



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph's Mission & Charism Changing: Sponsorship of Immaculata Academy to End

Hamburg, NY – The Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph (FSSJ) announced today that the order's mission and charism would need to be expressed in new and different ministries as the order responds to the realities of diminishing numbers and an aging population. As a result, the FSSJ will be concluding its 88-year-old sponsorship of Immaculata Academy.

In a letter to the parents of current students, Sister Ann Marie Hudzina, General Minister of the FSSJ stated that, "For the past 88 years, Immaculata Academy has concretely expressed the FSSJ mission and charism. In turn the congregation has supported the school by providing for its mission and charism, providing personnel, and providing financial resources. Due to the changing realities within the congregation, furthering the FSSJ mission and charism via a school is no longer viable."

After lengthy meetings with the school's Board of Trustees, numerous ideas were explored and discussed regarding the future of the school. The Board concluded, however, that in light of the FSSJ's current realities, the conclusion of their sponsorship, declining enrollment, and discouraging demographic data, the school's current academic model is no longer sustainable and that the school will close at the end of the school year in 2016.

"This is a truly difficult decision and one that has followed much prayerful discernment," said Sister Jean Cherry, president of Immaculata Academy. "For 88 years, we have ministered to thousands of young women and have watched them become instruments of positive change – they are doctors, teachers, judges, mothers, and women religious – and for that we are truly thankful."

Approximately 60 years ago, there were more than 500 Sisters in the FSSJ congregation. Today, only 60 Sisters remain with a median age of 80. In 1954, with an enrollment of 292, Immaculata employed 14 Sisters from the FSSJ in teaching and administrative roles. Today, enrollment stands at 180 students and just one Sister remains on staff – Sister Jean Cherry, who serves as Immaculata's Assistant Principal in addition to her role as President.

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“In spite of our heavy hearts, the IA community must now come together to help the young women to whom we currently minister continue to grow and settle into a new school where they can enjoy an enriching high school experience,” Sister Cherry added.

The decision was made to close the school this year in order to minimize the impact on students and their families, and to maximize available resources for both financial aid and scholarships to follow students to other Catholic Schools, and for severance packages for faculty and staff.

Approximately 45 full and part-time faculty and staff will be displaced by the closure of the school. “We are currently working with the Board of Trustees and the FSSJ to do everything we can to assist these talented and dedicated professionals during this very difficult time,” said School Principal, Jill Monaco.

Although the school has been able to operate within budget, financial pressures have continued to mount. In addition to financial support the congregation has provided since the school’s founding, the FSSJ have provided more than \$7 million in subsidies to the school over a recent 13 year period to try and stabilize the school’s financial footing. A recent capital campaign has provided disappointing results.

“We were faced with the same difficult questions that all too many institutions like Immaculata have been faced with in recent years,” said Patti Michalek, chairperson of the Immaculata Academy Board of Trustees. “In the end, we determined that the conclusion of the Sisters’ ministry, combined with enormous financial challenges, would make it no longer possible to provide a quality, effective academic experience for the young women in our community.”

The FSSJ have arranged for counselors to be on-site at the school to help the students process the news on Monday. Counseling will also be made available to faculty and staff. The school plans to reach out to admissions representatives from other schools to help students plan for, and transition to new schools.

Plans for the school facility and grounds have not been established. Located at 5138 South Park Ave. in the Town of Hamburg, Immaculata has provided an all-girls Catholic high-school education since 1928.

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EDITOR’S NOTE:

- Immaculata Academy representatives, Sister Ann Marie Hudzina, FSSJ General Minister and Jill Monaco, School Principal will be available for media interviews on **Saturday February 27 between 10:00am and Noon.**
- Interviews will take place in the Library of the Mother House of The Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph located at **5229 South Park Ave, Hamburg, NY 14075.**
- Representatives will not be making formal remarks. There will be no media access to the school campus.