



DIOCESE *of* GAYLORD

March 21, 2024

Dear Manistee Catholic Central and Divine Mercy Parish Community,

I begin with a word of “Thanks” to all who have contributed in any way to the process that has led to this moment of decision on the future of Manistee Catholic Central. Upon arrival this academic year, the MCC leadership team was faced with a daunting mess of a financial and organizational nature, and then had the unenviable task of bringing serious concerns to light for all to see. The community has responded to these concerns with many good efforts to fight for the 60-year-old school, including letters, emails, petitions of support, alumni appeals, proposed models and ideas to improve enrollment, curriculum, parent involvement, fundraising – just to name a few.

Furthermore, the Manistee Catholic Central Foundation has solicited approximately \$345,000 and rallied people to the cause. Many people have participated in outreach efforts by the viability committee, filling out surveys and attending town hall meetings. Many sacrifices have been made and many prayers offered. It has indeed been a stressful time for all, not least of which for our students, parents, principal, teachers, priests and staff who are in the school every day. I know I too have spent almost every waking moment the past few months, feeling anxious about the situation, consulting, wrestling with possible solutions, and knowing a decision must be made.

Having spent considerable time in prayerful discernment, and fully understanding the weight of this moment, my decision regarding MCC boils down to finances. The \$345,000 raised thus far only covers about half of the current school debt, let alone any investment in the future. What must be stressed is the enormous amount of money necessary for the school to have a chance. We cannot risk losing Divine Mercy Parish. Please remember the school is an apostolate of the parish, not the other way around. The parish is our lifeblood for Word, Worship, Service and Community.

It is my understanding that there are significant donors hesitant to give because of uncertainty. Unfortunately, there is neither the luxury of time nor a guaranteed outcome under these circumstances. However, what we know is this: in addition to the \$345,000 pledged, another \$1,655,000 (one million six hundred and fifty-five) of investment is needed for the school to operate next year. As per “Pre-Kindergarten to Twelfth Grade” model shared at the town hall meeting on February 17, the amount of money needed to fund one year of an enhanced educational experience would be roughly \$3,000,000 (three million). Adjusting down, but without compromising the vision of enhanced education, a target of \$2,000,000 (two million) will be a start to implement improvements such as the hiring of an assistant principal/dean of students, grant writer, and other support staff. Enhancing the current model of education at MCC is non-negotiable.

Prospective donors will be given until **Monday, April 8** to raise added funds. If donors are willing to take this risk, the school will remain open next year and a comprehensive strategic planning process that will include a professional feasibility study for the school, evaluation of all parish properties, and best use of resources for the future of the Catholic Community in Manistee, will begin. To be clear, the 2 million dollars needed will only buy one year. To grasp the level of financial

commitment needed to secure the future beyond that, the same amount of money (roughly 2 million in total) will need to be raised again next year. If the additional money needed for this year is not secured before the April 8 deadline, the school will close at the end of this school year. If the goal is met this year, the same process will apply in 2025. In other words, if the target money is not raised, the school will close at the end of that school year. There is no margin for error.

In the event of a school closure this year, the comprehensive strategic planning process will commence, nonetheless. As that process unfolds, a feasibility study can be included to determine the possibility of an elementary school to reopen at the Divine Mercy Parish Center or some other location. Also, a determination is to be made regarding the future use of the MCC buildings and grounds for a new creative purpose that fits the mission of the Church. There will be no consideration of selling the MCC building/grounds until after one year and/or the completion of a strategic plan.

Everyone has been through a lot this year. We are all feeling the stress of potentially losing a beloved part of the Manistee Catholic community. If the money comes in, new strategies and solid leadership will have a chance to prove themselves. If the money does not come in, we will reverence the legacy of this institution, and the thousands of lives it has influenced, with dignified closing ceremonies and a permanent memorial.

So, to summarize:

- Two extra weeks will be given to allow donations to the Saber Strong Campaign through the Manistee Catholic Central Schools Foundation.
- In addition to the \$345,000 already raised, an added \$1,655,000 must be raised by Monday **April 8, 2024**.
- If the total of two million dollars is raised, MCC will remain open for another year.
- If the total of two million is not raised, MCC will close at the end of this 2024 school year.
- Accountability for the raised funds will determine future action.
- A Divine Mercy Parish strategic planning process will commence this year.

Let us trust God's Providence, as we do in all things. In these next two weeks, we will be in the heart of the Church's liturgies celebrating the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. As we pray with these central mysteries of our faith, God will lead us to accept his holy will as Jesus taught us.

In Christ our Life!



Most Reverend Jeffrey J. Walsh
Bishop of Gaylord