



St. Francis of Assisi Parish

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January 2, 2025

Dear Saint Francis of Assisi School Families, Parishioners, and PREP Families,

To say this has been a difficult year has been an understatement. All of you have been beyond patient dealing with the disruption of our parish and school due to the fire that occurred on October 7th of this year. It's only fair to all of you to give an update as to what we are doing as a parish and school community in connection with the archdiocese.

This update is long overdue, but it took over two months to finally have a sit-down with the Archdiocese about moving forward. I would confide in my priest friends over the sadness and anger I felt over this lack of communication regarding an action plan. We finally had a meeting on December 12th. Our principal, Mrs. Hamilton, and I were accompanied by one of our deacons, our business manager, and several other parish leaders at a meeting downtown to share the concerns so many of you have voiced over the past months.

Our goal at this meeting was to obtain clarity on those points and to gauge a time-frame for the recovery process. The conversation was led by the Vicar General and featured participation from many senior administrators in the area of education, insurance, legal, engineering, financial, and communications. While we were very grateful for so many experts listening to our concerns, we left with few definitive answers.

Cleanup and Security Measures at the Saint Francis of Assisi Campus

There have been many Friday and Saturday nights where I went out with gloves, a broom and a trash bag to clean up broken glass during times where the wind was blowing, and I was nervous it could hurt a child or parishioner coming into church for Mass. On at least one occasion, we had to alter recess to ensure no child was harmed during their recess period that occurred during high winds. Additionally, I mentioned how it is psychologically harmful for children to arrive at their beloved school and peer into a building where they can still see their artwork on the walls half burned down due to the fire. Totally unacceptable. Once these issues were voiced, the diocese immediately had all broken windows boarded. Sadly, the building has never

been winterized and we still do not have a roof overhead to protect the physical structure. Although much time has passed (nearly 3 months at this point), we have been promised that a temporary roof will be placed upon the building within the next six to eight weeks.

The fence placed around the school is completely inadequate and we are blessed Springfield Township has been so patient with us in the diocesan failure to properly secure the perimeter. I told the diocese we need a taller and more secure fence. Children are inquisitive by nature, and I can't tell you how many times I've asked local children to not climb the fence for their safety. We expect that a new 8-foot tall fence complete with mesh coverings will be in place by mid-January. This taller fence will encircle the perimeter of the building that suffered the fire, limit public sight lines, and prevent individuals from gaining access to the area.

Security Measures at the Saint Kevin Campus

Enhancing security at the Saint Kevin's location is underway. Quotes have been obtained for the installation of security cameras, door locks, and other items to match what is in place at Saint Francis of Assisi. The contracts are signed, although the definitive time-frame is ongoing. The company we primarily use is highly efficient in addressing our needs in a timely manner. I just passed St. Kevin's a couple days before Christmas, and they were already working. We are also working on signage for the drop-off and pick-up areas to provide for enhanced safety for students and school families during these busy times of the school day.

General Recovery Plans and Forward Looking Goals

Our greatest hope is to reunify all of our students in one location as soon as possible. The day after our fire, we had the Office of Catholic Education out here speaking about modular units. I felt so hopeful in the midst of this disaster. Immediately, we had two quotes and soon we had three, we could have had this in full operation by mid January if we were given permission to start back in October. We love St. Kevin's and would be lost without their help. Before the fire was extinguished, SFA already had an offer of help from St. Kevin's. Beyond unbelievable! We are so grateful for the use of their space, but the principal and I have spoken about this at length—the students need to be together in one location. SFA is one community. Plus, it's so difficult for our teachers and parents with siblings separated to continue to do this. Sadly, we left that diocesan meetings with no commitment. However, be assured we will continue to explore that avenue.

I understand financial resources are not limitless, but isn't that what insurance is for? This is a most catastrophic situation for our school, parish and local community and we have been dutiful in paying the diocesan and secondary insurance companies over countless years. During the meeting with the archdiocese, we were being constantly reminded of how the cost of

rebuilding could raise the premiums of other churches. It was quite frustrating. Meanwhile, I'm thinking about my brother who has Cystic Fibrosis; he is on a medication that costs \$700 per pill, and he has to take that pill 2x a day. My brother would not be alive without that medication and the insurance companies absolutely hate my family because my parents always fought to protect him. Well, yesterday, my mother texted me the following, "Forgot to tell you, there is a new drug that's even better than Trikafta...Daniel is eligible...this is great news... a wonderful Christmas gift for all of us...can't wait to tell you more." I grew up in a family fighting insurance companies and my brother is alive because of it; we will keep fighting for what our school needs to thrive and expand. Our school is still very much alive and, rest assured, Mrs. Hamilton and I will ensure it gets even stronger.

A favorite and inspirational quote of mine that speaks of truth and how we just have to do the best we can:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who never know the victory nor defeat

– *Theodore Roosevelt*

We'll make this happen, even with stumbles along the way! On our side of things, we have an amazing architect and engineer who are ready to roll. St. Francis is ready to rebuild. Let's get this moving! Mrs. Hamilton and I are so very grateful to you for your patience, understanding and support. You truly are the BEST!

God Bless you and have a prosperous New Year!

In Christ,

Rev. Matthew J. Tralies

Rev. Matthew Tralies, Pastor