

ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE

DEPARTMENT OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION MINISTRIES
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

July 22, 2008

Dr. Jim Merkel 10229
Woodsboro Pike
Walkersville, MD 21793

Dear Dr. Merkel,

May the Peace of Christ be with you!

Archbishop O'Brien has requested that, on his behalf, I respond to your June 18th letter.

For more than two years we have been in communication with you and the Administration of St. Thomas More Academy regarding how the school could receive recognition as a Catholic school within the Archdiocese of Baltimore. A great deal of time and energy has been expended on both sides and it saddens me that two issues, the Catechesis for Human Sexuality Program and the school being answerable to the Superintendent of Catholic Schools, are preventing what we believe would be a mutually beneficial relationship between St. Thomas More Academy and the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

From the Archdiocesan perspective, the implementation of the Catechesis for Human Sexuality is a non-negotiable issue. Over the past two years it was explicitly made clear what the expectations of the Archdiocese were. Ms. Goldbeck explained the various textbooks that were approved by the Archdiocese and provided copies of the materials to Ms. Neff. After you inquired about the possibility of using the "Chastity" program currently used in other local dioceses, Ms. Soldbeck conferred with the necessary personnel at the Catholic Center and clearly made it known that there would be no deviation from the Archdiocesan

policy on the Catechesis for Human Sexuality. This message was communicated prior to the Review Team spending three days at St. Thomas More. We specifically chose as a member of this Team, John Farrell, principal of Woodmont Academy another private, Catholic school, who had recently faced the same concerns/challenges with his stakeholders. Ms. Neff and members of the School Board articulated their affirmation of the approach that this particular school had used to fully comply with Archdiocesan policy. At this point in time, to request from the Archbishop a waiver from that program is neither acceptable nor in keeping with the integrity of what we agreed upon from the outset.

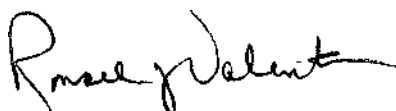
Secondly, you questioned how St. Thomas More being answerable to the Superintendent of Catholic Schools would affect the internal management of the school. At no time was it ever implied that we would see St. Thomas More as an Archdiocesan School. Our process and protocol always centered on the recognition of St. Thomas More as being a private Catholic school. The connection to the Superintendent would be the same as with any other recognized private school functioning within the Archdiocese. The Superintendent does not interfere with the internal management of the institution, but there are certain expectations/requirements which would be clearly delineated in the School's Memorandum of Understanding. One of the reasons I asked Ms. Goldbeck to chair the Review Team is that for eleven years she served as principal in two of our private, Catholic schools and always seemed to understand and value the relationship with the Archdiocese.

You have quoted Canon law as the basis for your independence. Your citing of Canon 803. 1 -3 reinforces the role of the ecclesiastical authority to recognize the school as being Catholic. However, if you read further on Canon Law 806.2 it states that "Those who are in charge of catholic schools are to ensure, under the supervision of the local Ordinary, that the formation given in them is, in its academic standards, at least as outstanding as that in other schools in the area.." The Ordinary has delegated that responsibility to the Superintendent of Catholic Schools. Although the regular presence of our parish priest in the school is

welcomed, they are not there in a supervisory or monitoring role, but purely pastoral.

If St. Thomas More still seeks the recognition as a Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Baltimore then all of the provisions and conditions cited in Archbishop O' Brien's letter of May 5th 2008 are to be met within the next 30 days. The stance of the Archdiocese is very clear; the conditions have been established. It is now up to the Board of Directors to make a decision if they accept the Archdiocese's requirements for recognition. There is no need for a meeting to further the dialog; all has been said that needs to be said. If the provisions are not met, the offer of recognition will be rescinded and this will be announced to the Frederick parishes.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ronald J. Valenti". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dr. Ronald J. Valenti Superintendent
of Catholic Schools

RJV/vg

Cc: Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien Bishop W. Francis
Malooly Ms. Margie Neff , Principal Ms. Carol
Goldbeck, Associate Superintendent Msgr. John
Dietzenbach, Vicar Forane Christopher
Cosentino, Board Member Alex Grabenstein,
Board Member William Nicklas, Jr., Board
Member Joseph Slattery, Board Member