

An Open Letter to the Students of Cardinal Gibbons

The Catholic Review

Dear Men of Cardinal Gibbons,

In an ordinary year, the end of the school year would bring with it mixed emotions: joy for having concluded a fulfilling academic year, excitement at the challenges that lie ahead and a bit of sadness for members of the senior class, who will be saying good-bye to friends and in some ways their youth.

This has been no ordinary year, however, and this graduation brings with it a whole different set of emotions. You are the last students to study at Cardinal Gibbons. I want to express personally my regret for the added anxiety and sadness that you likely have been feeling since we announced that the school would not reopen next year. The value and importance of your school in your life and the lives of your family and the entire Cardinal Gibbons community have not been lost on me. You neither deserve nor are responsible for the upheaval that has resulted in the upending of your lives.

You enrolled in school-at great sacrifices on the part of your parents and families-studied hard, prayed harder and wore proudly the Crusader name on the fields of athletic competition. You did your part. So why are you being punished the most? This is a fair question. I wish I had a fair answer. I don't.

In time, I hope you'll come to understand this decision was made to strengthen and to solidify Catholic education throughout Catholic Baltimore. My present intent is not to justify the decision by discussing enrollment, finances and other factors-all relevant and surely, important, but not the purpose of my writing you. Just know that this was a painful decision of last resort, intended only to make the kind of wonderful education you received continue to be available to you and many others long into the future.

Much has been said and written since we announced that Cardinal Gibbons and 12 other schools would not reopen next fall. Some of it has been accurate—much, unfortunately, not. We—the Archdiocese and the school together—had been struggling for years to save the school from a fate none of us wanted. There is finality to the closure of a school similar to the finality of death for the Church, the community, and certainly the students. I continue to empathize with you and to pray that this burden you have been carrying for so many weeks will soon be relieved.

I am not from Baltimore. My father and brothers did not attend Cardinal Gibbons or any other Catholic high school in this area. But this does not prevent me from understanding your loss and your great sadness over the fact that this year's graduating class—the 44th in the school's history—will be the last of many generations. It is obvious that you value the Gibbons Catholic legacy, and hopefully you will live lives reflecting that legacy for years to come.

As any one of you would likely attest, Cardinal Gibbons is more than a building. It is a spirit that has captured each of you, the product of the hours and hours of instruction, discipline, guidance and love that you have received during your formative years at Gibbons. This spirit remains yours, never to be taken from you. It will carry you throughout your lives and be passed along to your own children and beyond.

Please know of my ongoing prayers for each of you. May you take the gifts God has given you and the invaluable education you have received from Cardinal Gibbons and share them with the world. I especially pray that you will continue your Catholic education; you are worthy additions to any school you choose to attend next year, making those institutions instantly richer with the experiences you will bring them.

Finally, please continue to embrace the faith nurtured within you by your teachers, your family and your Church. It has enabled you to climb the mountain these past weeks and will guide you through the challenges that still await you. May God bless you and your family always, and may the spirit of The Cardinal Gibbons High School continue to brighten each of your lives.

In the Lord,

+Edwin F. O'Brien
Archbishop of Baltimore