



Office of Communications
4800 Union Deposit Road
PO Box 2555
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17105
(717) 657-4804

Immediate Release

March 18, 2008

Contact: Joe Aponick
(717) 657-4804 x210

www.hbgdiocese.org

Bishop McDevitt High School Relocation Announced

On behalf of the Diocese of Harrisburg and, in particular, on behalf of the thousands of people who make up the proud community of Bishop McDevitt High School, I am pleased to announce today a momentous decision. After thorough study, intensive listening and even more prayer, we have decided to build a new campus with modern academic and athletic facilities for Bishop McDevitt High School. I share this news with great joy, because it is clear this decision represents our best hope for enhancing the opportunity for an excellent Catholic high-school education for the young people of the greater Harrisburg area for many years to come.

After close consultation with the Board of Directors of Bishop McDevitt High School – who voted to support this decision - we have determined that the many and diverse interests of the people our Church serves would best be met by building a new high school. We found several sites that could be great locations. Our number one choice at this point in the process is an 86-acre site along Spring Creek Road, near Page Road, in Lower Paxton Township. This site meets all of our needs and criteria. We hope to purchase this site, pending the successful completion of our negotiations and the municipal approval process.

The new high school will include all the necessities and facilities required of a world-class high school program today – necessities and facilities that we could not economically create at the school's current 6 ½ acre site. These include space for first-class academic resources, full athletic facilities, and sufficient parking – all at a location that is central to the ten parishes that comprise and support the school, including easy access for students from the city of Harrisburg. This latter point has been particularly important in our deliberations. Our commitment to maintaining and even growing our ethnic and cultural diversity remains undiminished. But the stark truth is this: we can

only continue this mission with a School that is thriving. A school that is in sustained enrollment decline is not a strong foundation for service.

As you know, there has been much discussion and wide consultation with the Bishop McDevitt community concerning this decision. There are widely differing viewpoints. And I say to you today that I find those viewpoints to be responsible and appropriate – including the views of those who advocated for renovation to our existing site. I share their attachment to and admiration for the beautiful architecture of the present school – and their reverent respect for the great work that has been done within those beautiful walls. They are right to say we should not lightly leave those walls behind.

But amid these differing viewpoints to which I listened carefully over the past months, I was forced to try to find those that seemed to capture an overarching truth, one that would focus us on what is best for this community and the Church – not just today, but long into the future. One such view was unearthed through the survey we administered over a year ago. The survey found that parents of prospective future students favored a new facility by a 2 to 1 margin. I have been concerned by the declining enrollment at Bishop McDevitt High School. While the enrollment in our Catholic secondary schools has generally been growing in the diocese, enrollment at McDevitt has been steadily declining. Growing and sustaining enrollment is extremely important for the future viability of the school and for our Catholic educational mission in the Harrisburg area. It became clear to me from the survey that remaining at the present site, even with a large and costly renovation, likely would not reverse the enrollment decline. The majority of parents of prospective students from all the ten sending parishes have basically told me: “If you build a new high school, we will send our children.” This includes parents of prospective students from our four Harrisburg city parishes. Today, Bishop McDevitt is near the geographic fringe of the territory it serves. The new proposed location is more central to the ten parishes Bishop McDevitt serves – while still remaining convenient for our city families. This new location is the right way to respond to our Church’s changing needs – while honoring our commitments to all those who count on us.

The situation we have faced regarding the location of our Catholic high school in Harrisburg is not unlike that faced by Bishop Philip R. McDevitt himself 80 years ago. There were many differences of opinion when Bishop McDevitt, for the good of the future of the school, decided to move it from downtown Harrisburg to Market Street. In fact, when he purchased the 6 ½ acres on Market Street in August of 1927, it was called at the time “a wild purchase,” with critics saying, “What would they do with all this ground?” Well, I must say that great things have been done with that “wild purchase” of 6 ½ acres. Since its last move in 1930, Bishop McDevitt High School has flourished as an outstanding educational institution and has produced abundant fruits in its holy and noble mission of Catholic education. And I anticipate that with this new move, Bishop McDevitt will flourish anew and produce abundant fruits in its holy and noble mission for many generations to come. We all recognize that Bishop McDevitt High School is more than a building and more than land. It is first and foremost a community. As bishop, I

am deeply proud of that community. We will move forward into the future with hope and determination, strengthened by the strong spirit that has always animated Bishop McDevitt High School.

With this announcement today, we begin Phase II of our project. Phase I was the feasibility study. Our needs were determined, building and renovation data were gathered, a survey was developed and conducted, and an exhaustive real estate search was conducted. Because we knew we could not make the decision of whether to build or renovate in a vacuum, it was only when we identified potential sites that the full pros and cons of the decision could be fully weighed. With this decision, we have now focused on a priority site, thus enabling us to move to Phase II.

Phase II is the Schematic Design process. Many important tasks will need to be accomplished, including the development of specifications, timelines, schematics and cost estimates for the new facilities. The final phase of the process will be Phase III, when the actual construction will take place.

In this Phase II, we will be creating three committees: one for the planning of the new facility, one for the planning of the future use of the present building, and one for the capital campaign. The proposals from these three committees will be studied by the Board of Directors of Bishop McDevitt High School which will be consulted before decisions are reached.

The success of the capital campaign will, of course, be crucial to our efforts. Money needs to be raised if our dreams are to be realized and fulfilled. I am confident that our people, our community, and all who love Bishop McDevitt High School will rally around this project and support its successful completion.

The planning on the future use of the present site is also very important to me and to so many others. That is why we are setting up a special committee to study just this issue.

Before I conclude, I would like to quote from Bishop George L. Leech, the fifth Bishop of Harrisburg, Bishop McDevitt's immediate successor. He spoke the following words on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of Bishop McDevitt High School in 1969:

"I reserve my heartiest congratulations and highest tribute for our wonderful Catholic parishioners of this high school area, you the living parishioners and the hundreds like you and before you, now gone to claim their reward in Christ Jesus. You are the ones to whom this McDevitt Jubilee Day belongs in the first place. You of the laity, so many of you actual alumni of this high school and now seeing your children and your children's children benefiting by the solid and trustworthy policy and program of this high school."

It is in that spirit that Bishop McDevitt High School must continue. It is my hope and prayer that our wonderful parishioners of today, our devoted McDevitt alumni, as

well as others from the wider community who support Bishop McDevitt, will unite with me just as our ancestors did when they united with Bishop McDevitt in support of a wonderful vision for the future. We do all this for the good of our children and our children's children, God-willing for many generations to come, so that they will benefit as so many others have from the education received at this great school. I am confident of this support which will enable us to realize a successful crusade for a bright and strong future for Bishop McDevitt High School.

Most Reverend Kevin C. Rhoades
Bishop of Harrisburg

+ + +