

Organization Works For Parental Choice

By MARTIN TOOMBS
Southern Tier Editor
Binghamton—Expansion of the textbook law, use of public school buildings and grounds by Catholic school students and the students' participation in BOCES programs are three benefits obtained at least partially through the efforts of the New York State Federation of Catholic School Parents, according to the federation.

William Gallagher, the federation's executive director, notes that none of the achievements of the past few years have actually given money to Catholic schools, but he estimates the savings and increased programs were worth \$73 million to the state's Catholic schools.

Interviewed recently at his office, located in the Diocese of Syracuse's Southern Tier Office here, Gallagher noted that his organization has had "a few false starts" in Rochester, and is currently organizing there. He noted that the

Elmira organization, led by Dr. Thomas Curran, has been operating for several years.

Gallagher emphasized that he is "expecting some good things from people in Rochester." He added that Sister Roberta Tierney, diocesan superintendent of schools, and Timothy Leahy, the deputy, have supported the organizing efforts.

The federation has three primary goals, Gallagher said: organization, public relations and political action.

Organization includes the organization of a new national group, and of local home-school associations.

"It isn't enough to sit back and let the school go by itself, and say 'sister, you're doing great,'" Gallagher said. "We are trying to get better cooperation between parents and teachers. We're trying to get the parents to realize that they are the

primary educator of the child, that it isn't enough just to drop the child off at the door of the school."

"We try to have the home-school groups take out their constitution and look at the primary reasons for which they were organized," he continued, "and it isn't simply fund raising, although that's very important."

Each diocese is considered to be a chapter in the state federation, with three members on the state board. One of the members of the state board recently was elected president of the new National Forum of Catholic Parents Organizations.

Gallagher estimates that of the approximately 1200 Catholic secondary and elementary schools in the state, 800 have parent organizations affiliated with the state organization.

"Most of us feel that the parents and the kids, especially as they get older, are the best public relations agents a school could have," Gallagher said. "We're the consumers, we're the parents and if we're satisfied, if we're pleased with the job Catholic schools are doing, it is easier for us" to convince others of the schools' value.

Gallagher noted that the federation, as a non-profit group, is limited in its political efforts, and is

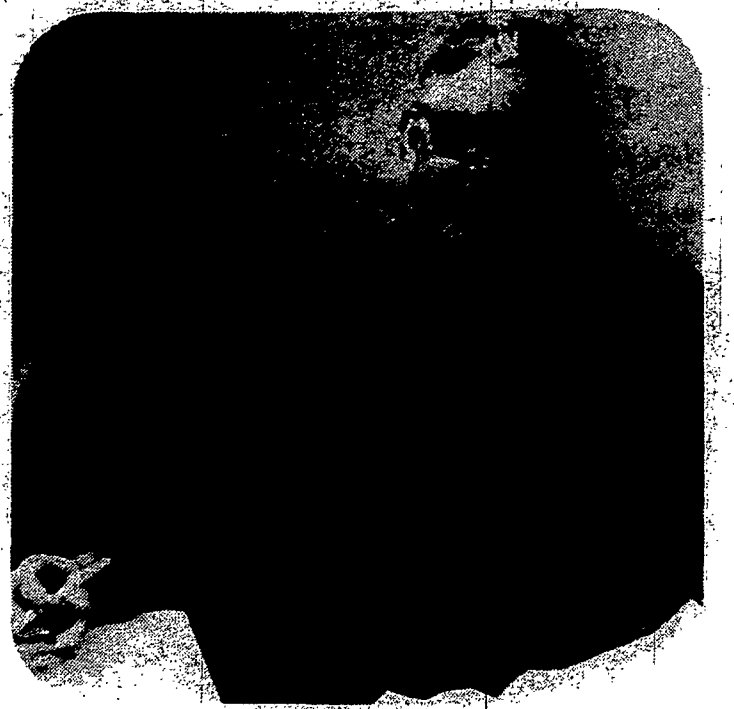
currently considering forming a tax-paying lobbying group to carry on political activities. The federation has been involved in many legislative programs, and has spoken to the Board of Regents at its annual hearings the past four years, Gallagher reported.

The federation doesn't ask for money for Catholic schools, Gallagher emphasized. Parental choice is the federation's goal, and the legislative programs are designed to provide funding for parents, not schools.

The program for 1977 includes field trips for students in private schools, provision of driver education and physical education for all students in the state, legislation concerning the 15 mile busing limit and a voucher experiment.

Vouchers have occupied much of the federation's time, explaining it to both Catholic parents and legislators, Gallagher said. Several legislators have reacted favorably to an experiment Gallagher noted, but none have submitted the necessary legislation. The state's fiscal situation could delay such an experiment even further, he added.

The voucher system provides for tax support of the school chosen by the parent, regardless of the



WILLIAM GALLAGHER

school's affiliation. Gallagher pointed out that a similar program, the GI Bill, allows selection of the college the student will attend. Although vouchers have never been tested in court, Gallagher noted, many think that they would be found constitutional.

Gallagher noted that an experiment might take five years, and resistance to the program would come from many elements in public education.

"Our philosophy in this is

we know that given the present make up of the Supreme Court that there are grave restrictions on getting a share of our tax dollars," Gallagher said. "On the other hand, our feeling is that we have a right to it. I'm convinced personally that we will get it, as long as we keep fighting for it. So our idea is to keep the level of consciousness of everybody, of the legislators, of the governor, of the court, that we're around, and that we deserve a share of our tax dollars."

SOUTHERN TIER
AUBURN-GENEVA

Pastoral Assistants Happy with New Jobs

By MARTIN TOOMBS
Southern Tier Editor
Pastoral assistants are becoming more numerous in

the diocese, and each seems to have her own style. In the Southern Tier, one pastoral assistant is a member of the NAACP, and another visits a

bakery each day, picking up the day old donuts for distribution to the area poor, elderly and shut ins.

Sister Joanne Cullen has been pastoral assistant at Ss. Peter and Paul in Elmira since August, and recently joined the NAACP. The parish has about 40 Black families, she estimated, and has been an active center for Black ministry in the area.

Sister Mary Jude at St. Ann's, Hornell, began picking up the day old donuts about a year ago, she said, and they have been appreciated by the people she visits.

The two sisters, both in their first year as pastoral assistants, taught for many years before changing roles. Sister Jude taught for 34 years, the last eight at St. Ann's. Sister Joanne taught for 22 years, including several years at St. Cecelia's, Ss. Peter and Paul's Eastside neighbor.

Sister Jude explained her change in job as growing from a discouragement with her teaching. She told Father MacNamara, St. Ann's pastor, of her discouragement, and he suggested the pastoral work, paired with religion classes in the school and CCD.

Sister said she is happy with the new arrangement, and likes the combination of religion teaching and pastoral work.

Sister Jude noted that she had always been concerned with the elderly, and now is able to visit them on a regular basis. A shortage of time makes it difficult for her to visit as many as she would like, she noted. The parish has about 75 persons on the Communion list.



Sister Joanne giving Communion to Sharon Jennings, on one of sister's regular visits to shut in parishioners.

sister said, and she takes Communion to those the priests are unable to visit.

"The elderly are very happy to have a visitor" she pointed out, and added that they "have been very open" to her bringing Communion to them.

Another duty Sister-Jude has assumed is training the altar boys. She offered the thought that she may be too tough on them.

Noting that "50 per cent of Steuben County is unchurched," sister pointed out that "there's no end to what you can do; the only thing that limits you is time."

Sister Joanne moved into pastoral work because she felt that she could have more contact with people, she said. Her acceptance by the parishioners has been "very good," she added. She is involved in St. Cecilia's as well, with a combined sacramental program. Her other activities include participation in a Parent

Teachers Organization at a local public school, rural ministry in the towns of Lowman and Chemung, and social work in the three Eastside housing developments. Help with food stamps, Medicaid, and Medicare are all part of the ministry in those areas, sister said.

The parish has about 75 elderly shut ins, Sister Joanne said, and she makes home visits and takes Communion to them. The parish also includes the Newtown Towers Senior Citizen housing building, and parishioners are also visited in other nursing homes and hospitals.

In addition to staff meetings with Father Edward Foy, Ss. Peter and Paul pastor, she and Father Foy pray together each day, Sister Joanne noted.

Father Foy called the pastoral assistants a "real step forward for the Church" that "fits in with what the Pope has been saying about women in the

Church." He noted that his experience with Sister Joanne has shown how important women are to the work of the Church.

"The quick acceptance by the people of sister is what struck me," he emphasized, "it didn't take them long at all to accept her equally with myself."

Sister Joanne had noted that persons sometimes relate better to a woman; Father Foy agreed, noting that "she's been able to touch people I couldn't touch."

Lenten Series Begins at St. Alphonsus

By MARY ANN GINNERTY

Auburn— "There is a need to bring people together in small groups for prayer and thinking about faith, sharing insights into it, and hopefully, bringing this back into the larger parish community," explained Father Thomas Nellis, associate pastor at St. Alphonsus, here.

Father Nellis outlined the dimensions of Lent 1977, a program open to St. Alphonsus' parishioners aimed at nourishing the sense of community, the heart of the parish.

The discussion series, described more as a small, temporary community of 10-15 persons was organized on February 27. Meetings are scheduled at the convenience of the participants with a staff person and lay leaders present.

Father Nellis pointed out that there is a certain unity by common faith, but there is a need to build on this. He indicated that larger parishes like St. Alphonsus are coming to grips with the need for providing more personalized experiences as enrichment opportunities.

A cross section of people come together to discuss basic issues such as prayer, moral life, liturgy, faith and doctrine. There will be a sharing of not only the insights, but the frustrations about church as well. The ultimate purpose, Father Nellis said, is to come closer to a realization of the supportive prayerful community.

The discussion aspect of the Lenten Program is an expansion of last year's program which was limited to Holy Week.

One other part of the series includes topics on each Sunday evening of Lent beginning at 7:30 p.m. at the St. Alphonsus Parish Center. These will deal with prayer, conscience formation, the new rite of Penance a communal Penance service and the Way of the Cross.

Brother James Leahy will speak on prayer this Sunday evening, March 6. Brother James, director of Christian Brothers Novitiate in Skaneateles, holds a doctorate in theology and has done post doctoral studies at the Biblical Institute in Rome. He has conducted several scripture series in the past at St. Alphonsus.

SOUTHERN TIER NEWS

Martin Toombs
Oakwood Terrace B-1
West 13th St.
Elmira Heights, N.Y. 14903
607-732-3371

AUBURN-GENEVA
Mary Ann Ginnerty
294 1/2 South Street Road
Auburn, N.Y. 13021
315-253-2176