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NEWS RELEASE

Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School to Close Its Doors May 2024: Families Encouraged to Preserve Fatima's Last Chapter and Complete the Legacy

ALBUQUERQUE – Tuesday, November 28, 2023 – IMMEDIATE RELEASE – After 74 years of dedicated service in providing Catholic education excellence, Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School regrets to announce the decision to close its doors in May 2024. The difficult decision was reached following several meetings between the school's leadership, including Very Reverend Stephen Schultz, Pastor; Melinda Mader, Principal; and Donna Illerbrun, Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

The leadership team engaged in an extensive study of the school's enrollment of 54 students, demographics, and financial status. It became apparent the school would not be able to open for the 2024 fall term. To ensure a smooth transition for students and staff, and to honor the legacy of Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School, the decision was made to keep the school open through May 2024.

A meeting was held on November 27, with the dedicated teachers and staff, where they were apprised of the circumstances. The school administration is committed to working closely with the educators to assist them in finding employment opportunities at other archdiocesan Catholic schools.

In an email sent to the school's families, they were notified of the closure and invited to a parent meeting scheduled for November 29. Illerbrun expressed her sentiments, saying, "I want to emphasize that this will be a memorable time, and we should work together to share the history of the school and create memories."

Illerbrun further stressed, "Our schools offer academic excellence, faith, service, and the love of God. It is surprising they are not filled to capacity, especially when the education of our children is so important. Our students are reading in kindergarten and first grade, and they perform at the top nationwide. A quality education that forms the whole child is so important in today's world."

Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School has been a pillar of the community, shaping the minds and hearts of generations. The school expresses gratitude for the unwavering support it has received over the years and invites the community to join in celebrating the rich history of Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School.

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A brief history, provided by Our Lady of Fatima Catholic School:

The land on which the church, school, and convent stand, was a gift from Mr. and Mrs. Harry Owen. In the spring of 1948, a surplus army building was prepared by the Mission Mass League for use as a combined church, school, and rectory. This building, known as "The Barracks," was in use until 1983 for many parish activities. The first Mass was celebrated on January 3, 1949, and the parish was named on July 1, 1949.

School construction was made possible by a fundraising campaign sponsored by the new parish and St. Charles Borromeo Parish, their brother parish. His Excellency, the late Archbishop Edwin Byrne, broke ground on July 3, 1949. "Heights Catholic School," as it was then called, enrolled its first pupils in the fall with Sr. M. Ignatius as the first principal. The school, formally dedicated on January 29, 1950, had 157 students in four grades taught by three nuns.

The new Convent for the Dominican Sisters of the Grand Rapids was blessed and dedicated in December 1951. In 1954, four classrooms were added to the school and the rectory was purchased. In its newly improved building, the school grew to the full eight grades.

Discussion of plans for the present church edifice began in 1953, when the Archdiocesan Fund Campaign was held. Rev. Msgr. Jose Garcia, V.G., broke ground and construction started on January 19, 1957. In May of that year, the "Fight to Furnish" campaign was conducted to provide the necessary furnishing and equipment for the new church. It was formally dedicated on May 4, 1958, by the late Archbishop Byrne. The relics of Saints Vincentius and Charus are in the main altar; Saints Felix and Laetus are in the east altar; Saints Beatus and Clementis are in the west altar.

In 1980, a gift bequest from the Helen T. Gallagher Estate led to the construction of Fatima-Gallagher Hall. The multipurpose parish center was dedicated on January 4, 1984. Many parishioners joined in the campaign, "Project Parish," to provide the necessary funds for the construction. Fatima-Gallagher Hall houses the school's gymnasium, cafeteria, library, the pre-kindergarten classroom, and meeting rooms. It is also used as a gathering space for various parish functions.

In 1996, the portable building used by the school was replaced with an addition of three new classrooms. This addition was made possible by the efforts of Rev. Clarence Galli.

The Rt. Rev. Msgr. Joseph Charewicz, V.F., served as pastor of Our Lady of Fatima Parish from its beginning until March 1, 1970. In 1970, Very Rev. Lucian C. Hendren became pastor until 1977. Msgr. Sipio Salas took over and was pastor until 1985. In June 1985, Rev. Donald R. Kapitz became pastor and served until August 1988. Rev. Clarence Galli served as pastor until 1997. Msgr. Francis Eggert served as pastor until his retirement in 2015. Very Rev. Stephen Schultz is the current pastor.

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