



Dear Parishioners,

A few weeks ago during the celebration of Catholic Schools week, I had the pleasure of talking to you about many of the great things that are happening at Our Lady Star of the Sea School. I am very excited about the wonderful direction of our school.

Even with all of the good news about the school, I need to talk to you about a difficult reality we are facing this year with the school budget.

This current school year our enrollment for Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade is at 152 students. Normally the school's enrollment is approximately 185 students, although we could easily handle over 200 kids. There are several reasons for low enrollment this year. First of all, thanks be to God, we graduated one of our largest classes in recent history of 28 students, but we only had an incoming Kindergarten class of 14. Last year we also had many families from the Navy who were transferred to new duty stations, but we did not see new Navy families moving into the area. We also faced some uncertainty last year when our beloved principal Sally Merriwether retired.

Frankly, I think a lot of families are trying to make it through pretty rough economic times. This has meant that many families have chosen public school or homeschooling over our parish school.

I also have to take a lot of the blame for the low enrollment this year, as I don't think I was aware about the amount of energy we needed to be putting into marketing Our Lady Star of the Sea School.

This is in addition to the fact that we have tried to maintain tuition at a reasonable level while we are constantly seeing costs go up in healthcare benefits, utilities and other expenses. On average our tuition increase has only been 3% while the increase in expenses has been 12%. Every week more and more of our families are coming to ask for help just to make their tuition, and we are doing everything we can in terms of financial aid to help these families.

Both the school and parish office staffs have had to bear the consequence of this tough economic situation. Most of our teachers and staff are working for about 85% of what they could make if they were at a public school, and we trimmed the school budget as lean as we can. We have even had to make cuts in the parish staff to be able to come up with the funds necessary to keep up with expenses.

Now let me tell you the good news about the school. First of all, our *Catholic Identity* and desire for excellence in education have never been stronger. Second, we were fortunate to find a very capable and dedicated principal in Mrs. Jeannette Wolfe. Third, we are excited about the new school website which does a great job of marketing the school (check it out at <http://school.starofthesea.net>).

Mrs. Wolfe has visited the surrounding parishes throughout January to talk about and promote the school in our neighboring parishes. This has sparked a lot of interest especially in Kindergarten and Pre-school. Our "Little Stars" pre-school in its first year, is almost full and is receiving rave reviews from everyone. Our preschool program will be sending 11 of the 12 five-year-olds on to next year's Kindergarten class.

This year, as part of the school auction, we are funding a bus which will help with transportation from North Kitsap and Silverdale. The lack of providing transportation has been a real limiting factor for many parents who want Catholic education for their children, but can't manage the commute.

We are also starting up an All Star Alumni Association for all of you past graduates of the school. Our goal is to help connect with classmates, create a mechanism for financial support and to promote the school.

I'm also a little embarrassed to say that many of you probably don't even know that the school has a great and very fiscally sound endowment program that began in 1990 with bequests of about \$350,000. This endowment has grown to over \$650,000. From the endowment alone we have received over \$550,000 to offset expenses over the past 22 years. What a legacy!!!

Our Lady Star of the Sea School does have a very bright future. However, we are going to have a hard time getting through this year. Each year the parish budgets about \$150,000 to \$180,000 for the school subsidy. It is about 15% of our annual budget, but myself, Fr. Freitag, and Fr. Mitchell all believed it was worth it, and that it is money well spent to form children in the Catholic Faith. This year the projected subsidy is about \$350,000.

We just can't afford it.

That's why I am asking for your help. Pleading for your help. What we need is a one-time gift to get us through this rough year. Please prayerfully consider making a donation to Our Lady Star of the Sea School. Your donation will assist us in keeping our tuition affordable for all who want Catholic education. Providing the opportunity for our youth to grow and learn in Catholic Culture has been a priority at our school for 85 years and with your help, we can continue this wonderful tradition.

Please take one of the School Pledge envelopes home and pray as a family on what you can do to help our school.

Thank you for your support of Catholic education and Our Lady Star of the Sea School!

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Fr. Lappe".

Fr. Lappe  
Pastor