

# Archdiocese approves policy on sale of vacant schools

The Archdiocese of Baltimore has developed a policy to provide the proper canonical oversight for the sale or lease of former or current Catholic school buildings so that usage does not hinder the growth of other Catholic schools.

Under canon law, the sale or lease of parish or school buildings and land is considered an act of extraordinary administration and requires approval by the archbishop.

Under this new policy, approved by the Archdiocesan School Board in October, a Real Estate Transaction Advisory Committee (RETAC) has been formed and is comprised of the building's vicar bishop; the archdiocese's vicar general; the chair of the school board's strategic planning committee; the schools superintendent, the executive director of the office of research and planning; and the executive director of the office of management services.

Monsignor Richard J. Bozzelli, pastor of three parishes in Glen Burnie – Holy Trinity, Church of the Crucifixion and Church of the Good Shepherd – helped shape the policy and will serve RETAC as head of the archdiocesan school board's strategic planning committee.

He said the archbishop previously made ad-hoc decisions with the office of facilities management as proposals were made.

"The concern became, was someone taking a broader view as to the impact of the disposition of buildings," Monsignor Bozzelli said.

The vicar general, currently Monsignor Richard W. Woy, would chair RETAC if there is a proposed sale or lease of a building. A pastor or pastoral life director must first submit a written proposal for a building sale or lease to the archbishop with a description of the property and its intended use. The letter must include details on the potential purchaser or lessee, their offer, terms of the sale or lease, and, most importantly, the impact it might have on other Catholic schools in the area.

The archbishop will forward the request to the vicar general, who will alert RETAC and the Office of Research and Planning about the proposal. That office will coordinate the preparation of a due diligence report examining the impact the disposition of the building will have on other Catholic schools in the area. RETAC will meet and prepare a written proposal to the archbishop on whether it approves the deal.

“Presumably, if the committee felt it would have an adverse impact on the viability and availability of Catholic schools, they would recommend that the transaction not be approved,” Monsignor Bozzelli said. “I could see it being more subtle, too, where the committee may say ‘Well, this is what we think could happen,’ but not necessarily say up or down, just to express concerns.”

After receiving that recommendation, the archbishop may choose to consult further with the committee or the archdiocesan school board about the disposition of the building.

“I think it’s a good thing because it creates a broader vision in terms of what can often be seen as a disconnect or discreet transactions,” Monsignor Bozzelli said. “It realizes that the disposition of a building can have a broader impact beyond the parish that is disposing of the building. It tries to bring that into perspective so the archbishop has a bigger picture when he has to decide whether to approve or disapprove of the transaction.”