

Claremont Confidential

By Les St.Pierre



Moving Forward

The news there will be a new Catholic school here in Claremont has many townspeople buzzing with elation. Nervous excitement, if you will.

The biggest question out there is "Why?", especially when history reminds us prior decades eventually led to the downfall of such an undertaking.

Who better to go to than the Very Rev. Shawn Therrien, V. G., current pastor at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Claremont and Dean of the Upper Valley Deanery? Sitting at the kitchen table in the rectory for an interview to discuss the upcoming opening of the new Catholic school, Father Shawn wasted no time in answering the "Why?" so many are asking.

The answer is simple...there is a need, and a strong desire to move forward.

"This was not our idea," Father Shawn pointed out. "I was approached by the Superintendent of Catholic Schools four years ago about reopening the school. There is a recognized need and it is part of the bishop's vision in terms of Catholicity in our diocese. There is a great need. Schools can be an evangelizing tool. I think we have to go forward. It is my hope, in terms of the school, we can really change people's attitudes in terms of us moving forward. Period!"

A study was made three years ago and the returns of the survey indicated there was much need for an alternative to public schools. The go-ahead for the new school was given last November and it has been full-steam forward since then.

The new school in town, to be located at the present campus at Pearl and Central Streets, now leased to New England Classical Academy, will be named St. John Paul II Academy. Why that name and not St. Mary's?

"Because it is a new start," Father Shawn voiced. "I came up with the name and suggested it to the working committee and the people all came on board. John Paul was ded-

icated to education and he was dedicated to the young. He is probably the most brilliant Pope we have ever had."

John Paul II served as Pope from 1978 to 2005 when he died at the age of 84. He is known as Saint John Paul The Great by some Catholics.

"Our plan right now is for the school to be run by the parish," the St. Mary's pastor stated, "but there is a possibility it will become a diocesan school with shared governments. I think local control is very important. We have a very fantastic superintendent of Catholic schools (Dave Thibault), but he won't always be there."

The school will include kindergarten through high school senior status and there are plans to have pre-school and after school programs, as well. To date, there has been no principal selected and the selecting of a teaching staff is on-going.

"They will all have degrees," Father Shawn emphasized. "It will be a professional staff. We have had lots of applications to fill jobs."

An exceptional Liberal Arts curriculum, a challenging math and science program, and a Great Books program to inspire critical thinking is foremost in the upcoming challenge, in accordance with the handout brochures currently circulating in the area. Enrollment is not limited to just Claremont children and teenagers, but to anyone in surrounding communities and beyond.

As far as taking in special needs children, there should be no problem. The first floor of the school building is handicapped accessible, and participating in title programs will be in accordance with diocesan policy.

"So long as we can adequately provide for

the needs of the students, we will take them," Father Shawn said.

Tuition will range from \$5600 per school year at the pre-school to kindergarten level and bump to \$5900 at the k-5 level, then to \$6900 from grade 6 to 8, and end at \$7900 at the high school stage. There is, however, means to apply for help via scholarships and/or payment assistance plans by going on the parish's website at

www.stmaryparishn-h.org or via the registration site at STMARYPARISHN-H.ORG/JP2SCHOOL.

"We will take anyone who wants to go to school here, but there are not special programs for atheists," Father Shawn reported. "We are unapologetically Catholic. You don't have to believe in it, but you are going to learn it."

Continuing his assessment of getting the new school off the ground, Father Shawn said, "One thing I want to make perfectly clear is we are not opening a drop-off school where you drop your kids off in the morning and pick them up in the afternoon. We are building a community. That means families

who put their kids here had better be ready to actually participate in that community and its school. That means engagement, not activism!"

None other than John Paul II himself said it best, perhaps, when he once expressed, "As the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the whole world in which we live."

"We live in such a precarious time in our world that we cannot let the naysayers get in our way," Father Shawn closed.

My take on all this? Don't go where the path may lead. Go where there is no path...and blaze a mighty trail.



Very Rev. Shawn Therrien, V. G., current pastor at St. Mary's Catholic Church with a photo of the late John Paul II (Les St.Pierre photo).