



CATHOLIC INDIAN MISSION

Standing Rock Indian Reservation

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My name is Monsignor Chad Gion. I am the pastor of the Catholic Indian Mission in Fort Yates, ND. I also oversee Saint Bernard Mission School, an element of the Mission.

Saint Bernard Mission School has served the families of Fort Yates since 1910. It was established at the request of members of the tribal community who sought an alternative to the federally operated boarding school system in Fort Yates. The request sprang from a two-fold desire: 1. That children would receive a quality education, and 2. That they would return to their homes and families at the end of each school day. The Catholic Indian Mission, itself established in the 1880's, stepped up and met the need. For over 112 years, Saint Bernard Mission School has accomplished the work of educating and forming young people in Fort Yates. Since its establishment, high school graduation rates of former Saint Bernard students have exceeded those of the public school system.

Saint Bernard continues to exist solely through the generosity of people of all faiths, all ethnicities, and all economic circumstances from across the United States. While we occasionally receive support in the form of a significant bequeathal or major donation, these are rare. The vast majority of our donations come in the form of checks for \$5-\$100 from good people of limited means who desire to see our students flourish.

While I do not know the detail of our families' financial situations, I can confidently say that none of our families are able to afford the full cost of educating their children. For most, even a fraction of that cost would be a significant hardship. The purpose of tuition at Saint Bernard is not to add to the school income but to provide a sense of "buy-in" on the part of families.

HB 1532 would ensure costs to families remain low while providing reimbursement to Saint Bernard that will significantly aid the school in its work serving the families of our community. For a small school of limited means, passage of this bill will allow us to look at ways to expand our services to students.

Simply put, HB 1532 would be a significant aid to the work we do at Saint Bernard. Please vote PASS.

Respectfully,

Msgr. Chad Gion