

Survey Shows Sisters Happy in Parish Teaching

A companion piece to the School and Society Survey which this Spring sought opinions of the laity on the future of the diocesan school system was an attitudinal survey of religious women who staff the diocesan schools.

Research done among their own members in 1969 and '70 by the Sisters of St. Joseph, the Sisters of Mercy and the School Sisters of Notre Dame, was released this week by the diocesan Schools' Office as a chapter in the continuing report on the present and future status of the school system.

The following is a summary of material entitled "The Religious: Her Role and Her Future," as prepared for the Educational Task Force by Sister Patricia Donovan, RSM, of the Schools' Office, who has been responsible for collating the statistics of the Survey.

A willingness to stay indefinitely in parochial school teaching was voted by the majority of Sisters in elementary schools of the Diocese in recent sur-

veys covering about 500 religious teachers of the three major religious communities.

Three-quarters of the Sisters said "yes" when asked "Would you choose to continue indefinitely in elementary schools, if you had the option to choose your apostolate?"

The latest chapter of the School Study called "The Donovan Report," states that this declaration "should in some measure arrest the fears of diocesan administrators and pastors about the willingness of substantial numbers of Sisters to serve in the parochial school apostolate."

Even more heartening, the report said, was an affirmative by 82 per cent of the Sisters that "teaching in the elementary school is the most effective use of the Sisters in the parish."

Yet, in the face of this strong support for the educational apostolate, Sisters are doing serious reassessment of the role of women religious in the

Church. Sixty-nine per cent of the Sister respondents disapproved the survey-proposal that Sisters should be withdrawn from all other works and brought into the elementary schools to strengthen the parochial system.

Awareness of the crisis of parish finances, declining enrollment and Sister - shortage has prepared the Sisters for the reorganization and change which may come in the parochial system, the survey showed.

Only 8 per cent of the respondents rejected the proposal of consolidation of schools in a limited area while 82 per cent approved the idea that Sisters should be withdrawn from some schools and reassigned to enlarge and strengthen the Sister-faculty of another school. The limited Sister-supply is stretched too thin, they hinted.

In testing the Sisters' attitudes about partial closing of schools some 63 percent agreed to closing grades 7 and 8, but less than 35 percent voted to

close grades 1-6 in favor of quality junior high education.

Since 1965 Sisters have been assigned to parish schools by "mathematical allocation" in which a computer analysis made a "just and equitable" distribution of religious teachers on a diocesan-wide basis. This helped parishes to keep some Sisters on the staff even as school enrollment declined. It also saved the expense of hiring that number of lay teachers.

But, the Report stated, the steady decline of Sisters until they were less than one-half of each parish school faculty caused a "dilution of the influence and the impact of the religious on each of the elementary schools."

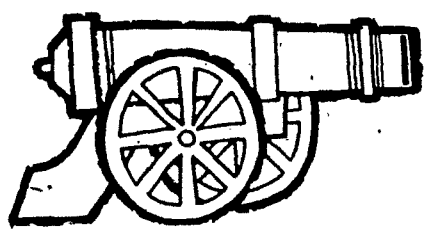
This resulted in a weakening of the Christian atmosphere in the schools, the removal of pupils by parents who were disappointed that the Sisters were gone, a negative effect on the community life in that convent and an impediment to recruiting vocations in that parish.

Sisters generally agree, the report stated, that the parochial school faculty should be 75-80 percent Sisters. This ratio can only be achieved if the allocation system is abandoned in the diocese and some parishes give up all their nuns to other schools.

A section of a Sisters of St. Joseph survey discovered that 30 percent of their community believed their apostolate of teaching was not "best embodied in the present school system." Asked to suggest new teaching fields some 200 respondents listed adult education, campus ministry, retarded children, inner city and CCD as deserving of more effort by the St. Joseph community.

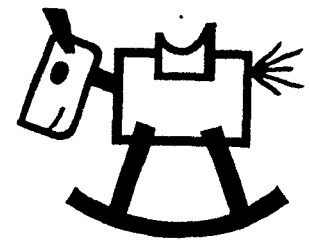
The report stated that the Sisters of St. Joseph and Sisters of Mercy presently have only 163 young Sisters "in formation—from 1 to 8 years in religious life," and less than 35 percent of these are aiming at elementary school teaching.

Because of a "principle of (Continued on Page 17A)



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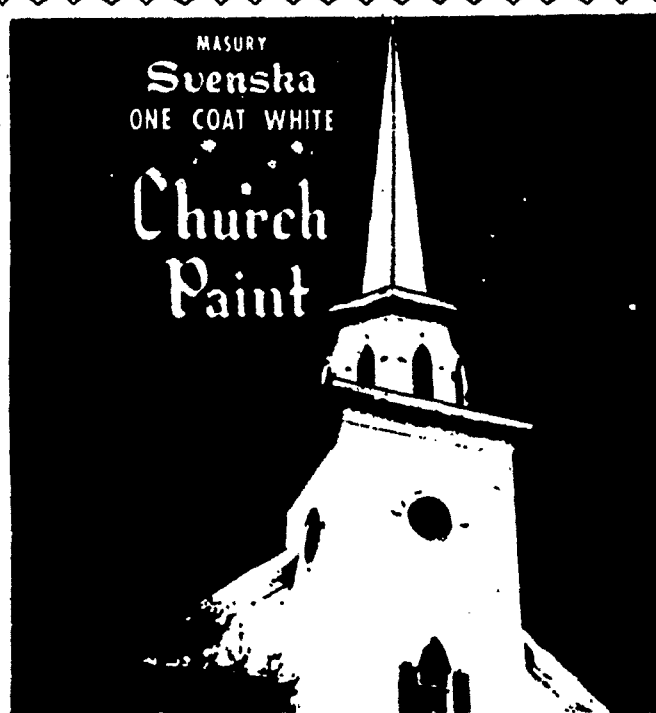
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