

Catholic Schools Are 'Holding Their Own'

By PAT PETRASKE

It's almost that time again.

While children are hanging on to the last vestiges of summer, mothers are praying for the strength to endure. The break comes Sept. 3, the day after Labor Day, when the 85 parish schools in the diocese reopen. Within the week, the nine Catholic high schools and the suburban schools will be operating. Rochester public schools open Sept. 4.

Fewer students will be heading for the classrooms this year. Enrollment will continue to decline approximately five per cent each year, according to Father Daniel Brent, diocesan superintendent of schools.

Figures are not yet available for this year but 34,754 elementary and high school students were enrolled in the Catholic schools last year. Of these, 26,283 were elementary students and 8,471 were high schoolers.

Referring to a study, "Statistics of Trends in Education 1962-63 to 1982-83" compiled by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, (HEW), Father Brent believes the diocese is following the enrollment trends throughout the country.

"The country is going through a decline in enrollment because of a general decrease in the population," said Father Brent. A long projection by the HEW shows a decline from 35,114,000 school children (ages five to 13) in 1972 down to 31,234,000 in 1982.

"We are able to hold our own percentage-wise because we are trying to deal more with philosophy of the school. We do a better job of selling the school because we try to bring people in to see what is going on," explained the priest.

Diocesan figures for the coming year show the number of classrooms at around 1,033. In charge will be approximately 312 religious teachers (including 80 administrators) and 746 lay teachers.

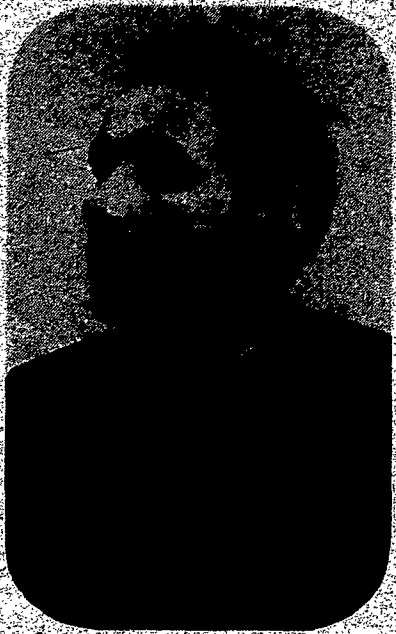
Once again the diocese has been faced with more school closings and consolidations because of increasing costs. Father Brent pointed out that these account for a relatively small percentage of enrollment losses. St. Patrick's of Mt. Morris closed in June after a survey showed that 65 per cent of the parishioner favored discontinuing the school. This affects 95 pupils.

The parish councils of Holy Apostles and Holy Family voted to merge their schools. In September grades K-five will be housed in Holy Apostles and grades six-eight will attend Holy Family.

Continuing the 1973-74 "year of cooperation," St. John's of Humbolt Street and Blessed Sacrament will remain consolidated for 1974-75. The Bishop Hogan Junior High formed last year from the merger of the two schools' seventh and eighth grades will again be located at St. John's. Kindergarten through sixth grade will be at Blessed Sacrament.

Lack of finances was also the reason for the further consolidation of the Council of Inner City Parishes (CICP) school system. St. Bridget's will not open this fall. St. Michael's, a junior high school last year, now will house grades K-six.

When asked about further consolidations for the upcoming school year, Father Brent replied, "Hopefully, there will be." While no school at present is slated for closing, Father Brent hopes the diocese will continue to work toward school systems on a regional basis. The boundaries of these systems would not have to follow the present outlines of the five regions.



FATHER DANIEL BRENT

Despite the problems facing CICP and its schools, "they can think and work together," he said. The superintendent also praised the school systems in Auburn, Elmira and Corning.

What the new year will bring for the students is an "opening up of education," predicted Father Brent. He sees growing trends toward ungraded classrooms, more supportive services such as study aids, library material, and individual attention and more

responsibility for learning being delegated to each student.

At the lower level will be the continuing encouragement of kindergarten and pre-school programs. Father Brent believes these programs are receiving added interest because of a change in philosophy. "The students will not have to switch from a public to a parochial school at such a young age," he said. Pre-school programs have an advantage for the diocese because they are a source of income.

"Parents seem more willing to pay tuition for nursery school than they do for the higher grades," according to the priest.

Tuition in the diocese averages approximately \$200 per student. Many schools, especially in the inner city, charge tuition on a sliding scale according to incomes and the number of children attending the school. A different approach to tuition payment is being used by approximately 20 parishes. If parents maintain a minimum amount at each Sunday collection, there is no further payment of tuition.

The new year will also bring an increasing emphasis on service oriented courses on the high

school level and new approaches to religion and social studies on the junior high level. High school students will be able to take courses designed to give understanding and practical experience in human development work.

Religion courses for seventh and eighth grades will be a series of themes based upon the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' publication, "To Teach as Jesus Did." The courses will explore message, community and service, Father Brent explained.

An interdisciplinary program will replace the old concept of junior-high social studies which formerly had explored New York State history in the seventh grade and United States history in the eighth. Now students will be exposed to various disciplines such as history, geography, sociology, economics, anthropology and political science.

Nearly a dozen schools will continue to take part in the urban-suburban transfer program which is part of the area's integration plan.

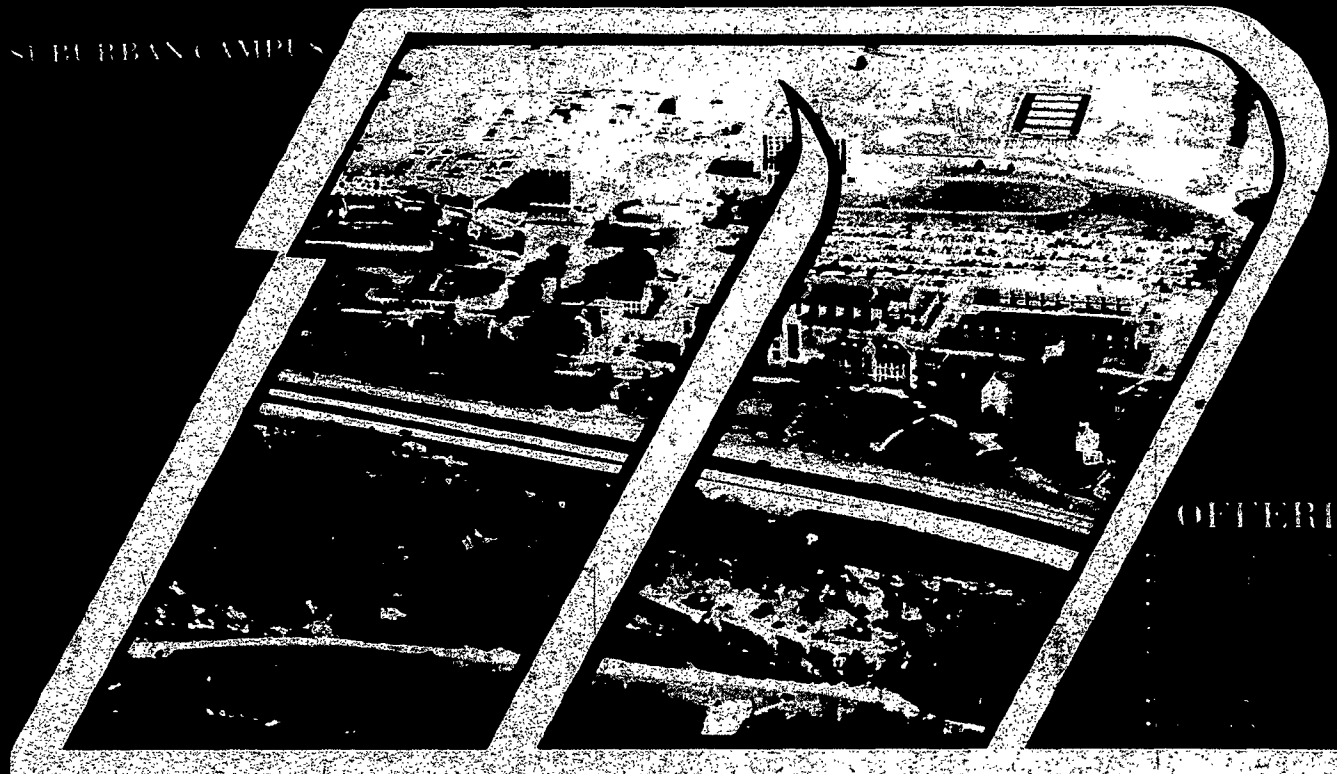
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