

Task Force Begins Work on School Guidelines

The Diocesan Educational Task Force must formulate advisory guidelines for the future of the parochial school system by Thanksgiving time, the 20-member board was told at its inaugural meeting last week.

Explaining four options of action which will dictate the future survival or closure of a large percentage of the 92 parish elementary schools in the diocese, Father Daniel Brent, Superintendent of Schools, asked the Task Force to give the diocese "criteria for deciding which option we shall pursue in the year ahead."

"Decisions about school closings for next year, made after the Task Force has studied all the facts we have and has met with coordinating committees from different parts of the diocese, must be made and announced by early winter," he said.

Bishop Hogan, welcoming the Task Force members and its educational advisors to their initial gathering at St. Thomas More School, called the group "the pro-tem Board of Education for the Diocese."

Their purpose, the Bishop said, is to "recommend action, to develop priority guidelines for the school system's problems, to advise on the use of religious teachers in the system, to set criteria for the closing of schools where necessary, to look to the welfare of all religious education in the diocese."

He stated that recommendations for action in the various sectors of the diocese will be made only after the Task Force has digested all the facts and has met with clergy and laity of those areas.

Basic statistical material to be examined include the Donovan Report, the Alzheimer-Clewell Report, the School and Society Survey, and other findings gathered by the Schools' Office and the religious communities on the state of parochial schools.

Members of the Task Force are:

Rev. Daniel Brent, chairman; John Herbert, Auburn; William J. Mc Donald, Geneva; Dr. Thomas R. Curran, Elmira; C. Norman Driscoll, Rochester; William S. Asher, Webster;

Robert J. Fien, Pittsford.

Also Sister Ruth Agnes Kesselring, SSJ., Sister M. Stephanie, SSND., Sister Ann Miller, RSM.

Also Msgr. William M. Roche, Ithaca; Rev. George C. Vogt, Henrietta; Rev. James J. Marvin, Wayland; Rev. David N. Gramke, Ithaca; and Rev. Joseph Gersitz, S.J., Rochester.

The diocesan education staff members are: Father Albert Shamon, Gerald Connor, Daniel Holland and Leon Hart, CSB.

Father Brent reported that the diocese faces three major realities: "a cost squeeze", caused by rising school expenses and uncertainty about state aid; "declining registration", caused by a "loss of loyalty" toward parochial schools; and crucial shortage of teaching Sisters, which affects the character of the school and the costs of the lay faculty.

In view of these trends there are only four options for the future, he explained. The Task Force will help the diocese make the choice and advise on the means of fulfilling it. They are:

a. - Keep a maxi-system of schools, serving the major proportion of the children of the diocese, between 38 and 40 per cent.

b. - Keep a mini-system, holding on to a selected half of the present parochial system, by consolidation, reassignment of religious, financial adjustments.

c. - Close the whole school system within the year.

d. - Permit survival of the wealthier schools, letting others gradually give up when their finances force them to close.

Both Father Brent and Father Daniel Holland, diocesan director of Religious Education-CCD, strongly reminded the Task Force that any cri-

teria for closing parish schools must include a "back-up program" for religious instruction.

"Planners of diocesan action have a responsibility to face the issue of guaranteeing the religious education of all children. We must be prepared to offer a viable option for the religious training of each child put out of the parochial school when it closes," Father Holland said.

"Designing that future will be as hard as decision-making on closing the schools."

The Task Force plans to meet every two weeks this Fall. Members were given folders of facts and figures on the schools' status to study before the next session in Geneva on Oct. 6.

New Directive On 1st Confession Issued by Diocese

Children shall make their First Confession by the end of the third or fourth grade, a full year or two after receiving First Communion, according to official directives given to priests of the diocese this week.

The first confession need not be prior to First Communion, the guidelines state, "since a very small child is incapable of serious sin."

The suggested time for First Communion is the end of second grade.

Traditionally, in the U.S., children received the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist together in the spring of second grade year. Judgment was that they had reached "the age of reason" by then, commonly scaled at 7 years of age. Preparation for both sacraments was given simultaneously.

In recent years many parishes have been allowing First Communion at the end of second grade and deferring the First Confession for another year or more. Divided opinion among priests and parents on the propriety of this schedule has kept the traditional method in use in some parishes.

The new guidelines, fully endorsed by Bishop Hogan, state that the time separation between the sacraments would emphasize the individual dignity of both and would also erase "the still prevalent notion that confession must precede the reception of the Eucharist."

Father Albert J. Shamon, Vicar for Education, presented the guidelines at diocesan clergy conferences at the Notre Dame Retreat House on Canandaigua Lake.

"The aim of Christian initiation," he said, "is to lead every child to participate fully, in proportion to his capacity, in the life of the Church. Under early formal instruction the child grows to an awareness of the reality and activity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in his life."

Only when this realization has "sufficiently matured", Father Shamon said, is a youngster to be allowed to approach the sacraments.

Parents will be responsible for deciding their child's readiness for First Confession and Communion, the guidelines state. "As the primary educators of their children, their decision must be respected."

"Before acting on this judgment, however, parents and child should consult one of

their parish priests in order to insure that this judgment is theologically informed."

Specific minimum requirements for First Communion are present, the guidelines stated, "when a child expresses a desire for the Eucharist and when he is able to distinguish it from ordinary bread." These minimums presume instruction by parents and other teachers on the doctrinal content of the sacrament.

Discussing the psychological and theological considerations behind the directives, Father Shamon explained the deferment of the child's confession: "Since an authentic Christian moral sense is one that develops in terms of a relationship with God, and since moral judgment needs guidance in the process of growth, time is needed to cultivate the virtue of penance before the Sacrament of Penance will fulfill its purpose in the child."

He suggested that priests, parents and religion teachers must reshape their children's instructions on sin and grace.

"Seeing sin as a mere bad action or quantity of evil which could be unloaded made confession resemble a laundromat more than a personal encounter with the forgiving Christ," he said.

This weakened the notion of inward conversion or change of heart which is essential for one's return to God.

"Since mortal sin is a reversal of one's basic stance toward God and since conversion is the re-alignment of that stance," the guidelines declare, "a child of seven or eight is psychologically incapable of the kind of intellectual deliberation necessary to commit a mortal sin."

Sin must be shown to children as "more than a private affair involving a certain quantity of evil or a list of actions." Mortal sin is rather, the guidelines declare, "the taking of a basic stance against God, an alienation or enmity with God, with neighbor, with self and with the world."

The Sacrament of Penance is not only a means of establishing a broken relationship strengthening an unbroken one. So the sacrament ought to be used frequently to keep our love relationship with God growing."

The guidelines gave pastoral directives for the celebration of First Communion, suggesting that every child receive the Eucharist first with his family and later in a group with all the members of his age class.



Mass Honors Mother Mary Bride on Retirement

Mother Mary Bride Claire, RSM, (kneeling front center) who retired as Sisters of Mercy superior general Aug. 31, was honored at Mass celebrated by Bishop Hogan in Motherhouse Chapel on Sept. 20. Sister Bride, who taught at Our Lady of Mercy High School for many years prior to being elected superior general in 1961, stepped down as head of the 413-member diocesan order because of poor health.

Diocesan School Enrollment Report Elementary Schools

Rochester	11648
Monroe County	12254
Cayuga County	1827
Livingston County	639
Steuben County	1178
Ontario County	1556
Chemung County	1697
Tompkins County	324
Wayne County	524
Tioga County	258
Yates County	89
Seneca County	597
Total:	32,582
1969 Total:	34,639

(Father Leon G. Hart, Associate Superintendent of Schools, noted: "The drop is much less than we thought — one half of the predicted drop. It probably is an indication of the effect of the Mandated Services Act.")

The act provides state money to diocesan schools for attendance records, examination records, and other state mandated services. Payments will come to diocesan schools in March and May of 1971.

Father Hart said, "We have more schools open than we would have been able if it hadn't been for that anticipated help."

High Schools

Rochester	2278
Monroe County	6009
Ontario County	444
Chemung County	596
Total:	9,372
1969 Total:	10,101

(Father Hart said the drop in enrollment was due to the closing of three diocesan high schools: Kings Prep, Mt. Carmel and Padua. He further stated that the enrollments in the remaining schools remained substantially the same.)

Hotel Mass To Be First For Diocese

Approximately 500 men from the Rochester Nocturnal Adoration Society are expected to participate in a "first" for the city's religious annals—the first public Mass to be celebrated in a hotel here.

Bishop Hogan will celebrate Mass in the new Holiday Inn, Main and St. Paul Streets, at 8:30 a.m. Monday, Oct. 11, in the banquet room immediately preceding the society's annual breakfast.

In previous years of the society's Communion breakfasts, Mass was celebrated in a parish church and the men then marched in procession or drove to a hotel or auditorium for the meal.

Because of the large number expected, Francis J. Werdein, breakfast chairman, this week urged all of the society's regional directors to submit reports on registrations.

FORTY HOURS

Forty Hours Devotion will begin Sunday, Oct. 4 in the following parishes: Holy Cross, Our Lady of Good Counsel, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Rochester; Canandaigua, Horseheads, Mt. Morris, Ontario, St. Rita, Webster.