

March 26, 2026

Dear Ss. Andrew-Thomas Parish Family,

After much prayer, careful consideration, and extensive consultation with parishioners, school families, and diocesan leadership, I have come to the difficult decision that Ss. Andrew-Thomas School will close at the end of this academic year. We will continue the operation of Little Saints Daycare.

This decision has not been made lightly. In addition to four public meetings and ongoing dialogue with parishioners, alumni, and school families, the discernment process also included much prayer and communal participation in forty days of Eucharistic Adoration.

I am keenly aware of the profound impact Ss. Andrew-Thomas School has had on families, alumni, parishioners, and the wider community. As the oldest Catholic school in the Diocese of Madison and in Wisconsin, it has been a place of grace for generations—a home where children have grown in knowledge, faith, and friendship, and where countless lives have been shaped by the light of Christ. Its legacy is rich and enduring, and its influence will continue to bear fruit in the lives of all who have passed through its doors.

At the same time, we must also be honest about the challenges we face. In addition to reading this letter, please see the attached documents which provide details of our current reality and answers to frequently asked questions.

The Challenges of School Enrollment

Over the past few decades, enrollment has steadily declined, and with the loss of students, the sustainability of the school has become more and more tenuous. Our current enrollment is less than 50% of what it was 15 years ago. Over the last five years, our average number of students has been 28. With 11 different grade levels (3K-8th), we are averaging just 2.5 students per grade. This year, we have zero students in fifth grade, zero students in sixth grade, one student in seventh grade, and one student in eighth grade. Our second, third, and fourth grades are combined into one classroom that totals seven students. Blending this many grades together makes providing age-specific academic content more challenging than at schools with single-grade classrooms. We had hoped that larger class sizes in our 3K program would naturally lead to continued growth in the years that follow. However, we have not seen that outcome, as enrollment often declines from 3K to 4K.

Commitment to Parish Stewardship and Mission

In addition to having fewer students in the school, we are also seeing a noticeable decrease in the number of parish families, or even Catholic families, being served by the school. As stewards of our parish resources, we are called to ensure that these resources are used in ways that most effectively support the mission of the Church. Last year, when we had only 18 students enrolled, the parish supported the school with a subsidy of \$171,250, which is **74% of the income collected through the parish offertory donations**. That means that seventy-four cents of every dollar collected at Mass last year supported 18 students in the school. That same year, our religious education program, which served more than 60 students from our parish, could only be given \$7,358 of financial support.

Numbers like these make it clear that the financial support given to the school by the parish could be redirected to strengthen other vital ministries such as parish faith formation, outreach to the those in need, and catechetical and spiritual activities serving the entire parish community. This is not simply a financial issue, but a question of stewardship and mission for our parish. A particularly pressing need for Ss. Andrew-Thomas Parish is the hiring of a dedicated youth minister who would serve a larger number of our parish families by cultivating relationships with middle and high school students. This is the age group that is most likely to leave the Church and it is vital that we keep them active and involved in their faith through engaging, age-appropriate activities such as youth nights, Bible studies, teen conferences, Christian concerts, and mission trips.

Continued Commitment to Catholic Education

Many people have expressed their passionate commitment to Catholic education and the pivotal role it can play in the lives of our children. I share this conviction deeply. The presence of other good Catholic schools nearby provides strong reassurance that our families would still be able to give their children the Catholic education they desire. St. Clement School in Lancaster has room for all our current students and is only 12 miles from Ss. Andrew-Thomas School. Holy Ghost-Immaculate Conception School in Dickeyville/Kieler is even closer and transportation is covered by the Potosi School District. We are committed to assisting our parish families who desire to send their children to either school. More information on parish assistance options (tuition assistance, transportation, etc.) will be provided to our school families.

Little Saints Daycare

Because Little Saints daycare serves our youngest children, it does not carry on the Catholic faith in the same explicit way as the school. It does, however, provide an important service of Christian charity that meets the practical needs of our community, welcomes families to the area, and is financially stable. The before- and after-school care it provides is a genuine blessing for many local families. As such, we will continue to support the operation of the daycare.

A New Parish Vision

The decision to close a Catholic school is as difficult as it is heartbreaking. Yet our commitment to serving the needs of our parishioners, properly stewarding our resources, and effectively carrying out the mission of the Church makes this a necessity. I believe our path forward is a positive one because by redirecting our resources, we can support families in Tennyson and Potosi through the daycare, ensure that Catholic education remains within reach for every parish family just a short distance away, and invest in our teenagers and young families.

I want to acknowledge the great debt of gratitude owed to all those who have made extraordinary efforts to support Ss. Andrew-Thomas School. Beyond the dedication of our teachers and staff, the commitment to volunteering and fundraising by families, parishioners, and neighbors demonstrates the great love this community has for the school. I recognize that this news brings sadness and a sense of loss to many in the community. It is important to acknowledge our grief and to entrust this moment to God, confident that He continues to guide our parish and call us forward in new ways.

In the coming weeks, I am committed to walking closely with our school families, faculty, and staff—offering support, resources, and accompaniment during this transition. We will also take time before the end of the school year to honor and celebrate the history, achievements, and countless blessings of our school.

Let us hold one another in prayer during this time. May we give thanks for all that has been, and place our trust in the Lord, who makes all things new.

With gratitude, faith, and hope,

Fr. Stephen Brunner
Parochial Administrator

“Better than anyone else, the Holy Spirit will teach you how to taste with the heart and carry out with sweetness what reason shows to be for the greater glory and service of God.” -St. Ignatius of Loyola