

High School Update

First Edition

By Fr. Dave Heney

Here is some additional information about the high school project, the Legion of Christ religious order, and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

First of all, let me affirm that our new high school is not a St. Paschal Parish or Fr. Dave project. It will be a privately owned and operated Catholic school approved by the Archdiocese in the same manner as Louisville, La Reina, Crespi, and Chaminade. Our progress is closely coordinated with the Cardinal and the Department of Catholic Schools which will ease future accreditation and ensure we truly have a “Catholic” school. As an area pastor with a lot of interest in this project, I have been asked by the Cardinal to help coordinate our efforts with the Archdiocese, but approval for religious orders, curriculum, and other major issues are at the Archdiocesan level.

The Archdiocese has long recognized the demographic need for another Catholic high school in our area, but has waited for some qualified religious order with a good history in education, good prospects for future vocations, and significant local financial support to come forward to help make it happen.

Several groups of interested parents have formed in recent years in various locations, such as Camarillo, Simi Valley, and even several groups here in Thousand Oaks, to build a new school. All are equally welcome by the Archdiocese to present viable plans. Some are still working and I wish them well. Last summer, one local group began to form a plan to acquire land and develop a school with the Legion of Christ, a relatively new religious order. In meeting with them and a few Legion priests already working here, I have come to believe the Legion of Christ fits the requirements of the Archdiocese very well.

There are many reasons why the Legionaries have come to the enthusiastic attention of the people here. Some have known of them for a long time while others met them on retreats they have been leading in our area for a number of years. I first met the Legionaries in Pasadena where they continue to serve today as the Catholic chaplains at Cal Tech. Members of our committee have visited their schools around the country and all of us have done extensive research on them. They are approved and respected by many Catholic bishops around the world. While many seminaries are struggling, their seminaries are thriving with new vocations. They have extensive fund-raising abilities, and education is one of their main priorities.

I have also been impressed at their flexibility in adapting their educational system to our local needs. They are dedicated to forming an affordable, convenient, and academically excellent high school that will work in close cooperation with local parishes and elementary schools. For example, decisions about adding a junior high or even lower grades will be based on future demographic studies of those age groups after the high school is built, and in concert with existing schools.

When conversations with the Archdiocese began last fall, the Cardinal asked if they would be willing to run not only our school, but also take over another school that needs their help. He wrote to the Legion office in December, “I am very interested in the concept of your assuming the leadership of two Catholic high schools at the same time, namely, one in south Ventura County as well as one of our poor inner city schools already

Next Steps:

- The Archdiocese and the Legion will finalize arrangements outlining responsibilities for the two schools. The Legion will then assign a member of the order specifically to our area to help in the development process. In June, Legion priests already working in the Archdiocese will begin to visit parishes for Mass and speak with any interested parents or other groups about the school.
- The Land Committee will continue to negotiate for suitable and acquirable land convenient to the major populations of our area. This is the area in which I am most involved right now. Most large parcels in Ventura County are of limited suitability because of strict zoning issues, however, progress continues. Our Land Committee consists of Joe Brown, of Janss/Brown Realty, Paul Griffin, of Griffin Industries, Tom and Ted Mackel, of Mackel Realty, and Frank Schillo, former Ventura County Supervisor. I am deeply impressed at their expertise and commitment to this project.
- Once land is acquired, a new and larger committee will be formed to guide actual development of the school. The Archdiocese offers guidelines for the make-up and operation of school committees and how they should be formed, especially for such wide geographic areas such as the Conejo, Simi, Moorpark, and Camarillo regions. I am looking forward *very much* to this wider participation of capable people to help and will communicate how that can happen after the all important first step of land is acquired.
- This new committee will then write a formal business plan in consultation with the Archdiocese and the Legion to organize the overall development of the school. We have already begun to organize efforts for seeking major fund-raising gifts and lead donors.
- I am looking for a convenient way for parents to find information, ask questions, or make comments about the school’s progress. I would like the SPBS Parent Survey to remain focused on SPBS issues. However, in the meantime, please feel free to e-mail or write to me.
- Everyone; please continue to pray! I am only interested in this project if it proceeds in a way that even Our Lord would be proud. Please continue to pray that each step moves forward wisely and in the right spirit. We believe in the power of prayer so please continue your prayers for its success.

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in existence.” The Legion readily accepted, however, that sudden doubling of their responsibilities also doubled and somewhat slowed the planning process.

On a personal note, I can affirm that they have my fullest confidence for a number of reasons. When I came to St. Paschal’s, I promised to serve under the ideals of Openness, Accountability, and Responsibility. I also tend to look for those same qualities in the people I meet or institutions with whom I work.

Although the Legion has many obvious strong points, every Legionary I have met has also been completely open and forthcoming about any problem areas. They have spoken openly and clearly about their schools that have succeeded and schools that have struggled. As regards the accusations from the 1950’s against their founder, Fr Marcial Maciel, they were investigated thoroughly and found to be without merit, as is explained quite openly by the Legion itself on their own websites, which you can study at www.legionofchrist.com, and www.legionaryfacts.org. I have read and recommend Fr. Maciel’s autobiography as well, “Christ is My Life.” That kind of direct openness is impressive to me, and rare in the world today.

I am particularly attuned to *accountability* in the church today. I have seen for myself that the Legion has accountability to a high degree. Every Legionary is responsible to another in an accountable and public chain of command. There is a lot of oversight and supervision. (I believe that is precisely what is needed in the Church and especially priesthood today.)

Most importantly, in studying other religious orders that have recently formed new schools, I have noticed a practice of putting

forth dynamic or talented personalities to lead these projects. The danger is that the project rises or falls with that individual person. The Legion approach is to base the success of a school on an *organizational concept and a proven educational system* and not on the abilities or talents of an individual person. While individual talent is important, of course, the strength and energy of the organization are more so. I strongly believe that is a healthier, safer, and more reliable approach.

I have also seen for myself that Legion institutions are faithful and accountable to the spirit and direction of the Second Vatican Council. All of their schools are lay administered and staffed, with one or two priests serving as campus chaplains. They are proud of their overall record around the world and are willing to stand on it. That is being accountable.

Finally, I find that they are *responsible* in their commitment to carry out the direct mandate they have received from Pope John Paul II to increase their projects throughout the world. While many religious orders are receding or not interested in serving here, they are advancing and committed to our project. When asked by the Cardinal to double their efforts here they readily accepted, even though it doubled their responsibilities.

Credibility is also important to me. I have noticed that they live the Gospel they teach. I have never heard any Legionary say a bad word about anyone, even when faced by people who themselves are not open, accountable, or very responsible. (I need to learn that more myself.) Not only do I see openness, accountability, and responsibility in the Legion organization but have even learned a few things about living the Gospel from them as well.

The Legionaries themselves will have ample opportunity to explain their own approach to education as more conversations about the project continue. They will begin to say some of our parish Masses and in the area as well. Our committee has enjoyed working with them as we lay the groundwork for the new school, and I have enjoyed their sense of humor and joy in ministry when they have been here at St. Paschal’s.

Like our committee has done extensively, please feel free to read any and all materials from their website or anywhere else you might find, to meet and speak with them yourself, and then make your own decisions. In the meantime, however, I have asked them to give a brief explanation of the philosophy behind their policy of having co-institutional schools, which is included below.

Legionary rationale for co-institutional education

By Fr. John Bartunek, LC

The very first apostolic endeavor taken on by the Legionaries of Christ when we were only a thirteen-year-old congregation, in 1954, was a school. Since then, we have developed an entire educational system, an academic curriculum, and an international network of educational institutions in accordance with the Catholic Church’s extensive and most up-to-date guidelines on Christian education. Currently, this network numbers 154 schools, and includes pre-schools, elementary schools, high schools, and 11 universities spread throughout 13 countries (not including our first university in the USA, the University of Sacramento, which is scheduled to open with a graduate school of education in 2005), as well as post-graduate institutions dedicated to research and teaching in many fields of intellectual, religious, and social concern.

In all, our system is currently educating tens of thousands of students worldwide. As a religious congregation, we share the Holy Father’s conviction that education is and always will be a crucial ingredient in the Church’s efforts to re-evangelize society and guide its members to meaningful, fulfilling lives.

Co-institutionality is a policy choice we have made based both on our own experience throughout the past sixty years and on the results of various independent studies delving into the intellectual, emotional, and psychological developmental patterns of children, adolescents, and young adults. Numerous studies and experience both show that, in general, between the ages of 9 and 19, boys and girls demonstrate marked differences in the pace at which their reasoning and emotional response capacities develop. Because of this, it is often beneficial for them to dedicate themselves to learning in a largely single-sex environment.

In order to provide this proven learning environment, having two independent single-sex institutions causes various inconveniences, and sometimes even significant strain both on parents and students. For instance, each school has to build its own academic, liturgical, and extracurricular facilities, parents often have to double their driving time because daughters and sons go to schools at a large distance from each other, interaction between boys and girls can be limited to artificial, socially biased situations, etc.

Co-institutionality, wherein boys’ and girls’ schools exist side by side, sharing a school identity, some facilities, and certain activities, relieves many of these strains and inconveniences, while respecting the different gender development patterns. We are aware that other educational philosophies differ in their cost-benefit analysis of this approach, but our experience has shown that the results of co-institutionality are most often well worth the extra effort involved in making it work.