



September 17, 2025

Dearest Sacred Heart Community,

We will very likely be hosting a brand-new Catholic high school at Sacred Heart starting in Fall 2026. This is exciting news, but I want to be transparent about the impacts it will have on our community.

Background

As you may have seen in our bulletins, we are deep into the process of creating a Catholic High School that can serve Skagit and Whatcom Counties. Over the last two years¹, a dedicated group of volunteers has formed a Steering Committee to oversee the work and make crucial decisions. On Sept. 02, that Committee made the final determination that Sacred Heart's Parish Hall should be the start-up location for this high school. For more information on this decision, you can visit <https://ndhighschool.org/>, the High School project's website.

I had proposed Sacred Heart to the Steering Committee as a potential location almost a year ago. I have tried to speak with as many parishioners as I could about this possibility, including an early conversation with the Pastoral Council and some recent discussion at our Mass Times Town Halls. Sacred Heart parishioners (viz. Bridget Rauvola, Molly Belvo, Jamie Twining, Andy Remien, Molli Janicki, Katie White) have been integral to our Steering Committee and subcommittees. And at every step, I have only heard excitement and openness to using Sacred Heart's Parish Hall for this purpose. Nevertheless, I am aware that I never held a formal Town Hall on the topic, so there might be perspectives that I did not receive. If you have concerns, please do get in touch with me.

Caveats

There are some caveats that I want to be clear about:

1. The high school does not yet have official approval from the Archdiocese. We have to make all of our crucial decisions, including initial location, before we can apply for the final green light from the Archbishop. **If** the high school is approved, then it will be at Sacred Heart.
2. We still need to work with the City of Bellingham and our neighbors. It is unclear whether this will trigger a change of occupancy review and what permitting or community engagement that will require of us. This is already in process.
3. The unexpected can always occur, especially with start-up ventures and in 65-year-old buildings. We are still exploring alternative locations in case our desire to use the Sacred Heart Parish Hall for a high school does not pan out.
4. This is a temporary location. The goal is to move the high school to a more permanent campus within 10 years.

¹ <https://ndhighschool.org/timeline/>

Effects on the Sacred Heart Community

This decision was made because the Steering Committee thought it was best for the sustainability and growth of the high school, not out of any partisanship for Whatcom County or Sacred Heart. Nevertheless, it is really exciting for our community to be able to host this high school in its early years. I know many of us are looking forward to having these Catholic school students, parents, and educators as a constant presence in our church and on our campus over the coming decade.

Part of being good hosts, however, means making space for the high school to be a high school. In other words, it is essential that faculty and students feel ownership over their space – to decorate, to rearrange, to use for new initiatives. This means that the parish hall needs to become **a high school building, sometimes used by the parish**, rather than a parish building sometimes used by the high school. This would make it very similar to the way in which the Assumption parish community uses the different spaces and meeting rooms in Assumption Catholic School.

We are still working out the memorandum of understanding with the high school, but I foresee the following being the most likely effects on the Sacred Heart community:

1. The Parish Hall will be available for parish activities on evenings and weekends, but not before 5:00 pm on weekdays. For groups that want to meet during the week, we might start to use the Winter Chapel in the church building.
2. Ellie Spring and Kim Walker will need to move their offices to the Assumption office building. Beginning last month, Kim was already responsible for the faith formation programs at both Sacred Heart and Assumption, so she had already developed strategies to be present to both communities. Ellie and I are actively developing ideas to keep her present and engaged with Sacred Heart parishioners, so that she can continue to be the go-to person for all things Sacred Heart.

This is a new adventure for all of us, so thank you for your patience as we figure it out together. If you have questions or concerns, please reach out to me (frmoore@whatcomcatholic.org) or Andy Remien, the high school's Director of Implementation (andy@assumption.org).

May the Lord bless you and your families,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Fr. Moore". The script is cursive and elegant, with the "F" and "M" being particularly prominent.