

YOUR SAY

M. Bridget Algeo

LC: Beyond sentimentality is reality

I agree with Francis Ginkevicius that Monsignor Schade's vision was to deliver the best Catholic education to all.

I respectfully disagree with his charge that supporters of LC remaining in Lansdale do so out of "sentimentality."

No matter where we stand on the issue, let's listen to each other.

Economics is a critical issue that should not be dismissed. Ask any Catholic pastor, principal, educator, or parent.

When the topic was discussed in an August WNPV radio interview, a Hilltown proponent acknowledged, "It is reasonable to expect a tuition increase." Another proponent added that this premium "wouldn't be a problem for the affluent."

It is, however, going to be a problem for many families. The decision to build a new school in a public school district does not cost students their education. But as we seek to deliver the best Catholic education to all, we must realize that our risks are monumental ~ and the price is likely to be the Catholic education of many children.

Interestingly enough, in the same radio interview, Bishop Shanahan High School was used to support the case for the new school.

The example of Shanahan does just the opposite. In 1998, Bishop Shanahan, truly landlocked, was truly relocated. It's enrollment increased significantly due to three crucial reasons that the Hilltown site does not feature:

- There was absolutely no tuition increase to inhibit enrollment.
- Shanahan is the only Archdiocesan high school not only in Chester County but within a 20-mile radius.
- Shanahan's Catholic feeder schools displayed a trend in increasing enrollment.

All this allowed Shanahan to keep all its students and its identity, as well as to gather new students in. That's relocation.

There are other realities to be considered:

- Demographics. Many people have been vaguely referring to demographics. According to the PA Department of Education's most recent data for 2014, there is a projected increase of 990 high school students in Central Bucks, and a net increase of 660 for the combined Upper Bucks districts of Quakertown, Palisades, and Penridge.

- It would take 10 % of these students to attend the new school just to add 165 students to the 800 to 900 at LC. Given the trend at the Catholic elementary level isn't supporting this percent, it is reasonable to conclude that these numbers are not likely to occur. Consider, too, the number needed to compensate for students lost to the tuition increase.
- Technology. From elementary to high school to post-secondary institutions, the challenge of bringing state-of-the-art equipment and the technological advancements of the private sector into educational facilities will always exist. The building in which I teach is over 40 years old. That hasn't stopped Internet research, lessons on hand-held computers, Smart Board presentations, technologically interactive instruction, and openness to future developments.
- The condition of LC. Most agree that the facility needs serious improvement. Any building put on hold for years eventually would. It is a fact that no open, carefully planned, and serious effort to renovate and expand at its present site has occurred.

As the value of schools like LC are being recognized, it is interesting to note that an initiative to maintain older schools in established neighborhoods was begun in Pennsylvania two years ago.

Facts, not sentiment, support Lansdale Catholic, as do the successes of other Archdiocesan high schools. Archbishop Wood wonderfully serves 1200 students on 32-acres. Conwell-Egan does the same for over 1,000 on 27-acres. On its 34 acres, a refurbished Lansdale Catholic, to which many alumni and community members would give, can continue to bring the best Catholic education to all. Archbishop Wood wonderfully serves 1,200 students on 32 acres, Conwell-Egan does the same for more than 1,000 on 27 acres. On its 34 acres, a refurbished Lansdale Catholic, to which many alumni would give, can continue to bring the best Catholic education to all.

M. Bridget Algeo is a Catholic educator if 15 years and a resident of Lansdale.