



Saving St. Joseph's School

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Donations keep pouring into a struggling Petersburg private school. Saint Joseph Catholic School must come up with one million dollars by next Monday to stay open. But even if it gets the money it needs, will it have enough students to remain open in the future?

Enrollment in many of the Richmond Diocese 25 catholic schools comes down to demographics. Right now, it's only St. Joseph's that's been told it needs to raise \$1 million, \$500,000 to repay its debt, and another \$500,000 for building upgrades.

While the money is coming in, will students be coming in if the financial goal is met? There are many challenges facing St. Joseph's....

"The challenges here are, one of the huge challenges is demographics. This is a community where the population has gone down both in the public schools and here in the private schools," says Annette Parsons of the Richmond Catholic Diocese.

Enrollment may be down, but St. Joseph's is the only private school in the area with dual accreditation, along with 133 year history in Petersburg.

Sister Natalie McCubben says, "They're all certified teachers, which to me is just one big plus, for any school."

Sister Natalie has 48 years in education, but the Diocese points out, its not just school enrollment that's down.

"Even parrish population has gone down significantly," says Parsons.

Saint Joseph's though, isn't closing its doors with out a fight.

"I'm actually seeing the Pope and President on Wednesday, maybe I can put a bug in their ear," says Attorney General Bob McDonnell.

He stopped by to drop off his donation.

"I have some good news for you. I've got, I brought a little check for you here this morning, \$1000, I tell you what happened, we've collected another \$2,500 from my office."

Yet if the goal is met and the school stays open, enrollment will have to increase to keep up with costs.

"The dangers will continue to be there, yet if we can put these schools on a firm foundation and they have to have systematic planning in effect," says Parsons.

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St. Joseph's is more than \$100,000 in debt, and the Catholic Diocese of Richmond says it may have to close its doors. The 133 year old school has until Monday to raise one million dollars to cover building repairs and debt.

Over the past few weeks, friends of the Petersburg school have come forward with donations. Local painters, roofers and drywallers have given their time and work free of charge to try and make improvements to the building. So far, the school still needs more help. Attorney General Bob McDonnell is lending a hand to draw attention to their cause. He will tour the school Monday around 10 am to meet with students and faculty at St. Joseph's.

If the school does not meet its goal by the end of the school year, they will have to close for good and all of the donated money will be returned.



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