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From: Bishop Michael C. Barber, SJ

Re: Saint Elizabeth High School

Date: September 7, 2016

This evening I met with the families of St. Elizabeth High School.

St. Elizabeth has a long and proud history. The fruits of the work accomplished at St. Elizabeth have blessed and graced the Fruitvale neighborhood, and the lives of literally hundreds of thousands of people.

My goal is to keep that proud history alive and flourishing for the next century. I am very concerned about St. Elizabeth's long term viability, but I believe we have found a way to keep Catholic education flourishing in the Fruitvale neighborhood. A sustainable future for St. Elizabeth requires us to stop what we are currently doing and "re-start" Catholic education.

Since at least the early 1990s, St. Elizabeth has seen a decline in enrollment that mirrors a pattern across our country. This has resulted in a downward spiral that has proven impossible to stop.

Today's students, to be fully prepared for college, need more than just the basics. They need a challenging and wide-ranging set of coursework, enrichment classes and programs. They need up-to-date computers and other equipment. It has become increasingly challenging to provide a quality education that serves our students well.

It is simply not possible to provide a high-quality, college preparatory education in a school with good, but so few, students. This is not my opinion, but based on research and analysis.

A little over a year ago, I commissioned a group to study the feasibility of founding a Cristo Rey High School in the Oakland Diocese. Known as "education that works," these innovative, Catholic, college prep high schools are exclusively for urban families. Cristo Rey is unique: Its corporate work study model provides students with professional work experiences which also offset the cost of tuition. Graduates of these schools are entering and completing college at twice the rate of inner-city, traditional high school graduates. There are already 30 schools operating successfully in the United States, including Immaculate Conception Academy in San Francisco and Cristo Rey San Jose Jesuit in San Jose.

The feasibility committee was given the mandate of answering four questions: Is there 1) the necessary community support; 2) sufficient financial support 3) adequate corporate sponsorship for student employment and 4) a religious order interested in partnering.

There is more work to be done, but we have found significant community support. Thus far we have pledges of \$1.5 million toward the \$2.5 million needed to launch. With a dozen companies willing to offer jobs, we have about half of the corporate positions needed for the students. And the Brothers of the Christian Schools, who have a long and proud history in Catholic education, are now affiliated with us.

We have progressed to the point where we can decide where our own Cristo Rey school should be. Based on our commitment to the St. Elizabeth community, the solid physical condition of the St. Elizabeth buildings and the analysis of the committee, I have decided St. Elizabeth High School is the best fit for a future Cristo Rey high school.

The Cristo Rey school is targeted to open in the summer of 2018 with freshmen only. A "break year" between the current student population and the beginning of the Cristo Rey school, recommended by the Cristo Rey Network, allows for a successful transition. There will be no classes at St. Elizabeth High School for the 2017-18 school year.

Our first priority is helping students in the three transitioning classes (classes of '18, '19 and '20) move to a new school for the 2017-2018 school year. I understand the challenge this is.

The Diocese of Oakland, St. Elizabeth High School and six other Catholic high schools – Bishop O'Dowd, Holy Names, St. Joseph Notre Dame, St. Mary's College High, Moreau Catholic and Salesian College Preparatory – have developed a plan so that all current St. Elizabeth students can enroll in one of the six schools beginning in the school year 2017-2018. They have agreed to the same admission process, tuition expectations and student support systems.

Together, we must ensure that every current St. Elizabeth student continues to receive a quality, college preparatory, faith-filled education. I hope that you will join the St. Elizabeth parents, administration and transition team, the receiving Catholic high schools and the diocese in supporting these students as they move through this, toward graduation and preparing for their life's work.

The Cristo Rey model of secondary education meets the needs of Catholic families today. It is a viable, sustainable opportunity for families who cannot afford a tuition-only school, to provide their children with a challenging, quality, Catholic education.

The Cristo Rey model can allow us to ensure that St. Elizabeth serves as an anchor in the community well into the next century. Our future graduates will have the corporate experience and rigorous academics to succeed. It is truly "education that works."

I am excited about the future of Catholic education in our Diocese. I hope you join me in that excitement, especially in regards to establishing a new Cristo Rey high school in the Fruitvale area of Oakland. Please note that we have a transition team in place to answer your questions. You may email the team at [transition@stliz-hs.org](mailto:transition@stliz-hs.org) or call 510.866.2254.

Sincerely in Christ,

*+ Michael Barber S.J.*

The Most Reverend Michael C. Barber, SJ  
Bishop of Oakland