

January 10, 2012

Dear Parents of our School's Children,

No doubt, the decisions of our Archdiocese to close & combine 44 parish schools, plus 4 High Schools have occupied your attention. While upsetting for many, it should not have been a surprise. People who are active in the life of the Church, particularly their parish were aware of this for a long time. Although no one likes it, many understood the reasons for these decisions. To say that *Mother of Divine Grace School* dodged a huge bullet is an understatement. Do you understand that we are the only stand-alone parish school in Port Richmond and one of the few in the Northeast? What happened to us was a *Blessing* and we have to ask ourselves two questions: Why were we blessed? What are we going to do with this blessing? Certainly, contributing factors to our "survival" was our Principal, Jane Lockhart, the fine faculty which she leads, the enthusiastic support from a small core of parents and groups like MDG's *Home & School Association*. But that's not the only reason; yet, I can't put my finger on it, other than the intercession of Our Blessed Mother and the love of Our Lord. We are about the same size as the other parishes, indeed, there were 2-3 parish schools that were closed who had 310 + students. It would have been so easy for the Archdiocese to make things clean & neat by closing and combining everyone in Port Richmond. One thing I'm sure of is that, we will never survive another scrutiny like this if every family is not involved in their parish, not just their children's school, but their parish. All of this leads me to the second question: "What are we going to do about this?"

It can be argued that the parish school is the barometer that measures the health of a parish, or it can be argued that the parish is the barometer that measures the health of its parish school. Personally, I believe if the parish is spiritually unhealthy, the parish school will become unhealthy. Which brings me to the purpose of this letter. As the young adult generation of the *Mother Divine Grace Parish*, you are our barometer and right now I would say that *Mother of Divine Grace Parish* is running a temperature, I'm talking a severe temperature. Why would I say that? Because the spiritual health of a parish is measured by who & how many of its members center themselves through the Eucharist.....every week. 70% of you are not coming to Mass; that's not good.....not good at all! It also means that 70% of our children are not centered in the Eucharist either. Why would Our Lord or the Archdiocese affirm a parish and the parents of its children, when 70% of them ignore the very thing the Parish school exists for, namely the living of our Catholic Faith, which is centered in the Eucharist? Two other barometers that measure the spiritual health of MDG's people are #1 How they extend themselves when they are asked for their help and #2 How generous are they with their personal Treasure; i.e. in contributing to the financial health of their Parish. I have to tell you, 70 % of you do very little if anything, while about 30% are busting their rear end for the life of their Parish. Why? Because they understand, that just as a poor school can drag a healthy parish down; a poor parish can drag a

healthy school down. Moms & Dads, we are what we celebrate. If the Eucharist isn't a weekly part of your life; you won't translate what you celebrated into the lives of your children or their school.

My point here is not to point fingers, but it is to be judgmental out of love for you, your children and our parish. MDG parish is on the bubble. In 12-24 months, we, like every other parish in the Archdiocese will be evaluated as to whether the Archdiocese can allot any more of its shrinking resources to us, when other parishes show a serious love of God and of each other by how they reflect the Eucharist in their personal lives. Whether you like it or not, whether you want to be or not, as 20-30-40 year olds you are the core of Mother of Divine Grace Parish now. You are MDG! As they should, the leadership of the Archdiocese is going to evaluate you, not the faith of our children, not the faith of our senior citizens. They are going to evaluate what you do, not your explanations for a lack of involvement. What will they see? What will you have been doing that will give them reason to celebrate the fact that MDG is a Catholic Family centered in the Eucharist and who exercises the same generosity of our Time, Talent and Treasure that we praise Our Lord for, each weekend in the Eucharist?

Father Walter Benn

Pastor