

# MCGRATH BEGALA

**DANIEL CARDINAL DINARDO, FEBRUARY 5, 2009** | Everywhere we look, we are confronted by the inescapable reality that these are times of both momentous challenge and necessary change. From the furthest reaches of the global economy, to the familiar financial, cultural and media institutions that form the pillars of American society at home, we see how an orderly world we thought we understood has instead been thrown into varying states of crisis and disarray.

Naturally, as an integral part of this diverse and dynamic community, the Catholic Church has not been spared its own significant challenges; and today I would like to tell you a few of the steps we are taking to strengthen our schools throughout the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston.

Eighteen months ago, we launched a comprehensive review of our Catholic schools – delving into the challenges they face, and the opportunities they present. The purpose of the study was to create a strategic plan that ensures educational excellence in our Catholic schools for the next 20 years. As you might expect, the study was tremendously enhanced by our collaboration and consultation with the administrators, key leaders, faculty, parents and many others across the Archdiocese who direct and animate our schools.

Our dialogue covered the many issues confronting our schools such as changing demographics, aging facilities and declining enrollment. While I believe we achieved a broad consensus on our plan moving forward, there were also areas of disagreement along the way. Where our children and their education are concerned, everyone wants the best – on that, we all agree.

The key for those of us in positions of responsibility and leadership, then, is to serve the greatest possible number of students without sacrificing the quality of our schools. To be clear, God's love is truly infinite, but our resources surely are not.

After a year and a half of rigorous study, then, this week we are announcing the first round of decisions made on the basis of our joint findings. Interested parties should consult our website [www.archgh.org](http://www.archgh.org) for more detailed information.

One piece of good news is that we will be building new schools in areas of high population growth – like St. Theresa's, opened this year in a multi-cultural area of Sugar Land – so even more children may attend a Catholic school near their home.

Our Archdiocese is blessed with 62 schools. Of the 48 parish based schools, 44 will continue operations at their current locations, many with plans for refurbishing, construction of additional classrooms where needed, and new models of governance.

Not all of our decisions have been so pleasant, or easy, however. Yesterday, I had to deliver the painful news to four of our struggling schools that they would not re-open in August.

Not a single child, it should be noted, will be deprived of an education based on this hard decision. We will have 11 inner-city schools operating in August, and the Archdiocese is working diligently to ease the transitions of affected school families to other schools if they so desire, and to give priority consideration at other Catholic schools to affected employees.

P.O. Box 27701-516  
Houston, Texas 77227

(Office) 713.660.0982  
(Cell) 713.240.6260

[jim@mcgrathbegala.com](mailto:jim@mcgrathbegala.com)  
[www.mcgrathbegala.com](http://www.mcgrathbegala.com)

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Still, change can be hard. I fully understand the sadness and frustration that some parents and alumni at the consolidated schools feel as the campuses they revere as the site of their early education or that of their children are converted to other uses.

In the meantime, I want to thank each individual who contributed his or her time and passion to the successful completion of this landmark study. Let me particularly single out the parents and the dedicated and professional Religious and laity who have educated the hearts, minds and spirit of generations of young people in this great archdiocese since 1847. Most of all, they have challenged our students, as did the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to America last April, “to bear fruit in the way you lead your lives and in the way you build up your families and your communities.”

This nurturing of Catholic Faith and Christian virtue – together with our commitment to academic excellence – has always been the central mission of our Catholic Schools. I assure you that such nurturing and devotion will not be diluted as we go forward with our plan for the schools of this Local Church.

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[jim@mcgrathbegala.com](mailto:jim@mcgrathbegala.com)  
[www.mcgrathbegala.com](http://www.mcgrathbegala.com)