

ARCHDIOCESE OF BALTIMORE

DEPARTMENT OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION MINISTRIES
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

August 29, 2008

Dr. Jim Merkel 10229
Woodsboro Pike
Walkersville, MD 21793

Dear Dr. Merkel,

May the Peace of Christ be with you!

I have received your letter of August 18th, 2008 announcing your decision not to have St. Thomas More Academy accept the conditions for recognition as a Catholic school within the Archdiocese of Baltimore. It is extremely unfortunate that after all of these deliberations that the end result has come to this.

I would be remiss if I did not reiterate all that transpired to make the recognition for St. Thomas More Academy a reality. Prior to the Review Team visiting the school, we were straightforward and upfront in stating that Catechesis for Human Sexuality was a nonnegotiable. We did not hide any of the prerequisites; there were no hidden agendas and all of the procedures and protocols were clearly spelled out.

Your continued reference to sex education in the curriculum is grossly misleading. The materials supplied to you and the Board concerning the program instituted in the Archdiocesan curriculum namely, **Family Life** and **Growing In Love** includes a Family Resource booklet (a resource booklet specifically for parents) and a student textbook. In both book series, details of human reproduction and puberty are contained only in the Family Resource booklet not in the Student textbook. This allows the parents the flexibility to share specific sexual information with their child as they see fit. This was repeatedly made known to you and the Board. It is my sincere hope that no one has misled or misinformed the parents about the nature of our program.

From my perspective, your concern about the Superintendent's interference is another "red herring." I made it clear in my July 22nd letter that the Superintendent's Office does not interfere or *engage* in the internal management of the school. You would be subject to the same conditions as every other private Catholic school. St. Thomas More Academy was not being

singled out with any other special condition. Your school's Memorandum of Understanding would have specified the requirements. When more than 20 other private Catholic schools in the Archdiocese can follow the same conditions, I find it difficult to see what would make St. Thomas More's leadership question this relationship or feel that their autonomy would be compromised. Further, I remind you that when Carol Goldbeck and the Review Team visited the school all members of the school community had ample opportunity to raise specific questions about expectations/requirements.

I feel that we made every effort to foster an Archdiocesan relationship with St. Thomas More Academy and I am truly saddened that we have lost this opportunity.

Archbishop O'Brien has directed that there should be clear communication about the review process and the conclusion of this process with both the presbyterate of Frederick County and the families of St. Thomas More Academy. I will be in touch with both groups during the month of September.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ronald J. Valenti". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Ronald J. Valenti

Superintendent of Catholic Schools

Cc: Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien
Pastors of Frederick County
Carol Goldbeck Members of the
Board Margie Neff
Principals of Frederick County
Chris Weber Caroline Pugh