

# Rumors rally school support in Bath

Because rumors of a school closing can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, they strike terror into the hearts of principals and parents alike. But reports that St. Mary's School in Bath might close have had the opposite effect, according to the principal, Sister Mary Agnes Zimmer.

"We've had four calls for registration already," Sister Mary Agnes said. "We had a very successful Catholic Schools Week, and at the open house last week parents were very concerned and supportive."

"I would say it is very definitely due to the publicity," she added.

The publicity she refers to stemmed from a published report late last month that the school might close. The report was prompted by the parish finance committee's recommendation that the school close next year.

"When people saw that in print, they became very concerned," Sister Mary Agnes said. "But no decision has been made as yet."

Like schools all over the diocese, St. Mary's School has been afflicted with declining enrollment and rising costs for some time. Last year, the school claimed 120 students in pre-school through grade six. This year, enrollment dropped to 75, due in part to the administrators' decision to drop

the preschool program because of low enrollment and the program's failure to feed students into the kindergarten class.

Frances Abbey, a parishioner who sent her three oldest children to the school, described the finance committee's action as "premature."

"It came as a shock to a lot of people," she explained. "Finance alone shouldn't determine the outcome. The heart and spirit of the parish are another aspect that should be considered ... and the input of the parish people should be involved."

Diocesan officials agree, especially since the finance committee alone does not have the authority to close a parish school.

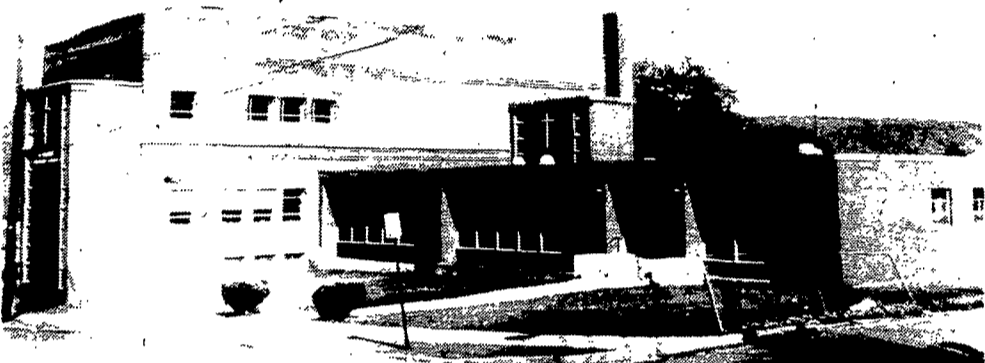
Since then, parish and diocesan representatives have been working together, seeking ways to increase enrollment and reduce the parish's assessment for school support.

"It's a good school," said Sister Roberta Tierney, diocesan director of the Division of Education. "We need to look for other alternatives."

Because registration is coming up, a decision is expected soon, according to Sister Mary Agnes.

Members of the finance committee and the pastor declined to comment.

# School merger proposed



Corning Catholic South is the site designated by the long-range planning committee for a consolidated school. The building, formerly St. Mary's School, opened in 1960.

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McDonald, the former superintendent of Corning's public schools and district superintendent of Steuben County schools, and other members of the committee were asked "to make recommendations for the best method to sustain and maintain Catholic education in Corning."

Based on a study of past and current baptismal records, the committee predicted fairly consistent enrollment figures for the next five years. But present class sizes as small as 10 have driven the per-pupil cost high enough to become a financial drain to the system.

Diocesan school guidelines suggest a school budget supported by a ratio of 40 percent tuition to 40 percent parish support to 20 percent from various fund-raising efforts. In Corning, however, parish assessments now comprise 76 percent of the schools' annual budgets, while their tuitions are categorized among the lowest 4 percent diocese-wide.

If the plan is approved, consolidation will lower the per-pupil cost to \$808 from \$1,186 at Corning North and \$1,065 at Corning South. These savings would allow parish

assessments to be reduced gradually without raising tuition immediately, McDonald said.

"It's not just dollars," McDonald added. "We honestly felt that consolidation at this time would not weaken the Catholic part of our education."

After analyzing seven optional configurations for the schools, the committee chose a kindergarten-through-grade-five format. But because a survey of parents in November revealed that no one wanted to give up seventh and eighth grades, the committee revised their plan to include junior high students.

Since the task of developing a plan is completed, the planning committee has now disbanded. School boards and parish councils will consider the plan at meetings throughout February. Diocesan approval will also be necessary before the plan is finally adopted.

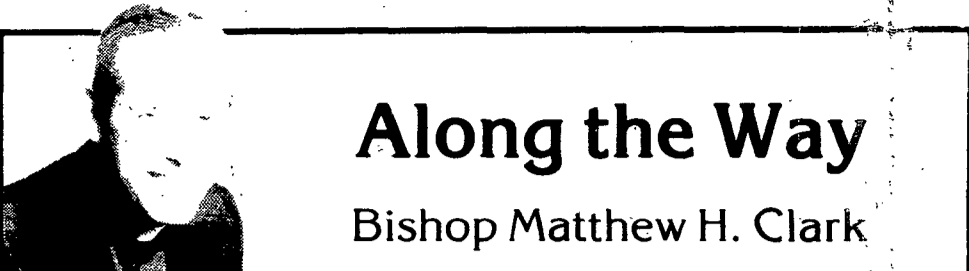
The decision to close St. Vincent DePaul's school building, opened in 1913, would be a painful one for parishioners. They have asked for more time to consider the proposal, but with school registration coming up in March, that time is limited.

# Mercy Basketball Victorious

Our Lady of Mercy High School varsity basketball team beat Bishop Kearney, 61-37 on Tuesday, Jan. 21.

Senior guard Stacey Paridon scored 23

points, and juniors Julie Seitz and Kerry McCarthy scored 16 points and 10 points respectively.



# Along the Way

Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Sunday evening.

I wrote a personal check this week that behaved like Silly Putty as soon as it left my hand. It bounced so high it made Spud Webb and Dominique Wilkins (the NBA slam-dunk finalists) seem earth-bound! When it finally stopped banging off the ceiling, I was \$10 poorer, mildly embarrassed and strong in the resolve that henceforth I would deposit my pay check promptly and not carry it around in my pocket until I forgot it was there.

The truth is that I got in trouble not because I intended to act unjustly or to harm anyone, but because I put off making the bank deposit and then forgot it. I guess it's fair enough to say that in this case there was no moral guilt on my part, but even my mother would be hard put to argue that I should not be held responsible for the consequences of my forgetfulness. And she, if not my banker and creditors, would be the first to come after me if such delinquency became the pattern rather than the exception in my life.

Why do I make such a song and dance about all of this? Only because I think most of the trouble we get ourselves into or cause for others is the result not so much of ill will as of forgetting the importance of our routine and ordinary in our daily living.

Think about it for a moment. Have you ever been so worried or pre-occupied that you responded to the greeting of a friend with all the animation and warmth of a figure on Mt. Rushmore? Have you ever been so tired that you had no energy left to be present to a loved one who really needed your

attention? Have you ever let small annoyances pile up on you in such a way that you exploded at some innocent soul for no good reason at all?

If you have had such experiences, you can probably say that you didn't decide deliberately to act in any of the ways described. But what about the events or silences or decisions that preceded them? When did I begin to lose perspective about the relative importance of work and friendship and my own personal needs? Why am I on a track that leaves me exhausted most of the time? What makes me so unable or unwilling to deal with the normal, small annoyances of daily living?

Lent is an excellent time to face questions as these. It's a time for remembering the fidelity and passion of God and is a six-week invitation to surrender our minds and our hearts to deeper realities — God, our neighbors and all that is very best within us.

Lent is a time to look at the way we move through all that is ordinary and routine in our lives — my rest, the way I show those closest to me, what I take to nourish my body and my spirit, how much time I am willing to spend with the Lord.

It is from such daily events and decisions about them that we construct the basic patterns of our lives. If the Lord leads you somehow to reattend such things in the Lenten season, remember His assurance that great things will be given us if we are faithful in the small.

Peace to all.

**FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT**  
**Sunday's Readings:**  
**Deuteronomy 26:4-10;**  
**Romans 10:8-13; Luke 4:1-13.**

The first Sunday of Lent invites reflection on the need for reconciliation. The Book of Deuteronomy conjures up the image of the Israelite people having been transplanted to Egypt in need of reconciliation with the plan of God. "He heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil, our oppression. He brought us out of Egypt with His strong hand and outstretched arm, with terrifying power, with signs and wonders..."

Luke's gospel gives us the

CROSSROADS

traditional message of Jesus' temptation and the challenge: are we loyal to God or to the things of this world? Perhaps our Christian vision is in need of clarity. After all, Jesus was tempted with food, authority and power but remained steadfast in His loyalty to God.

St. Paul summarizes all these ideas with the statement: "For if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." The challenge of this Lenten season is to reconcile the authenticity of this statement with the world in which we live.

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