

ST. MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL PARISH AND SCHOOL

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February 13, 2010

Dear Friends in Christ:

It has come to mind that I owe every member of the school community a tremendous apology. I have unwittingly charged you with the impossible task of reading my mind. To relieve you of this task, I write today to inform you that despite all you may have read or heard rumored about the future of Saint Michael the Archangel School, it is not now nor has it ever been my intention to end our participation in the evangelization mission of the Church by closing our school.

In a *Washington Post* article of Saturday, January 30, 2010, regarding the closing, reorganization, and restructuring of Catholic schools, it notes that St. Michael the Archangel School in Silver Spring is “still determining its future.” This is true only to the extent that we are determining the best course to insure our future. We continue to discern how to apply every lesson learned to the present and future growth and education of our students.

As you know, the past few years have been difficult, but a difficulty is only an adventure that is misunderstood, to paraphrase G.K. Chesterton. Our most recent history gives evidence of current financial difficulties.

We ended the school year, 2006-2007 with a surplus of \$499.37. That was typical. For the greater part of the last ten years we have ended the school with a small surplus or deficit. Our enrollment was strong at 217 students against a capacity enrollment of 225 students. The following year tuition increased to satisfy mandated salary increases to bring our teachers salaries within the range of public school salaries. Our enrollment of 208 students occasioned the loss of approximately \$70,000. Most of that loss, however, was delinquent tuition receivables. We managed to collect all but \$20,000 of that debt which was referred to a collections agency. The loss of \$20,000 is not exceptional for a parish school.

In 2008-09, we experienced a tremendous anomaly. Our enrollment dropped to 198 students and we lost \$336,624.00. In the 75 year history of the school, we had never suffered such a catastrophic loss. The anomaly was caused by several factors, each of which has been addressed and corrected. Nevertheless, the amount was large enough to trigger a consultation process with the Archdiocese.

Throughout the process, we examined what went wrong; we studied our strengths and learned of our weaknesses. Then we began the difficult task of healing our school and establishing checks and balances to prevent this from happening again.

“Omnis lux scientiaque a Deo est.”

Today, we are stronger than we have been for years. We established an Admission Program and began organizing a professional development plan. Thanks to the grace of the Lord, our efforts are already bearing fruits. Our enrollment on opening day of this school year was 191 students, up from 156 in July of 2009. By Thanksgiving, we had enrolled 194 students and today, that number has increased to 200. We are one of the few Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Washington that has increased enrollment over last year.

God has blessed us in several ways. Thanks to the generosity of two law firms, one in the District and another in New York City, we now have computer resources on par with any Catholic school in the Archdiocese. Our faculty, school advisory board, alumni, volunteers, staff, and rectory employees have contributed over \$40,000.00 toward financial aid funds. These monies will assist us in keeping our commitment that no child should be turned away from a Catholic education because of money.

This good news should lead you to a renewed pride in and love for our school; however, I do have one important request. I would like to see the enrollment for next year exceed 210 students. This is an ambitious goal and I need your help. I need you to spread the word that St. Michael the Archangel School is beginning to thrive. I need you to tell the story that our parish-based school, which is dedicated to passing on the Gospel message, is committed to academic excellence, small enough to be personal, large enough to be great, alive and on the move. Talk to your relatives, neighbors and friends. Tell them all about this gem of great value that has been hidden in Downtown Silver Spring for too long.

St. Michael the Archangel School will be here next year, and we will be here the following year. We look forward to celebrating the Centennial of Saint Michael the Archangel School in 2024. All this becomes possible if we remain faithful to the will of God and remain co-workers in the vineyard that is Saint Michael the Archangel School.

I thank each one of you for your patience with me and your permission to share in the education of your children. It has always been and remains my passion. Please know that Mr. Eames and I are always available to address any and all of your questions and concerns.

Yours in Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rev. Eddie Tolentino". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Msgr. Eddie Tolentino, III
Pastor