



DIOCESE OF STEUBENVILLE

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Bellaire St. John Central High School to close in June

STEUBENVILLE – Diocese of Steubenville Bishop Jeffrey M. Monforton announced that St. John Central High School, in Bellaire, Ohio, will permanently close its doors at the end of the school year in June.

The decision to close St. John Central came after receiving the unanimous recommendation from the governing Board of Pastors and in consultation with the diocesan Catholic schools office. The bishop said, “I am extremely disappointed, however the enrollment, declining financial resources and support, and the estimated necessary capital expenditures are now beyond our control and leave me with no real choice.”

Father Timothy McGuire, pastoral administrator of St. John Central High School, has been associated with the school for 30 years, starting as vice principal and teacher. He agreed that the diocese had to close the school, as difficult as the decision was for everyone involved, “There have been many dedicated and enthusiastic people who have loved their time at St. John’s over the years, hence my sadness. However, St. John’s has served the community well for decades, and its former students and staff can be very proud of their contribution to the church and the wider community.”

Over the last ten years, the high school has struggled to keep a viable enrollment, making it increasingly difficult to support itself, financially. In October of 2015, the school reported an enrollment of 91 students, but that enrollment dropped to 40 students the following school year (2016-2017).

In the Spring of 2016, Bishop Monforton approved a plan to help bring financial stability to both St. John Central High School and St. John Central Grade School (also located in Bellaire), by bringing both schools under the same roof, sharing both physical plant and administrative costs.

In addition to these measures, the bishop approved petitioning the local court to authorize the use of restricted endowment funds to help subsidize the high school budget in hopes of re-growing the enrollment to a

financially sustainable level. However, in the fall of 2017, the High school reported another significant drop in enrollment to 29 students, placing an even greater strain on those financial resources.

High School enrollment figures for the current school year were reported to be 43 students in October of 2018. Although this increase over the last two years seemed promising, both St. John Central High School and Grade school are now faced with new financial challenges that involve immediate emergency repairs to the building's heating system and estimates to provide for a long term solution could cost as much as \$500,000.

Coupled with this new challenge is the reality that the financial assets which were used to help subsidize the high school budget over the last three years are almost expended. In addition, almost 25% of the high school budget is subsidized by local Catholic Church support. The reality of a local diminishing economy have made it increasingly difficult for these parishes to continue providing the level of support required to maintain a school with such a low enrollment.

It was in view of these factors, at the request of the local Catholic pastors, in consultation with his chancery administration, and with the hopes of strengthening financial viability and enrollment for the remaining Catholic school options in Belmont County, that the decision was made to close St. John Central High School.

Regarding how the remaining St. John Central Grade School might move forward, given its current reported enrollment of 65 students (K through 8), and its shared operational costs with the high school (including the shared use of the physical campus on which the schools are located), Bishop Monforton has asked the pastor and parish community of St. John Catholic Church in Bellaire, to present a plan for the future of St. John Central Grade School. A final decision concerning the elementary school will depend on the viability of that plan.

