

St. Mary Star Of The Sea Closing

By Miriam Rosenberg



After 134 years, St. Mary Star of the Sea Catholic School will close on June 30

A rich part of Far Rockaway history will soon be gone. After 134 years in operation, St. Mary Star of the Sea Catholic School will be closing its doors come June 30.

In February, St. Mary's the Reverend Monsignor John Bracken notified parents and guardians of the decision by the Diocese of Brooklyn to close the school.

In a letter obtained by The Wave, Bracken said the following: "As you may know, the Diocese commissioned a task force to undertake a lengthy and comprehensive analysis of the vitality of all parochial schools. The members studied the number of students enrolled, the prospects for future enrollment, financial health of the schools, the changing demographics and other critical factors.

"When those criteria were used to evaluate St. Mary Star of the Sea School, the task force concluded that our school was vulnerable because of a dwindling enrollment – a consistent trend that has seen a loss of 50 students in the past five years, now at 213 students – and strained financial resources: the Diocese is no longer able to provide support to the school, nor does the parish have funds to subsidize it.

"As a result of its findings, the task force recommended to Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio that the school close at the end of the academic year on June 30, 2011, and the Bishop has accepted the recommendation.

"This is a painful decision for students, parents, guardians, administrators, faculty, staff and the many parishioners, now and in the past, who took great pride in the accomplishments of the school for more than a century. But the harsh reality made this decision necessary."

The letter laid out the fiscal facts that led the task force to its decision.

At the time the analysis of St. Mary was taking place it had a debt of \$528,536. In addition, several families were unable to make their tuition payments – a trend that, according to Bracken’s letter, “is likely [to continue] this year.” The breakdown of the school’s finances was as follows: “In the 2009/10 school year, the school received over \$58,000 from the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Trust of the Diocese, but recorded a deficit of almost \$62,000. In the current school year, the trust fund provided \$63,000, yet the operating budget shows a deficit of over \$130,000, a devastating number.”

Bracken added, “It was increasingly clear that the school could not continue to provide a quality education with such drastic financial needs. I sincerely wish it were otherwise.”

An email to St. Mary’s Alumni Association told its members that, “While rich in tradition and achievement, recent economic and demographic trends have not been kind to St. Mary’s School.”

“The school’s been on life support for the longest time,” said Association member Joseph Barden. “I wasn’t surprised, but it hurts.” Despite that hurt, Barden said, “all have accepted this difficult decision with grace and dignity.”

When its doors opened in 1877, the school’s first class was made up of 60 students along with administrators and teachers from the Sisters of St. Joseph. The brothers of the Sacred Heart took over teaching upper classes for boys when the current building opened in 1909.

The Alumni Association will host a special Mass honoring and remembering the graduates of St. Mary Star of the Sea School on June 4 at St. Mary’s Church and School. The Alumni Mass of Celebration will begin at 3 p.m. followed by a reception and student-assisted tour of the soon-to-close school.

The school, located at 595 Beach 19 Street, serves pre-K through 8th grade. Requests to the Diocese of Brooklyn for a comment have not been returned.