



April 14, 2011

The Christian faithful are to foster Catholic schools, assisting in their establishment and maintenance according to their means (Code of Canon Law 800 (2)).

Dear Parishioners of St. Jude of the Lake:

I am excited to announce that our Saint Jude of the Lake School is pursuing authorization to be an International Baccalaureate School. The IB mission to “develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people” who become life-long learners and strong leaders corresponds well with our Catholic worldview. The challenging academic program and rigorous academic assessment of IB matches the tradition of academic excellence of St. Jude of the Lake School.

Background of Decision: During our parish strategic planning process, surveys, town hall meetings, staff meetings and leadership meetings were held in order to gather and review data on the mission and ministry of the parish. A significant amount of that data concerned the teaching mission of the parish, including the Saint Jude of the Lake School. The resulting strategic plan reflected the importance of the school over the past five decades and the desire of parishioners to continue and strengthen the school for the future.

Despite the strong parish support for the school, the number of students attending the school has continued to decline over the past few years. This decrease in enrollment has been at the top of the agenda of most parish leadership meetings and was raised in our 2010 school accreditation visit.

In the fall of 2010, the possibility was raised of pursuing authorization through the International Baccalaureate Organization. An exploratory phase began involving our principal, Jennifer Cassidy, some of the teachers and parents, and the School Advisory Council, focusing on the question of whether IB would be a good fit for Saint Jude of the Lake School and this community. Mrs. Cassidy reported on the progress of the exploratory phase at leadership meetings, a parish open forum, a principal breakfast and the parish bulletin.

School Self-Review: During this exploratory phase, I asked parish leadership to conduct an internal review of the school based on criterion supplied by the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, our 2010 school accreditation visit, and additional criterion specific to our community. Though this review was not required, I thought it prudent to critically examine our school as we considered the future, including the possibility of IB. This search focused on topics such as academics, finances, enrollment, parish and local demographics, marketing, technology, and facility/maintenance.

Consultation: Information gathered during the IB exploratory phase and the school self-review was shared with the trustees, the members of the Finance and Pastoral Councils, and the School Advisory Council. These councils met together on March 22, 2011. We discussed the information and heard from Jennifer

Cassidy and three of the teachers who had participated in the exploratory phase and expressed their strong support for pursuing IB authorization. Everyone was given the opportunity to ask questions and share their thoughts and concerns. The consensus of the leadership group was enthusiastic support for pursuing authorization through the International Baccalaureate Organization. They strongly recommended that I give my approval for seeking authorization.

Decision: I have accepted the recommendation of the parish leadership and asked Jennifer Cassidy to submit an application for St. Jude of the Lake to become an IB school. We will begin implementing the program for all grades K – 8. I believe this to be an excellent opportunity to strengthen our school around the core values of Catholic Education: academic excellence, worship, service, enrichment activities and building community.

Process of Becoming an IB School: If Saint Jude of the Lake is accepted as a candidate school, then we will take the next 18 months to prepare for application for authorization as an IB School. During this time, the teachers will undergo intense training and collaborate in reorganizing a curriculum according to the IB learner profiles and framework, ensuring that State of Minnesota Education Standards and archdiocesan Religion Standards are met. You can find more information on IB at ibo.org or by visiting the St. Jude of the Lake School website.

Costs of Becoming an IB School: The process of requesting, receiving and maintaining IB status will require additional funding beyond the current range of parish assistance. Mrs. Cassidy and I will be inviting the alumni of St. Jude of the Lake School and current parishioners who want to support our Catholic school to contribute to a specially designated fund that will cover the application fees and other expenses associated with pursuing and maintaining IB authorization. We will also be pursuing grants and other financial opportunities from outside the parish as we seek to become the first IB Catholic school in the State of Minnesota. We may also use the profits from our parish endowment fund, which has as one of its goals the support of Catholic education. No money from the *Duc in altum* capital appeal will be used for this initiative. As a sign of my support, I have contributed \$500 to the IB fund. Those interested in making a contribution to the IB fund may send a check to the parish or school with the words “IB Fund” noted in the memo line.

Conclusion: The face of education is changing throughout the nation. Charter schools and specialized public schools continue to emerge. Catholic Schools need to respond to those challenges and ensure an excellent academic curriculum while maintaining and strengthening our Catholic identity. I join the parish leadership of Saint Jude of the Lake and state my strong belief that becoming an IB School will build on the wonderful tradition of our school and position us for the future, as we educate and form the entire person, and make that education and formation available and affordable to all parish families.

I ask for your support and prayers as we move forward with this initiative. I especially encourage parents with school age children to consider Saint Jude of the Lake School for your child’s education and formation. Please contact Jennifer Cassidy in the school with questions and to arrange a tour.

Peace, Fr. Ralph W. Talbot, Jr.