 MEDIA RELEASE

*Immediate Release*  
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**St. Joseph Catholic Academy Cathedral campus handles crisis without missing a beat**

The fire yesterday near the corner of 11th and Isadore happened just as lunch was finishing up for the students at Cathedral elementary school but thanks to the leadership of the campus and an emergency plan in place, children were safe, and parents were kept informed.

While it’s not ideal to consider the ‘what ifs’ that might happen to disrupt a school day, Dean Kent McEnaney, veteran teacher, was ready.

“Although the school building was not in immediate danger when the fire started, there was concern that the wind could change and blow smoke and embers our direction.,” he wrote in a note to his parents.

But that didn’t stop the staff from enacting the evacuation plan to move students to the gym down the street. Students that were in the church were instructed to stay there.

Fr. Stephen Hansen also responded by joining the children in the gym to pray the rosary to help calm any anxieties.

“Our mothers on Earth have the gift of giving us calm and peace and so do the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary on our behalf,” Hansen said. “We all know the power of the prayers of children are especially strong and when we prayed the decade of the rosary, the intention was the safety of the firefighters and all the first responders.”

As the final bell for the day grew near, it was decided that it would be safer to dismiss the students from the Academy’s other campus, St. Gianna, that is just a block further south.

"The area was full of strangers and emergency personnel which, in our opinion, posed an unsafe situation for our students,” McEnaney explained.

The staff at the St. Gianna Center welcomed the students and everyone was able to connect with little to no delay.

Parents were kept informed through a mass text messaging system that allowed quick updates and to assure parents their children were safe. It also asked them to avoid the area.

“We advised that parents should not come to the school at that time in order to ensure that we did not get in the way of the emergency personnel who were still arriving,” McEnaney said.

“The safety of the children was always our first and foremost concern,” he added.

According to Head of School Catherine Neumayr, before the start of school, the safety plans developed with the help of the police and fire departments contributed to the success of the situation.

“The teachers and staff did a great job of keeping the children safe and the children did their part by paying attention, following directions, and remaining calm,” McEnaney said. “We are thankful for the efforts of the fire department, who arrived promptly and worked diligently to save the houses in the area.”