



New Catholic High School Project: Questions and Answers

In the following interview, Father Kris Stubna, Secretary for Catholic Education in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, discusses developments concerning the projected new Catholic high school in Butler County.

What are the plans for a new Catholic high school in the Diocese of Pittsburgh?

The Diocese of Pittsburgh has purchased approximately 71 acres of land along state route 228 in Cranberry Township for the purpose of building a new co-educational Catholic high school with an anticipated enrollment of 1,000 students. Bishop David Zubik has stated that the success of a capital campaign to raise the significant funds necessary to finance the new school will determine whether the Diocese will proceed with construction.

How did the idea for a new high school come about?

For a number of years, the Diocese of Pittsburgh had been exploring the concept of building a new Catholic high school in the Cranberry area. The area has experienced significant growth in population but has had limited direct access to Catholic secondary education.

At the same time, the Board of Directors of North Catholic High School, Troy Hill, was wrestling with the declining demographics in its area. There were simply fewer and fewer potential students in the area. North Catholic High School with its board and supporters attempted to raise sufficient funds to construct a new North Catholic High School, but the size and scope of this project required a broader diocesan approach.

North Catholic and the diocese are now working together both to engage the alumni and supporters of North Catholic and also to broaden the base of support for a new high school.

The diocesan vision of this new school in Cranberry Township is one steeped in the Marianist tradition of North Catholic. But it will also expand its base to serve many families who have the desire to access Catholic high school education and to build an innovative educational program for the future. This will be a new co-educational Catholic high school in the heart of the fastest growing population center in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

Will this be a new school or a relocation of North Catholic High School to Butler County?

This will be a new school, built to provide a 21st Century Catholic education grounded in academic excellence, faith formation and the most updated technological capabilities and partnerships with the wider business community that will prepare our students for success in every dimension of learning and life.

At the same time, this new school will bring with it the very best traditions, programs and spirit of the current North Catholic High School. The charism of the Marianist educational program that was foundational to North Catholic High School will be foundational to the new school. That means an education grounded in faith, family, spirit and service.

Will North Catholic High School stay open until the new school is built?

That is certainly the hope of all involved and would represent the best scenario, but there can be no assurances. The Board of Directors for North Catholic High School, in cooperation with the Catholic Schools Office, is working hard to insure the viability of the current North Catholic program until the new high school is operational. The demographic decline of school age children in the traditional city feeder schools and the economic challenges facing our region make this task exceptionally difficult. We will continue to work hard at fundraising and enrollment, but the long-term viability of North Catholic depends on its ability to operate with a balanced budget and with a sufficient number of students.

Clearly, the success of the capital campaign for the new school and our efforts to raise sufficient funds for the existing school are the keys to whether North Catholic will stay open until the new school might open.

Is this new high school a reality, or just a hope?

It is as real as you can get. As noted, the land has been purchased by the Diocese. The land is right across from St. Kilian Parish. We have already invested heavily in the ongoing site development and have recently chosen the Astorino architectural firm to begin working with us on the design. Discussions are underway with the necessary municipal and township authorities, while local corporations and civic groups either have been consulted or will soon be consulted. Many other interested persons have likewise been involved in earlier discussions. Ongoing meetings with the priests in the region, particularly Vicariates 1 and 4, are taking

place. The educational blueprint for the new school is being developed and refined. We are excited to be talking to a number of potential partners in the educational arena, including area universities and colleges, along with the business and corporate community. Our original goal remains to have the new school open its doors by the 2012-2013 school year. Clearly, holding to this timeline depends on the success of the campaign to raise sufficient funds to move the project forward.

Bishop Zubik has made it clear that this is a vital project for the future of the Diocese. This new school “will provide young men and women a 21st-Century education in an environment where faith and values thrive,” he said, “which is the very definition of Catholic education.” This project is an integral part of the vision to bring the Church Alive in that region of the diocese.

Which brings up the obvious question: how much will this cost?

From all preliminary studies, we have learned that the cost to construct a state-of-the-art 21st century high school facility serving 1,000 students will cost nearly \$60 million. These numbers reflect the cost of the land acquisition, site development and construction of a facility with adequate square footage necessary for the educational, extracurricular and other programs intended for the site.

How much of that \$60 million has to be raised now?

\$60 million is the estimated total cost to build the new high school. In our capital campaign, we need to raise about \$20 million to secure the necessary financing for the project to move forward. Part of the financing plan is to insure that debt service to the new high school will be able to be met in a reasonable manner without hampering programming and future needs. About \$4-5 million in pledges, cash and in-kind gifts have been raised through the alumni and friends of North Catholic High School. These efforts continue as well as the Diocesan-wide efforts to secure financial support for what we consider to be an exciting and critical project.

Currently there is no Catholic high school in that part of the Diocese and many of our families and young people have no access or limited access to Catholic secondary education. This is a project of the entire Diocese of Pittsburgh, not North Catholic High School alone.

That is why it is so important that potential donors, corporations or related institutions be identified who are willing and capable to be a part of this campaign. Any assistance in that regard will be gratefully received.

Will the new high school be self-supporting after the capital campaign?

Yes. Like any of the Catholic high schools in the Diocese, the new school will be required to service its own debt and its own ongoing operational budgets. This can be accomplished with the successful capital campaign.

Will the new school also seek support from regional businesses?

Both in the capital campaign phase and in the years ahead, the new school will work with the corporate presence in the region. This will not only be as a means to raise funds, but to involve corporate entities in assisting with the educational process.

Tomorrow’s schools need to create the leaders for tomorrow. The vision for this new high school is to create successful, faith-filled leaders for the Church and the community, people who are prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

At the same time, this new high school facility is envisioned to be of service to the whole community and region. It is our hope that parishioners from all the parishes in the region will be able to utilize the facility for a variety of programs and services, and that the larger community will see this facility as an asset to life in the region.

We keep referring to this as “the new high school.” Has the school been officially named yet?

No, not yet officially. Our focus right now is on setting out the educational blueprint and conducting a successful capital campaign so that the project can truly be given the green light to proceed.

We have, however, made a commitment to keep the “North Catholic High School” name as part of the identity of the new school. Certainly the capital campaign provides a variety of naming opportunities in recognition of those who are helping us to make this dream a reality.

What will a new Catholic high school like this mean to the community?

This will be more than a school building, more than a high school serving only its own students. This will also become a center for the Catholic community of the north and western parts of the Diocese, including Butler and Northern Allegheny, as well as Beaver and Lawrence counties. This facility can provide a venue for Catholic youth activities, catechetical formation for area children and adults, as well as a gathering place for parishes, Catholic organizations and faith-related communities. The new facility can also be a center for interfaith and ecumenical events. Indeed, it is anticipated that the new high school can further serve the wider local communities including Cranberry and Adams Townships.

For more than 180 years in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, Catholic schools have been critical for the Church to teach as Jesus did. With rich and challenging academic efforts, our young people have learned that faith and reason are the pillars of humanity. This new school will bring to the fastest growing section of our Diocese a tradition of excellence, rigor, charity, service and faith. It represents all that is encompassed in Bishop Zubik’s description of how we are to be the “Church Alive!”