



DIOCESE *of* GAYLORD

April 9, 2024

Dear Manistee Catholic Central School Community and Divine Mercy Parishioners,

With a heavy heart, I announce the closure of Manistee Catholic Central School at the end of this 2023-2024 school year. The past few months have been long and exhausting for everyone involved. There have been valiant efforts, especially by alumni, to rally for the school, which will be rewarded by God in his own ever-trustworthy ways.

The extended time given to solicit donations before the deadline of April 8 yielded more funds but fell short of the goal. All who made contributions are to be commended. It is my understanding that donors can request money pledged for this campaign to be returned, or keep it invested at the MCCS Foundation for future Catholic educational needs in Manistee.

Understanding that people are hurt, let us make a special appeal to our better angels to guide us through the days, weeks and months ahead. No one desired this outcome. The sad reality is that many factors, some under our control and others not, contributed to the outcome. A close look reveals plenty of places to point fingers, as I suspect is the case with the over 300 other Catholic schools in the U.S. that have either closed or merged since 2020.

Regarding “what’s next” ... I believe it is important to face our fears and trust Divine Providence. The Church has survived two thousand years of the human drama. We are the Church of today and will continue to thrive with God’s help. “Fear is useless; what is needed is trust.” (Luke 8:50). We must never tire of taking the risk of investing our gifts and talents. New endeavors await.

I would like to address a particular message to the following:

Students: I remember the upset I felt when my elementary school, middle school and high school closed. With each closure, part of my life story went with it. In time, I also came to realize that ‘God provides,’ and God builds up a resiliency in us to adapt to many of life’s unexpected events. I will pray your strength of character and knowledge of being loved by God carries you through this moment and always. Thank you for your witness of faith.

Parents: Thank you for all the sacrifices you made for your child and for being their first teachers in the ways of faith. Continue to set a good example.

Administration, teachers and staff: Thank you for your commitment to Catholic education over the years and providing a nurturing environment for all to grow in wisdom, age and grace.

Divine Mercy Priests and Parishioners: Thank you for your contributions and stewardship over the years, and centering MCC in Christ through the sacramental life and loving support.

Looking ahead, the diocesan pastoral center staff will provide guidance to help during the last weeks of the school year, especially for student and staff related concerns. As previously mentioned, a closing Mass and ceremonials will be planned, guided by the school leadership team.

In due time, a Divine Mercy Parish strategic planning process will begin (TBA), and a shared vision of ministries and use of buildings/properties should be developed to provide what can be a new and creative energy for the Catholic community in Manistee. Although this is a time for mourning a loss, like our ancestors in faith, we must always be a people of hope in what God has yet in store for us.

The profound mysteries celebrated recently during Holy Week are a powerful testament to a core Christian belief – “through the Cross to the Resurrection.” For all who have born the weight of these trying times at MCC this year, there will be new life. Eyes of faith will see it.

I conclude this letter with a prayer I have found very helpful over the years. It is a prayer by Fr. Ciszek S.J. sprung from his experience of life’s hardships, struggles, angers and frustrations... and how God is in the midst of it all:

“Lord, Jesus Christ, I ask the grace to accept the sadness in my heart, as your will for me, in this moment. I offer it up, in union with your sufferings, for those who are in deepest need of your redeeming grace. I surrender myself to your Father’s will and I ask you to help me to move on to the next task that you have set for me. Spirit of Christ, help me to enter into a deeper union with you. Lead me away from dwelling on the hurt I feel: to thoughts of charity for those who need my love, to thoughts of compassion for those who need my care, and to thoughts of giving to those who need my help. As I give myself to you, help me to provide for the salvation of those who come to me in need. May I find my healing in this giving. May I always accept God’s will. May I find my true self by living for others in a spirit of sacrifice and suffering. May I die more fully to myself, and live more fully in you. As I seek to surrender to the Father’s will, may I come to trust that he will do everything for me.”

In Christ our Life!



Most Reverend Jeffrey J. Walsh
Bishop of Gaylord