

# Parish School Thrives With All Lay Teachers

By PAT PETRASKE

A school without sisters is not a Catholic School. Right?

Wrong.

St. John of Rochester in Perinton continues to have a parish school despite the departure last year of its two remaining sisters, who entered other ministries.

"Although the parish was loath to see the sisters depart the fact of the matter is that the school continues to flourish," said Father Vincent Collins, pastor. He terms the reaction "panicky, unfounded thinking" that the school would fail and eventually close.

St. John's is the only elementary Catholic school in the diocese that has an all-lay

faculty and is among only 200 schools in the country which do not have religious personnel as teachers or administrators. Father Collins believes that an all-lay school is a "real, definite plausible alternative" to the typical Catholic school.

He also terms his school a "prototype of the future" because fewer women are entering the convent and fewer sisters are choosing teaching as a vocation. "Nuns consider other ministries to be more meaningful than the humdrum work of classroom teaching," Father Collins said, emphasizing his words with an occasional bite on his cigar.

Presently there are eight religious orders in the diocese, with a total of 312 sisters who teach in grammar school. The number has declined from 343

teaching sisters last year and 430 two years ago. In 1961 there were 820 sisters teaching in the diocese.

The question of whether St. John would close when the sisters left was never considered, according to Father Collins. "Many parents, however, thought the school would close by itself because parents would stop sending their children here," Father Collins said. Enrollment did drop slightly (less than five per cent) which the pastor believes is the direct result of the vocal opposition.

The Sisters of Mercy, whose order staffed St. John's, has a new personnel policy. Vacancies no longer are filled by appointment. The sisters now apply for positions that are open. Traditionally, a parish is staffed by sisters from only one congregation, although a sister from another order can apply for a position in that parish. Positions in the inner city school and as religious education coordinators and pastoral assistants are "non-congregational."

Father Collins said that the school's education committee sent a list of vacancies to every order in the diocese as well as to orders around the country. "The religious orders are having difficulty staffing their own schools," he reported.

Sister Mary John Van Atta, public relations director for the Sisters of St. Joseph, explained that "We feel an obligation to staff the parishes we're already involved in." She added that lack of numbers prevents the Sisters of St. Joseph from branching out to other parishes.

Their personnel policy allows the sisters to apply or to be appointed to a vacant position.

Father Collins and Father Joseph Gorman, associate pastor at St. John's, now teach religion each week at the school.

John Patrick McKiernan, the youthful principal at St. John's, praised the cooperation of the eight-member staff with the pastors, who maintain the school's Christian atmosphere with Bible sessions, Lenten vigils and First Friday devotions. Coupled with this atmosphere is the school's ability to compete academically with the public schools.

One advantage of an all-lay faculty is that "I have the opportunity to select the staff of the school. If the school is staffed by an order, the administrator usually does not have a say in the choice of teachers," McKiernan said.

On the other hand, there is a disadvantage in that the students no longer have daily contact with religious. McKiernan feels this contact encourages vocations.

He added that St. John's might again have religious personnel if

JOHN MCKIERMAN

sisters should apply to fill future vacancies.

St. John's school is now "living in a fish bowl," McKiernan observed. "The people are watching us. They have higher expectations than parents of public school students and are looking for a system with more discipline. We want to show that we're a Catholic school in every sense of the word."

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Blessed Trinity's first Student Council officers are Linda Guzman, treasurer [left]; Gary Vivenzio, vice president; Mary Rowley, secretary, and Sharon Avino, president.

## Blessed Trinity Elects First Student Council

Student Council elections were another first for Blessed Trinity School which opened its door last September following the consolidation of three of Auburn's parochial schools.

During a presentation before a gathering of the 220 junior high students, individual candidates addressed themselves to reasons why Blessed Trinity should have a student council and what their goals would be if elected.

The voting resulted in the election of Sharon Avino as president, Gary Vivenzio, vice president, Mary Rowley, secretary and Linda Guzman, treasurer.

Individual junior high home room representatives elected included Mary Burke, Laurie Gardner, Michele Pitcher, Brian Bourke, Tim Graszko, Jeanne Donohue, and John Brennan.

## Pope Cracks Down On Secrets Leaks

Vatican City (RNS) — Pope Paul has ordered a drive ending information leaks of official Church "secrets" to unauthorized persons.

A three-page directive made public here March 14 enumerated matters falling under the classification of "pontifical secrets." It threatened violators with "sanctions commensurate" with the offense.

The new "instructions," which stressed the biblical observation that there is "a time to keep silence and a time to speak," were signed by Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Jean Villot upon the approval of Pope Paul.

Included in the directive under the rubric of "pontifical secrets" were Church business transacted by the Secretariat of State and its allied Council for the Public Affairs of the Church, as well as official information concerning proposed appointments of bishops and other high prelates.

According to the instructions, official secrets would be confined to cardinals, bishops, advisers and others sworn into "pontifical secrecy."

Under the new rules, the strictest secrecy is imposed on "all those who have culpably gained knowledge of documents or questions protected by pontifical secret, or who, having gained knowledge without guilt, know with certainty that they are still covered by pontifical secrecy."

As for sanctions, the directive said it would be "commensurate with the offense and the damage it has caused." There was no elaboration.

Observers said the Vatican has been upset by premature disclosures concerning documents that Pope Paul was about to issue, and by information leaks pertaining to proceedings of high Vatican tribunals.

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