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Dialogue for Renewal

"Active sharing . . . is necessary for the Church." —BISHOP JOSEPH L. HOGAN

INTERVIEW: Sister James, Educator

"We have not involved the parents enough in the religious education of their kids."

That is one of several points made by Sister James Lynch, SSJ, assistant vicar for education for the diocese.

She was talking about survey results released this week which have to do with the Catholic school system and religious education.

"The Church has not invested enough time, money and energy into training volunteers to teach CCD classes," said Sister James, remarking that volunteers were often available but unskilled.

The survey showed, she feels, a great confidence in the Catholic school.

"The confidence that people showed is due to the fact that Catholic schools have made great strides in providing innovative educational opportunities by way of non-graded classes, remedial reading and math, learning centers with independent study, field experiences and team teaching."

A certain ambivalence pervades this confidence, however, said Sister James.

"It's difficult to tell from the survey," she said, "whether the parents are for the Catholic schools or are moving away from the public schools."

The Catholic school system provides parents with "a choice away from public education," she said, a choice which attracts



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parents because of a widespread "disillusion with public schools."

This "disillusion," Sister James said, is part of a wider phenomenon in American society. She sees a growing distrust of governmental services in all areas changing the mood of the country during the past ten years.

This includes welfare, poverty programs and education, she said.

What kind of a future does she see for the Catholic school?

"The key problem is financial. Catholic schools will last a long time, but each parish supporting a school is unrealistic. The challenge is to find new ways to finance consolidated schools and

develop new ways of religious education.

"School is only one form of religious education," said Sister James, who also believes strongly in the value of adult education.

"Because we focused most of our energies on the schools, we neglected to develop other ways to meet the religious formation needs of children not in the Catholic schools, young adults and married couples."

Adult Catholics today are seeking things from education, Sister James said. "Vatican II challenged them. Some are requesting for themselves. Education for the children alone is not enough. It has to be revitalized, deepened. And the Church is more willing to provide for adult religious education."

Then she added, "The problem is that adults feel that when they leave school, they have learned what they need to know. Perhaps that was true before Vatican II made new demands."

The survey indicated a low attendance at adult education classes except for Pre-Cana.

"There are not enough opportunities for adult education," said Sister James, "and many feel they have learned all they need. Finally, their own religious education is not a priority for many."

She felt that the survey was not entirely accurate on this point, and that many more adults had gone to religious education than it indicated.

Analysis

The Survey and Parents' Thoughts On Catholic Schools

Although Catholic schools in general are facing financial difficulties and in some cases the prospect of closing, parents still strongly support them.

This is the conclusion to be drawn from the results of the diocesan-wide survey which were released this week.

Although new emphasis has been placed on programs such as adult education and CCD classes, most Catholic parents remain unfamiliar with the thrust of these programs.

Over half the people surveyed (52%) feel that Catholic education is better than a public education, and another 24% feel it equals that of the public schools.

This degree of support is surprisingly high, the survey firm indicated, in comparison to the original discussions held with sample groups of lay people.

Superior discipline, long a touted advantage of the Catholic school system, attracted only a small proportion of parents, the survey indicates. Instead, most (62%) felt that "better self-discipline and work habits" were the most important reason for parochial education.

Only 7% of the respondents think that parents send children to Catholic schools to avoid racial integration; this is not the kind of question, however, that most people would feel comfortable about answering yes, and the possibility exists that this figure is not entirely accurate.

Converts and older, traditionally schooled Catholics are both more strict in their religious observance than other Catholics. Mass attendance, Communion and confession are more frequently practiced by this group, but they are no more or less in agreement than others with the Church position on moral issues.

A majority of those surveyed could give no opinion about the training and competence of CCD teachers. Parents seemed to indicate, said the survey report, a concern that "CCD training cannot replace full-time parochial education in the development of moral character and strength."

Although most of those surveyed believed in the quality of Catholic education, the survey firm reports that "group discussions and personal interviews" showed an awareness that separate parochial schools can no longer compete with the public sector.

This means that education in the diocese faces a time of decisive change.

There is not much optimism about the efficacy of present alternatives to parochial education, but there seems little choice but to try them.

Regional Report:

Father John Philipps, South East Monroe

While he thinks that the overall "structure of the pastoral council is not down to the parish level yet, people are voicing their concerns at the parish councils and that is satisfactory."

Father John Philipps, coordinator for the 18 parish Southeast region of Monroe County and associate pastor at St. Louis in Pittsford, a preliminary regional meeting was held on March 4, as a step toward the formation of a regional conference.

The meeting was well-attended, and most of the parishes in the region were represented. Sister Ruth Maier, associate regional coordinator, said that the meeting provided opportunities for members of different parish councils to meet one another.

Nine parishes in the district have parish councils and there are councils in action or in formation in several special communities such as religious houses, hospitals and schools.

Father Philipps, all the parish councils, and the regional team will meet for discussion with Bishop Joseph L. Hogan on May 14 at St. John the Evangelist on Humboldt Street. Representatives of parish



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councils and regional standing committees will report on progress in their areas, and Bishop Hogan will address the group and answer questions.

Father Philipps looks toward June as the date for the regional conference.

While Father Philipps sees the development of the region as encouraging and

enthusiastic, he did note some reluctance to parish councils on the part of a few pastors; but "I think laymen will carry it along."

Within the region, Father Philipps sees "Human Development coming on quite strongly." He said that the councils are "grappling" with the problems of the elderly, and with housing.

On the education front the concerns are "all the usual, the total education needs of the parish."

Father Philipps' long term goals are to "fulfill the mind of the Church in that the people have a voice in the decision making, that the Church become more aware of its mission and conscious of its responsibility."

Serving with Father Philipps are Sister Ruth, Sister Jean Bellini, regional education committee; Dr. Robert Geraci, regional Human Development; George Walker, regional liturgy; and John Coleman, regional representative to the Pastoral Council Formation Committee.

Father Paul McCabe, who is now at St. Augustine's and out of the region, was in charge of religious education. A replacement for him is being sought.