

Bishop Hogan Explains Closing of Schools



Bernadette Gonzales of Mt. Carmel makes a point during parents' meeting.

The Inner City Schools ... What Happened

As the initial shock over the closing of two inner city schools last week began to wear off, two things were evident:

1. The diocese has no intention of changing the decision to close the schools.

2. Parents and parish councils from the schools, Mt. Carmel and St. Bridget's, nonetheless will try to reverse the decision.

The tumult began when the Council of Inner City Parishes last Monday announced its decision to close the two schools and transform St. Michael's from a junior high school to an

elementary school. This leaves just three schools, all elementary, in the CICIP system — St. Michael's, Holy Redeemer, and Immaculate Conception.

The action was taken because of the lack of finances to support the schools.

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The natural chagrin on all sides — the diocese over making a difficult decision, the CICIP forced into a financial corner, and the parents and administration of the schools who felt they were ignored in the decision — was sharpened by confusion and misunderstanding.

The CICIP had planned a fund drive to meet school expenses but after meetings between its representatives and diocesan officials it was decided on June 8 that the drive should be coordinated with diocesan fund development plans.

Shortly after this agreement, the financial plight of the schools became evident when the CICIP disclosed a projected deficit of more than \$80,000 for the fiscal year ending June 30, and that teachers' salaries were being held up.

"Taking the bull by the horns" Bishop Joseph L. Hogan took quick and decisive action, explained Father Raymond Booth, CICIP chairperson and pastor of Mt. Carmel.

The Bishop met with the pastors on June 14 and told them to develop a plan to cover the \$80,000 deficit and to show how they planned to operate within a balanced budget for 1974-75 and he requested response by June 21.

"I am not suggesting that consultation with councils and representatives will not be needed but because of the seriousness of the situation and time-frame, a smaller group might be more effective to develop plans," the Bishop told the pastors.

During the week of June 17 to 22, the pastors and Father Daniel Brent, superintendent of schools, met to formulate plans.

My dear People:

The rights of men, women and children are rooted in the concept of the dignity of every human person. At Vatican II, my brother bishops asserted belief that "the root reason for human dignity lies in man's call to communion with God." (PASTORAL CONSTITUTION on the CHURCH in the MODERN WORLD, n. 19) To respect and realize the rights of the human person is to contribute to the fulfillment of God's design for the human community, and this is not a peripheral but a pivotal responsibility for all Christians. To focus on the issue of human rights in a religious context, it is especially important to examine how the Church as a teaching community can contribute to the importance of promoting human rights and how the Church as a community of action can aid the implementation of human rights.

It is important that we honestly face the problems that are before the Church today. The Church's influence in society today ultimately rests with its members and their impact on society. The institutional Church can and must teach; the institutional Church can and must act through policy and programs. But if the teaching and action do not find resonance in the convictions and lives of the community of the Church, the institution will stand isolated and ineffective.

The basic power of the Church as a force for social change, social justice and human rights resides in its capacity to form a community with a conscience. The Catholic conscience today is being urgently mandated by the teaching Church to understand our faith commitment squarely in relationship to our concern for the human and civil rights of our neighbors. This is not a peripheral issue of conscience; it is a priority issue. This faith commitment needs to permeate our pulpits, our schools, our programs and our personal lives. To be concerned about the welfare of our neighbors, especially those who desperately need our love and concern, will be measured by the substance of our commitment to them. The demands of the Gospel persist even to this very hour! As my fellow American bishops said in the noted pastoral letter on Catholic education, "To Teach as Jesus Did". "Even though Christians may at times err in their facts, interpretations and conclusions they must not fail to apply the Gospel to contemporary life." The Diocese of Rochester has a commitment to its poor and less privileged peoples, and we need never apologize for that commitment. We Catholics need to be in the forefront, speaking for and helping those whose voices are often too weak to be heard.

I deeply regret that it is necessary to call for a realistic cutback on our Rochester inner city educational program. A factual response concerning the closing of the two inner city schools of Rochester accompanies this open letter to you. It is necessary that we be called into accountability and that all of us adjust our diocesan programs to the personnel and financial resources that are realistically at our disposal. I must honestly state that the Diocese of Rochester will never have enough financial resources to accomplish all that needs to be effected for the well-being of God's people.

The unfortunate cutback in assistance in the Rochester inner city ministry makes us all a bit more poor. We are one body in Christ! Need I remind you, "All of you together are the one body of Christ and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it." (1 Cor. 12:27) Truly, we are responsible to and for one another. May I remind you, too, that God's gifts of resources, talents, and financial means are not just for ourselves but for the service of others' needs. "If one of the brothers or one of the sisters is in need of clothes and has not enough food to live on, and one of you says to them: 'I wish you well; keep yourself warm and eat plenty,' without giving them these bare necessities of life, then what good is that? Faith is like that: if good works do not go with it, it is quite dead." (James 2:15-17) Whether it be in the inner city or the outer city, each has a unique gift to give. One may be the gift of caring, the other may be the gift of being cared for.

My responsibility as your Bishop urges me to proclaim that together we are called to be our brother's keeper. Our diocese needs to provide the means to make this truth a reality. About one quarter of the monies received annually in the Pastoral Office through diocesan assessments is used in charities for the Rochester inner city ministries, the Human Development Apostolate as well as the Rural and Spanish Apostolates. Presently, the Diocese of Rochester is initiating a Fund Development Office with the hope that generous contributions will supplement our already fixed income. Hopefully, the Council of Inner City Parishes and other ministries will be aided by this additional assistance.

I heartily commend those parishes which have so generously and gratuitously responded with financial assistance to the needs of poor parishes. Many human development committees of parish councils have actively explored ways in which they may effectively assist inner city and rural parishes and areas. It is my fond hope, too, that regional efforts in our 12-county area will encourage us to cross economic and ethnic boundaries when we see people in need of help. When our diocesan Pastoral Council begins to function, it will assist in bringing the Church of Rochester, throughout the diocese, to a more effective role as servant to the People of God.

I wish to express publicly my deep gratitude and respect for all of the priests, Religious and dedicated lay who serve so generously and selflessly in the Rochester inner city apostolate. Their service makes the love of Jesus visible to the whole Church of Rochester throughout the diocese.

May the Lord bless us in our efforts, and may the Spirit of God make us one in proclaiming His power and truth in our society.

With a blessing, I remain

Your devoted Shepherd in Christ,

Joseph L. Hogan
+ Most Reverend Joseph L. Hogan, D.D.
Bishop of Rochester



Man With a Message

A familiar face visited Rochester last week. Cesar Chavez, president of the United Farm Workers, spoke at Immaculate Conception Church and at an outdoor rally at the Civic Center Plaza. Staff writer Pat Petraske and photographer Dave Witbeck were on hand and their report is on Page 10.

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