



ST. JOAN OF ARC  
CATHOLIC CHURCH

359 West Areba Avenue  
Hershey, PA 17033

Parish Office  
717-533-7168

Religious Ed. Office  
717-533-8578

School Office  
717-533-2854

*"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God, have faith also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places" (Jn 14:1-2a). And one of the dwelling places, this side of heaven, is in our back yard.*

A few weeks ago, we began construction on a fence here at St. Joan of Arc Church. This fence would enclose the back property where the children at the school have recess everyday; the property where our afterschool program allows for our children to play outside as they wait for their parents; the property where our sports teams practice and our festival plays out. I know that for many years, the topic of a fence for this area has risen to the surface at school board meetings and church board meetings, but nothing ever came of it, due to a fear that the community would be *up in arms*. Following the Newtown shooting, many people were reactionary as is common amidst such a tragedy. Immediately many people wanted bulletproof windows and doors, while others wanted no windows; no recess; some even suggested not taking the children to Mass during the week, which is really such an integral part of who we are as Catholics, that something would certainly be missing.

When I spoke to our parents, I assured them that "we cannot guarantee your child's safety." Now, you might have paused after reading such a statement, but it is an honest statement, and anyone who says he or she can guarantee it, are either delusional or misleading. We cannot guarantee their safety, but I promised to do what I could within my power to make them as safe as possible. This includes new security doors on the school, "Child safety" badges for all teachers, staff and volunteers, and a fence around the play area. This fence was originally part of the capital campaign, and the money for the fence was raised by the school, agreed on by church council as part of the capital campaign and unanimously by the school board. The minutes of both councils are regularly put on the website.

Having said this, the playground is a center of the community, and I thank God for that. We all want a place where we can play. But the only reason the playground is here, is because of the school. And the greatest treasures in this school, the children, are also the highest priority. The safety of the children trumps any other priorities on that back lot. We still want people to enjoy the park. We still want couples to walk through, and the young boy who shoots baskets for hours at a time (I hope he made the team somewhere!), the Frisbee throwers, the wonderful impromptu soccer games of twenty or thirty people that form from nowhere, and the numerous children who spend hours on the playground. To enter, it might just take a few more minutes to walk around to the gate. So the playground is open for all to enjoy, but will close at certain times as well.



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During school hours, the playground will be closed to outside access. And late evening hours, when we have experienced mischief in the past, those doors will be locked as well. We would ask anyone who uses the area to help care for it. The church bears the maintenance and cleanup, the supply of playground mulch and insurance for this area. And we do this so that the community can share in this valuable resource. I will apologize in advance if this has caused any unrest among our neighbors and parishioners, but anymore, between zoning and regulations and builders and weather, we were just so crunched with time and resources that we wanted to have it erected before the "Second Coming." Signs on the fence designating times, etc. will be forthcoming, but if you have any questions you can ask our school board members, or Parish representatives, or simply show up at our Parish Festival on June 19, 20, or 21<sup>st</sup>! You will see me there...I'll be by the fence in my overalls.

Rev. Michael W. Rothan

Pastor, St. Joan of Arc Church

