

FAIRFIELD COUNTY CATHOLIC

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A plan for Catholic education in Stamford

By JOE PISANI

STAMFORD —Two years ago, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano launched an initiative to ensure “sustainable Catholic education for years to come” by combining four schools to create the Catholic Academy of Stamford, which will be located on a central campus with Trinity Catholic High School and St. John Fisher Seminary, where he resides.

Dr. Steven Cheeseman, superintendent of schools, said, “The idea behind this whole project was the goal of creating a revitalized sector for Catholic education in Stamford. That is why the bishop moved there, because it offers an important opportunity to lead from the center of Stamford.”

Dr. Cheeseman said construction has begun at Trinity Catholic, where science labs are being added and the lower level will be renovated to accommodate the middle school. Three elementary schools have been consolidated at St. Cecilia’s campus on Newfield Avenue, where they will remain for another year or two before moving into the middle school building.

Deacon Patrick Toole, Episcopal Delegate for Administration of the diocese, said the “Catholic Education Reimagined” project was an outgrowth of the fourth diocesan synod and has as its goal the evangelical renewal of the diocese, starting with the city of Stamford.

Part of that vision was to “transform five existing failing Catholic schools into a new single Catholic school that will serve young people from ages three to 18, providing them with authentic Catholic and disciplined formation as disciples, and a superior academic education utilizing blended personalized learning, centered in Eucharistic spirituality.”

The project began two years ago when Bishop Caggiano put together a study committee to examine the state of Catholic elementary schools in Stamford, said Patricia Brady, who is the Head of School for the Catholic Academy and for Trinity Catholic High School.

The committee’s recommendation was to form the Catholic Academy of Stamford from St. Cecilia, Our Lady Star of the Sea, Holy Spirit and the Trinity Catholic Middle School so that there would be one pre-K3 to 8th grade on a single campus. The lower school consists of pre-K3 to 5th grade and the upper school of 6th to 8th grades. The lower level of the Trinity Catholic building is being renovated to accommodate the upper school.

“This vision that the bishop has is to strengthen Catholic education in Stamford by improving our facilities and launching a major initiative in personalized learning,” Ms. Brady said. “Without this vision, we may have had to close schools. Instead, on one campus we will have everyone—3-year-olds to seminarians. It will truly be an epicenter for Catholic education in all its forms, with the bishop living on the campus.”

Phase one of the project was completed in August and involved the construction of science labs at the high school. Immediately following, phase two began—the demolition of the entire guidance area and third floor of the high school to build new classrooms, a state-of-the-art media center, offices and the Learning Academy to accommodate special-needs students. This will be completed by Thanksgiving, she said.

In early December, phase three, the demolition and renovation of the lower level of the high school will begin in order to create space for middle school students. It is expected to be completed by April 2019.

Sharing resources is another advantage to having the students on the same campus, Ms. Brady says. Faculty, for example, may teach pre-algebra to upper school students and algebra to the high school students.

“Being in the same building will permit the sharing of resources and faculty,” she said. Under the plan, each division will have a principal. “The reaction of parents who chose to have their children stay has been very positive,” Ms. Brady said. “Change is hard for people, but I believe they are going to see we are committed to Catholic education in Stamford, and in two to three years, we will be getting enrollment back up to where we want it.”

She anticipates the 6th-8th grades will move to the new location at the Trinity High School building in August 2019. After the middle school students are in the high school, the planning will continue for pre-K3 to 5th grade students’ location.

The bishop said the planning group did complete evaluations of the schools to determine which facility would best allow for Catholic education to not only continue, but grow.

“Our goal is sustainable Catholic education for years to come,” Bishop Caggiano said. “The Diocese of Bridgeport is committed to strengthening programs to continue to attract new students. Our Catholic schools are known for being faith-filled centers for student development, for 21st century teaching and for producing graduates who are prepared to be leaders in their community and the world.”

Michael Macari, director of communications and marketing for Trinity Catholic, said this is the second major renovation for the high school, following a \$2.7 million upgrade of the athletic field two years ago.

Macari said once all the schools are centrally located on one campus, they expect there will be 350 to 400 students in pre-K3 to 5th grade, 200 in 6th to 8th grades and a target of 500 students for the high school. St. John Fisher Seminary will be expanded and include a perpetual adoration chapel in line with Bishop Caggiano’s vision of Stamford being the center of Catholic faith in lower Fairfield County, Deacon Toole said.



CATHOLIC EDUCATION REIMAGINED
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THE CATHOLIC ACADEMY
OF STAMFORD

TRINITY CATHOLIC
HIGH SCHOOL

