

Five former Catholic school buildings to be used for education

Five former Catholic school buildings in the Archdiocese of Baltimore will gain renewed life as educational facilities after Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien announced Dec. 29 that the archdiocese has signed leases with educational organizations.

"The archdiocese has a long history of making its facilities available so they can continue to be used for the benefit of their surrounding communities," Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien said in a written statement. "We are especially pleased when we can find partners in the community who share our interest in serving the educational needs of children and who respect our need to ensure the stability of our Catholic schools."

In early 2011, the archdiocese announced a new policy for processing requests to sell or lease former Catholic school buildings. The process was established at the recommendation of the Archdiocesan Catholic School Board, following up on a recommendation by the Blue Ribbon Committee on Catholic Schools which issued in June 2010 a series of more than 50 recommendations to strengthen Catholic schools. The lease requests were approved because they were deemed not to be a threat to existing Catholic schools, according to an archdiocesan statement.

Monsignor Richard Woy, vicar general, told The Catholic Review that the proceeds from the lease of the buildings will benefit the involved parishes and a special fund supporting Catholic education. Parishes that have outstanding debts to the archdiocese will also be expected to use proceeds to settle the debts.

Monsignor Woy noted that there are ongoing negotiations with other organizations concerning the lease or sale of other buildings.

"We don't want any of our buildings to become a drag or an opportunity for blight," he said, "but, rather, that they be used for the welfare of the community."

More than 20 former Catholic school buildings in the archdiocese have been sold or leased for use as educational institutions.

The five newly approved leases are with the following groups:

- Midtown Academy, for a charter school that will operate at Corpus Christi, Bolton Hill.
- St. Vincent de Paul Society, for a Head Start, early childhood program at St. Francis Xavier in East Baltimore.
- Project LIFT, for an adult literacy program at St. Brigid, Canton
- The Baltimore Montessori, for a Montessori school at Our Lady of Good Counsel in Locust Point
- Little Flowers Early Development, for a daycare and afterschool care program at St. Peter Claver in West Baltimore.