

**St. Ann's Church
2900 Pacific Avenue
Wildwood, N.J. 08260
609-522-5583**

January 5, 2010

Dear Wildwood Catholic High School Families:

As you know, population changes in Cape May County and in Lower and Middle Townships have adversely affected elementary and secondary school enrollments in public and private schools in the region. Wildwood Catholic High School, unfortunately, has been unable to avoid the impact of these changes.

In fact, enrollment has declined rapidly over the last six years, dropping 42 percent, from 336 students in 2004-2005 to just 194 this year. Projections indicate that the enrollment will not improve, but will further decline in the years ahead.

The steady decline in enrollment has adversely affected tuition income, which has been insufficient to cover per student costs. This decline also has financially burdened the school with growing debt of more than \$685,000 and annual deficits which are expected to top \$500,000 this year and almost \$900,000 next year.

The decline in enrollment, and the resultant impact on school finances, also has impacted St. Ann's, the parish sponsoring the school, so much so that resources will increasingly be drawn away from other important parish ministries. As we continue to make progress in our efforts to unite St. Ann's parish and Assumption parish, we must ensure that there are adequate resources to provide ministry and care for the 2,100 families that will be served by the new parish.

Given the gravity of the enrollment decline and the dire financial situation, and trends indicating a worsening situation, and after having met with our Core Team and diocesan school advisors, I wrote to Bishop Joseph Galante in late November to share these concerns with him. At that time, the independent Meitler Study of our high school was being drafted. The report was sobering and confirmed the insurmountable troubles facing the school. Following Bishop's consultation with his school advisors last month and having considered the reality that neither the diocese nor the parish can afford the increasing debt of the high school, we have concluded that it is necessary for Wildwood Catholic High School to close at the end of this school year.

While this decision is a necessary one, it has not been an easy one. I recognize that the closure of the high school is difficult for our school families, faculty and administration, and parish community, all of whom have supported the school with loyalty and dedication. Yet, it would have been irresponsible for everyone involved to allow current conditions to persist or to deteriorate even further over time.

To assist faculty and staff, we will work to place faculty and staff in other Catholic schools and, for those who do not secure employment, we will offer a severance package.

Meanwhile, a \$1,000 per student tuition voucher will be provided to each family that may be applied toward tuition at Holy Spirit High School in Absecon or another diocesan Catholic high school chosen by the family for the 2010-11 school year. We also in the weeks ahead will explore transportation accommodations for families who wish to enroll their children in another diocesan Catholic high school.

Finally, I write to inform you that the new Cape Trinity Catholic School, joining the school communities of St. Raymond's, St. Ann's and Our Lady Star of the Sea, will locate at the high school campus beginning in September. The North Wildwood location will ensure easy accessibility for school families, while the well-equipped facilities—which include computer labs, media center, science labs, auditorium, cafeteria and gymnasium—will effectively serve the needs of the Cape Trinity Catholic School community and make it a first class elementary school for lower Cape May County.

The present high school property also will be used for the Notre Dame de la Mer Parish Center as we work to provide improved ministry and care to the Catholic community here. Bringing the parish center and elementary school together will make sure the Catholic Church maintains an important educational and pastoral presence in the Wildwoods.

I thank you for your understanding at this difficult time. While we mourn the loss of Wildwood Catholic High School, we look forward with great excitement and expectation to the opening of Cape Trinity Catholic and the new life that we hope to bring to our parish community in the years ahead.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael J. Field". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "M".

Reverend Michael J. Field
Pastor