

Recommendation and plans made for St. Paul School in San Antonio to close at conclusion of 2024-2025 academic year

It has been recommended that St. Paul School in San Antonio cease operations at the end of the 2024-2025 academic year, it was announced at a Town Hall Meeting held March 26 with members of the community. Options to best meet the needs of students were also discussed with attendees. Over the past several years, the school has worked diligently to maintain educational excellence, expand enrollment, prioritize recruitment efforts, and bolster finances. Despite these efforts, St. Paul's School continues to need substantial financial assistance each year from the parish -- around \$250,000 annually -- which is coupled with more than \$1 million in deferred maintenance needs, as well as a significant decline in enrollment from Pre-K to grade eight, currently serving about 100 students.

The financial needs of St. Paul School are immediate. In the past academic year, the archdiocesan Department of Catholic Schools and Father Mark Dreves, temporary parish administrator, have assisted in putting in place systems for administration and have assessed the long-term outlook for the campus. Currently in the State of Texas, school choice legislation has a particularly good prospect of becoming law, however, for St. Paul School, that would not provide the type of immediate assistance needed for operations. This Spring, as challenges with the school became more pressing, former students and the alumni association came forward with financial pledges and contributions, along with other volunteer efforts, to sustain and continue the mission of the school.

At the two-and-a-half hour meeting there were many questions and suggestions regarding possible options to keep the school open. The community asked Father Dreves to take those recommendations to Archbishop Gustavo García-Siller, MSPS, for his consideration, which he pledged to do. However, he stated that personnel from the school and the archdiocese will continue to move forward with the commitment to ensuring a smooth and compassionate transition for students and families.

"St. Paul Catholic School has been a cornerstone of faith, education, and community for many years. Generations of students have grown in knowledge and faith within these walls, guided by the dedicated hands and hearts of our teachers, staff, and volunteers," Father Dreves said in the letter shared with the school community following the town hall. "It is impossible to fully express how deeply this school has touched the lives of so many, and the thought of closing its doors weighs heavily on all of us. Our goal is to provide as much support as possible during this time of transition — whether that be through helping identify appropriate schools, guiding families through the process, or offering emotional and spiritual support along the way." Father Dreves told parents that teachers and staff remain dedicated to making this final year a memorable and meaningful one, ensuring that each child feels valued and supported throughout this journey, and that in the months ahead the school will continue to put forth its very best efforts to provide high-quality educational programming for students.

"We pray for the wisdom of the Lord to guide us through this challenging season. While the path ahead may be uncertain, we take comfort in knowing that God's grace and presence will be with us through every step. We ask for your continued prayers and support for our students, families,

and staff as we navigate this transition together,” he said. “Thank you for your unwavering dedication to St. Paul Catholic School. Your faith, love, and commitment to our mission have made this community a truly special place. Though this chapter is coming to a close, the spirit of St. Paul will live on in the hearts and lives of all those who have been touched by this community.”

Parish leadership and representatives from the archdiocesan Department of Catholic Schools met with families at the town hall gathering and addressed admissions and tuition to other Catholic elementary schools, financial assistance to help in that transition, responded to additional questions, and reviewed information from individual packets prepared for each family. Hope for the Future will provide \$500 to students who transfer to a school within the archdiocese to help offset the costs of enrolling at a new school, especially with uniform costs and fees. Faculty and staff will be given priority consideration for open positions in other Catholic schools across the archdiocese.

St. Paul Parish and the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Brigid of Ireland established St. Paul Catholic School in 1953, with enrollment exceeding 500 students in the mid-1950s.

For more information, visit sacatholicschools.org, call (210) 734-1954, or e-mail enroll@archsa.org