



## OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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March 20, 2015

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is with great sadness that I have accepted the recommendation from the parish and school leadership of Saint Patrick's Community in Owego to close this June of 2015. At the same time, I am both very grateful and deeply impressed by the extraordinary efforts of both the parish and school communities which contributed to the school's 150 year history of Catholic education. Unfortunately a pattern of declining enrollment, coupled with increased costs and serious, mounting and unsustainable financial strains upon the parish, has necessitated this decision.

Since 2008 Saint Patrick School has dealt with challenges to its continuation. It is truly remarkable that it has served the community over these years up to this time. Once again, this has been due to those very dedicated members of the Saint Patrick School Community and its loyal friends who labored so diligently to keep the doors of this school open. But the reality of the present situation has led to a decision which, while heartbreaking, is made in good faith and with genuine concern for the entire parish family. Both the parish and school leadership have informed me that "the parish does not have the resources to fund the school any longer... The parish contribution to the school for this year was projected to be 37% of its tithing from parishioners however, with the decrease in enrollment, it will likely be higher. For the last four years, the parish has contributed an average of 36% per year to the school. By the end of the 2014-2015 fiscal year, the parish will have liquidated nearly all of its assets to meet its needs and the needs of the school."

Catholic schools, in a different era, provided my education from kindergarten to post-graduate doctorate studies in institutions sponsored by the Religious Sisters of Mercy, the De LaSalle Brothers of the Christian Schools, diocesan priests, the Order of Preachers (Dominicans) and the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). Thus, it personally pains me to witness the closure of a Catholic school. Yet, even as the Diocesan Bishop, I am unable to mandate the decisions parents make for the education of their children. I also must respect these decisions made for any number of reasons, such as a family's financial circumstances and the particular needs of the child. I do appreciate that in these decisions parents are quite mindful of the welfare of their children.

However, perhaps the sadness of Saint Patrick School's closing can become a catalyst for our other Catholic schools to seek ways to make known what our Catholic schools offer and for alumnae and alumni of Catholic schools to lend their renewed support for the educational system that guided their paths in life.

Saint Patrick School, Owego

March 20, 2015


Page two

Enrollment remains the critical concern and if our schools are to continue they require a strong enrollment history, which is the greatest indication of a school's success and stability into the future. Of course enrollment is united to the school's identity from which the school derives its inner strength and all its programs and initiatives flow. Who we are and what we do as a Catholic school should be clearly and proudly manifested so that parents see in our schools a true support in the holistic education of their children: mind, heart and soul.

In closing, I wish to renew my gratitude to Father Thomas J. Valenti, Administrator of Saint Patrick Church, his Parochial Vicar, Father Brian K. Carpenter, Mrs. Paula K. Smith, Principal of Saint Patrick School, together with the faculty, parents, students and parishioners who have demonstrated their strong commitment to Catholic education over this last year and for all who have supported Saint Patrick School in its long history. United with you in this time of transition, I have asked our diocesan offices to assist the parish, parents, students, faculty and staff in effecting a positive academic transition for the students of Saint Patrick School.

Asking the Lord's blessing upon you and assuring you of my prayers, I remain

Devotedly yours in Christ,

  
*The Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano*  
*Bishop of Rochester*