

St. Joseph High School
4132 Page Boulevard
St. Louis, Missouri
February 17, 1942

Rev. Alfred G. Thomson
St. John's Church
16th and Chestnut Streets
St. Louis, Missouri

Dear Father,

Father Marren called last Tuesday to say that there were some statements on the report given you that were rather confusing and that from now on all of our money was to be turned into the office each month, all bills to be paid from there, and all our needs requisitioned from there. Since that is your wish, I shall be glad to conform to it. However, in justice to ourselves and our project, may I say that since I have been sending in my statement and the check to cover our membership fees at the end of the year, I should like to finish out this year as I have been doing. Then next year I shall start out according to your wishes.

The Negro has never had a Catholic High School education before. He has never been trained to assume any obligation in this regard and, I feel, that remarkable progress has been made in this short time. The ideal set-up is a great distance from us yet, but comparing our beginning with the beginning of the diocesan girls' high school makes me feel that we are making rapid strides in spite of the statement of Father Marren to the janitor, when questioning him about how I might be using the telephone, that St. Joseph's was nothing but a drag on the diocese. Can the fact that money is being used to save souls be a "drag on the diocese"?

We have many needs--class books; some properties, small though they be; some social affairs and activities to carry on; an attempt at athletics to interest the boys we have and to entice other Catholic boys; that, we as teachers who are trying to do an efficient job feel are a necessity. Naturally all these require money, and by some activities, and donations in answer to requests made, I have been able thus far to satisfy our needs. Each closing day has found us with all these accounts taken care of. Just now they are not, and rather than turn our accounts over now, I should like very much to finish out this year and hand to you an account that has been settled.

It will be much easier to have this done at your office because Sister Anna Adelaide, who is our bookkeeper, and I have full programs each day, and all of this must be done after school hours. Sister teaches every period, as I am teaching five periods and trying to take care of the administration besides. Going into homes after school hours to look up absentees only to find families in need of food, fuel, and clothing is another one of our jo

Providing recreation for the adolescent boy and girl in a suitable environment is another, since the Negro has been entirely left out of the C. Y. C. program. Begging money to try to support a delinquent girl in a Catholic institution in order to keep her out of the State Reformatory, since the State of Missouri makes no provision for placing one out of the state, and since there is no Catholic institution of any kind in the state of Missouri for either the Negro boy or girl, is an odd job here and there. You might be interested to know that no Catholic chaplain is appointed for the detention home. A Catholic priest has not been in the home, the judge says, for ten years. That is right here in St. Louis--an institution for both white and black.

So you see our problem includes many activities the sisters and brothers in the other diocesan high schools do not even dream exist. At the end of the day, when teaching is over, the order for the cafeteria placed, the janitor's work supervised, this thing out of order taken care of, and that which needs repairing or adjusting seen to, the children in their proper activities, I can easily call it a full day. Some days have more than others. On Tuesday, 180 public school children come for instructions. They begin at nine o'clock and continue until three-thirty. It means doubling up and completely readjusting our whole program in order to accommodate them. Whenever the weather is the least bit cold we cannot use the second floor, because it is too cold. We have come to school in the morning to find cold radiators more than once. Certainly a building cold over Saturday and Sunday and without steam until eight o'clock Monday is hardly comfortable before noon of that day. Only today the second floor class rooms registered 52°, and the steam was shut off at 10:00 o'clock. After the Christmas holidays, we left the convent at 7:00 o'clock, in order to see that things were in order for the opening of school. The heat was not turned on, nor had it been since we left school, although I had called Sunday asking if it would be possible to have some steam on that day so that it might be more comfortable Monday morning. Because the janitor at St. Anne's was sick, it was not possible for us to have any heat. Finally, at 8:00 o'clock the steam began to come up, and although the first floor was comfortable, we were not able to use the second floor for two days. When I mentioned it once or twice to Father Sprenke, he said he was shooting all the steam over that was possible. Father Smith said it could be heated, but we are not going to fuss about it. We have to live over here and are trying to go on peaceably in spite of the many hardships.

Last year when we met to discuss plans for St. Joseph's with a group of priests, I petitioned you for a priest to be connected with the school. True, we have a religious instructor who devotes a whole day each week to us, but he is a religious priest and naturally does not feel that he can do much more than take care of the instructions. Neither is it possible for me to hold all cases until instruction day. Frequently, problems present themselves that could be taken care of much more effectively by a priest--a boy, for instance, reported by the doctor to have an active case of gonorrhoea. In several instances, in spite of the embarrassment and knowledge that I should not be

handling such cases, the immediate need was there and I could hardly tell the victim to sit down and stay put until the instructor would come in four days from then. Do not misunderstand. I am not complaining, but I see many places where we are making grave mistakes because of a lack of organization. However, it is better to go on as we are rather than have some one come in who is not sympathetic with the Negro and aware of his many short-comings. There are certainly some mighty unpleasant things being done to them by some of our intolerant clergy. Just a short time ago, Oscar Lancaster was told not to come back to confession at St. Matthew's, but to go to "his own" church. No wonder a woman coming to me apologized after she had stated her difficulties saying she did not know where to go because she had no carfare to go to St. Elizabeth's and to the other priests she would be "just another nigger." We are on the verge of a race riot, and since the Sikeston tragedy, the feeling has just been intensified. No one but the Catholic Church will be able to do a thing, and we have done so little for them.

We are getting favorable comments from all quarters on our 134 students. Now that there are four Catholic grade schools, our number will steadily increase and when we can graduate those who have been in a Catholic school for the twelve years, we'll have some fine leaders in the Negro race. Even those who came to us from the public school this year are so tamed now their mothers think we are wonder workers. So you see this little project you started four years ago, in spite of the grief it has cost you, has already done so much good, and compares so favorably with your many other works that you are in for a very hearty welcome when you meet good old St. Peter at the golden gate, who will smile graciously at you because you did not draw the color line.

I shall be glad to abide by whatever decision you make regarding our statement and accounts. Thank you.

Very sincerely yours,

When you meet good old St. Peter at the golden gate
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Thank you.

Very sincerely yours,

Sister Anna Joseph Boehman, (A.P.)