

Good morning everyone and thank you for joining me today.

Well, what a difference a year makes! Just 12 months ago on this very day in this very room I was introduced to western Massachusetts as the 9th Bishop of Springfield; today i come to you with an answer to a question first raised then and some exciting news on how we plan to continue the rich and valued tradition of catholic education for generations to come.

Our theme is simple... one community, one mission, one in christ.

What we begin now is not limited to one new high school; rather it will be a far reaching plan on how we will sustain catholic education in our diocese.

So let me start by telling you what today's announcement is not - today is not about winners and losers, as much as some have tried to frame this important matter.

No today is only about winners, those young people, both now and hopefully well into the future, who will benefit from the steps we are about to undertake.

A year ago I was asked my thoughts on catholic education. My message then is my message now – that Catholic education remains an important part of our mission.

Yet our Catholic schools face many challenges for which we need to develop new models if they are to continue.

For even if that terrible tornado had never visited upon our region, both of these beloved schools were facing very real questions of sustainability.

So today is also not about band-aiding a situation but rather embarking on a path which opens the door for future generations of students.

In setting a course on this new and exciting chapter, I am reminded of last Sunday's message from sacred scripture, St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians. He wrote - *we walk by faith and not by sight!*

How true, for what we undertake is done with faith and hope.

Ironically, however, from a tragic event came the opportunity, the possibility for us to think with a fresh vision and to plan with new insights for the future.

I know many have grown impatient with the process, but these four years have not been wasted. First we fought for, and received, a fair and just settlement from our insurance carriers.

Then we worked in cooperation with Congressman Richard Neal, Mayor Dominic Sarno and FEMA to help guarantee that adequate resources were available to continue our mission of catholic education.

In just the last 8 months alone we have met with hundreds of stakeholders, heard from countless others, we have announced and established a plan to merge Cathedral and Holyoke Catholic High schools, started to align them for a smooth transition, explored countless diocesan, parish and commercial sites, began the process of creating a new governance model and leadership structure, and are investigating some cooperative opportunities for the two student bodies starting in the next academic year.

With assistance from Mr. Tom Brodnicki and partners in mission we have established a new development, marketing and recruitment team to hit the ground running July 1.

In fact they have ready begun as of today there is a new website and a number of social media platforms for Pope Francis High School.

So I can honestly say I have no regrets, no second thoughts on the time we have spent, for we had this one opportunity ... this one chance to set our course on a path to success.

So first let me offer my thanks in a special way to Msgr. John Bonzagni & the student advisory committee, many who are with us today. They undertook the tasks given to them with serious and thoughtful determination. Many could learn from the manner in which you worked together, with a single focus on the future. I cannot thank you all enough! (applause)

We know their work already resulted in sending me a short list of potential new school names from which Pope Francis High School was chosen. I would ask them now to unveil the new school's mascot which they came up with ... (pause)

The Pope Francis cardinals with primary school colors which will be red, gray, white and gold.

The white and gold representing Cathedral and Holyoke Catholic respectively, the red and gray representing the new dominant school colors.

After a well-deserved summer break we'll have these students back to work continuing to plan for the new Pope Francis High School. Thank you again students.

And now the site.

Let me start by saying I believe either of these sites would have worked and would have worked quite well.

I can say that with confidence because the academic program we intend to develop and offer at Pope Francis High School will be second to none. We are bringing the best of two great high schools together.

Because the two final sites were equal in so many ways, it was indeed a difficult decision to make, one which I have prayed over and have given much thought ...

As you can imagine I received many letters and emails, spoke to countless people as I travelled about the diocese these past months and i heard the thoughts of the transitional advisory committee, folk who are also with me today, and who as a group provided me with great insights.

In the end the opinions I received from near and far were almost equally divided. So I had no choice but to heed St. Paul's words and walk by faith.

After much thought, prayer and consideration I have decided to pursue construction of the new Pope Francis High School on Surrey Road in Springfield.

Again there were few substantial differences between each site under final consideration. The factor tipping the scales was that surrey road came to us free. So with a limited budget and strong desire to establish an endowment fund to offer tuition relief, and again given how equally matched these sites were, the surrey road parcel had a slight but important advantage.

While I am concerned this site is not as centrally located as many wanted, I do believe that issue can be addressed through a strategic transportation plan. In fact whatever site we had chosen would have required such a plan.

Of course this decision is contingent upon acquiring all necessary permits and FEMA approvals. And let me be clear I will hold the city and neighborhood to their pledge of total cooperation.

To the question many may ask on why we went through this just to arrive back on Surrey Road, I would say again we had one chance to get this right and so it was important that we explore all options, especially as it now involved Holyoke Catholic. If we had found an ideal centrally located, larger site, then buying land would have been a worthwhile investment... but that just wasn't the case.

I am also pleased to confirm that CBT Architects will design the new school based on input from faculty and staff, as well as members of the transitional advisory committee. We anticipate opening the new school in 2018.

In the end, for this school to reach its full potential and be successful we must all pledge... all of us... to set aside our differences on the one matter of site—the distance between which was measured in just a few short miles - and instead keep our eyes focused on the future and the exciting opportunity that is within our grasp.

To alumni from both schools I urge you to resist the natural tendency of thinking your school has died, no! In fact it has given birth to something new and exciting.

The legacies of Cathedral and Holyoke Catholic high schools will not disappear rather they will provide us with a strong foundation to build upon. We need your commitment to catholic education now more than ever. The time for excuses is over!

Finally I am most grateful to Dr. Paul Gagliarducci who has been leading the charge. Paul has graciously agreed to continue on & act as interim executive director overseeing the continued planning until the new school is built & operational.

Paul, you have been a steady hand throughout this process and we are all blessed by your continued guidance, leadership, and commitment to building a first class Catholic secondary school.

Bishop Mitchell T Rozanski

June 19, 2015