

**SACRED HEART SCHOOL
in VILLE PLATTE, LOUISIANA**

***Blue Ribbon Committee
Final Report
June 22, 2015***

Overview

At its inception, the Blue Ribbon Committee was charged to “comprehensively review the problems/conflict at Sacred Heart School in Ville Platte and to offer its analysis and recommendations to the entire Sacred Heart School family including clergy, administration, faculty, staff, parents, students and alumni.” To that end, members of the Committee have personally interviewed over 60 individual stakeholders, including current and former Pastors; current and former faculty, coaches, and staff; alumni; parents and grandparents of students; recent graduates, and interested members of the community. Its members have also reviewed countless letters and email messages submitted by those same groups, as well as other information concerning enrollment, policies, and practices.

These findings and recommendations are the fruit of those efforts. Through these recommendations, the Committee intends to create a framework and a timeline that address the problems and concerns it has identified, while providing Sacred Heart School with the maximum freedom and flexibility to move forward, fully aware that while no human solution is ever perfect, God’s love brings all human endeavors to perfection.

The Committee is profoundly grateful for the manner in which the Sacred Heart family has embraced the Committee and its mission; for the openness and candor in which so many have participated in this process; and mostly, for its prayerful support of this most important undertaking.

Commendations and Other Findings

The Committee’s recommendations are premised on the following core findings:

- ❖ Sacred Heart School comprises a vibrant community exemplified by the Trojan “Do or Die” motto and tradition. Love and dedication to the school

are generational and are founded upon deep and abiding devotion to the Catholic Church and her teachings.

- ❖ This enthusiasm and dedication is manifest in the interest so many have taken in the ongoing conflict involving the school's administration. The Committee views this engagement as an asset in both resolving the instant conflict, and in moving the school forward in the coming years.
- ❖ The current Administrator, Ms. Diane Fontenot, has served admirably in many respects throughout her tenure, making valuable contributions to the school in areas including curriculum and faculty development,¹ technology, and religious formation. However, due to a confluence of factors, the relationship between the Administrator and other stakeholders is currently irreparable. This impairs the Administrator's effectiveness and limits available avenues for meaningful reconciliation.
- ❖ An Advisory Council, as required under Diocesan policy, representing the best interests of Sacred Heart School students, should be formed, to potentially include parents of current students and members of both Sacred Heart Parish (the owner Parish) and Our Lady Queen of All Saints Parish (although not an owner Parish). A Council is vital in providing stakeholders with a voice in the operation and direction of the school. It is equally vital in providing necessary support to the school's faculty and staff in carrying out the school's foremost responsibility: the education and religious formation of children.

¹Over the last five years, an exceptional number of faculty, coaches, and other staff have left Sacred Heart School, either as a result of retirement, relocation, resignation, or non-renewal of their contracts. While this trend is concerning, and while it was examined by the Committee in the course of its broader inquiry, the Committee recognizes that such decisions are informed by a variety of factors, and that a more detailed review of complex personnel decisions is beyond the scope of this Committee's charge. As this report ultimately recommends a change of administration and the reinstatement of the Advisory Council, the Committee leaves all personnel decisions to the sound discretion of the Principals of the Elementary and High Schools together with the Pastor.

Recommendations

- ❖ The Committee recommends the immediate removal of the current Administrator, Ms. Paula Diane Fontenot, either through retirement, resignation, or termination.
- ❖ Mindful of the limited time between the issuance of this report and the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year, the Committee recommends a transitional period subject to the following mileposts:
 - **By July 31, 2015 or as soon as practical: The seating of a new Advisory Council.** In light of time limitations, the Committee recommends that this Council be composed according to the existing Constitution and Bylaws. (*See* DP 1009, Regulation 1). An accommodation will be necessary in order to provide for an alternative timeline and balloting process. Under existing rules, selection of the Council occurs in April, and ballots are distributed and returned through students. As School is not in session, we recommend that the Bishop empower the high school and elementary Principals to make the necessary accommodations in order that nominations, balloting and elections may be accomplished as close to July 31, 2015 as practical. The Committee leaves to the sound discretion of the incoming Council, subject to Diocesan policies and regulations, any decision to amend the existing Constitution and Bylaws to provide for an alternate means of composing any future Councils. The Chairman of this Blue Ribbon Committee and/or other members of the Committee will make themselves available to facilitate the selection of the new Council and to assist the incoming Council as needed during this period of transition.
 - **By August 31, 2015: The formation of a committee charged with searching for a new Administrator, or alternatively, determining if the position of Administrator should be eliminated.** The Committee recommends that this new committee be composed of both of the current Assistant Principals plus representatives from these groups: the Advisory Council, the faculty, the Foundation, the Booster Club, and the Parent-Teacher Club. Every effort should be made to insure that this new committee represents a fair cross-section of Sacred Heart Parish and Our Lady Queen of All Saints Parish. The Committee is aware that the current administrative model, which features an Administrator and two Assistant Principals, has been the subject of ongoing debate regarding its

effectiveness. The Committee is also aware that the school may want to conduct a broad search for a new Administrator, including a possible nationwide search. This transitional period will permit both the study and evaluation of the current administrative model and, if deemed appropriate, a comprehensive search for a new Administrator.

- ❖ The Committee recommends that Ms. Virginia Morein and Ms. Dawn Shipp, who are currently the Assistant Principals over the elementary and high school campuses, each assume the role of Principal over their respective campuses.
- ❖ Mindful that a significant number of students at Sacred Heart School belong to Our Lady Queen of All Saints Parish, the Committee recommends an expanded role for the Pastor and parishioners of Our Lady Queen of All Saints Parish. To this end, the Committee recommends that the Pastor of Sacred Heart Parish, in consultation with the administration of Sacred Heart School and the Advisory Council, identify the means through which the Pastor and parishioners of Our Lady Queen of All Saints Parish can more actively assist in the development and operation of Sacred Heart School.

It is the Committee's sincere hope and fervent prayer that these recommendations will assist Sacred Heart School in achieving the reconciliation all parties desire and deserve as the school continues its mission of educating future generations of Catholic Christians.

In service to Our Lord and His Sacred Heart,

The Blue Ribbon Committee