

# St. Aloysius and St. Veronica Schools announce plans to form new Catholic academy

Two strong and successful Catholic elementary schools in the Diocese of Trenton – situated just over three miles apart – will pool their resources and efforts to become a newly-established Catholic Academy that will open its doors in September, 2019.

St. Aloysius School in Jackson and St. Veronica School in Howell will undergo a merger at the end of this school year, transitioning into Mother Seton Academy, according to the pastors of the two sponsoring parishes.

Father John Bambrick, pastor of St. Aloysius Parish, and Father Vincent Euk, pastor of St. Veronica Parish, announced the decision Jan. 7 in a joint meeting with parents from the two schools. Citing the similarities and connectedness of their two parishes, and the solid foundations that both schools have achieved, Father Bambrick and Father Euk shared that the time was right to bring St. Aloysius and St. Veronica Schools together, not only to strengthen Catholic education in their communities now, but to ensure it for the future.

The pastors requested and received approval for the planned merger from Bishop David M. O’Connell, C.M., in mid-December. The Bishop also approved the selection of the school’s new name: Mother Seton Academy, which honors the history of the Catholic Church in the United States. Mother Seton, who went on to become St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, is the first native born citizen to be canonized and the founder of the first American religious community, the Sisters of Charity. St. Elizabeth also opened the first Catholic parish school in the United States.

With a current, combined Pre-K through 8<sup>th</sup> grade enrollment of more than 350 students, the merger will result in a single new school sponsored by both parishes with a new name, new administration, new teaching staff and new mission. Driving this new vision is the steadfast belief both pastors have in the importance of Catholic education, and the spirit of support that the two parishes have historically shown for their schools.

The continued presence and involvement of the Sisters of the Resurrection, who have served in St. Veronica School for 53 years, will also benefit the new model and help to facilitate its success as a Christ-centered, academically excellent learning experience for students. Mother Seton Academy will seek current teachers from both schools to be part of this new venture.

While the physical plants of St. Aloysius and St. Veronica Schools are nearly identical, the Howell site offers the advantage of being slightly larger (allowing for future growth), has an athletic field (which the St. Aloysius site lacks) and is easily accessible from major roads (195 and Rt. 9). Therefore, Mother Seton Academy will occupy the campus of the former St. Veronica School.

The designation of an Academy reflects the commitment to fulfill the robust and specific guidelines for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Catholic Elementary School, which have been established by the Diocese’s Department of Catholic Schools. The guidelines include criteria in such areas as curriculum, teacher training, advanced instruction and options for enriched activities.

JoAnn Tier, diocesan superintendent of schools, conveyed words of encouragement from Bishop O’Connell and pledged the support of the Department of Catholic Schools in the establishment and launch of the new Academy. “It is both commendable and inspiring that these two parishes are going to work together to ensure the continued health of Catholic education for the children in their communities and those throughout the area.”

Looking ahead to September, Father Bambrick stated, “This new model presents exciting opportunities for growth and vision. The Academy model will be a more challenging and enriching educational experience.” The pastor also expressed confidence that the new Mother Seton Academy will “ensure the best possible footing for Catholic education moving forward, despite such projected challenges as demographic changes for the region.”

Father Euk pointed to the growing initiative in the Diocese for parishes and schools to work together, and described the formation of Mother Seton Academy as a “wonderful example of what is possible when we truly embrace a spirit of collaboration.” He underscored his deeply held conviction that Catholic schools are essential parish ministries, and bring many benefits to the sponsoring communities. “I am very optimistic that Mother Seton Academy will continue to bring blessings to our two parishes.”