

School Closings No Idle Threat

By WILLIAM A. RYAN
(NC News Service)

Washington — Catholic school officials have made plain in a variety of ways they're not kidding when they warn that financial problems may force a widespread shut-down of the nation's parochial schools.

There was a time not too long ago when this was seen in some quarters as an idle boast, aimed at scaring up some extra money for a school system that was essentially solvent. But no longer.

A significant number of

state legislators and public school officials have recently shown they take the threat seriously, and have little stomach for the prospect of the nation's public school systems swamped by hordes of former Catholic school students.

Take Illinois, for example. A recent survey taken among Catholic school superintendents in the six dioceses of the state found financial problems have forced the closing of nearly 30 elementary schools and two high schools during the past three years.

The Illinois Auditor of Pub-

lic Accounts, Michael J. Howlett, specifically endorsed the giving of financial aid to parents and students for use in paying educational costs — in nonpublic schools.

Most recently, J. Theodore Meyer, a Republican from the south side of Chicago, filed a bill in the state legislature which asks that local non-public school parents and teachers receive the same amount of money currently being appropriated by the state to individual public school districts for their students.

Then there's Missouri. The state's Catholic bishops greet-

ed the new year with a soft-spoken but clear warning that Catholic schools can't go on much longer without help from the state. "The effect of a widespread cutback in education on the part of private agencies is apparent," the bishops said, but they spelled it out anyway. "As the contribution of the private agency is lost, tax money would be consumed in accepting transfers; public school programs would be crippled; tax moneys for other needs in health and welfare would not be available."

No sooner was the statement out than the Catholic

school board of the Kansas City-St. Joseph diocese took it literally. The board voted to shut down all diocesan schools by Sept. 1 unless the state came forth with 50% of their funding.

Bishop Charles H. Helmsing declined to endorse the dramatic gesture, but only after saying that the public wasn't quite ready for such drastic action. He thanked the board, told them to keep fighting for state funds, and announced that Catholic schools would maintain some lease on life at a reduced level recommended in a pastoral planning survey.

Officials Becoming Aware of Problem

From Courier-Journal Services

WISCONSIN:

The growing fiscal problems of private schools are causing financial problems for the state as well, declared Gov. Warren P. Knowles.

The Wisconsin chief executive made this appraisal at a news conference in which he named the head of a special task force on education.

Gov. Knowles noted that about 30,000 parochial school students a year are being transferred into public schools at the present time because of closing classroom doors in private education in the state.

A \$20 million school aids deficit for assistance to public schools now facing the state at the end of the current fiscal year has been caused in large part because of the accelerating transfer of private school students to public schools, the governor claimed.

NEW HAMPSHIRE:

Strong legislative support has been given to a state Senate bill which would establish a Parochial School Study Commission to deal with financial problems now confronting Catholic schools in New Hampshire.

At a joint meeting of the Senate and House Education Committees here, Republican and Democratic legislative leaders joined with religious and lay educators in warning of an impending financial crisis unless some state aid is provided for non-public schools.

Under Senate Bill 29, a 15-member commission would study the question of whether the state can assist parochial schools—the number of parochial schools in danger of closing, the impact of parochial school closings on the public school system, and ways and means by which the state may help communities prepare for such an eventuality.

ILLINOIS:

The Illinois federation of Citizens for Educational Freedom (CEF) is endorsing tuition grants of \$50 for parents or guardians of nonpublic school students in grade schools, and \$100 for those with students in nonpublic high schools.

A bill requesting tuition grants from the state is expected to be filed in the Illinois legislature within weeks, according to a CEF spokesman. No such bill has yet been introduced.

MICHIGAN:

A bill to provide property tax credits to parents of children attending nonpublic schools has been introduced in the Michigan legislature.

The bill would exempt parents from school taxes in an amount equal to the tuition they pay to nonpublic schools.

Rep. Stephen Stopczynski, the principal sponsor, said the bill would give parents of nonpublic school children about \$30 million in tax relief annually.

MONTANA:

Two bills have been introduced in the Montana legislature to provide "purchase of service" aid, covering pay of teachers teaching secular subjects, and textbook loans to pupils in non-public schools.

Supporters of such legislation state that non-public schools may be forced to close unless financial help is forthcoming and that the expense to the taxpayer would be much greater if communities had to absorb pupils from private and parochial schools.

The Montana Association of Non-public Schools, representing primarily Lutheran and Catholic schools in the state, is seeking \$3 million in state aid. This is believed to be the current deficit under which the schools are operating.



Parochial school is very much in the news these days. Financial problems are piling up and campaigns have begun in several states in efforts to obtain varying types of "state aid" for parochial and private schools. Adding to the problem has been the sharp drop in the number of priests, Brothers and Sisters available to teach in Catholic schools. (RNS)

Students' Unique Idea

New Lenox, Ill.—(NC)—Some 500 pupils at Providence Catholic high school here have raised more than \$38,000 in cash and pledges in a drive to keep their school from being closed.

Contributions from persons impressed by the students' determination have come from throughout the country, and are still coming in.

The Joliet diocesan board of education had recommended that Providence High be closed because of financial problems and shortage of teachers. The school's board of directors concurred. But this was before the students—and their parents—went to work. Their efforts seem to have paid off.

Bishop Romeo Blanchette of Joliet recently announced that Providence, along with nine other Catholic high schools in the diocese, will remain open next year.

"I decided that the pastoral aspects were such as to swing the balance, and the financial problem and lack of personnel could be solved if put to the challenge of the people," the bishop said, commenting on his decision to keep school open on a tentative three-to-five-year plan. The bishop stressed that his promise was made conditionally, depending on continued enrollment and the availability of Religious teaching personnel.

More Victims

Milwaukee Closing Eleven Schools

Milwaukee — (RNS)—The Milwaukee Catholic archdiocese expects to close 11 schools with a total enrollment of about 9,000 pupils at the end of this school year, Father Harold J. Ide, assistant superintendent of education, announced.

In Wisconsin last year, an unexpected 16,000 pupils from private schools—mainly Catholic—transferred to public schools. The transfer played a large part in a public schools "budget deficit" of more than \$20 million.

The State Department of Public Instruction has predicted that 29,000 more private school pupils will transfer to public schools in 1969 and 1970.

Baltimore Cuts School Subsidies

Baltimore — (NC)—With reluctance, the Baltimore Catholic school superintendent explained that "realism and justice" will force the archdiocese to decrease its present \$900,000 annual subsidy to five high schools.

But it will continue to finance building and major maintenance costs in the schools affected.

The present subsidy, to be granted for the last time next year, will be replaced in

three years by an annual payment of \$250,000 in scholarships to needy students. The new fund will represent a \$200,000 increase over the present \$50,000 scholarship fund.

In some schools, the tuition will go from \$300 to \$600 for incoming freshmen. Other school tuitions will only increase by as little as \$75.

9 Parish Schools To Be Shut Down

St. Cloud, Minn.—(NC)—The St. Cloud diocesan board of education announced the closing of nine parish schools, the combining of two others, and the dropping of grades in several schools, as the first phase of a program to consolidate the school program in the diocese.

In other actions, the board gave preliminary approval for a total evaluation of the parochial school system in city of St. Cloud and immediate area. The study will be made as soon as possible, and its proposals will be submitted to the diocesan board for action. But it is not expected that any major decisions will be announced before next year.

Father David J. Rieder, diocesan superintendent of schools, said the scarcity of teaching Sisters was a major factor in the school consolidations.

School Agnosticism Hit by Romney

Lansing, Mich.—(RNS)—A spiritual rebirth, especially in the public schools, was called for by former Gov. George Romney, newly appointed secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, during a farewell testimonial dinner here.

Departing from his text, Gov. Romney, veteran Mormon leader, lashed out at what he called "the neutral agnosticism in our public school system. The greatest need in this country today is for a spiritual rebirth and a greater faith in our Creator," he said, 1,000 persons attending the testimonial.

Shortly before his departure to Washington, Romney had suggested that church-related schools get out of "secular education."

Manhattan Has 'New' Department

New York — (RNS)—Manhattan College will change the name of its Theology Department to the Department of Religious Studies, Brother Gregory Nugent, F.S.C., president, announced here.

Brother Luke Salm, F.S.C., head of the department, noted that its policy has been to investigate and explain religious questions in an objective fashion.

"The name change," he said, "will convey this viewpoint more effectively and make it easier for the student entering Manhattan to understand why each curricular program includes a specified number of credits in religious studies."

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Bi

By FR. RICHARD

Bishop Sheen's living-room of a home on Hand Street's inner-city describing the air recently incorporated into Sheen Housing Foundation.

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Neighbors, restless and several priest-inarians, -crowding room sensed they ing—a momentou True, the setting of the cultured di-Bishop's office, shelves, objects a's sive desk. But th Church acting off charm and sympa

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