

In this written communication, I share with you, as promised, as much as I can about questions, comments, concerns, and compliments regarding the “New Era” plan. I am attempting to share these with you word for word, so that everyone can see what was asked and how it was asked or how comments were made. Quite literally I have “cut and paste” most questions and comments. In cases when I believe I have already responded to the question/comment, I will simply mark that as “see above” or something similar. I am also including some of the comments that have been shared with me where someone commented on social media. I do not use any form of social media, as I know it often expresses inaccurate, unkind and inappropriate things. Some have noted that there have been some Facebook comments that were taken down. That is not in my control; but they were removed because of comments that were deemed particularly inappropriate. Please excuse any grammatical or spelling errors on my part, as this is not meant to be a paper. But most of the quotes have been copied as they were written.

“If it was not someone from either church or former LMC person, who is the mysterious, generous donor that the money was received from ??”

- Obviously, I will honor a person’s wish to remain anonymous. I don’t believe it is in the concern of the school community who this person is. I would hope there would only be expressions of gratitude.

“Why would you take out Catholic from the name that LMC - Lake Michigan Catholic / LMC is embedded in it ??”

- On the contrary, if we look carefully it says specifically, “Our Lady of the Lake Catholic School.

“Why would Citizenship be a Catholic pillar versus Stewardship and how is being taught to be a good citizen a Catholic value ??”

- Quite simply, the pastors of our schools had for decades, used “citizenship” as part of who we are. As I have stated before, unlike other schools, we do not prepare students for the world. We prepare them to change the world. And that points to good citizenship. Stewardship is a way to be an ideal way to be a good citizen.

“Why was the current parents, alumni and the catholic community here NOT involved in any of your decisions you have made?”

- Actually, they were. I presented my ideas to the entire school board (some of whom are parents, staff, and/or alumni), the principals and the athletic director, two representatives from the Twin Area Catholic Schools Fund (chosen by them), parish staff and others.

“How is changing LMC name going to bring up enrollment in this community?”

- Changing the name will not, in all likelihood, bring up enrollment. But, the name change reflects a “seven pillar plan” which is not considered by many. Statistics have shown, though, that enhancing Catholic Identity in a Catholic School does have a major impact on enrollment. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, we are consecrating ourselves to the Blessed Mother and not a Lake. It is interesting that the local public school is named after a saint, while our Catholic school is named after a Lake. At one time, that might have made sense and was a solution to a problem. But that was then. This is now.

“Why would you make such changes without the current parents, alumni & catholic community agreement for them?”

- See above

“I love the new name of the school. It feels very “Catholic.” Now we have to find ways to increase our enrollment. Let the parishioners help you.”

- Thank you. And the name change is one goal... to show we are a Catholic School. As I’ve said, the “seven pillars” plan is the best means to increase enrollment... with the help of others.

“I was so impressed today with your presentation and the changes ahead. As you know, I had very limited information prior to today and I was only able to attend the MS/HS meeting today. I know there is a lot more that was shared at the 6:00 pm presentation. As each of you spoke today, I grew even more excited. Father Arul's opening prayer fit the occasion perfectly. The theme continued with your discussion. Father James talk brought me to goosebumps. James White gave a great introduction of his support and enthusiasm for the plan. When Bishop Bradley moved to the Consecration to Mary, I felt a calm, a peace, come over me, over the school. We have needed this for some time as I have felt the evil residing in the school. Father...Thank you for all of your work. Thank you for bringing Mary back to our school. Thank you for your vision. Thank you for listening to God! I couldn't be more proud to be a part of this school and the future of our school. Our family will continue to pray for you daily as we know the work has just began. The reward will be great! I look forward to watching all of these changes shape this school into a superior institution with Mary at the forefront. “

- Again, many thanks. I think your comments reflect the opinion of many others. Unfortunately, they are not the ones who reach out as much as those who are opposed to the plan.

“Thank you for sharing this update. It isn’t clear WHY the name had to change. Is there a merge? Will it become a Micro School? Best wishes for the future!”

- No, the intention is not to become a microschool. However, I am hopeful that the changes we make will help attract those who homeschool their children. While we must still follow much of the bureaucracy and standards of the public school system, we hope to far exceed that.

“I just wanted to drop you a note to congratulate you on your excellent presentation last night at the Church. You did a great job on it and delivering a solid message with the proper context.” This person went on to state the following:

“I fully understand your desire to change the name of the school. It is a great statement that something has changed and we have a new focus and recommitment to Catholic Education in this area! Some people will not see the need to change the name. I get it and when it is explained I think many will see it as a positive as we yank our Catholic community from complacency and waiting for the final shot to fall to having a vision of the future for the school. I am a St. Joseph Pony forever , but the local school is my school no matter what you call it. By the way, I recall that when St. John's and St. Joseph merged one very positive potential for a name change of the school was "Our Lady of the Lake"!

- I was not aware that “Our Lady of the Lake” was once discussed. It doesn’t surprise me. The name change to “Lake Michigan Catholic” was made in 1969. As others have said, it was a way to combine the schools (St. Joseph and St. John’s) without causing upheaval from one parish or the other. That was not an uncommon thing to do. After Vatican II, especially in the late 1960’s and the 1970’s, it was not uncommon for new schools to be named in a “secular” or “neutral” way. Like many other things, there has been great misperceptions and beliefs about what Vatican II teaches. Consciously or not, this misinterpretation is real. That’s why, for example, you see many churches (St. Joseph’s included) have often been stripped of the history and beauty of a church to try to make it more “modern.” St. John’s, thankfully, did not fall victim to that.

“I understand your seven pillars and appreciate the execution elements embodied in them to execute the vision. I see the foundation for differentiating the Catholic School from the rather good public schools in St. Joe and Stevensville with the added advantage of being a strong consideration for students of other school systems around us. Differentiating ourselves from the public schools is absolutely essential in my mind. Something I do not think we have done a very good job of in the past/present. “

- I totally agree in each thing you said.

“I like the structural changes to include a School system President so the principal can concentrate on delivering the promised faith based education. I also appreciate someone given the task of developing and executing our school enrollment emphasis. That being said I do have a concern about one thing. That is adding to the fixed cost structure of the school. I

believe this is going to have to be managed very carefully in my opinion. One other concern with this division of responsibility may be the perception of the principal being a lesser job and the attendant difficulty in retaining talent. Not a reason for not doing the division of labor...just something to manage.”

- I agree; proper management of these structural change is essential. The President/Principal model has been successful in other places. But you are right, there has to be good management of it so there are no “minor” roles, only working together.

“You did a good job of explaining the 3 legged stool of structure to support the funding of the school. I clearly understand the Parish Contribution to 50% of the cost of the students and the role of tuition paid by parents. What is not clear to me is the role of the School fund or Foundation. Frankly, it is my feeling, and that of others, is that there has been money going into the fund, but not a lot going out to the school. This may be a perception issue, but I for one will not contribute anything to the Fund any longer until I am comfortable that the schools short terms needs are being met. There is no need to have a rainy day fund while Rome is burning!”

- I understand your concern, and I am going to pass that on to the Fund.

“You alluded to it last night when you tried to discuss a "Liberal Catholic Education"! I understand the harken back to classical thought so prevalent in the design of our country by our country's founders. All I can tell you is that word "liberal" to many in this area is like a dog whistle! My suggestion is to either lose that word or explain it until the cows come home. It will not help this effort but will seriously damage it. I am not a right wing "Trumpster" in any way shape or form when I emphasize this. I am a very moderate Midwesterner who has voted on both sides of the ticket and most folks will hear that first word "liberal" and will not even listen to the two that follow! My opinion.”

- I agree.... I don't like the word “liberal” in it either, as it suggests something that it is not. I've been trying to think of another word with the same comment. I'd welcome any suggestions from anyone!

“Have similar presentations to yours last night been given or scheduled with the other Parishes in the area, especially across the River? I have not heard if that had been done or not.”

- Father Adams is in the process of compiling the information in a format he chooses to be explained to the other parishes.

“I applaud that the education standard being sought is the highest in the land. I do not think any goal less than that is worthy of the strategy for our School System.”

- Yes; we have to have a goal. Becoming a “National Blue Ribbon School” is not easy, but it is possible!

“These are my few thoughts and feedback on the direction you have set for the school here. I believe the timing is right and the direction is correct. My prayers and wishes are that this effort will be the great success it can be under your leadership!”

- Thank you. I believe the timing is essential. We couldn’t wait for major changes.

“I just found out that you have decided to change the name of the school. Who made that decision? Why? At what cost? Were any alumni or parishioners involved? It is a waste of precious resources, money better spent on curriculum improvement or tech inventory.”

- Most of this has been answered above. However, the name change was my decision, with the Superintendent and Bishop’s approval, and after consultation with a wide variety of people. Since this stage is paid for by a private donor, there is no cost to the school. In fact, we are making curriculum improvements, too.

“Let me get this straight: I have now graduated from a high school no-one has ever heard of (including myself!)? Changing the name for a pragmatic reason (to reflect another merger, or perhaps to disassociate from a tragic incident, etc.) might make some sense, but to change simply for change's sake is sort-sided, time-consuming, unnecessary (as far as I know) and disrespectful to alumni. I suggest this Name Change be put to a vote of all Lakers, past and present.”

- I’m not clear why a name change would change where a person has graduated from. That would be like saying the child of a divorced parent means they have no last name. I think the key is as it was said, “as far as I know.” As for a vote, that wouldn’t reflect the absolute need to make bold changes. Unless all past and present Lakers know the day to day issues at the school, a vote wouldn’t work.

“As a proud graduate of Lake Michigan Catholic (1972), this is the first I heard of the name change of the school. The new name is fine, but was the name change, and loss of historic identity, necessary? Lake Michigan Catholic was a needed blended name change from St John's and St. Joe's. This new name change is not. Just curious. I came from St. Johns and noted that Bishop Bradley cited St. Joseph's history, “This is an important moment in the rich history of Catholic education in St. Joseph – the very place where hundreds of years ago French missionaries arrived to spread the Catholic faith...”, but, I'm sure unintentionally, neglected to note Benton Harbor's St. John's history. St. John's has a very rich history, too. My family have been members of that parish since the early 1900's. My Grandfather, [], helped level the ground for the school, when it was built, I was told.,My Dad, brother and sisters, Aunt, Uncle and cousins, all attended St. John's and have and had strong feelings for it.

Thank you.

- The real name for this plan was "Return to the Future." "New Era" seemed to click more and took a life of its own. I'm not sure why there would be a loss of historic identity, especially given the number of times name changes and mascots changed over 150+ years of the history of our schools. I have addressed the "blended name" above. You mentioned Bishop Bradley's statement at the reveal of the plan. I assume that you quoted him accurately. Assuming that, you will see that he was referring to the St. Joseph community and not the church or school. I'm sure he agrees about the history of all three parishes. In fact, that's one of the reasons that we are in the same collaborative.

"Father, Thank you for a wonderful introduction and explanation about our new direction here. The students needed to hear much of what you spoke to them about. I think it calmed some fears and doubts about the decisions that led to the changes. I am hopeful that as time moves on those who still doubt and fear will come to understand the true blessing that having our Blessed Mother in our name and at the lead truly is."

- I believe that will be the case. Thanks.

"Dear Fr. Fleckenstein, This is fabulous news!! What a wonderful patron: Our Blessed Mother! Our three children graduated from LMC: 2009, 2013, and 2014, thanks be to the Good Lord. I just passed this message along to them and they seemed quite pleased. Thank you so much for this very special news, for all you do for Our Lady of the Lake AND Saint Joseph Catholic Church."

- I am grateful for your positive and supportive comments.

"Fr. John, As an alumnus of Lake Michigan Catholic [...] I just wanted to send a congratulatory note to you on your rebrand. I think it makes a lot of sense and a chance to double down in the region and plant your flag as the preeminent faith based educational institution in the region. Exciting times. Change is seldom welcomed or comfortable for people so I'm sure you'll be dealing with varied opinions. I can speak from experience when I say when it comes to rebrands, it's best to go bold and only move forward...while still showing compassion for people's feelings. I was also part of the team that worked with the previous administration on creating the anchor logo at the school's athletic logo. It sounds like you're keeping the nickname "Lakers" which is great. Prior to the anchor, the athletic logo changed multiple times (from the mitten..state of Michigan, to a wave, to a monster), and never truly conveyed "Lakers" or the port of St. Joe. For any clarity or psychology around why and how we came up with the anchor as the athletic logo, my brother [...] as an identity guide that we created that gives some context around the decision, should you choose to stay that course. Congratulations once again, and Go Lakers."

- Thanks. We never considered a change to “Lakers” or the school colors. We did decide to replace the anchor, but I think it would be great to have, eventually, a place where all of the names/logos/mascots, etc., are very visible.

“We will do our best to promote this great change and sing its praises! And pray about it. We sure can be “stiff-necked people”! You’re in our continued prayers. Thank you!”

- And the entire Laker community is in my prayers as well.
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What follows are some of the comments made on social media. I am not a person who uses or reads social media. These were given to me for the purpose of this document. Also, I do not read anonymous letters. For me, it is not a valid way to truly communicate. I reached out to some of the people who made negative comments. As of now, I have received no return message from them. I’m sure these quotes aren’t necessarily in order, but I listed them in order as best I could. I will only respond here below if something has not been addressed above, or if it something I’d like to emphasize. Again, these are “cut and paste” or typed word for word as written.

“One priest decided to change Lake Michigan Catholic to Our Lady of the Lake. Changing the name does not fix the problem.”

- I totally agree. This is a good example of not looking for the reasons behind it or investigating the entire plan.

“Rouge Priest”

“This is crazy. So disrespectful of the Alumni that formed Lake Michigan Catholic years ago.”

- The school had 100 years of alumni before the 1969 name was changed. And they changed the name a few times during those 100 years.

“Lake Michigan Catholic used to be St. Joseph Catholic. Was it disrespectful to change back then?”

“Were you there during the merger. Were you part of the process. It was a big deal. We both hated losing our schools but we came together in a new school. Lake Michigan Catholic”

“I agree 100%. Those two schools came together and named the school Lake Michigan Catholic. I also heard that back then this new name had been an option, but they didn’t go with it, because it made the school sound like an all girl private school.”

“Notre Dame of the Lake.”

- I'd like to point out that the official name of the University of Notre Dame is "Notre Dame du lac" which means "Our Lady of the Lake."

"So disappointing! LOL... what a horrible acronym!"

- "OLL" or "OL" is used. Anything else is an insult to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

"I know, I heard the softball girls team saw that too with the lol. I guess a lot of the middle/high school kids are upset and don't want the name change, but Father John was the one pushing for it.

"So sad."

"This is not a good thing!! Especially the sneaky way it was handled!! Changing the name will NOT FIX THE PROBLEM!!"

- I totally agree; please inquire about the entire plan. And there was no sneaky way; such a statement is inaccurate and not helpful.

"Now mind you, I currently live in a very Catholic area, with multiple Catholic schools. Most are all girl, or all boy, only a few mixed. This is not unusual."

"They're not changing the name, they're making the school Catholic again, which as a former student I can tell you is desperately needed."

- Exactly right.

"How are they making it more Catholic? I will believe that when I see it. You can a name, it is a nice name, however the problem will still exist."

"it's still a Catholic school, just as much as when I graduated. The name isn't the issue."

"And how much will this cost-from uniforms-school, sports, etc, this is quite unnecessary.

- I have addressed this above, but I will add that much of the clothes simply say "Lakers." So, no change. There will be a transition period, too. So, when new uniforms, etc., are needed, then the name will change.

"Dumb"

"It costs money to make a name change. le signs, letterhead, and the numerous other places LMC appears. I don't think a name change is going to increase enrollment. Such a waster of money.

- I have explained this, and I should add that another \$10,000 was donated yesterday by another person... bringing us to \$260,000 of unsolicited money. That money has been used thus far for a financial and operational independent auditor, a part-time assistant for me to help compile all of the information, our marketing partner, etc. There are monies remaining for signage, etc.

“It is nice to see so many people passionate about our school. I don’t believe there is anything greater than a faith-based education for our children and our community. I see terrible things here everyday [...] generally involving people that did not have the awesome opportunity to attend our school or a similar institution. Our school is about the kids let’s stay focused on molding them into the best people they can be. A name is just a name. Let’s refocus our passion, positive and negative, on our kids.”

“The foundation and history of the institution is the alumni. As the first class to go all four years at the new school, I have very strong commitment to Catholic School education. They should have asked the alumni for input. Especially the ones that are still active with the school, let alone the fact that I have donated a fairly large amount of money to the schools over many years.”

“I am behind this effort for whatever the reason. I know Catholic schools are in trouble. Wake up alumni. How much have you contributed? How many have sent kids to the school or pulled them out? Obviously the school needs help. Time to put egos aside and help this effort to save Catholic schools.”

“I am deeply saddened by this (LMC ’73)”

“Nice talking points, however, of the 25 top Catholic high schools in Michigan, only 11 are named for saints. One of which is Our Lady of the Lakes is Waterford. I am also mystified by “other adaptations” comment, there were two schools, they merged together to create a new identity, which resulted in Lake Michigan Catholic Lakers!”

- Much like political polls, one cannot pick and choose which ranking is used. One ranking I saw had 18 of the top 25 with Saints or religious names (such as Sacred Heart). Only 5 had non-religious names, and the other 2 were named after a bishop or religious brother. So, 20 out of 25 have religious affiliations/names.

“hi, the other adaptation Fr John mentioned at the parent presentation was that we were known as St Joseph Lake Michigan Catholic School for athletic requirements. With the name change, Fr John stated the most important factors of the change were to reestablish our Catholic identity and that we would remain Lakers forever.”

“I don’t think any of us has lost our Catholic identity. Was Father John. Around in 68 and realize how hard it was to give up our identity then. St Joseph and St Johns did not magically mold together. It took a couple of years before we actually became one without separating the

schools. How dare someone that is probably from a consultant firm destroy that history. Why didn't we get an Alumni presentation. They sure can find me when asking for money or a class reunion."

- No, I was not around in '68. But there were other times in 150+ years of our school that experienced name changes. My own high school name was changed, so I do get it. This is more than a name change, as stated above.

"There's so much more beyond the name change...it's a great plan! The Bishop consecrated the school to the Blessed Mother yesterday."

"This is AWESOME!"

"yes!!! Soo exciting!"

"Great move! Should have changed the name years ago. Prayers for a successful transition."

"This is so perfect,,, love love love"

"good thing we have an anonymous donor that paid for all of the above! And like I said...this goes way beyond a name change. But nobody wants to listen to that part, unfortunately. Fr. John has an incredible plan."

"I don't get why people are so bent out of shape. The school was named wrong from the beginning. Catholic schools should always include the name of a saint in the school name."

"Brave man"

"you are so right. This crowd is known for giving a rough time to anyone with vision and a desire for change."

- I almost didn't include this one. But it does encapsulate a large part of what I am experiencing right now.

"Change is always hard! Complacency is easy! Sometimes change is needed! To begin a positive step forward! I agree! It's a beautiful name."

"Father has a great plan in place. Lakers Forever!"

"I'm so sad to read all the negative comments on social media. It makes my heart hurt. I know change is difficult, but some of the comments are downright nasty. As a Catholic, I have complete trust and faith that the leaders of my daughter's school are going to continue to provide a quality, faith-based education that will prepare her for the ugliness that seems to be consuming our planet"

“I can’t believe how good ppl have been treated. Ppl that worked hard for the school and were gotten rid of this Passion.”

“I attended LMC for 12 years, a proud Laker. I am sad to see the name change, but if it means better things to come for the school, that’s definitely a good thing. I am looking forward to seeing Father’s video. Please post the link when it’s done.”

- Yes, I am working on a video with the entire presentation. It’ll be done very soon. I thought I would send this document first as promised.

“Great school, great new name!”

“Not my ego that needs to be checked. I sent my children to the catholic school. I asked and was told nothing was changing: a lie. Every catholic school in the country is suffering. Please don’t tell me that changing the name to make it sound more catholic is the answer, The person who donated the money should be the one to check his/her ego.”

- Catholic Schools who are building Catholic identity are actually growing. Not all Catholic schools are suffering. In fact, during COVID, many Catholic schools grew, The person who donated the money wants to remain anonymous, so he/she has no ego to speak of in this regard.

“no I am not saying agree or like it. Just support because I think we have all tried everything else. Seems like taking it personally does not help. I really don’t think most alumni have noticed until this. Remember doing all those capital campaigns and knocking on doors? I was there ten years after my daughters graduated also. It has been a challenge to get people to care. Why not try something new?”

“...The backhanded, secret meetings taking place only showed someone was concerned about image. I feel sorry for the current high school students. I can safely say that this is no longer my school or my children’s school. I went to Lake Michigan Catholic. So did my children. This is my opinion. The school has now turned its back on their former and current students. I’m still catholic...but will no longer be a part of this school.”

- I’m sorry to hear it. I would hope people would listen to the entire plan before making rash decisions.

I have written this and responded to the best of my ability. I am thinking that, at this point, these comments pretty much cover what people think, and don’t find it necessary to add to it in the future.

Let us pray that our school can thrive and succeed.

Fr. John Fleckenstein