

Catholic school will close in June



Father Morgan Rice tries to see if kindergartner Ariena Blocker of Rochester knows who he is dressed like. St. Kateri School in Irondequoit will close in June. TINA MACINTYRE-YEE/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

Enrollment low at 67-year-old St. Kateri

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An Irondequoit Catholic school that teaches preschool through fifth-grade students will close in June, according to a letter sent out to parents on Friday.

St. Kateri School, which first opened in 1957, will close due to dwindling enrollment trends, Father Lance Gonyo said in the letter. Data included in the letter shows that total enrollment has decreased from 196 in the 2018 to 2019 school year, to 115 for the current 2024 to 2025 school year.

Father Gonyo said that enrollment needs an average of 18 students in each grade for kindergarten through fifth grade to have a balanced budget. This number, however, has not been met in the past seven years leading to smaller class sizes and significant financial effects, he said.

For the 2024 to 2025 school year, there is only a total of 62 kindergarten through fifth-grade students and 53 pre-k students, the letter showed. Because of this, class sizes this year range from seven students to 39 students, leading to increasing costs for the parish, Father Gonyo said.

A parish financial report was shared with the St. Kateri parish community on Oct. 19 and 20, showing that the parish will have to spend \$470,153 for this school year, exceeding well beyond the parish's budget, Father Gonyo stated in the letter.

"In closing, I must share with you that it is a particular source of sadness for me, and I know for many others, that despite the generosity and good efforts of so many in the St. Kateri School community, the school cannot continue," Father Gonyo wrote to parents on Friday.

Community reacts to St. Kateri School closure

Many in the St. Kateri and Irondequoit communities have taken to social media to express their frustrations and sadness following the news of the school's closure.

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"I have been a part of this school a decade this year! My 3rd grader will now be faced with separating from her beautiful school, the friends and teachers she has grown up with, and loves very much, and the amazing community we have surrounding this one of a kind school," Terra Waddington Rivera wrote on Facebook. "We are deeply saddened, and angry." "Great school. Great people. Big loss," Kim Smith said on Facebook.

"This is heartbreaking!! 2 of my grandchildren go there and they are flourishing and love it!!," Debbie Letta Clementi wrote on Facebook.

Though many in the St. Kateri community were saddened to learn the news, Father Gonyo said the school will make every effort to provide the best possible environment for students and staff in the remaining months of the school year. This includes:

- Ensuring students are welcomed at another Catholic school within the Diocesan Catholic School System, like St. Ambrose Academy in Irondequoit, St. Rita School in Webster, Holy Cross School in Charlotte and St. Lawrence School in Greece. All of which will have registration opportunities in the new year, Father Gonyo said.
- The school will assist St. Kateri School faculty with human resources support and possible placement at a nearby Catholic School.
- And welcome students from St. Kateri to join the parish's Religious Education program, "to ensure their ongoing quality formation and education in the faith and sacramental instruction," Father Gonyo wrote.

St. Kateri School, which opened as Christ the King School in January 1957, currently has 24 members of faculty and staff listed on its website. The school will be set to close down in June 2025.

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— *Madison Scott is a journalist with the Democrat and Chronicle who edited our Weld Street Project and also did reporting for it. She has an interest in how the system helps or doesn't help families with missing loved ones. She can be reached at MDScott@gannett.com.*

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