

Pius and Concerned Parents

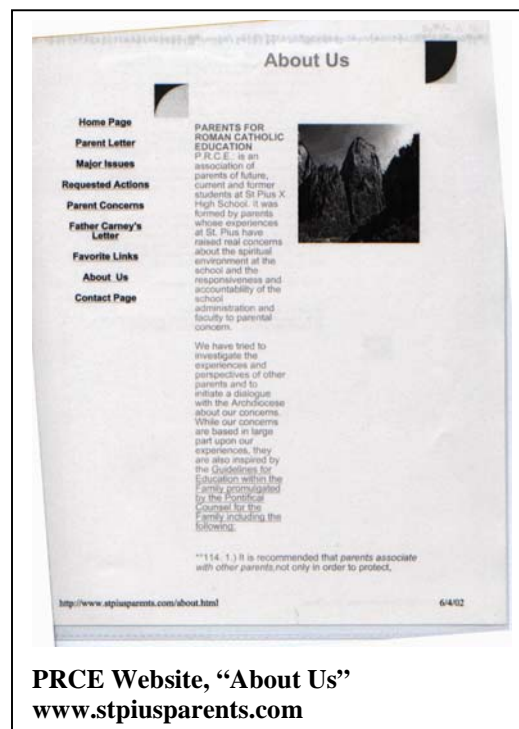
Pius X High School Parents Concerned

During the 2001-2002 school year, a number of Saint Pius X High School parents became increasingly concerned about curricula at the school, particularly in religious education and Catholic spiritual formation. They were convinced that teaching in a number of classes was inappropriate and over-sexualized and worried about improper counseling procedures.

Finding that their individual concerns were not addressed, they formed the Parents for a Roman Catholic Education and appealed in turn to the school administration, to the Archbishop, and to fellow parents.

Short term parental goals include having theology courses taught from approved Catholic textbooks, giving parents adequate opportunity to review – and decline, if they wish – materials with sexual content, and the development of school policies to insure respectful and timely meetings with parents.

Long term goals are more complex. Parents wish to support Saint Pius X High School's mission as a Catholic school. Foremost among the many ideas under discussion has been the creation of an oversight mechanism for the high school's curricula, perhaps by means of a review board of parents and priests, under the Archbishop, or by having all curricula materials available for public review.





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- 1. An Independent review of St. Pius X High School should be conducted by and outside panel of experts.**

The panel should be appointed by the Archbishop and comprised of respected individuals with appropriate experience from both the local community and other areas of the country. The review should include: the mission/vision for the school, how well St Pius X High School meets that mission/vision for the school, and how it can continually progress toward that vision. This review should place a special emphasis on the degree to which the school environment, curricula, and counseling foster the spiritual and intellectual development of the students in light of the teaching and traditions of the Catholic Church. This review should be limited in time, but should include surveys, interviews, and systematic review of existing data in order to identify patterns and trends. The results should be reported to the Archbishop and used by the administration and the proposed School Board to improve the school.
- 2. An Independent School Board modeled after school boards at most fine institutes of higher learning and all public school districts should be created to oversee St. Pius X High School on a regular basis.**

This Board should be appointed by and responsible to the Archbishop for the conduct of the School. In turn, the school principal should be accountable to the Board. Like most such Boards of Directors or Regents, this Board should provide policy direction of the school, oversee the performance of the school and its senior administrators, and develop procedures to hold the school and its senior administrators accountable for the implementation of policies and the quality of the school's performance. The Board membership should include one or more member of the clergy, one or more parents, one or more alumni, and one more representatives of the local Catholic community. One primary responsibility of the Board will be to insure that St. Pius X High School is accountable in appropriate ways to the Archbishop, parents of students, and the Catholic Community at large.
- 3. Parental opportunity to review and consent to all Sex Education programs taught to their sons and daughters.**

St Pius X High School should provide parents the same opportunity afforded by the local public school system to review and consent to such programs, to have the option of opting out and to be provided alternative activities if that option is selected. This opportunity should apply to all sex education regardless of the title of the course in which it is taught.

http://www.stpiusparents.com/custom.html 6/4/02

PRCE asked for an independent review board, under the authority of the Archbishop, that would have oversight of the school's Catholic identity.

PRCE outlined how such a Review Board might be structured, to assure maximum accountability.

PRCE sought parental review and consent to all programs with a sexual content, consistent with their right and responsibility as parents.

From the PRCE website, accessed June 2002: additional requests made by the parent group

Lack of Constructive School Response

Excerpts from PRCE letter to Archbishop Michael Sheehan

When we met with you in May seeking to improve the Catholic environment at St. Pius X High School, one of the major points we tried to make was that parents who raise concerns about policies and practices are ignored and marginalized. A second point was that we questioned the accountability and responsiveness of the school administration not only to parents, but also to the Archdiocese. Events since our last letter seem to affirm our concerns. Though many promises have been made, in the intervening five months very few have come to fruition. Some examples:

* Since our meetings with you and with the St. Pius Advisory Board in May, we have not received any formal response from Dr. McLeod on any of the issues we've raised. Nor have we received any of the information or documents we requested from her. It is clear we are being ignored.

* Your directive that theology be taught from approved textbooks with the Imprimatur is also being ignored....


The content of senior theology has not changed either. The textbook will be used when relevant, but the other sources that many parents have found objectionable in the past will continue to be used. The course outline even identifies "agitation days" which some parents may find particularly objectionable and therefore want to attend....

* In your May letter you stated that it had been decided that an independent review would be conducted focusing on Catholic identity. We are still awaiting word on the status of this independent review....

* You mentioned that you asked Dr. McLeod to review our request to opt out of sex education and to reply. You emphasized that it is essential that teaching on this delicate issue be identical to that of the Holy Catholic Church. We have had no response from Dr. McLeod regarding any such review. We are unaware of any policy or procedural change in this regard. To allow parents to opt out of sex education will prove to be particularly difficult at St. Pius X because it is taught in so many different classes....

* In my last communication to you, I mentioned that the need for a Parent Outreach Subcommittee on the Advisory Board had been called into question and that its continued existence was in doubt. Since then it has been dissolved. All issues brought forward by concerned parents must now go through the executive committee and Dr. McLeod prior to any hearing by the Board. These are two

Since this letter, Dr. McLeod has clearly stated, in violation of Archdiocesan policy and canon law, that parents cannot opt out of sex ed (see page 31).



more hoops and two more filters indicative of an organization that does not want to hear parental concerns and seeks to protect itself from accountability at the price of responsiveness to its clients....

We realize that our request for a school board with the authority to bring accountability was not well received by you. However, we believe even more strongly that the lack of accountability to you and the parents demonstrated by the activities described above are another argument for such a board. I have mentioned that I serve on the Board of Regents for New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology and have found the school administration very responsive to direction from the board. We are asking for a similar board at St. Pius X High School to provide accountability to you, the parents, and the Catholic Community of the Archdiocese.....

We are very disheartened, but we will not give up. It is clear to us that some of the administration and faculty do not consider themselves accountable to parents. In fact, some are behaving in a manner that indicates they are not accountable to the Archdiocese or you as the leader of the Archdiocese....

We have found that the Administration at St. Pius has simply refused to deal either with us or more importantly, with many of the issues we have raised. Our major interest is in the spiritual development and well being of our sons and daughters. We know we share this goal with you and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. We pray you will continue to engage in this effort to improve the Catholic environment at St. Pius X High School. We are convinced that without your strong leadership, little improvement will be forthcoming.☛

The full text of this letter can be read at www.stpiusparents.com/catalog.html

Negative School Responses

Screening Parents from the Parent Advisory Board

As the concerns about Parents for a Roman Catholic Education (PRCE) became more widely disseminated, the Pius administration attempted to identify members of PRCE. In March 2003, when the time came to nominate and elect four new members to the Parent Advisory Board, an unprecedented form was distributed to parents, asking prospective candidates to identify various group affiliations.

To: St. Pius X High School Advisory Council Candidates
From: St. Pius X High School Advisory Council Election Committee
Date: March 2003

Enclosed is a form to be filled out by all candidates applying for a St. Pius X High School Advisory Council position. **THE FORM MUST BE RECEIVED BY APRIL 1st.** If you would like an electronic MS WORD version of this form, please send e-mail requesting the St. Pius Advisory Council Election Form to lrgarci@sandia.gov.

There are four positions available for this election. Any officially recognized parent or guardian of a St. Pius student registered for the upcoming year is eligible to be a candidate. Ballots will be mailed to St. Pius parents of students enrolled for the fall in April and the results of the election will be announced in May.

We appreciate your interest in serving on the St. Pius Advisory Council. If you have any questions about the election process or about the Advisory Council, please call Linda R. Garcia at 296-6684.

Please be sure that the enclosed form is completely filled out (limit answers to front side of form) and returned **NO LATER THAN APRIL 1st** to:

Linda R. Garcia
823 Piedra Larga Pl. NE
Albuquerque, NM 87123

You may also email the completed form to lrgarci@sandia.gov.

Pius attempts to identify members of Parents for a Roman Catholic Education who are applying to the Parents Advisory Council.

This is the first time candidates to the Council have been asked to submit such a form.

With the appearance that the Pius parent group would be eliminated from the Advisory Board, concerned parents feel that all avenues for discussion of substantive issues have been removed.

No person identified as a member of PRCE was elected to the Advisory Board. Also, voting is no longer anonymous.

**St. Pius Advisory Council
Candidate Application**

The St. Pius X High School Advisory Council Mission Statement: "In the spirit of cooperative endeavor, the Council supports the school in its efforts to achieve its mission by advising the administration on operational and policy issues considered relevant to the school's progress."

Please answer each question. Please limit your answers to this one page.

Name: _____
Ages & grades of children attending St. Pius: _____
Ages & grades of other children: _____

1. List education, employment history, and areas of expertise:

2. Indicate any involvement in the following groups or activities:
St. Pius Fine Arts Boosters SPX volunteer (name activity) _____
St. Pius Athletic Boosters Parish Council or volunteer (Parish/role) _____
St. Pius Parent Association School volunteer (school/role) _____
St. Pius Parents for a Roman Catholic Education _____
Serra Club, Knights of Columbus, other Catholic Church Organizations: _____
Other (civic, school, church) _____

3. Using the mission statement above and considering the standing committees of Election, Long Range & Financial Planning, Nominating, Recruitment & Public Relations, and Student Financial Aid, discuss what you might contribute as a member of the Board:

4. The school motto is "Teach me goodness, discipline and knowledge." Use this motto to explain how the Advisory Council can help St. Pius embrace these values:

An interview with Principal Dr. Mary McLeod is required. Please call her secretary, Barbara Cooney, at 831-8411 by April 2nd, 2003 for an appointment.

Completed form must be returned no later than **APRIL 1st** to: Linda R. Garcia, 823 Piedra Larga Pl. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87123
Or email to lrgarci@sandia.gov

Confidentiality

Parents are concerned about instructions to their children that what is discussed in the classroom is “confidential.” Since teachers act *in parentis loci* – in the place of parents – it is difficult to see why classroom instruction might be considered appropriate for “confidentiality.” In fact, at a time when children have been sexually abused in unprecedented numbers, “confidentiality” seems a particularly *unhealthy* novelty to be introducing into the classroom setting.

Handout to Advisory Board members.

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- ❑ **LISTENING FOR INFORMATION MODE** Students are taught how to listen for facts, improve note taking techniques, how to select pertinent information from lectures, how to organize information, and how to ask pertinent questions of the instructor or peer instructors.
- ❑ **REFLECTIVE LISTENING MODE** Students are taught how to open their minds to listen to Heart information; they practice supportive listening without judging, and are informed and held accountable for classroom/confidentiality.
- ❑ **CONTEMPLATIVE LISTENING MODE** Students will learn to be open and listen to God's presence in the moment, not anticipate ahead of time what one is going to hear.

THEOLOGICAL WRITING (3 modes)

- ❑ **SCHOLARLY WRITING** includes term papers and essays in which it is essential to cite resources, objective facts and follow a more rigid structure, i.e. the MLA format including a bibliography. While both tradition and experience may be included, this type of writing follows an objective, narrative style.
- ❑ **REFLECTIVE WRITING** includes term papers and essays in which it is essential to consider both personal experience and the human experience in dialogue with some aspect of faith. A more affective (Heart) approach, this type of writing should follow a more subjective, personal narrative style. Its structure is loose and more creative forms may evolve from this kind of writing – such as free form poetry, music, dream interpretation, imagery.

In Closing

These pages express some of the concerns parents have about St. Pius X High School.

Among their concerns is a final exam that asks students to name “four forms of sexual intercourse.” Among them is also the teacher who asks students to write about their sexual experiences. Parents are concerned about the poor judgement of mandating a graphic film about homosexual sexuality. They are concerned about the irresponsible counsel of a distressed young woman. They are concerned about a secularized value system, an overly sexualized environment, and a politicized theology. And, most deeply, they are concerned that, after years of communication, their archbishop has taken few, discernable, corrective measures in Albuquerque’s one and only Catholic high school.

How are those concerns, then, to be addressed? *Los Pequeños de Cristo* urges parents to assume their Church mandated duty as the primary educators of their children. This may include reviewing a school’s curricula, lesson plans, reading lists, handouts and visual aids. It also includes daily discussion with one’s children about what they have been doing and learning.

A Catholic school and its parents ought not to be at odds with one another. Ideally, they are both working toward the same goals: the formation and salvation of young souls. Parents who have lost confidence in their school’s overall soundness, however, may need to consider alternative educational possibilities.

Our children are already saturated by the world’s values. A Catholic school must provide something more. Catholic schools must teach the Catholic faith and inculcate high moral principles. They must nurture men and women capable of bringing Christ and His Good News to a broken world. The material presented here is not indicative of such a school.