

Ready to Fight for Their Catholic Schools

By PAT PETRASKE

"We can do it!"

The cry ran through the crowded school auditorium of Our Lady of Mount Carmel as parents and teachers met to protest the closing of two more inner city schools and the conversion of St. Michael's into an elementary school.

Using both Spanish and English the primarily Puerto Rican and black audience rejected the patient explanation of the decision given by Father Daniel Brent, superintendent of schools. They demanded a chance to try to raise the money themselves to cover the \$80,000 deficit facing the Council of Inner City Parishes (CICP) system.

Representatives of the parish council at Mt. Carmel voted to join with the parish council at St. Bridget's and formulate a plan for fund raising, hopefully to be presented to Bishop Joseph L. Hogan.

Many of the complaints focused on the CICP fund drive that was stopped, lest it conflict with a fund raising campaign to be launched by the new diocesan development office. Bernadette Gonzales, from the Lewis Street Settlement, pointed out that money from the development drive will not be apparent for at least three years.

"These people have children in the school now. . . This is more than a church; if we can't have the school, we'll lose part of our community," she exclaimed.

Attempting to allay fears that "the diocese is abandoning the inner city," Father Brent emphasized, "The bishop is not against you." He explained that last Fall four representatives of the CICP and four from the diocesan staff voted on a cooperative plan to raise money.

He added that the Bishop does not forbid the parishes to raise their own money, but that they would have to garner approximately \$480 per child.

Her voice sometimes trembling with emotion, Angela Reyes, whose two children attend Mt. Carmel, asked for an explanation of why the Bishop had delegated to the CICP the responsibility of handling the \$200,000 subsidy from the diocese but would not give the CICP the responsibility for other fund raising efforts.

In an earlier interview Mrs. Reyes had called the decision, "One hell of a kick."

Outraged feelings of discrimination also were voiced during the three-hour discussion.

The diocese should stop discriminating against these people. We're being used as a pawn on a chess board. They said the plan would be in operation for five years and now they've sold us," said Sadie Maciuska whose son has had to be transferred to three schools in three years because of closings.

The closing of Mt. Carmel school has hit the Maciuska family doubly hard. Mrs. Maciuska's husband, a maintenance man at the school, probably will lose his job unless the building is rented out. The two are debating whether to continue sending their children to a Catholic school.

Returning from Dayton, Ohio, for the meeting, Sister Julia Norton, principal at Mt. Carmel, said she hoped that "the decision will be rescinded. But if that does not happen, we must work together at St. Michael's." Sister Julia will be back in Rochester July 27, and plans to visit each family to discuss information necessary for the next school year.

However, Sister Julia questioned the decision, noting



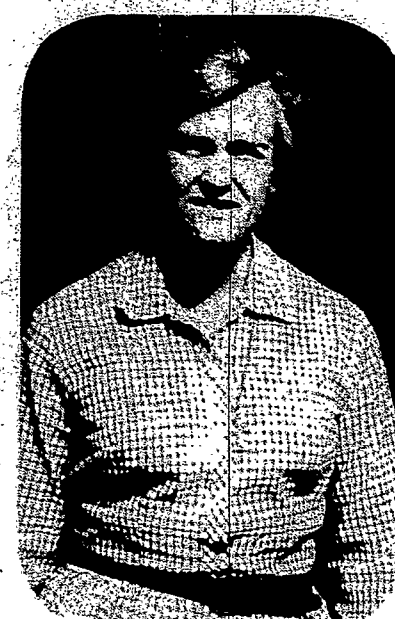
SADIE MACIUSKA



PEDRO PEDRAZA



FATHER DANIEL BRENT



SISTER MARY WINTISH

"We have no promise that the plan will last more than a year."

Starting the year with a balanced budget will help to ensure its success, replied Father Raymond Booth, pastor at Mt. Carmel, who believes everything still hinges on the fund raising effort. He told his parishioners that "no decision in my entire priesthood had upset me more, especially the means used to reach the decision."

"I take part of the blame. There should have been an emergency parish council meeting. I still believe strongly in the team concept and believe any major decision should be brought to the council," Father Booth said.

Approximately 180 students from Mt. Carmel and 125 students from St. Bridget's will be transferred by bus to St. Michael's or neighboring schools. But "no way are the kids from Mt. Carmel going to be welcome," snapped Earline Key, whose five children attended St. Bridget's. She believes problems will occur with increases in tuition and overcrowding.

Father Brent, while admitting that inconveniences will occur, stated that "no child is not welcome in the system that you people created. Catholic schools are still available to them, but what is not available is a school in every single neighborhood." He noted that no increases in tuition are planned.

Other parents from St. Bridget's also expressed anger and disappointment over the decision. Enoch Kettles is looking for another Catholic school for his three children since he feels the public schools lack discipline.

"I don't care what it costs, if I can find one, they're going to a Catholic school," said Linda Rosier. She took her daughter from an all white school and enrolled her at St. Bridget's "for social reasons. The school is like a little family, I hate to see it get away from us," Mrs. Rosier said.

While St. Bridget's has lost a fine educational institution, "we're not down and out," said Father Francis Vogt, pastor. The parish council is involved in planning sessions with the diocese, the region and community organizations, including the Spanish Apostolate, Human Development and the region. "They're helping us use the resources we have for the future. We hope to set up some center to serve the poor. Despite numerous problems St. Bridget's future may be brightening. Urban Renewal offered to buy some of the buildings, and the State Welfare Department wanted to establish a day care center at St. Bridget's which would also increase revenue. Approximately 1,400 apartments are scheduled to be built and will increase the diminishing neighborhood population.

Father Benedict Ehmann, retiring pastor at St. Michael's, echoed Father Vogt's "great disappointment" over the

decision, but stated that "necessity demands it." He questioned however, why the problem "surfaced so late."

The consolidation cuts the teaching staff in the inner city from 38 teachers to 27. Sister Kathleen McCusker, principal at St. Bridget's believes the teaching staff has lost confidence in the CICP and would be wary of "walking into another situation for fear the same thing would happen."

"The teachers will have no jobs as such," said Sister Mary Wintish, principal, who explained that her staff at St. Michael's "are junior high school people." Elementary teaching positions will be available at St. Michael's but many of her teachers either are not qualified or prefer not to teach on that level.

Father Booth maintained that every effort is being made to find teaching assignments.

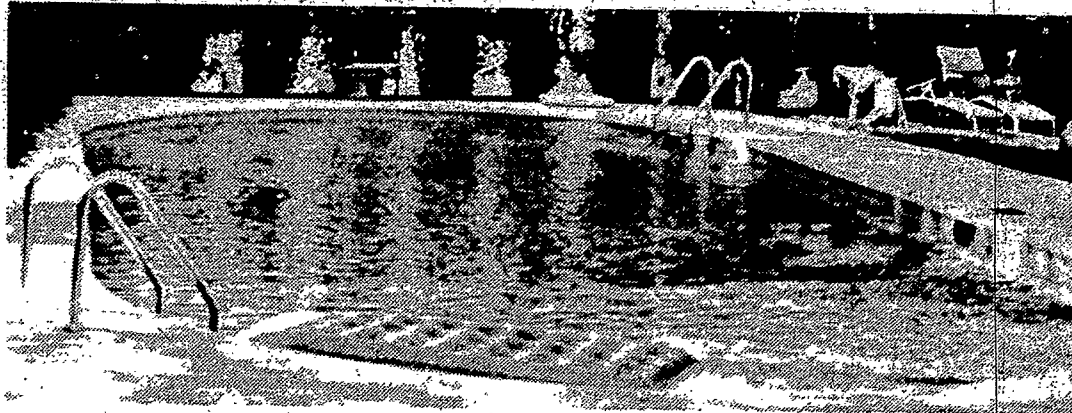


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