

## Parish School Board . . . a Growing Trend

Possibly a Universally Accepted Part of Future Education Systems.

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The Parish School Board represents a relatively recent innovation in Catholic education. Virtually non-existent a decade ago, this emerging aspect of Catholic education is finding increasing acceptance today.

Although still in the "thought stage" or "on the drawing board" in many areas, numerous diocesan school systems are witnessing a growing interest in both the consideration and implementation of parish school boards. It can be anticipated that this trend will continue for some time. And it is conceivable that the parish school board will some day be a universally accepted part of the Catholic educational structure.

For example, the first parish school board in our diocese was constituted about four years ago and now 49 of 97 schools have, or are in the process of forming, parish school boards.

Few can argue with either the idea or the wisdom of the school board concept relative to a school, be it parochial or public. All schools essentially serve a "public." To the extent that a school's service is discharged (that is "educating" children), support by the school's "public" will be forthcoming in both its financial and affective (moral) forms.

But the school's obligation in a modern and changing society extends beyond just teaching students; schools must additionally accommodate and incorporate the needs of their "public" into the formulation and reformulation of their programs. That the goals and directions of education are the concern of more than educators (teachers and principals) is fundamental to any kind of school in a democratic society.

In that the parish school board is a very recent addition to the Catholic education structure, problems in implementation and operation may be compounded. Not only are such boards subject to the "bandwagon" syndrome but also to hasty implementation, vague role definition, and implementation according to inappropriate "board" models.

More specifically, in incorporating a new order of things in Catholic education, the tendency for Catholic schools to have parish school boards simply because



a neighboring school has one, will be (and already is) seen.

Finally, there is a real danger that since this is a "new" kind of board (that is, one without a clear functional precedent) it will be modeled after the public school board, the college board of trustees, or some similar type of directing body. In any event, the relevance of any such model for the parish school board must be clearly established before the model is used as a prototype, if it is to serve a viable purpose. Otherwise a "monster" may be created. Dangers such as these are inevitable when new mechanisms are introduced and their adoption tends to become "faddish" or "the thing to do."

In one parish a school board was established and began its operation. Shortly thereafter it was observed by a number of interested parishioners that there was a good deal of confusion regarding the admittance criteria used in accepting children for the school.

Somewhat different criteria were established and communicated simultaneously to the parishioners by the school board and by the pastor. In an effort to clarify the situation, an "amended" policy was formulated by the board and pastor working together.

The end result was, nonetheless, continued confusion over the three sets of entrance criteria, and even more disturbing, a number of parishioners began challenging and openly questioning the nature of the entrance standards. Resolution of the problem took considerable time and energy on the part of the pastor and the members of the school board.

any such board might best be determined, established and modified at the individual parish level.

Thus, unlike public school boards which have a prescribed function (role) emanating from the state governmental structure, the parochial school board is free to operate in terms of the particular or unique needs and desires of the school and parish it serves.

This is not to say, however, that there is not some general consensus on the basic rationale underlying the parish school board movement.

Parish school boards basically provide the Catholic school's "public," that is, parishioners and other interested people, with an opportunity to have a voice in the affairs of their school.

The voice of the laity in the dialogue about the direction of their schools should serve well to ensure that school programs meet the needs of the student population and the ultimate needs of Catholic youth for societal life. It is recognized that the financial dimension of the Catholic school is circumscribed by broader Church and parish considerations and that teaching is (and rightfully should be) the province of educators. School goals and directions are not necessarily so bounded. The parish board offers an effective way for "bridging the gap" between a Catholic school and its "public."

The parish school board can also provide invaluable assistance to the Sister-principal and

pastor in guiding the operation of the school. Matters of policy such as admission standards, the school's plan for reporting pupil progress, matters on student dress, etc., can be established and reviewed by the board. School budget policy can likewise be pursued by the parish school board. In this regard, not only can the board help in determining the priority and relative importance of expenditures for the school, but also in this time of financial crisis for many Catholic schools the board can devise strategy and procedures for enhancing and improving the fiscal resources available to their school.

To the extent that school board activity can effectively assist and deal with such matters of policy, Catholic educators are freed to devote time and energy to fulfilling their basic role: working with and educating children.

As the board reviews policy or seeks to determine priorities, committees of the board, augmented by parishioners, can explore in depth the problems confronting their school.

On the matters of crucial significance to the parish and all parishioners, the board can bring these matters to the parish at large in order to assess their feelings and preferences.

Although the foregoing indicates the consensus regarding what the parish school board's role is, it is sufficiently vague as to allow possibly too much room for interpretation. It might be helpful to clarify the role of the

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the Centenary of our Diocese  
we are grateful  
for the blessings  
that God has bestowed on us  
and on our forefathers

The Parishes of Wayne County

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St. Anne, Palmyra

St. Michael, Newark

St. Michael, Lyons

St. John The Evangelist, Clyde

St. Patrick, Savannah

St. Mary Magdalen, Wolcott

Church of the Epiphany, Sodus

Church of St. Rose, Sodus Point

St. Gregory, Marlon

St. Mary of the Lake, Ontario

Redemptorist Fathers  
and School Sisters  
of Notre Dame  
St. Joseph's Church

Thank You,  
Lord, for the  
Many Blessings

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