

This is the Age of Catholic Schools

Father Thomas Gallagher serves as secretary for education at the U.S. Catholic Conference. The former superintendent of Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, discussed Catholic education in a recent interview. The following comments are taken from that interview with Katharine Bird of NC News Service.

Q. Father Gallagher, what is your primary concern right now?

A. Tuition tax credits, which I see as empowering parents by giving them a choice in what schools their children can attend. This is a right guaranteed by law in this country.

Q. Could you give readers an idea of what you do to support tuition tax credits?

A. Recently, I've gone to the White House and to Capitol Hill to discuss particulars of the present bill and I had a bit of contact with the White House staff in composing the bill.

Earlier, our strategy included trying to persuade President Reagan to attend the annual National Catholic Educational Association Convention. He is invited routinely every year, but this time he came to take the opportunity to unveil the tuition tax credit bill.

I also work for tax credits within the Catholic educational system and by serving on a coalition of private schools and a Catholic-ecumenical coalition.

Q. How do you answer critics of tuition tax credits who protest the introduction of this bill in a time of economic distress when many social programs are being trimmed?

A. First, the amount of money involved is insignificant — \$100 million — rising ultimately to \$1.5 billion — out of a total



FATHER GALLAGHER

budget of \$729 billion.

Second, it's not taking money away from the federal budget but rather it's leaving money in people's pockets. People have a prior right to their own money.

Third, tuition tax credits are a major investment in family life. No social program is more crucial than the family in our society. Families are strengthened when they feel they can make choices.

The bill will give a choice to middle-income and poor parents, who say cost is the main reason they don't send their children to private schools. Mom and dad will be able to say, "I want to send my kid to this school." They won't feel so manipulated.

Father Andrew Greeley's 1973 study showed that loyalty to Catholic schools dips when you hit the \$15,000-\$20,000 annual income level. This was a big surprise. It means that the bulk of our kids are from middle-to-lower-income families. The White House has mentioned similar studies.

Q. How would you evaluate chances for passage of the tuition tax credits bill by the Congress?

A. It's closer now than ever before. Presidential support is crucial. Now

President Reagan has offered to support tuition tax credits. And if he does for credits what he did for AWACs, our chances are very good. The president's staff says the bill has a good chance of passing, too.

Q. What do you see happening in secondary education?

A. We're moving into the age of the computer and it's exciting. There's no doubt the future lies in technology and computers. Some schools in New York and California are using computers to teach students subjects like Latin, in one case. Often the Catholic schools drag their heels when new technology appears. Here, we are taking the initiative and I see it as an encouraging sign.

Q. Do people hold any stereotypes about Catholic schools?

A. Right now Broadway's theaters are presenting some plays about Catholic schools stuck in the mindset of the 1940s and 1950s. It is not fair to us. People don't realize that the public schools of the time were equally rigid. The Broadway view is a way of dumping on us which many Catholics could find embarrassing. It's tempting just to fold our tent and go away. But the challenge to us is to tell the real story of Catholic education. Today is different from "the good old days." And we don't need to apologize for what we have no control over.

Q. What would you tell people about Catholic education?

A. I'd like to tell the people what a critical role

Catholic schools play. They make a substantial contribution to the life of the Church. Too often people don't appreciate the fact that there is a Catholic worldview. The schools help the Church perpetuate this view.

The Catholic schools provide a laboratory for learning. We try to teach with the aim of bringing a better world to fruition today. Our schools are a community of the disciples of Jesus Christ — full of original sin. But here students pick up lessons for living in the future, but also for today.

I think it is important to remember the future doesn't always come. Some of my classmates in the seminary and even in elementary school have died already. For them, it helped to live for the moment.

Q. What do you think the future of Catholic schools looks like?

A. Today is the age of private and Catholic schools. Parents are taking a hard look at moral development. For the question of religion is natural: Somewhere along the line everyone asks, "What gives life meaning?" Then, in answering that question, people begin to set priorities for themselves. Catholic schools can work closely with families and the Church in that process. That puts our schools at the crest of what people are thinking right now.

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Notre Dame

Elmira — Two new staff members will greet the more than 500 students entering Notre Dame High School this fall. The two are Fiona O'Connor, a Notre Dame graduate who will teach English, and Thom Lambert, a member of the Theology Department.

Three foreign exchange

students will also study at the school this year, side by side with those Notre Dame students who traveled through Greece and Italy with Greg Grund in the People to People Program.

The fall sports program will include golf, cross-country, football, soccer, girls' volleyball and girls' tennis.

'Family Challenge' Offered at Fisher

The special challenges to families in modern America is the topic of a non-credit course offered by the Office of Continuing Education at St. John Fisher College this fall.

Topics to be covered include marriage communication, family dynamics, married sexuality, raising children, family finance, and religion and the family.

Father Robert Collins, former director of the Office of Family Life, will be the

instructor. Father Collins is the Roman Catholic chaplain at Monroe Community College and is active in the Worldwide Marriage Encounter program.

"The Family: Challenges for the '80s" will be offered on Fridays from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. There are 10 sessions beginning on Sept. 17 and concluding on Nov. 19. There is a \$45 fee.

Contact: Paula E. Lane, ext. 365; Gina M. DiBella, ext. 234.

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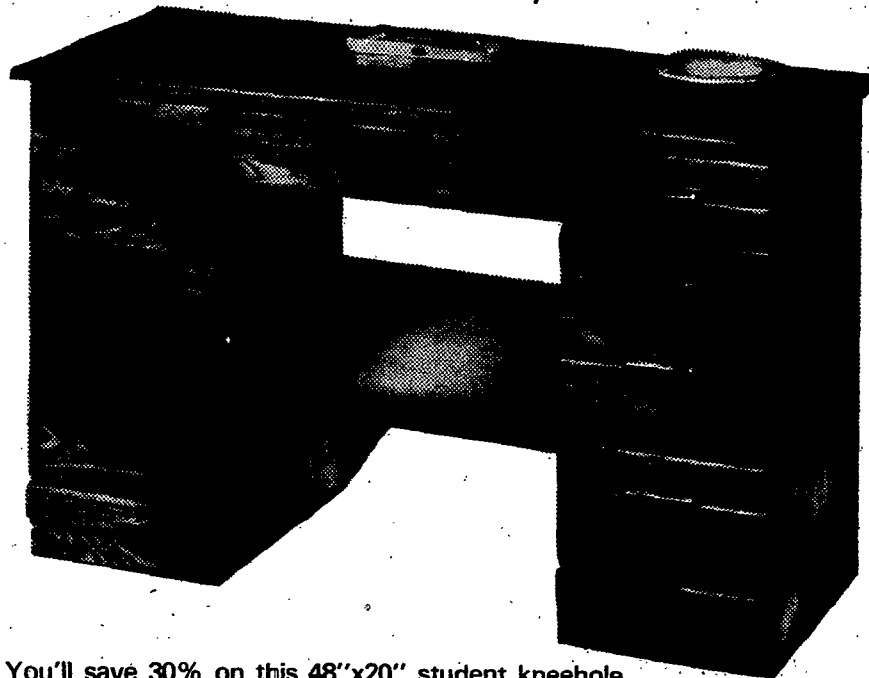
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