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Catholic schools struggle to comply with court ruling

By Teresa A. Parsons

A basic inequity is what most principals, parents and diocesan education officials call this summer's Supreme Court's ruling that Chapter 1 remedial instruction cannot take place in Catholic school facilities.

In a 5-4 decision, the nation's highest court ruled July 1 against a New York City program that allowed public school teachers paid with federal Chapter 1 funds (formerly known as Title I) to teach remedial classes in parochial schools. The ruling, which stated that program involved "excessive entanglement of Church and state," was also directed at two similar programs in Grand Rapids, Mich.

That decision allowed public and diocesan school officials only two months to design and implement responses to the court's decision, although the program struck down by the court had been in place for 18 years.

For Woodrow Hammond, director of the Rochester City School district's Chapter 1 program, that wasn't just inconvenient, it was infuriating.

"I do not support the Supreme Court's ruling," Hammond said. "I do not believe they realized the debilitating effect it would have on both the city and parochial systems. Had they thought it through, I think they would have given us a stay of a year ... to come up with a good plan."

That's exactly what happened in the New York City case, where a federal court judge last month granted the school system a one-year delay in carrying out the decision, stipulating that the city's board of education report on its progress every 60 days.

In the Diocese of Rochester's 12-county area, an estimated 1,000 to 1,500, or 5-7 percent, of parochial school students participate in Chapter 1, which aids educationally disadvantaged students in reading and math. James McAuliffe, the diocesan assistant superintendent for public affairs estimates that about 50 of the 75 diocesan schools offer Chapter 1 instruction.

So far, McAuliffe has been notified by 45 Catholic schools of their implementations of the court ruling. Plans range from busing students to nearby public schools to students walking to close "neutral sites." Other responses being considered include specially equipped mobile units that would park near parochial schools as needed or designated neutral sites in central locations.

As a result of the haste with which plans were conceived by school districts, some

parochial school parents have withdrawn their children from Chapter 1 instruction. That's despite the fact that as taxpayers, they are guaranteed access to that service for their children.

Some were concerned about their children being shuffled around outside the school building. Others argue that children who need remedial help can ill afford to miss regular class time. Whatever the parents' reasons, most principals anticipate further withdrawals as the onset of winter complicates transportation.

In Rochester, more than 280 students in four Catholic schools are affected — St. Stanislaus, Corpus Christi, St. Monica's and Our Lady of Perpetual Help. At all four schools, students now wait nearly an hour after school before public school teachers are available for remedial instruction.

At three of the schools, students are then bused to nearby public school buildings. Students at St. Monica's go next door to the Genesee St. Child Care Center, a neutral site, where the school district has rented space for Chapter 1 instruction.

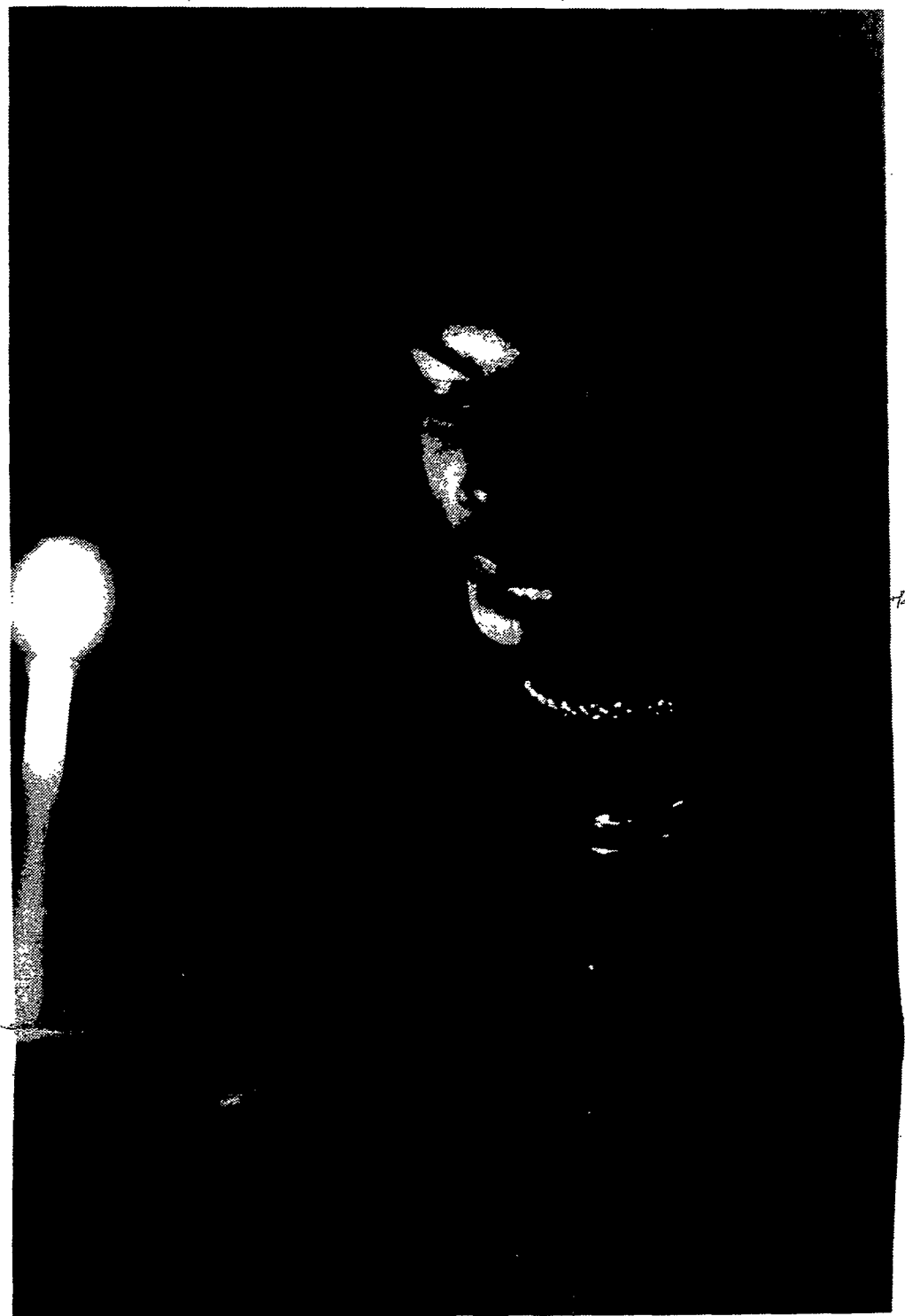
Requirements for establishing a neutral site are that the building not be used for parochial education or contain any religious items, such as crucifixes.

Gaynelle Wethers, principal at St. Monica's, said parents of her nearly 50 Chapter 1 students were receptive to the changes. "It is a long day," she admitted, "but parents actually appreciate the help their children are getting with their homework. They're willing to make that kind of sacrifice for their children's education."

Sister Clare Francis Mogenhan, principal of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, is not unhappy with the content of the program, but she said the physical aspect is "not too hot." The number of students from her school enrolled in Chapter 1 remedial instruction has so far dropped by four to 19. They are instructed in the public school cafeteria, which she described as "not exactly conducive to learning." But she stressed that she doesn't blame the city school district. "They're doing the best they can under the circumstances," she said.

Three students of the 30-35 Chapter 1 students at Corpus Christ school have dropped out of the program, according to principal Sister Eileen Daly. The reason most parents cited was that their children were not

continued on Page 3



Illuminating a pastoral letter

Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

LaJuane Mack read several parts in last week's dramatization of the Appalachian bishops' pastoral letter, "This Land Is Home to Me," at St. Bridget's Parish, Rochester. See story on Page 5.

Nicaragua: Two perceptions

Witnesses for Peace return with messages for public

By Teresa A. Parsons

Even before they left Rochester, the 18 members of the Witness for Peace delegation made a promise about their return: each agreed to share with people here whatever he or she heard, saw and experienced of Nicaragua.

Thursday night at the Gates Presbyterian Church, as the group addressed its first audience, most of the members revealed another promise they'd made, or rather the same one again. This time it was at the request of many Nicaraguans they met in their travels — cab drivers, coffee farmers, people in the marketplace and the country town of Yali.

"They placed great trust in use as recipients of their hospitality to bring their message back," said Sister Beatrice Ganley.

The Nicaraguans' message, conveyed by the delegation, was that the greatest suffering

the Nicaraguan people results from the U.S. government's policy of supporting the contras. "We can't stand much more of this," Nicaraguan citizens asked the delegation to report.

In the village of Yali, where the delegation stayed for several days, one woman told the group that the contras had killed 108 townspeople during the past two years, including women and children. The village only has 3,500 inhabitants.

"The actions of the contras only serve to bring suffering to the Nicaraguans," the woman wrote. "If it weren't for the U.S. support of the contras, they wouldn't be able to continue with their destruction of our country and especially with the assassinations of our sons, brothers, and in general, all of the people, a people who want peace."

Tom Harris said he got some idea of the

continued from Page 4

Former Sandinista says party misleads Nicaraguan visitors

By Karen M. Franz

Humberto Belli, author of the book "Nicaragua: Christians Under Fire," explains that he was for many years a member of the Sandinista Party and, therefore, knows whereof he speaks.

Nicaragua under the Sandinistas is not a utopia, he claims. The Sandinistas are communists, and they intend to create a communist state in which there are no religions, no freedoms. But, he adds, because of the religious character of the Nicaraguan populace, the Sandinistas are moving slowly toward communism, progressing cautiously to consolidate their power.

Many who visit Nicaragua for a few weeks come back with the impression that all would be well in Nicaragua if it were not for the intervention of the United States. Those visitors are being misled, Belli told a small audience at St. John Fisher College last

Thursday evening.

"There is a clear pattern of commitment to Marxist-Leninist ideals in the documents of the Sandinistas since the 1960s," he said. "You will listen very often to people who have been in Nicaragua for one, two or three weeks, who do not even speak the language or understand the culture. They come back as experts on Nicaragua. I have been in this country for three years, and I still don't think I understand American politics," he said.

Most of the American groups that go to Nicaragua are hosted by CEPAD, an evangelical Protestant group Belli claimed is really a propaganda tool of the Sandinista government. The political pilgrims, he said, return to this country prepared to convince the public of the wonders of the revolution.

"These people want to find out what they want to find out," he said, "and they find it

Continued on Page 4

Inside this issue:

Spooky origins

Various pagan religious traditions were combined throughout the centuries, creating the Halloween celebration of today — Page 7.

The Baptismal Call

Our series of profiles on the way average Catholics carry out the call to demonstrate their faith continues on Page 10.

A misleading score

Despite the unbalanced score, Saturday's match between the McQuaid Knights and the Little Irish of Aquinas was a rough one — Page 13.