



## **Saint Albert announces cooperative agreement with Heartland Christian**

COUNCIL BLUFFS- Saint Albert Catholic Schools is pleased to announce it has reached an agreement with Heartland Christian School in Council Bluffs that will allow its athletes to join the Falcons' and Saintes' high school programs.

The cooperative agreement is not expected to affect volleyball, girls or boys basketball, or girls or boys track, as Heartland Christian plans to continue to field teams in those sports. Under the new agreement, HC students would have the opportunity to join teams in the other sports Saint Albert offers.

Heartland Christian initiated the conversation with Saint Albert, seeking more opportunities for its athletes.

"Saint Albert's athletic department is second to none in this area," Heartland Christian Executive Director and Activities Director Larry Gray said. "To us, with the size of the school and the Catholic background – which for us is a biblical background – it was a no-brainer. For us, it's just thrilling to be able to say that the sports we don't offer they can get at Saint Albert, knowing you're getting the best in the area."

The agreement will be open for discussion from sport to sport, and from season to season. If at any time Saint Albert becomes uncomfortable with the arrangement in one or more programs, it has the authority to end it.

"I think this agreement is a positive step toward building a relationship with another faith-based institution," said Deacon Vernon Dobelmann, Saint Albert's Executive Director. "This cooperative agreement enhances the outreach of Saint Albert Catholic Schools to the community in a profound way. The end result is a win-win for both institutions."

Saint Albert will retain its full identity, continuing to be known as such and maintaining the nicknames of its tradition-rich athletic teams, the Falcons for the boys and Saintes for the girls. Periodically, an effort will be made to recognize the Heartland Christian athletes on its roster.

Saint Albert coaches will remain in charge of their programs. HC athletes will sign the same activities contract that Saint Albert athletes sign and will be held to the same high expectations.

"We have certain standards for our kids," Gray said. "I feel we're like-minded, when it comes to how we want our kids educated. It's the level of trust that we've had with Saint Albert, but it's also the quality of athletics they've offered for years."



Athletic Director Ken Schreiber believes the Saint Albert coaches and parents have the character and leadership necessary to make the transition as smooth as possible.

"I feel the Saint Albert coaches and community will welcome the Heartland Christian athletes to our sports programs," he said.

The addition of Heartland Christian's enrollment numbers are not expected to warrant a rise in class in many, if any, of Saint Albert's varsity programs. In the Basic Education Data Survey (BEDs) numbers used for the 2019-20 school year, Heartland Christian ranked 355<sup>th</sup> out of Iowa's 364 high schools with 36 students in grades 9, 10 and 11.

Members of Saint Albert's leadership team made a presentation to the Council Bluffs Area Catholic Board of Education at its October meeting, detailing the benefits of the arrangement, and it passed by a unanimous vote. Gray said the board vote was also unanimous at Heartland Christian.

Deacon Dobelmann said the opportunity to help a neighbor made it a logical and appropriate decision. Few schools its size field as many varsity athletic programs as Saint Albert.

"While this partnership provides student athletes from Heartland Christian a place to compete, it also gives Saint Albert student-athletes a chance to learn teamwork on a wider level," he said.

Saint Albert Catholic Schools currently enrolls approximately 700 students in grades PreK-4 through seniors. The Sheryl K. Johnson Child Care Center is currently enrolling approximately 70 children from ages six weeks to age four.