

Diocesan officials approve Chemung County school plan

By Teresa A. Parsons

In a letter dated January 15, 1986, Bishop Matthew H. Clark notified members of the Chemung County General Education Board that he and diocesan education officials have approved a plan for reorganizing the Catholic elementary school system in Elmira beginning in September, 1986.

The plan, which the board approved Thursday, Dec. 12, by an 8-1 vote, designates St. Mary's School building for primary grades (pre-kindergarten through 3), Our Lady of Lourdes' for intermediate (4-6) and St. Casimir's for junior high (7-8). St. Patrick's School building, where the regional junior high has been located, will no longer be used as a school.

In his letter, Bishop Clark wrote: "I realize that there are concerns about some elements of the plan. I urge you to continue to promote the strengths of the plan and to do all that is possible to assist in areas of transition.

"Yours is a history of strong support and cooperation to offer Catholic education to the people of your area. May you all continue to work together toward this goal in a united way," he continued.

For members of the long-range planning committee, who spent more than a year developing and explaining the plan, diocesan approval meant the end of what was, at times, an ordeal. Chairman Jim Snyder and committee members Jim Cummings, Fran Smith and Kathy Valenti of Our Lady of Lourdes, Rich Baker of St. Anthony, Larry Stephens and Bill Baker of St. Mary's, began work on the plan in December, 1984.

Introduced to parents at a meeting in September, 1985, the plan was formally tabled for discussion by the school board at its October meeting. At that time, it came under fire from parents concerned over such specifics as transportation, the amount of input they had in formulating the plan, the method of tuition assessment and the school system's new format, which is a step away from neighborhood schools.

Now that the plan has been adopted and approved both locally and at the diocesan level, reassuring those parents and answering their concerns is the task faced by the school board's public relations committee, headed by Sister Patricia Carroll and composed of long-range planning committee members, parents from each of the schools, and a Corning Glass employee with marketing expertise.

Next month, during Catholic Schools Week, the committee will sponsor open houses at each of the three facilities designated by the plan. On Tuesday, Feb. 4, parents of students entering kindergarten through grade three are invited to visit St. Mary's primary building. Parents of students entering fourth or fifth grade will be invited to Our Lady of Lourdes school building on Wednesday, and those whose children are entering junior high will gather at St. Casimir's building on Thursday. Parents with children in more than one building are invited to one or all of the open houses, which each begin at 7 p.m. At each meeting, parents will be offered a tour of the facilities and the opportunity to meet teachers and principals and ask questions. Sister Patricia, principal of the regional junior high school, expects that a task force of parents will also be on hand with answers to such specific concerns as transportation.

At the same time, parents will be asked for their help in planning the transition between buildings this spring and for ideas about how best to acclimate their children to the change.

"We want each child to feel at home next fall," Sister Patricia said. "We also want to keep an ear open to people's concerns."

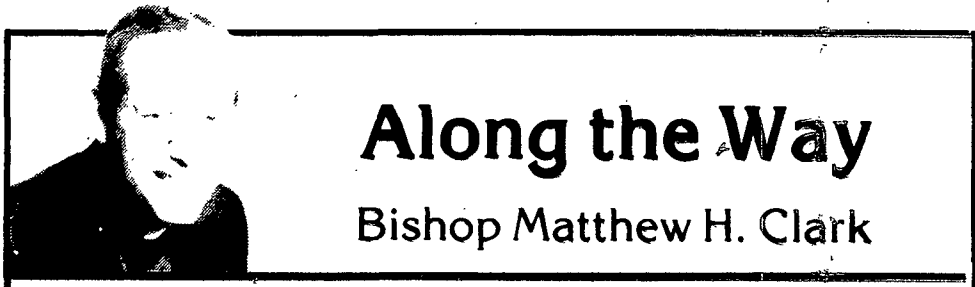
Meanwhile, to better reflect regional nature of the system, families are being asked to suggest new names for the schools by February 7. A committee comprised of parents, pastors and principals as well as long-range committee members is also working on possible names. So far, potential categories include American saints or titles of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

At the board's February 13 meeting, all the suggested names will be submitted for approval by the board.

Once the school system is renamed, the public relations committee will publish an informational brochure for use in recruiting. Formal registration for next year will begin March 10 and end in April.

At its January meeting, the board unanimously voted to offer both full-day and half-day kindergarten at the St. Mary's primary building next year.

The board is also seeking a full-time chaplain for the Chemung County System. Sister Patricia believes the chaplain will be a great help in communicating between the pastors and parents of seven parishes and the principals and teachers in the school system.



Along the Way Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Last week I had the pleasure of my annual visit to our sister diocese of Tabasco in Mexico. It was a grace as always to be with our friends there and to renew the commitment we have made to walk together in our journey of faith.

I convey to you the affectionate greetings and gratitude not only of Bishop Rafael, but of the great number of persons who hold you in their prayers each day. The people, especially the very poor, find in our presence there a reminder that they are not alone or uncared for. They find in your encouragement a greater ability to realize their human dignity.

Your prayer and support for them, through our Diocesan Mission Collection and Operation Breadbox, help them develop their God-given talents and enable many of them for the first time to work together and to better their own lives.

I think of the Catechists of Health. They devote considerable time and energy to teaching their sisters and brothers better ways of nutrition, sanitation and preventive health care. As a group of them told me about different dimensions of their work, I was deeply touched by their oneness with the people, and felt proud that we are all very much a part of that.

I remember as well a visit with four leaders from the cooperative your care helped establish in Oxolotan. As the leaders of the effort shared both the successes and disappointments they have thus far experienced, they did so with a strong sense of union with you. When

they spoke of their successes, they spoke of them as our successes. When they spoke of their failures and disappointments, they did so expressing the hope that they had not let us down too much. I was deeply touched, as I'm sure you would have been, by the openness and utter simplicity with which they shared the story of their struggle. Experiences like these deepen my conviction that, despite all the challenges this effort places before us, we are in the beginnings of a venture that will become more important as the years go by.

I'd like to say more about that in a future column, but let me, for now, offer this brief update:

1) During my discussions with Bishop Rafael, we decided that our missionaries will work from now on as part of an integrated team under the direct leadership of a Mexican pastor, rather than as a separate Rochester unit relating at a distance to our Mexican friends. This will allow us to develop a stable base community into which our missionaries can be received, and in which they can receive any additional language training and pastoral or cultural formation they may need. When and as this matures, we will be able to make solid judgments about further developments.

2) Father Paul Ryan is doing extraordinarily well. He looks like a million dollars, is speaking Spanish in a way that pleases him and the people he serves, and he is at least as happy and good-spirited as he has ever been. P. J. sends love to all. And for now, I say: Peace to all.

Diocese of Syracuse to mark 100th anniversary

Syracuse (NC) — The Diocese of Syracuse will observe its 100th anniversary with 17 months of events, including a dinner for 2,500 Catholics, a picnic, publication of a history of the diocese, and regional and parish celebrations.

Nov. 26, 1986, is the official anniversary of the diocese, which was established by Pope Leo XIII.

A kick-off dinner Jan. 31 at Syracuse University's Carrier Dome will feature Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York and Holy Cross Father Theodore Hesburgh, president of the University of Notre Dame, as speakers.

Regional and parish liturgies are planned throughout the seven-county, 171-parish diocese on or near the anniversary date.

Other events include a symposium for Lent 1987 on hunger, hospitality, unemployment, service, sexism, equality, human dignity,

nuclear arms and peace concerns.

The Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, located in downtown Syracuse, was undergoing \$880,000 in renovations in preparation for centennial celebrations.

Ontario Group Plans Series

Five training sessions will be offered by Birthright of Ontario for anyone interested in volunteering for the group. An international non-denominational service, Birthright provides positive alternatives to abortion in crisis pregnancy situations.

The first session was held Sunday, Jan. 26. Subsequent meetings are Saturday mornings, February 1, 8, 15 and 22, from 9 a.m. to noon at St. Mary's of the Lake Church, 5823 Walworth Road, Ontario. For more information, call (315)524-2559 or 524-7509.

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