

# **An open letter to the Catholic faithful of the Archdiocese of Baltimore**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As reported in The Catholic Review last week, St. Michael School in Frostburg – the last parish elementary school in far Western Maryland – will close its doors for good at the end of the current school year after over 110 years of educating the children of Allegany County in the Catholic faith. Years of declining enrollment (there are just 85 students enrolled this year, down from a high of 345 in 1968) and a corresponding affordability gap (tuition has risen by 500 percent over the past 20 years), required that the inevitable and sad decision to close the school be made.

The factors that led to the decision to close St. Michael's are the same that have prompted this decision-of-last-resort when other schools in our Archdiocese have been forced to close in recent years. Downward trends in enrollment, escalating tuition, rising salary and benefit costs are not new; we have been struggling to address these challenges for some time in an effort to keep Catholic education affordable for all who seek it. This has and continues to be a priority of this Archdiocese.

Though we have taken steps to respond to these challenges, the recent downturn in our national economy has collided with these pre-existing factors to create a perfect storm that poses an immediate threat to the sustainability of many of our Catholic schools.

This issue dominated the discussion at last week's meeting of the Presbyteral Council, as the following data for the current school year was shared:

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