

Bishop Hogan's Radio Address

Future of Catholic Education

Major excerpts from Bishop Hogan's radio broadcast on "The Future of Catholic Education" carried Saturday evening, Oct. 17 on WSAY, Rochester and 6 affiliate channels throughout the diocese.

It is a great privilege to be able to communicate with all of you — through the facilities of radio — and to share with you our common concerns — to explain problems to be faced and decisions to be made. I intend to address you twice a month during the Family Rosary for Peace Program.

Tonight I would like to share my thoughts with you about our present school crisis — truly a national problem — by no means unique to the Diocese of Rochester.

The pioneer bishops of this country and their people with them were convinced that the Catholic school where Christ would be the very heart and center of curriculum and classroom was the only adequate fulfillment of the Lord's command. "The school before the Church" became the rallying cry to encourage the sacrifices of their people.

Yet even in their most glorious days, we were never able to educate many of our children in parish schools. Those who could not attend for a variety of reasons were often considered second-class members of the Church.

Often, too, these schools served to lull parents into believing that they were completely fulfilling their responsibilities as the child's first and best teachers by using the schools as their proxies.

I truly believe that our present crisis can bring us the grace of a greater awareness that our efforts and sacrifices for Catholic education should be directed to all of our people.

The crisis you all know. You have read about the possible closing of some parish schools — the consolidations of others. In some instances, these have already become a reality. Unless something unforeseen happens, these instances will probably multiply in the near future.

The ingredients of the crisis are well-known, too — rising costs — shortage of religious teachers — declining enrollments. The questions then become: What can the diocese do to preserve what has been a valuable system? How much of it can be kept?

What about the religious education of the increasing numbers in our public schools? They have the right to the best in religious instruction — good teachers and modernized courses. What can the diocese do to strengthen the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine program?

And then there is the practically untouched field of adult religious education. What is the diocese going to do about that?

Let me submit this progress report of our efforts to meet the crisis:

A few months ago the areas of responsibility for education in the diocese were redefined. We established a new structure — a Department of Education with four distinct divisions of competence:

(1) The Office of General Education responsible for all secular instruction in our 92 parish schools and 12 high schools;

(2) The Department of Religious Education and C.C.D. to concern itself with all religious instruction for all of our children, both in Catholic and in public schools;

(3) The Department of Adult Education;

(4) The Department of the Campus Ministry for the Church's work on the college campuses within this diocese.

It is our view that the teaching mission of the Church must reach the entire body of the Family of God; and this means that the running of our parish schools cannot be an obstacle to a program of quality religious instruction to every public school child in the parish.

It also means that the religious training we offer to adults must assume a role of greater importance in parish life; and that the care we furnish to the minds and hearts of collegians must be as dedicated as that which we have traditionally given to little children.

The next step in our project of improvement for diocesan education came with the inauguration last March of a diocesan-wide survey on the efficiency of our schools and the attitudes of our people toward educational problems.

I accompanied the questionnaire, available to every family in the diocese, with a letter in which I announced that critical decisions would have to be made in the near future and that I would be relying heavily on the results of the survey to arrive at valid judgments. I did not wish to form judgments on the basis of rumors or speculation or hearsay.

With recommendation from the Office of Education. I asked a very intelligent and dedicated Sister of Mercy (Sister Patricia Donovan) to conduct the survey. I asked her to make her own recommendations at the conclusion of the survey — which included the input of studies made by our two largest Communities of teaching Sisters (the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of St. Joseph) who examined the schools where their Sisters teach.

My next step was to appoint a Task Force of Education to face the crisis. This group may be called an Interim Diocesan Board of Education, composed of representatives of our Educational Council — plus sisters, priests and laity from every major portion of the diocese — given the challenge of analyzing the Donovan Report, making recommendations for guidelines and decision priorities, addressing their conclusions to coordinating committees from all areas involved in the decisions.

This Task Force, presently meeting every two weeks, will by the end of this year deliver a consensus which will help to direct our future.

Without prejudice to any decisions forthcoming, I can assure you tonight most forcefully:

1. The Church will remain dedicated to the apostolate of education.

2. The pattern of how our parish schools operate in the next few years will almost surely be different from the past.

3. The emphasis we place upon religious education for our young people not in the parochial school structure will most assuredly be stronger.

4. The efforts we make to offer advanced religious knowledge to adults will positively be improved.

5. Our inner city educational program — now subsidizing six Rochester schools and providing a Christian education to 1,900 pupils — will continue as a responsibility of the whole diocese and as a living witness of our concern for the social

problems these families endure.

A special Task Force is presently at work to evaluate the best potential of this witness of the Church. The program must provide quality integrated education to justify the subsidy for the underprivileged.

What are my predictions for the future of our elementary parish schools?

Let me be quite clear: every effort will be made to keep as many parish schools open as possible. Why this determination? Because I see in them a great value already proven — and not readily replaced by any established program. In their defense, may I say:

1. The religiously-oriented school is needed by our whole society because of the priceless moral and spiritual dimensions they give to education. The school which explicitly exists to explain and foster the practice of virtue must be kept alive on the constantly increasingly amoral American scene.

2. The parish school has a history of proven value that religious instruction is not to be considered an after-school or part-time accessory, or as a side-issue in life.

3. The learning of spiritual and moral values in conjunction with secular subjects in the school's curriculum attests that broad human knowledge improves when it is enlightened by religious faith and practice.

But may I say also that the diocese accepts a serious obligation to do more than ever before to improve the religious education of the increasing numbers enrolled in public schools where no way has been found to introduce moral and spiritual values into the curriculum.

Each parish must meet this serious duty by finding more lay apostolates willing to assist in C.C.D. programs.

This year 55,000 Catholic youngsters are enrolled in this program. Our expenditure of time and money, personnel and skill must reflect our concern and conviction that their religious training is as serious a responsibility as that of maintaining the Catholic school system.

To sum it all up, the key issue of the future is not whether to have or not have parish schools. It is rather, "How

shall we provide the best Christian education to the greatest number of people?"

We are reevaluating our efforts, setting new priorities and intending to give new emphasis to the needs of all of our people in the parish family — pre-school to adult.

We may slowly change our operational structure and patterns, but our goal shall remain constant: To form all students into the mind and heart of Christ who made the command crystal clear — "Go teach all nations" — but left to our wisdom the implementation of the command.

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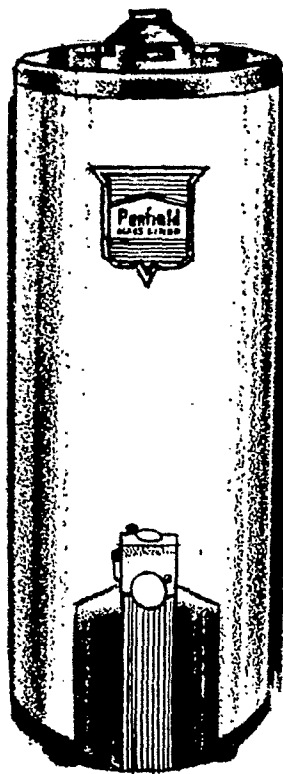
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