004	418	39
2002-2003	408	49
2001-2002	421	67

Three to four years ago, Father Franks and Carlton had discussed St. Mary as a possible regional school because of the growth in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 school years. And then the bottom fell out, so to speak. Carlton will provide hard copies of the data above and enrollment by parish.

Father Walter discussed the decrease in baptisms at St. Joseph and how that should be considered. Also consider information from the federal census that indicates that Lancaster has grown only by 3,000 people over the last 10 year. The number of school age children is at 22% of the total Lancaster population. This puts Lancaster second to last in Fairfield County (last is Walnut Township in Millersport) for the number of students in the district (this is for all of central Ohio). Family population is dropping, and this may affect the Catholic family figures. Decline may not just be switching to public schools, but the family population is going down. Fairfield County is a bedroom community; look at it very carefully.

In addition, when looking at retention, take an honest look at why students are leaving. Census data for the Catholic schools should include enrollment trends by grade. The committee would need to define 'active' parishioner.

Diane Stuckey distributed a list of questions that she gathered from some members of the Catholic community. This is something for everyone to look at later.

Items to consider when developing the committee include: size of committee, meeting place (Diane Stuckey offered her office space), date and time, and a time line. Jason Leach proposed the meetings be on the first Thursday of the month. First meeting could

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be as soon as June 2. The group could work like a task force. For example, a leadership team with sub-committees or people whom are actively working on research/data.

A number of people volunteered to help in various capacities in the planning process Jamie Bryant (St. Mark) spoke of his willingness to crunch data; Kathy Wotruba (St. Mary) would be willing to solicit opinions (surveys, data gathering, seeking solutions and ideas); Diane Stuckey (St. Mary) would be interested in this operations/finance matters; Jason Leach (St. Bernadette) and Kellie Boyden (St. Mary) were among several who were interested in serving.

The need for involvement from Fisher Catholic and members from all the deanery parishes who are interested, who support and want Catholic schools (including those with young children, young married couples, older parishioners with devotion to Catholic education, those who had children in Catholic schools).

Expertise in financial aspect (school costs, facilities, maintenance, etc) would be very helpful. Principals from all schools in the deanery (St. Mary, St. Bernadette, Fisher, St. John) should be involved; their awareness of class size and teacher assignment would be essential.

Father Walter presented an issue of Our Sunday Visitor, the national Catholic newspaper which had a special pullout section about evangelization and inactive Catholics. Thirty-two percent of Catholics leave the Church. Forty six percent of the 32% have no religious affiliation. The remaining 54% have joined other Christian communities. The article includes four points as to what to do about it. The 1/3<sup>rd</sup> statistic is similar to what we see in our parishes and communities. It was noted that he four points are very important, but will take years to implement, and that our immediate task is to deal with necessary improvement to the current situation of our schools.

The meetings must not be held without the vital involvement of the priests, who need to provide input to make sure the right questions are asked. Priests need to take part in helping to determine what information we will need to seek. Also, it is important to remember that the school and parish records are confidential. Before any meeting, agendas will be sent to priests. After the meetings, meeting notes will be provided to the priests.

Communication to parishioners will start with the letter from Bishop Campbell. Bishop Campbell will contact Father Kessler and expects to have the letter out next week. The Bishop's letter will probably be broad so the feedback from the group should be that all the parishes in the deanery are working together (collaboratively) to look at all the data and suggest solutions. Everyone attending the meeting needs to stress that Catholic Education will continue in Fairfield county. We must be positive when we talk about Catholic education. We are working to build and strengthen the Catholic schools. A letter from the deanery priests might be sent after the Bishop's letter.

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Minutes from the meeting will be sent to the priests, principals, and the members of the school advisor boards.

Minutes submitted by Debbie Schmelzer

Addendum

**From the Fairfield Hocking Deanery Priests Meeting, May 9, 2011**

At their regular bimonthly meeting on May 8, the priests of the deanery determined that they would establish a Fairfield / Hocking Deanery Catholic Education Committee to discuss plans for the future for our deanery schools. Membership will include the active priests of the deanery (the five pastors and one chaplain), the four school principals, and members from each parish appointed by the pastors. The pastors have agreed to make these appointments as soon as possible. In early meetings the possibility of high school community representation will be discussed. The date of the first meeting will be announced to the members within a few days.

Father Kessler