

# The Future of Catholic Education is Bright

**Definition of Cluster:** Two or more parishes collaborate on a common mission to serve those within a geographical area. They share personnel, resources, and programs but they continue to exist as distinct parishes. They have their own parishioners, parish church and finances. There are various ways parishes can collaborate within this model, including sharing the same pastor, staff, etc.

**If you would like to see a video presentation by Fr. Olsen, go here [bit.ly/hsflhinfo](https://bit.ly/hsflhinfo). Password - LetMeIn (case sensitive).**

## Part 1: Current Reality: Enrollment, Teacher Availability, Priest Availability, Coop

Enrollment at both Holy Family and St. Francis will grow significantly.

- At Holy Family, there are currently 18 students in grades 9-12 and an average of about 7.5 students per grade level for the entire school. In 2024-25, those numbers should grow to around 40 in grades 9-12 and an average of about 10 students per grade level for the entire school. Those figures should remain fairly consistent for the foreseeable future.
- At St. Francis, there are currently 57 students in grades 9-12 and an average of about 16 students per grade level for the entire school. By 2029-30, those numbers should grow to around 74 in grades 9-12 and an average of about 20 students per grade level for the entire school.

**Conclusion - There are more than enough students to support two schools for the foreseeable future (thru 2034-35).**

### Challenges: Availability of Teachers

- There has been a growing teacher shortage for years.
  - 1) At St. Francis ten years ago, there was an opening for an elementary teacher. Mrs. Dunn received 30 qualified applicants. This year St. Francis posted openings for an upper elementary position for a few weeks and received 2 applicants. Last year, St. Francis posted an opening for middle school with possible endorsements in social science, language arts, reading, and religious education and received no qualified applicants. This year, St. Francis has posted an opening for a science teacher and, as of April 9th, has received no viable applicants.
  - 2) At Holy Family there was an opening for a 6th grade teacher last year. Mr. Bishop received one qualified applicant. This year, Holy Family has posted for a 5th grade teacher and, as of April 9th, received no qualified applicants.
  - 3) In recent years, both St. Francis and Holy Family have lost quality teachers that would have liked to teach in a Catholic school but couldn't afford to do so.
  - 4) In Nebraska, current shortages reported by the Nebraska Department of Education include Art, Bilingual, Career and Technical Education, Early Childhood, English as Second Language, Health/PE, Language Arts, Mathematics, Music (Instrumental/Vocal), School Counselor, School Library, School Psychologist, Science, Special Education, Speech-Language Pathology, World Language

- a) Of these critical shortage areas, St. Francis has two that are near retirement and one that is currently unfilled (science)
  - b) Holy Family has teachers that could cover all of those openings
- The teacher shortage will only grow worse.
  - 1) Fewer people seem attracted to a service lifestyle that's becoming increasingly demanding.
  - 2) The pandemic environment this year will lead to more teachers retiring early or leaving the profession.
  - 3) The rising cost of higher education and earning a four-year degree deters people from going into a field that pays as education does. Paying back student loans is difficult on a teacher's salary.
- Our schools are falling dangerously behind in compensation.
  - 1) Our base pay is roughly 82-84% of the base pay offered by public schools in our area.
  - 2) Benefits, especially health insurance, are even further behind.
- We are currently handling shortage of teachers by sharing teachers and coaches
  - 1) Fr. Wayne; Mrs. Braun, Guidance Counselor; Mrs. Preister, Speech Coach; Mrs. Ramaekers, Preschool; Fr. Olsen, President
  - 2) This allows for:
    - a) Sharing quality educators
    - b) Raising of salary
    - c) Retaining and attracting quality teachers
    - d) Saving financial resources at both schools
      - Sharing a teacher saves each school at least \$25,000/year/teacher
      - Sharing just four teachers would save EACH school at least \$100,000/year
      - Replacing retired teachers with younger teachers would save even more.

#### Challenges: Availability of Priests

- Fr. Olsen is currently responsible for 4 parishes, 2 complete school systems, and 2 distinct daycares. To put this in perspective, it would be analogous to an owner of 2 separate businesses, 1 with 4 franchises and the other with 2, while being the president of 2 schools. He is also responsible for the spiritual needs of 925 families.
- We are also blessed with an assistant. Fr. Wayne's replacement has been named, although that name is not yet public. This new assistant should be a tremendous asset to both schools and the parishes as well.
- There are no ordinations in 2021, two in 2022, one in 2023 and perhaps four in 2024. The attrition rate (retirements or otherwise) will be at least double if not triple that amount (COVID is impacting priests' health both physically and emotionally rather dramatically)
- The likelihood of having 2 priests in our cluster in 10 years is very low.

- Mission of Catholic schools is to educate students in the Catholic faith, which can't be done without priests

#### Current Coop Between LHF and HH

- LHF's relationship with Humphrey Public
  - 1) Positive relationship and great example of how to coop athletics
- Concerns with coop between public and Catholic school
  - 1) No substitute for a Catholic environment and culture
  - 2) Nothing influences environment and culture of a school like extracurricular activities do
- Proposals on the table to coop LHF and HSF
  - 1) Provide a Catholic environment for extracurricular activities
  - 2) Mutually beneficial for both schools
  - 3) Maintain viable Catholic education in the cluster
    - a) Importance of teachers and priests to provide Catholic environment in all areas including co-oping the athletic programs and extracurricular activities
- Apology for collateral damage that may come from proposal
  - 1) Working relationship between all three schools is the strongest it has been in years
  - 2) Desire to continue a strong working relationship even in the midst of difficult change

## Part 2: Proposals

For the past few months, the school boards have been working together to develop this proposal for our schools. It has been incredible to watch these two boards work together for the common good of both schools while protecting the identity of both schools. It is like they have been friends for years, even when disagreements about the best path forward arose. Both boards are unanimous in their support of these proposals.

Additionally, the parish council at St. Francis as well as the finance councils at both Holy Family and St. Francis have been instrumental to the development of these proposals. Although there have been some disagreements on some of the details, this overarching path forward proposed is unanimously supported by all of these boards as well.

**The goal of these proposals is, not simply to maintain Catholic education in our parishes, but enhance it dramatically.**

Teacher Consolidation is at the Jr. High and High School levels. Grade schools would remain the same.

- There are no plans to reduce the number of teachers in either system by not renewing contracts. Put more directly, **there are no plans to let teachers go.**

- As teachers leave the schools, whether by choice or by retirement, their counterparts in the other school would be offered the opportunity to teach his or her classes in both schools. This could be done either remotely or in person depending on the subject, with a corresponding increase in pay. This would accomplish four goals.
  - 1) It would save each school financially as the cost of one teacher could now be split.
  - 2) It would allow us to increase teacher salaries significantly, which would make us more competitive with public schools.
  - 3) It would allow us to reward our current quality Catholic teachers as well as attract quality Catholic teachers as they become needed by increasing salaries and benefits with the savings in an environment that will be increasingly competitive.
  - 4) St. Francis and Holy Family would no longer be competing for the same Catholic educators for their high schools.

#### Extra-curricular Cooperation

- Why? – St. Francis
  - 1) From a numbers standpoint, St. Francis has no need to co-op.
  - 2) From a Catholic standpoint, St. Francis has no excuse not to co-op.
    - a) The strength of St. Francis' athletic programs is a gift that could and should be shared. Holy Family also has a rich tradition of athletic success that will be beneficial to St. Francis.
    - b) St. Francis has an opportunity to reach out to a neighboring Catholic School that could benefit substantially from its gifts because of Holy Family's low numbers.
  - 3) It will save St. Francis money both in terms of coaches' salary and administrative expenses as well, as Holy Family would be responsible for paying for their coaches and their share of administrative expenses.
  - 4) There will be access to a much-needed workable gym.
  - 5) It's mutually beneficial. Through retirements, St. Francis is going to need teachers, which Holy Family can help with. Holy Family needs extra-curricular support, which St. Francis can help with.
  - 6) From a survival standpoint, both schools are going to be stronger working together than separately.
  
- Why? – Holy Family
  - 1) As beneficial as the current coop with Humphrey Public has been, it does not and cannot provide a Catholic school environment.
    - a) Without this environment, there's no reason for the Catholic school to exist.
    - b) If there were no alternative Catholic School in the area, the current coop with Humphrey Public would be workable, but not ideal. There is a Catholic school right across the street which shares the same Catholic school environment, which would be workable and ideal.
    - c) Extra-curricular activities, especially sports, impact the culture of a school dramatically. Generally speaking, the most impactful people in a student's life, after parents, are coaches. When coaches' ideals are centered around the Catholic faith and teachings the effect on a school can be transformative. Providing a Catholic environment in extra-curricular activities will increase the vibrancy of our Catholic identity for both schools.

- 2) It is proposed that Holy Family School would have almost the same arrangement with St. Francis as it did with Humphrey Public.
- 3) It's mutually beneficial. Through retirements, St. Francis is going to need teachers, which Holy Family can help with. Holy Family needs extra-curricular support, which St. Francis can help with.
- 4) From a survival standpoint, both schools are going to be stronger working together than separately.

#### Proposed Coop Name - Holy Family-St. Francis Flyers

- This is the hardest, most difficult challenge.
  - 1) Names are our identity. Past hurts and wounds can be aggravated most particularly by names.
  - 2) Changing names means changing identity and that is a loss that is difficult to deal with.
    - a) There was a lot of discussion about eliminating references to either school and coming up with an entirely new name.
    - b) In the end, it was felt that the tradition of both schools was too rich to simply cast aside. Better to try to incorporate that rich history into a new enterprise.
  
- Why Flyers?
  - 1) Flyers is a unique name with a unique history intimately tied to the history of St. Francis. St. Francis school was served by the Franciscan Order and their mascot was originally called the *Friars*. Two classmates from the class of 1949 had brothers in the Air Force during World War II. Marilu Leenerts Todar's brother, Gordon, was a pilot flying over the Himalaya Mountains between India and Tibet. Mary Jean Kelly Gunderson's only brother, Emmet, lost his life going down over the Adriatic Sea during World War II. The St. Francis mascot was changed from the *Friars* to the *Flyers* in memory of their service to our nation.
  
- Why Holy Family first
  - 1) As awesome as St. Francis truly is, in terms of Catholic Tradition, the Holy Family consisting of Jesus, Mary and Joseph is primary.
  - 2) It was felt if Flyers was going to be the mascot, Holy Family should have priority in the name.
  
- Why include St. Francis?
  - 1) The tradition of excellence at St. Francis is too rich to be set aside.
  - 2) The more saints the better!
  - 3) The hope is to include the Holy Family emblem found on their spirit shirts as well as the St. Francis emblem found on their spirit shirts into all uniforms.

#### Proposed Coop Details

- Proposed Target Date – Spring sports 2022.
  - 1) It may be possible for other extra-curricular activities (Speech, One Act) to coop earlier.

- Games and practices
  - 1) For football, the proposal is two home games in Humphrey and two in Lindsay. Basketball/Volleyball would not be an even split because Holy Family's gym is not regulation and requires the consent of the opposing team. However, since St. Francis generally plays smaller schools, perhaps more indoor games would be played at Holy Family than in the current coop.
  - 2) Practices would be split based on the proportion number of students out for a particular activity. For example, if 20 kids were out for football and 15 were from St. Francis and 5 were from Holy Family,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the practices would be in Humphrey.
  - 3) Transporting 20 students may require more vehicles and more drivers, while transporting 5 students would not require as much.
  - 4) Referees would be the responsibility of the school hosting the activity.
  
- Finance
  - 1) Each school would be responsible for activities using their facilities. Families from either school could help in either school. Initially, St. Francis would need to guide Holy Family people on what needs to be done in their facilities and vice versa. The hope is that there would be one combined booster club.
  - 2) All receipts, tickets, concessions, etc...from any event would go into one account from which all non-salary expenses (travel, equipment, referees, etc...) would be paid.
  - 3) All coaches' salaries would be paid by the schools proportionate to the number of parishioners in each parish. Currently, the split would be 55% St. Francis, 45% Holy Family. This is because all parishioners are responsible for Catholic education.
  - 4) All facility expenses are the responsibility of the host school.
  - 5) Contracts with other schools will be the responsibility of St. Francis in consultation with the administration at Holy Family.
  - 6) Any shortfall would be made up by the parishes/schools using the same proportion. It can be raised in whatever way the respective school sees fit (fundraisers, parish contributions, etc...)
  - 7) Holy Family parishioners would only be responsible for Holy Family school's financial obligation and not St. Francis', and vice versa. In no sense would money donated to Holy Family benefit St. Francis or vice versa. Each parish would be solely responsible for supporting their own school.
  
- Administration
  - 1) Eligibility rules and lettering guidelines will be the same for both schools.
  - 2) Since there is a shared president, any disputes will be resolved by him.
  - 3) Since most of the coaches for "team" sports will be from St. Francis, the concern was raised about favoritism. While coaches always strive to play the best players, different players have different strengths that coaches could evaluate differently. Any hint of favoritism would not be tolerated as all of the students involved are the Pastor/President's "children".
  - 4) Coaches will be determined by the administration (Mrs. Dunn and Mr. Bishop). Any disputes will be resolved by the President, currently Fr. Olsen.

## Part 3: Summary and Feedback

### Summary

At a time when our society seems to be fragmenting more and more every day, we have the opportunity to be a sign of contradiction (cf. Luke 2:34). By coming together to share our resources, not only serve as an example as to how past hurts can be healed, but, perhaps more importantly, we can ensure the future of Catholic education in both communities.

### What to do next?

These are only proposals. This is a beginning of a conversation that should not feel rushed or pushed. The soonest anything could possibly happen is with one-act and speech next year, and for athletics, no earlier than spring sports of 2022.

The school board as well as Fr. Olsen both need and want your input. So here's what we are asking:

- 1) **Pray!** These are big decisions and we need to know that it is what the Lord wants us to do. So please pray for Fr. Olsen, the school boards and everyone involved in this decision including you.
- 2) **Think and reflect.** It's only natural when hearing this for the first time that all kinds of emotions accompany this proposal. Before acting, please reflect on this proposal, not from the emotion of past hurts or fears about the future. Rather, ask yourselves these questions:
  - a) Does this proposal make sense to ensure the future of Catholic education in our communities?
  - b) Is there something that needs to be added or subtracted from this proposal?
  - c) Is there a better way forward given the challenges in front of us?
- 3) **Respond.** If you'd like to communicate with a board member or Fr. Olsen, please send an email. The addresses are listed below. There will also be Open Forums for parishioners both in Lindsay as well as Humphrey where Fr. Olsen and all the boards from both parishes will be present. At this meeting, questions or concerns raised through email will be addressed and any other questions, comments or concerns may be expressed.

The first meeting will take place in the **Holy Family gym, Sunday, April 18th at 7pm.**

The second will take place a week later in the **St. Francis gym, Sunday, April 25th, also at 7pm.**

Members from either parish are invited to attend either meeting.

### Timeframe for a decision:

School boards will meet jointly after each open forum meeting to discuss issues raised. Other committees (finance, parish councils) will meet at the regular meetings to discuss issues raised. In May, after these meetings have taken place, the school boards will make a final proposal available for comment to the parishes. Two weeks will be given for parishioners to make any additional comments, before the joint school board votes on whether to recommend the final proposal to Fr. Olsen or not. Fr. Olsen will then decide to accept or reject the school board's recommendation.

There is no plan for additional open forums unless the school boards and leadership committees feel like it would be necessary and productive.

Please feel free to contact the school board members or the administration with any questions, comments and concerns. Please be respectful as all of us, even if we forcefully disagree, are on the same team trying to discern the best way to bring Jesus Christ more fully into the world.

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“That they may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I am in You; that the world may know that You sent Me.” John 17:21