

## **New school aims to educate south metro Catholics**

Dave Hrbacek | November 5, 2018

A new high school set to open in Burnsville in the fall of 2019 hopes to serve Catholic families in the south metro of the Twin Cities. Local Catholic business leader Tom Bengtson, who helped launch Chesterton Academy in 2008, and retired NFL player and former Minnesota Viking Matt Birk are teaming up to open Unity High School at Mary, Mother of the Church in Burnsville.

The school will use existing classrooms at the church, and will begin with ninth grade in the fall, adding one grade per year until it reaches 12th grade. Bengtson said a Catholic high school was needed in this part of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. Archbishop Bernard Hebda has approved the beginning of a three-phase process to determine whether the school would gain official recognition as a Catholic high school in the archdiocese. If that happens, the name would change to Unity Catholic High School.

“I have known forever that the south metro — in other words ... below the Minnesota River — has not had a high school, and yet it’s an area of booming population,” said Bengtson, 57, who graduated from the Academy of Holy Angels in Richfield in 1979. “You’ve got lots of Catholic families down there, you have 10 Catholic grade schools down there, and yet there are no Catholic high schools.”

Bengtson estimates there are as many as 70,000 Catholic high school students in the archdiocese, and he said about 7,300 of them attend Catholic high schools per year. He said there is room for another Catholic high school without threatening enrollment at the existing ones. The closest Catholic high school to Mary, Mother of the Church is Academy of Holy Angels, just under 9 miles away. The site is slightly more than 9 miles from Convent of the Visitation and St. Thomas Academy in Mendota Heights.

The school will provide an emphasis on Catholic teaching and virtue. The founders chose the name “Unity” because they believe all local Catholic schools should work together.

The school will offer weekly “real world Wednesdays,” in which students will learn life skills like changing the oil in a car and working on a personal budget. An open house will be 6:45 p.m. Nov. 27 at Mary, Mother of the Church.

*For more information about the school, visit [unityhighschoolmn.com](http://unityhighschoolmn.com).*