

THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL REVISITED

First in a Series

By BARBARA MOYNEHAN

A recent publication put out for and by the Sisters of St. Joseph reported that the elementary school teachers of that community express hope for the future of Catholic education . . . "if they are good schools."

The definition given of a good school is one that provides the atmosphere in which each child can develop to the fullest his individual potential as a human person, through creative teachers, effective methodology and adequate working materials.

Sister Rosemary St. Peter, SSJ, who has been principal of St. Ambrose School for six years, spoke of her school: "Our big endeavor here is each child; to find the child and not frustrate him."

She pointed out that "Catholic schools must have a distinctive mark, however. You can't say we are just like public schools; we aren't and that's not what we are here for."

"The distinctive marks of Catholic schools are religious education and discipline, even in open education," she continued. "With our discipline we give right order by setting values to help the children find their own values."

"We've done everything possible to innovate to meet the needs of individuals. The children in each grade are doing work at their own level so they are emotionally comfortable and can achieve."

Sister Rosemary feels that developing in a child a positive self-image is most important; "If you build up a child, he

will be able to deal with any situation."

Breaking down structural barriers of the closed classroom situation at St. Ambrose has included departmental, modular scheduling which makes every day a different kind of day. Modular scheduling uses different periods of time for different classes, and utilizes each teacher as a specialist as opposed to teaching all grades or all subjects as they did in the recent past.

Since reading is essential to all other learning, work in this area is stressed for all age levels. A variety of texts are available in each class so everyone's level and interest are satisfied.

From first grade on at St. Ambrose, children work in groups, moving from class to class to work on both group and individual projects.

Sister Rosemary reported that "the changes in education are exciting and the children are happy. It shows — we have more students registering every year. Our present enrollment is 662 children."

With the emphasis changing from dictatorial learning by rote to learning to develop a well-rounded self concept, the role of the principal of the school to the teachers has changed.

Responsibility is now shared. Now there are teachers who do the co-ordinating on class scheduling, and on the economic questions that arise. The principal is a resource person, one who evaluates quality of education at her school and one who helps with inter-school relations.

In conclusion, Sister Rosemary said: "We haven't knock-

ed down any walls but things are really exciting and that is vital."

Sister Mary Edwardine Weaver, RSM, principal of St. James since 1968, made a similar observation of the non-graded primary unit implemented there three years ago.

When asked for an evaluation of the non-graded unit for first through third graders, she said that no major change has been seen in the total achievement, EXCEPT that the children are happy.

"School is now a happy place, a place to enhance personality development," she said, and stressed the fact that "if we are going to build individuals who can function in a changing society we have to develop personalities."

The non-graded primary unit and the departmentalized block scheduling of time the 7th and 8th graders spend in classes, makes a lot more work for teachers, Sister Edwardine said. They must prepare for the individualized needs of their pupils, plus joint planning among teachers since the emphasis has changed to departmentalized group teaching.

Sister Edwardine believes that parental interest is a good way of evaluating what the school is doing. "We have an extensive Teachers Aid Group, approximately 100 volunteers and 3765 hours of service."

The regular staff for the 498 students at St. James is 32 full-time teachers — five nuns and the rest lay teachers.

The latest addition is a room known as a "resource center," and Sister Edwardine is proud of it.

It is a room set up much like

a library, but the shelves hold film strips and tapes, not books. It is an enrichment center, where research, pleasure and remedial work is done. A student can use it independently or with his class.

Sister Edwardine repeated a comment Sister Rosemary had made. "One of the most important components of our program has been the coopera-

tion from public schools in the area."

She concluded saying: "Attitudinal development plays a major role in what we are doing. We are more concerned with the kind of people the students are than whether they get 90s or As. Our primary emphasis is the kind of people we're building to improve society."

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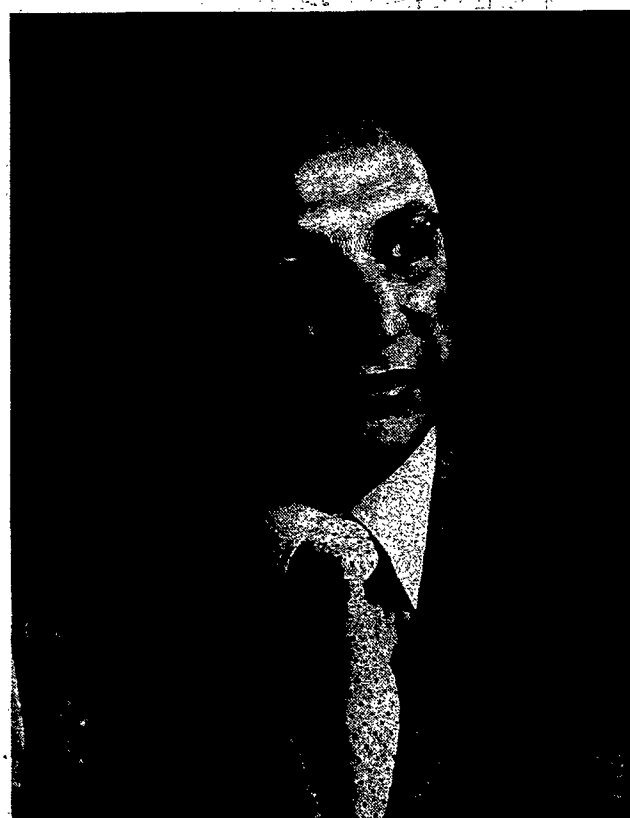
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U.S. Bishops Reiterate Selective CO Support

Washington, D.C. — (RNS) — The American Catholic bishops, in a formal declaration, have strongly reiterated their 1968 call for revisions in the Selective Service law to allow selective conscientious objector status for Catholics.

The document also urged "amnesty" for those who have left the country or gone to prison after refusing to serve in the Vietnam war on moral grounds.

"In the light of the Gospel and from an analysis of Church teaching and tradition," the bishops declared, "it is clear that a Catholic can be a conscientious objector to war in general or to a particular war because of religious training and belief."

The document reaffirmed the general recommendations of the November 1968 bishops' pastoral, "Human Life in Our Day," which called for a modification of the draft laws to include selective COs, and an end to peacetime conscription.

It also urged that draft counseling agencies be set up by Catholic groups, and made a plea that "alternatives" to military service be found.

In a double-phased vote by mail, more than two-thirds of the nation's 280 bishops approved the statement which had been rejected at several previous meetings.

Msgr. Marvin Bordelon, who heads the USCC Justice and Peace Commission which drew up the final document, said the 1968 statement by the bishops on selective COs caused considerable "backlash" among Catholics on all levels.

Additional backlash greeted Courier-Journal

the proposals at the two 1970 bishops' meetings and in April of 1971.

Msgr. Bordelon said it was "only a fortuitous coincidence" that the declaration was released while the bishops' Synod in Rome was discussing the same topics.

In outlining the need for their statement, the bishops observed that "for many of our Catholic people, especially the young, the question of participation in military service has become a serious moral problem."

It added that young people are looking to their spiritual leaders "for guidance . . . and for support when they judge their sentiments to be in keeping with Catholic Christian tradition."

Because the status of selective COs is extremely complex as regards present U.S. law, the bishops' declaration urged "moralists, lawyers and civil servants to work cooperatively

toward a policy which can reconcile the demands of moral and civic order concerning this issue."

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