

# Pastors' Reaction to School Report Mixed

By CECELIA VIGGO

The first report of the Diocesan Task Force on Education landed on clerical coffee tables "not with a bang but a whimper."

"Maybe" seemed the response of most of those questioned. Approval of the report as a whole was qualified by two criticisms: it was "too vague" and "not practical."

Msgr. George Cocuzzi, pastor of Holy Family Church, felt that the report was successful in that it "brought together all the suggestions aimed at shoring up the schools." However, he characterized the report as "iffy," and said that it had not answered the fundamental question: "Can the Catholic people afford to keep the Catholic schools?"

Father Thomas Brennan, pastor of St. Mary's Church, Corning, remarked "I can't see that it offers any practical solution to our difficulties."

Father Robert O'Neill of Holy Cross parish agreed with the major recommendations of the report. But he questioned whether the Task Force had heard from a broad enough spectrum of opinion. "I don't think that the huge numbers of indifferent people in the parishes came to the meetings," he said.

Strongest praise or disapproval of the report focussed on those suggestions concerning regional school systems:

Father Roy Kiggins of Our Lady of Lourdes parish, Elmira, felt that Task Force proposals on consolidation and coopera-

tion indicated a new approach. He believed that the report's conclusions reinforced plans being considered in Elmira for the creation of a regional school system.

His support was echoed by Father William Spelley of St. John the Evangelist parish, Greece. "For too long we have been concerned with our own parochial problems as if we were islands," he observed.

Father James Schwartz of St. Theodore's parish added that consolidation is necessary if the Catholic schools, enmeshed as they are in serious financial difficulties, are to continue to provide "quality education."

Counterbalancing this approval were the comments of Msgr. Leslie Whalen, pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Church, and Msgr. Patrick Flynn, pastor of St. Helen's Church.

Msgr. Whalen questioned the viability of consolidation recommendations. He anticipated parental objections to any plan that would take children out of their own parish school.

The Brighton pastor commented that public schools, run with tax money, may take action, despite the objection of parents. But, he added, the "Catholic schools are run by charity," and any recommendations of the Task Force are thus contingent on the continuing financial support of the parents in the parishes.

Msgr. Flynn was also wary of consolidation. "The whole tradition of the individual parish is something that should be respected," he said.

When we reported the comments of parish clergy, Father Daniel Brent, superintendent of schools for the diocese, had an answer for those who find the plan "impractical."

He stated, "If it develops that the Task Force plan does not get the response necessary to make it useful, there would be a backup emergency plan." This plan would offer guidelines concerning decisions about the closing of individual schools.

As for the vagueness criticism, Father Brent replied, "we've given the parishes pretty specific direction. We've offered a model for cooperation among schools, and urged homework to combat problems of finances, personnel and enrollment."

He admitted that the report "throws a great deal of responsibility back into the local area" but he said that the Task Force "was told that parishes want a maximum of local control."

Task Force members also felt that "local parishes are in a

better position to decide on how to work together."

Father Brent does not deny the value of the individual parish school but he stated that the Task Force is convinced that "long range problems must be solved together."

Some of those interviewed had suggestions concerning any future Task Force reports.

Father Phillip Billotte of Sacred Heart parish, Auburn, felt that the Task Force should concern itself more with the

role and value of religious education. He thought emphasis on religious education was especially important, given the possibility that in the future, it may be the only function of Catholic education.

Brian Mannion, president of the school board at Holy Rosary parish, although heartened by the conclusions of the report, suggested that, in the future, there should be "more direct communication between Task Force members, and pastors, principals and school boards."

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Around the World

Foreign students at McQuaid Jesuit High School are, from left, Joseph Kwik, 8th grader from Malang, Indonesia; Michael Ulrich, senior from Mannheim, Germany; Willibald Doeringer, senior from Ludwigs-hafen, Germany; and MacKenzie Mbinda, freshman from Kenya, Africa. Two McQuaid seniors, Peter Messner and Thomas Patterson, are studying in Puerto Rico.

## Niagara Re-Emphasizes Its Catholic Character

Niagara University, N.Y. — The board of trustees of Niagara University has reaffirmed its stand against "secularizing" in order to qualify for state funds.

The board also rejected a student proposal for co-ed visitation in dormitory rooms.

These decisions were announced in a letter to Niagara parents and collegians by Father Kenneth F. Slattery, C.M., president of the Vincentian institution.

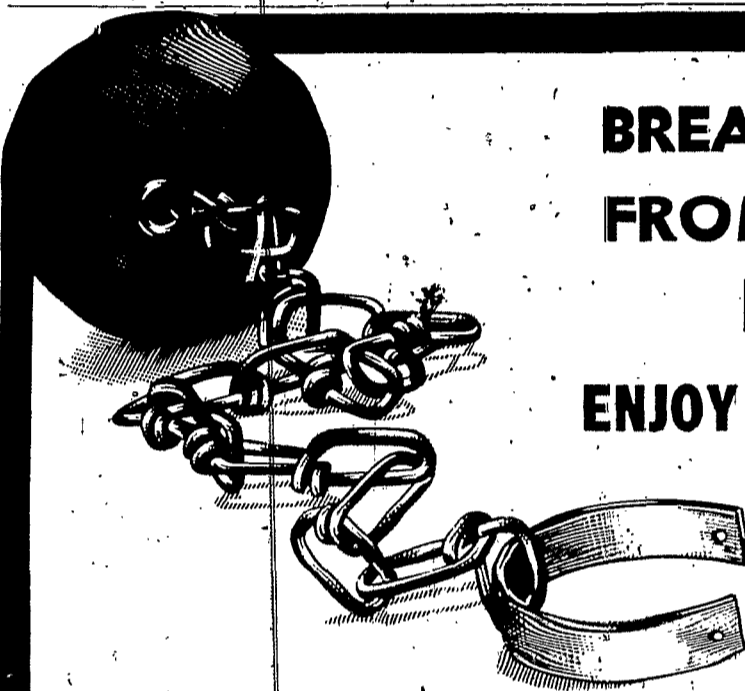
"Despite the critical condition of our finances, our board has determined that Niagara will remain Catholic," Father Slattery wrote. "As in the past, we will emphasize the fact that the Catholic faith and natural

law morality are the guiding principles of our campus community."

Commenting on the board's rejection of co-ed visitation privileges, Father Slattery declared that the denial "exemplifies Niagara's special character and life-style."

The president pointed out that "Niagara, unlike comparable institutions within the State of New York, does not receive state aid."

"This is because of its church-relatedness," he explained. "Such state aid, if granted, would amount to about \$250,000 annually. These circumstances have prompted some institutions to 'secularize' to qualify for state funds."



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