

Father Landry & devoted Sacred Heart parents, teachers, and staff

First priority for this meeting is to make it clear from my perspective that it is not about a question of support for Sacred Heart School. The school is an extremely positive asset to our community and even the neighboring communities as far away as Laurel, where an entire group leaves to attend Sacred Heart because of the quality of education and the environment provided for students, teachers, and parents.

Yesterday I met a proud and committed Sacred Heart parent at their Seafood Jamboree who told me that the top five students in academic achievement in the state of Mississippi attended Sacred Heart. By chance, this parent happens to be African American, many in our community might be surprised to know that Sacred Heart was the first school in our city to racially integrate. No one had to tell them that it was the right thing to do.

All of that having been said, the hearing today is about a part of the building housed by Sacred Heart High School a building that once was home to First Baptist Church.

There were many in our community who were very upset when that congregation decided to relocate. Many are upset currently about the idea of removing the church steeple. As someone stated to me recently "it is part of the skyline of Hattiesburg".

This is also not about a question of religion from my perspective, as I see us each a part of one body. I want to share a personal experience with you. In 2015, I was walking toward Hardy Street on Adeline, and as I got to 3rd Avenue, I looked up to see an incredibly beautiful sunrise; and what made it such an all inspiring experience was the juxtaposition of the steeple against the colors which with the skies were painted. It was absolutely magnificent. So, when the issue of removing the steeple came up, I went to the Dog Park on West Pine Street, and I watched the sun rise again – it was the steeple that caused me to stare with wonder.

My hope is that a solution can be found that preserves this vision in some way, that respects the burden financially to make repairs, and the visual aesthetics that can preserve the integrity of a priceless visual icon.

One suggestion would be a "Save the Steeple" campaign to raise necessary funds to make repairs with a plan for appropriate, even if new, and different materials, and a specific time frame during which to accomplish the task.