

St. Thomas More Academy recognized as a Catholic school

After years of discussion, St. Thomas More Academy in Buckeystown has been recognized by Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien as a Catholic school.

"It's a great relief," said Joe Slattery, president of the school's board of directors.

The school will remain independent and not an Archdiocese of Baltimore school. In years past, the school was not allowed to publicly advertise it was a Catholic school, but instead referred to itself as a school in the Catholic tradition.

St. Thomas More opened 10 years ago and currently has 95 students enrolled, with 110 registered for this coming fall. Slattery said the Catholic designation will strengthen relationships with local priests, who can now celebrate Mass at the school and offer sacraments. It will also assist in marketing efforts.

In a May 20 letter to Slattery, Archbishop O'Brien said St. Thomas More would be recognized as a Catholic school if it implemented the archdiocese's human sexuality program, further aligned their curriculum and expanded and implemented professional development opportunities.

The archbishop wrote a similar letter two years ago, but the school's leadership balked at the implementation of the human sexuality program. Slattery doesn't anticipate similar challenges.

"It came through a lot of discussion, but fruitful discussion," Slattery said. "We overcame the largest hurdles."

In his letter, the archbishop said if there are "deviations" from the conditions, he had the right to rescind the recognition.

"Please extend to all within the St. Thomas More Academy community my good wishes and blessings as we move forward in strengthening the mission of Catholic education in the Archdiocese of Baltimore," he wrote.

The school renewed its efforts to earn the designation recently and hosted a visiting team from the archdiocese April 20, 21 and 22. The team, chaired by Sister of St. Joseph Helen Wiegmann, submitted recommendations to Dr. Ronald J. Valenti, superintendent of Catholic schools. Dr. Valenti submitted those recommendations to the archbishop with his endorsement.

The visiting team will return in the spring of 2011 for another review.

Dr. Valenti told The Catholic Review that he feels the school has moved in a positive direction and that the human sexuality program is no longer a stumbling block for the school community. In the past, he said, some have misunderstood the component as sexual education, while he said it's part of the catechesis teachings of the church.

"It appears to us they are making every effort to comply with these conditions," Dr. Valenti said. "We feel in good faith they have met their part of the bargain. We are very pleased that this worked out in the manner it did."

The archbishop also said he expects the school to submit a quarterly report on the progress of the expectations to the superintendent's office.

Slattery said families were excited when told the archbishop's recognition.

"It has been received very, very well," Slattery said.