

# Catholic Schools: Believing in the Future

By Sister M. Edwardine Weaver, RSM

At the beginning of a new school year, I write out of a firm commitment to Catholic education and to the awesome responsibility educators and co-partners in this ministry have for articulating a collective vision in claiming the future ministerial role of the school in meeting the needs of the Church and society.

There is, I believe, a growing realization that the future of humanity may be to a great extent what people choose to make it. It is our generation that will assure the quality of Catholic education for the young of tomorrow. The driving energy that will push us out of the events of our day and into the future is the commitment to our mission of spreading the Gospel through educational institutions. The future is now — it is waiting for us!

What must distinguish Catholic schools as being truly special is not that they provide a quality education, but that they afford a quality education imbued with Christian Catholic values. It should be a visible, noticeable difference. Creating that difference is neither complicated nor expensive; it is simply being Christian, being positive and hopeful. I suspect one might say, "let's be realistic," "let's be more practical." On the other hand, we know the difficult lesson that imaginative or visionary thinking does not grow in an atmosphere of doubt and lack of encouragement. It is a fact that Catholic schools provide a consistent approach to values that society is sorely in need of today. Visionary and imaginative thinking must be nourished in planning and claiming the future.

Part of the vision will be to strengthen the position of schools with an environment created as a result of mutual commitment on the part of clergy, faculty, parents and students to the mission of the school. This means a commitment to both the professional aspects and a personal stake in the school and the lives of its students. This has been and must continue to grow as a "hallmark" of Catholic schools.

This future image may well include an expanded understanding and fuller use of

our educational facilities to include day-care centers, literacy volunteer programs, adult education and special education programs. It may also include a more effective means of financing these schools and programs. As a national group, parents of private school children belie the image of an affluent elite. Sixty percent earn less than \$20,000 a year. Twenty percent of private school children attend schools in center-city neighborhoods. In looking toward this future, questions such as people's needs and desires, use of facilities, legislation, growth limit, support and development are factors that must be part of shaping the future.

Sister Jeanne O'Laughlin, president of Barry College, recently listed five elements of future people and future institutions as being:

1. Future people must be able to generate alternatives
2. Future people must have an extended perspective
3. Future people must have the ability to articulate goals
4. Future people must organize self for purposeful action, get self to grow
5. Future people must come to a guiding image of the future — possible, probable, preferable.

It would appear that the key to the vision of the future is an answer to the questions: What do parents value most in life for their children? How important is it to not only teach children to earn a living but live a life? How can Catholic schools continue to develop leadership that will witness to Gospel values in society, no matter what the consequence may be? How can parents become a more integral part in shaping the vision of this future?

As we begin a new academic year, I would like to share with you the highlights of some programs for this year that are seen as initial steps toward identifying and building characteristics associated with the future:

**Market-Development of Catholic Schools** — a newly printed Spanish translation of the Catholic schools brochure will be implemented, out reach to the black community will continue, and the development of long-range planning for individual schools will be expanded to include a minimum of 10 more schools. A development

manual is in preparation and will be used in conjunction with support workshops on public relations, budgeting and alternative sources of funding.

• **School Self-Study and Evaluation** — "Shaping the Future" will enter Phase II with a team visitation to the five 1983-84 pilot schools. Nine more schools will enter Phase I.

• **Computer Literacy** — a curriculum guide for computer classes will be completed and orientation sessions for implementation will be held in the fall of 1984.

• **Tuition Subsidy** — alternative sources of funding will continue to be explored. A subcommittee of the diocesan Board of Education will continue to focus on this and on efforts with the Diocesan Development Office which will continue.

• **Sex Education** — a parent manual will be updated for use with the 1983 revision of the course of study.

• **Religious Education** — pilot use of REDI (Religious Education Developmental Inventory) will be implemented and evaluated at the fifth grade level.

• **Administrative Courses** — will be expanded to include an offering on the philosophy of Catholic education.

• **Principals' Workshops** — will focus on the development of spiritual leadership among school personnel and on practices that support this effort in training and supervising teaching staffs.

• **School Visitations** — the format for the annual visitation to each school will be redesigned to improve the monitoring of diocesan policies and support for school growth in the development of faith community.

• **Education to Justice** — Sixty trained leaders will be assisted in continuing Education to Justice through the infusion method in our schools.

• **Kindergarten Curriculum** — The religion program will be reviewed in regard to possible updating. This follows the revision of our 1-8 program.

• **Financing** — efforts will be made to examine the current methods of financing Catholic schools and possible alternative practices.

• **Urban Schools** — in conjunction with the Division



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of Urban Services, efforts will be made to address the growing concerns raised in providing the availability of Catholic education in the urban area of Rochester.

• **Regents Action Plan** — a diocesan response to the Regents Action Plan will be developed and used in bringing a consistent approach to program development in the elementary schools.

We believe in the future! We believe that this future can be shaped by the collective wisdom and vision of those who choose to do so. Catholic educators and co-partners in this ministry are reasonably well-suited to enabling the development of this future because they are engaged in an educational process that explicitly promotes values and ideals. We face this challenge with hope and trust. We welcome your partnership in forming the future and believe that future will continue to be a vital service to the mission of the Church in impacting the lives of people in life-giving ways for generations to come.

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## St. Patrick's Celebrates 125 Years in Education

Owego — Bishop Matthew H. Clark presided at the recent Mass of Thanksgiving noting the 125th anniversary of St. Patrick's School here. Many graduates, teachers and friends of the school attended the ceremonies which included a buffet and a social hour.

The school opened under the direction of Father Nicholas Byrnes in the rear of the church in 1859. The Sisters of Mercy, led by Mother Mary de Sales, began staffing the school a decade later.

A parish brochure commemorating the 125th anniversary said, "As Owego continued to grow in population, the school erected in the 1850s was beginning to be overcrowded and not in

conformity with the present day standards. Property known as the 'Stanbrough property' on Front Street was purchased in 1948 at the price of \$17,000. This land was directly in back of St. Patrick's and gave the church all the ground from Front Street to Main Street. Shortly after, funds were raised for a new school and in September 1950, the pupils at St. Patrick's entered the well-equipped school.

"The new six-room addition to the school was dedicated in 1967 by Bishop Fulton J. Sheen. Because of reorganization in the local school district, grades 7 and 8 were eliminated from St. Patrick's School. A parish press release notes

that a special Scholarship Fund for St. Patrick's School is being established.

"All reading and math will be taught at the same time throughout the school so as to have creative planning and movement of children from one group or one classroom to another," the parish release also said. "Computer education will be part of the curriculum for grades K-6, as well as hands-on experience in our computer center."

"Along with gym, music and art, Spanish classes will be held for grades 5 and 6. Mini-sessions on varied topics, arts and crafts and others, will be provided one afternoon a month," the release said.

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