



DIOCESE OF CAMDEN
Office of Communications

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Press Release

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Five Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Camden to close at the end of the school year

CAMDEN -- The Diocese of Camden announced today that five schools in the diocese will close, effective the end of the current school term on June 30, 2020. The three elementary schools and two high schools are:

- Good Shepherd Regional Elementary School in Collingswood
- Saint Joseph Regional Elementary School in Hammonton
- Cape Trinity Catholic School in Wildwood

- Saint Joseph High School in Hammonton
- Wildwood Catholic High School in Wildwood

The decision to close the schools is difficult. Years of dwindling community support in the form of declining student enrollment and local fundraising, despite significant diocesan and parish financial support, has necessitated this decision.

The administrations, faculties, families and donors who have supported these schools should be commended for their efforts to keep these schools open and accessible. However, the decreasing priority given to Catholic education by many parents, including Catholic parents, ultimately weakened the viability of these schools.

All affected students will have the opportunity to continue their Catholic education at nearby regional Catholic elementary and high schools.

Over the last five years, each school has seen a precipitous drop in registrations despite the best efforts of the school administrators to implement new enrollment and academic initiatives and continue their traditions of excellence in education while providing a home where the Catholic faith can be taught, learned, and lived.

	2015 enrollment	2020 enrollment	% change
Good Shepherd Regional School	154	108	-30%
St. Joseph's Elementary School	191	94	-50%
Wildwood Catholic High School & Cape Trinity Catholic School	382	337	-12%*
St. Joseph's High School	331	206	-38%

**WCHS/CTC is a shared physical entity; while the more significant drop is affecting WCHS, it is the determination of both administrations that the closure of either school renders the other school non-viable.*

Over the same time period, these three elementary schools have received a combined \$3.8 million in financial support from the diocese and/or local parishes to sustain operations while keeping tuition as affordable as possible. Wildwood Catholic High School has received nearly \$750,000 in support and Saint Joseph's High School has received loan support totaling \$1.1 million but currently carries a debt of \$6.6 million.

Unfortunately, the continued loss of enrollment over that time has strained these schools' finances to the point that even substantial diocesan and parish support can no longer meet the regular operational expenses of the schools.

Finally, compounding the already existing financial and enrollment issues at these schools is the expectation that they will suffer further negative impacts due to the economic realities of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated business shutdowns and personnel layoffs that have been felt throughout the region.

The decision to close these schools is sobering and painful. It has not been made lightly. It has been made with great deliberation, including insight from regional pastors, school advisory boards, the College of Consultors, the Diocesan Finance Council, the Office of Catholic Schools and the Diocesan Finance Office.

"Closing a Catholic school is gut-wrenching for everyone involved, from the principal and pastor to the superintendent and bishop. However, as stewards of the financial resources entrusted to us, we came to the difficult conclusion that low enrollment at these schools caused the strain on the funds available to become too great," said Dr. Bill Watson, Superintendent of Schools. "I am deeply grateful to the faculty and staff who have given so much to these schools and to the dedicated parents who have continued to send their children to them. We look forward to welcoming these families into another Catholic school community next year."

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About South Jersey Catholic Schools

The mission of South Jersey Catholic Schools is to educate and inspire young minds spiritually, academically and in service to others. Our vision is for students to become faith-filled adults who, guided by gospel values, shape our world with knowledge, integrity and compassion. Catholic schools in the Diocese of Camden provide an education that is Christ-centered and empowers students to reach their fullest potential in an intellectually challenging, academically excellent environment.

The Diocese of Camden Office of Catholic Schools provides strategic direction and ongoing educational support to schools in the Diocese of Camden, including 28 Catholic elementary schools, six diocesan Catholic high schools and three non-diocesan Catholic high schools. Schools in the Diocese of Camden serve nearly 12,000 students from the six Southern New Jersey counties.

About the Diocese of Camden

The Diocese of Camden, under the leadership of Most Reverend Dennis J. Sullivan, D.D., eighth bishop of Camden, serves approximately 475,000 Catholics in 62 parishes in Atlantic, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem Counties. The Diocese serves the South Jersey community through faith, education and social services.