



Feminist vision

Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister of Erie, Pa., visits Rochester to speak about the 'radical Christian issue' of feminism in Church and society. See page 6.



Sweet revenge

Cardinal Mooney avenged last year's sectional loss to Hilton by beating the defending champions, 10-6. Notre Dame's Crusaders weren't so lucky. See page 16.

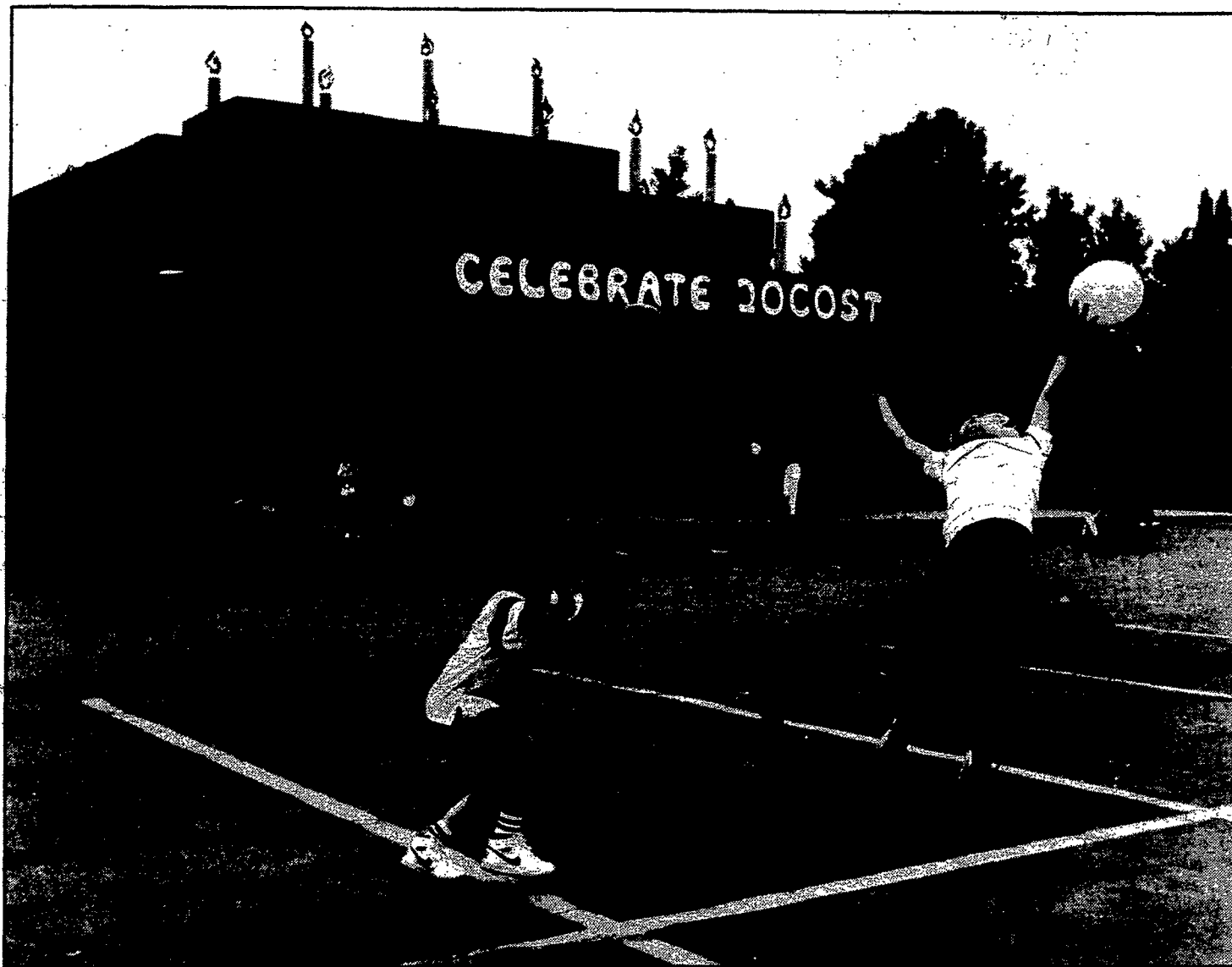
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Twenty candles

Third-graders Matt Bellittera and Tim Winter play with balloons in front of their church. St. Paul's in Webster celebrated its 20th anniversary on Sunday, June 7. The committee started planning the festivities about a year ago and came up with the idea of turning the church into a three-tiered cake complete with candles and a banner reading "Celebrate 20(Twenty)cost." The occasion was Pentecost Sunday. Get it?

Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

Low registration closes East Rochester school

By Teresa A. Parsons

St. Jerome's School was founded 33 years ago because parents wanted a Catholic school in East Rochester. The school began with two Sisters of St. Joseph teaching kindergarten and first grade in the parish's youth recreation center. Within three years, the school had expanded to fourth grade and occupied a brand new school building.

At the end of this year, St. Jerome's School will close. And although the closing was approved last week by Bishop Matthew H. Clark and announced by the pastor, Father Richard Masciangelo, it was once again parents who made the decision.

St. Jerome's has struggled to maintain adequate enrollment for the past several years while developing a long-range plan in cooperation with neighboring schools. In March, however, fewer than two-thirds of St. Jerome's students re-registered for the 1986/87 school year. Of 136 students who attended pre-school through grade six, only 80 planned to return.

"It was so totally unexpected," Father Masciangelo said. "I'm new here, and I understand they had been having enrollment problems for awhile, but I personally never expected this. I was hoping we'd be able to maintain what we had."

Parents who withdrew their children from St. Jerome's cited two overriding reasons, according to Principal Jane Lustyk. Those from the Fairport area were dissatisfied with the distance their children were transported, particularly those in seventh and eighth grades. Others expressed a preference for schools that include pre-school through eighth grades.

Last fall, St. Jerome's responded to low

junior high enrollment by consolidating its seventh and eighth grades with three other schools at Seton Junior High School in Brighton. Although Father Masciangelo said that the consolidation produced "a little savings" this year, Home/School Association president Theodore Marino believes it also affected this year's enrollment.

"The decline in enrollment in the lower grades was due at least in part to parents who had several older children in a junior high environment wanting to keep all their children together in the same school," he said. "Children, at least in some parents' view, were spending an inordinate amount of time on the bus. That type of situation can have an impact on after-school activities and a lot of other things."

Marino and several other parents responded to the registration crisis by organizing a phone campaign to try to recruit students they identified through census information as eligible. The campaign produced only four new students.

"We made calls to each and every parent to determine whether they had selected a school for their child," Marino said. "The vast majority had already made that decision."

Maintaining the school has long been a financial struggle for the parish. Last year, Father Masciangelo estimated that 60 percent of the parish's total budget was allocated to subsidizing the school.

He cautioned, however, that finances did not bring about the decision to close. "Obviously finances are very difficult at St. Jerome's, as with any parish that has a school and limited resources," he said, "but we were plowing ahead in spite of the

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Theodore Marino
Home School Association president

difficulties."

Even after the shock of registration sank in, Lustyk and Father Masciangelo had hoped to maintain at least pre-school through grade three at St. Jerome's. However, a survey of parents in March revealed that only 13 families were interested in that option.

"Father, we have tried to shake the bushes for enrollment, but there are no more bushes to shake," one parishioner told the pastor. "The kids just aren't out there, and those that are have, for whatever reason, said no."

On April 15, the parish council voted unanimously in favor of closing St. Jerome's at the end of this school year. Two days later, they submitted the proposal to diocesan officials for approval.

"One of diocesan officials' primary concerns was the suddenness of it," Father Masciangelo said. "But as Jane (Lustyk) and I both said to them, they were no more

surprised than we were."

After receiving Bishop Clark's letter of approval Monday, June 1, Father Masciangelo announced the school closing to parents at a meeting Wednesday evening, June 3.

"My first impression was that it came as a shock to all of us," Lustyk said. "But after people have gone through the initial shock, they seem to realize that this is something that's been coming for a long time."

After the shock subsided, Marino added, emotional reaction set in. "I think everyone is wondering what more could we have done? No one seems to have any answers. I don't know if there are any answers," he said.

Next year, the majority of East Rochester students who plan to continue in Catholic schools will attend nearby St. Joseph's in Penfield.

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