



# DIOCESE OF STEUBENVILLE

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## **For Immediate Release**

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## **Bellaire St. John Central Grade School to close in June**

STEUBENVILLE – Diocese of Steubenville Bishop Jeffrey M. Monforton announced that St. John Central Grade School (pre-kindergarten through 8th grade), Bellaire, Ohio, will permanently close its doors at the end of the school year in June.

The decision to close St. John Central Grade School came after receiving the recommendation from the schools' pastoral administrator, Father Daniel Heusel, and pastor of the schools' two supporting parishes; St. John Parish, Bellaire, and St. Mary Parish, Shadyside. In February, Bishop Monforton asked Father Heusel to present a plan for the future of St. John Central Grade School. The request came after the announcement that St. John Central High School would be closing at the end of the academic year due to low enrollment and declining financial resources. The two schools currently share operational costs, facility and administrative resources. A strategic planning group was formed consisting of school administrators, faculty, school parents and parishioners of St. John and St. Mary Parishes, to help formulate a plan that would allow the school to continue to operate on its own.

A plan was submitted to Bishop Monforton shortly after Easter. However, that plan involved considerable financial risks. The finance councils for the two supporting parishes were asked to consider provisions under which that plan might become more viable. Upon a review of those provisions, it was determined that the supporting parishes simply do not have the resources to keep a Catholic grade school open.

Father Heusel stated in a letter to the bishop, "We cannot keep up the level of financial support that is required to maintain St. John Central Grade School without jeopardizing the financial condition of the parishes. Father Heusel indicated that St. John's and St. Mary's parishes could join with other local Catholic parishes that support St. Mary Central Grade School in Martins Ferry.

Upon receipt of the letter from Father Heusel recommending that St. John Central Grade school close its doors, Bishop Monforton stated that he would accept the recommendation, “with sorrow, knowing that the loss of both the Catholic high school and grade school will be difficult for the Bellaire Catholic community. The financial situation has left me with no other choice but to close the school.” The bishop said he finds consolation in the knowledge that families who wish to keep their children enrolled in a Catholic grade school next year will find worthwhile nearby options in Martins Ferry and St. Clairsville. Both Catholic schools are in Belmont County and are able to accommodate additional students.

Father Heusel said, “No one wants our school to close. I know that this announcement will be the cause of great sadness in our community. We treasure the school and all the wonderful contributions it has made to our families and our community for over 150 years! Its presence has been an incredible blessing. We are extremely grateful to the many dedicated administrators, teachers and staff that currently serve and have served our community, our students and their families so well.”