



### Sermon on solidarity

Pope John Paul II concluded his two-day stop in Poland's Baltic port region by endorsing trade unions like those proposed by the Solidarity movement. See page 7.



### Passing the word on

After yet another league title, Mercy's Track and Field team wants people to know the all-girls' school can thrive in sports other than basketball. See page 16.

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### Sweet sorrow

At left, Carrie Fox and Rosemarie Tantalo joined in a parting giggle during the final graduation ceremony at St. Anthony of Padua, Rochester. The two graduates will attend first grade next year at Holy Family.

Below, teachers Connie Eddington, Sister Rita Malone, SSJ, and Doris Gillispie shared a poignant moment during the closing Mass for St. Jerome's School. Faculty members were honored for their service and dedication.

Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal



## Parents' federation disbands; lack of cooperation cited

By Karen M. Franz

On the heels of a markedly low local turnout for the New York state convention they hosted in April, officers of the Rochester Federation of Catholic School Parents have notified principals and diocesan officials that they will disband effective immediately.

Their decision places in question the future of the diocese's annual Marathon for Catholic Schools, the scholarships awarded through the Bishop Clark Oratorical program and a variety of lobbying efforts.

And, as is observed by Sister Roberta Tierney, director of the diocesan Division of Education, losing the public-relations value of the marathon is yet another black eye for diocesan schools, which have already received what she terms "bad press" concerning the rash of school closings this spring.

Administrators and federation members cite numerous reasons for the frustration that led to the organization's demise — ongoing disputes with principals regarding marathon participation and other issues, a leadership void both within and outside the federation, personality clashes, apathy among potential federation recruits, and burnout among the small core of federation members who have been doing the organization's work for most of its existence.

"It's a volunteer job, and these people have been bearing this burden for years," observes Brother Brian Walsh, diocesan superintendent for schools. Brother Walsh remarks that he has nothing but good things to say about the federation and its members, adding that their loss will probably be felt most in the area of lobbying. "They have a lot of political savvy ... They know who to talk to and what to say," he observes.

At least in part, Brother Walsh attributes the demise of the parents' federation to burnout on the part of the organization's executive committee, a body of about seven people, some of whom have been active since the group's inception nearly 13 years ago. He notes, moreover, that "when you have been doing something for so long that you are an expert at it, I think you get in a fixed view and you can't see it the way others see it."

Sister Tierney picks up on the same theme. "If anything was an error, it was not constantly generating new leadership," she allows. Without new blood, the federation's work demanded too much time commitment from the few leaders.

But beyond burnout, Sister Tierney finds a deeper problem. "My perception is that there has been some kind of breakdown in the relationship between the parents' federation

and principals," she observes, citing conflicting definitions of parents' proper roles and an ongoing conflict surrounding the annual Marathon for Catholic Schools.

Perhaps the most damning cause can be found in the comments of Gina Ouweleen, longtime officer and founding member of the federation. The federation has changed nothing in its 13 years, Ouweleen asserts, and the organization has had no noticeable impact.

She agrees that she and other federation members have been impatient with administrators who don't accept parental involvement. "The more you know, the worse off you are," she says. "Principals do have their hang-ups about parents who know what they're talking about."

Federation members believe that — as a result of such conflicts — many principals have been less than cooperative while others have actually thwarted parental awareness of federation activity.

"Year after year, people say they don't know we exist," Gilbert says, a hint of sarcasm creeping into her voice. "For a long time, I would say, 'I'm not doing this right ... We've got to do it better.' Then I realized that if the person on the other end of the line (the principal) isn't helping, you're not going to get anywhere."

Gilbert and Ouweleen explain that the federation depended almost completely on the principals throughout the diocese. According to diocesan policy, principals were required to name school liaisons to the federation and to cooperate with the liaisons in fulfilling such duties as distributing the federation newsletter to all school parents.

Gilbert recalls repeatedly telling principals that they were the only way the federation could inform parents of the issues facing Catholic education and of the federation's efforts on behalf of schools. Nevertheless, the two women assert, many principals have been uncooperative.

"Parents don't know that we've done all this or tried, because our newsletter doesn't get out," Ouweleen says. "We're just so dependent upon them (principals)."

"It seems that our parents don't know anything about the parents' federation other than the marathon," observes Sister Ann Collins, principal of St. Ambrose School.

Although she believes this lack of awareness stems largely from parental apathy to concerns beyond the sphere of the parish school, Sister Collins believes that lack of awareness may stem from the principals' failure to make parents aware of the

Continued on Page 2