

Project US

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program to integrate minority children into non-minority school districts. Project US also represented the first voluntary program that allowed urban and suburban students to attend schools in districts other than the ones in which they lived. Boston later started a similar program, and there are currently four or five other such programs scattered here and there around the nation.

Rochester, according to project director George C. Simmons, serves as an example and a resource to other communities considering such a voluntary school integration project. Indeed, in July, 1969, the Rochester program was singled out by the federal government as one of five school systems nationwide in which progress had been made in school desegregation.

"The major achievement of all these students was their presence and successful acceptance into a school district previously racially isolated," says Dr. Norman Gross, who directed the program from its inception in 1965 until his retirement in 1982. "Their success has proven that children of different ethnic and racial backgrounds can learn together in an atmosphere beneficial and enlightening to all involved."

Two years after the project began, St. Jerome School in East Rochester became the first suburban parochial school to participate in the program. St. Thomas the Apostle in West Irondequoit lived up to its district's reputation by initiating a program soon afterward, the same year that World of Inquiry School (an alternative primary public school) opened its doors with a voluntary enrollment of 40 white suburban students. Several private schools soon signed up, including suburban Harley School. Diocesan elementary schools have consistent-

ly remained in the vanguard, with 10 schools currently participating, and Sister Virginia says that plans are under way to extend diocesan participation into Catholic high schools.

More than 3,000 minority students have received a kindergarten through eighth-grade education in diocesan schools. This year, 211 students are enrolled in the program, attending Holy Rosary, Sacred Heart, Blessed Sacrament, Our Lady of Lourdes, St. Louis, St. Thomas the Apostle, St. Theodore, Our Lady Queen of Peace and St. John's on Humboldt Street.

As Project US community liaison specialist Irene Marrero points out, the primary difference between public and non-public school participation is the tuition charged by private and parochial schools. Four years ago when the federal government made substantial cuts to educational and other social programs, the distinction approached becoming a liability to continued diocesan school participation. Diocesan and parish funds, however, have helped to diminish budgetary losses to the Urban/Suburban program.

At Holy Rosary, Sister Virginia and her faculty concurred that participation in Project US would offer minority students an alternative form of education while providing an enriching experience for all cultural groups, simply by virtue of the introduction of multiple cultural experiences into what was at the time "an almost totally white student body." The school subsequently opened its doors to about 20 minority students in that first year.

"We decided to try to subsidize poor families who couldn't afford tuition," Sister Virginia recalls. Later, she adds, when funding became scarce, those who could afford to were asked to pay tuition. Since tuition has always been assessed on a sliding scale, according to the individual family's ability to pay, subsidies are

still allocated at the diocesan or parish level, even though government funds evaporated several years ago. Remediation and multicultural enrichment programs — film strips, speakers, and staff enrichment workshops — are no longer paid for by federal funds, leaving the busing of students as the only remaining government subsidy.

"I think it says a lot for the public schools as well as ours, that they continued to support the program after the Reagan administration's cuts," says Sister Virginia. "This gift of education to students is a very wonderful gift."

While she contends that a good education can be a tremendous asset to minority students, Sister Virginia is quick to emphasize the benefits that accrue to all students who attend Project US schools. Parents of white students frequently affirm the value of multicultural enrichment in their children's lives. The Catholic schools, moreover, have gained immeasurably from the interchange of cultures, particularly in light of the traditional Rochester diocesan philosophy of reaching out to educate successive waves of area immigrant groups.

"I see this as just another natural step in the progression," Sister Virginia observes. "All of our schools have black, white, Hispanic and Oriental children now, not just the urban/suburban (program) schools. That's been an enrichment experience in itself."

Irene Marrero has also attested to Sister Virginia's assessment of the intergenerational effect on currently enrolled children of the program's original participants. "I think when the program first got started, the urban/suburban transfer children were more like visitors, returning to their own neighborhoods at night and on weekends. Now, the children of the children who were in that initial program have really established ownership of their

schools," says Sister Virginia. Project US students participate in school bands and choruses, sports teams, drama clubs and other extracurricular activities, she adds, and truly seem an integral part of the school's spirit.

"Education is a gift of inestimable value," Sister Virginia observes. "The diocese is happy to be able to give this gift in the Catholic tradition. The schools are far richer by this participation."

A dinner at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center will commemorate the advent 20 years ago of this vital process of intercultural enrichment. The June 7 event, scheduled to begin at 7 p.m., will provide a time of reunion for students, parents and teachers who have participated in the Urban Suburban Program over the past 20 years.

Most of them would readily concur with Sister Virginia's summation of the program's lasting effects. "I think that as we look back on it, we'll realize that it's really been a wonderful process of assimilation," she concludes. "It enriches all of us."

Bridal attire needed for fashion show at St. Ann's

Those who have a wedding, bridesmaid, or a mother-of-the-bride dress, as well as veils or accessories which they would like to lend for this special event should call St. Ann's by June 13 and ask for the recreation therapy department.

Correction

In a story reporting the bequests of the late Earl J. Fromm to the diocese and various charitable institutions (Courier-Journal, May 15, page 23), the School of the Holy Childhood was incorrectly included as one of the beneficiaries.

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Announcements 7
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