



Country counselor

Sister Anne Alderman, SSJ, has returned to her rural roots, offering counselling to residents of small towns throughout Livingston County. See page 7.



Making a run

Former McQuaid standout Tom Sheehy is hoping his scrappy and aggressive style of play will earn him a spot on the Boston Celtics. See page 16.

COURIER-JOURNAL

Catholic Diocese of Rochester

50 Cents

Thursday, July 16, 1987

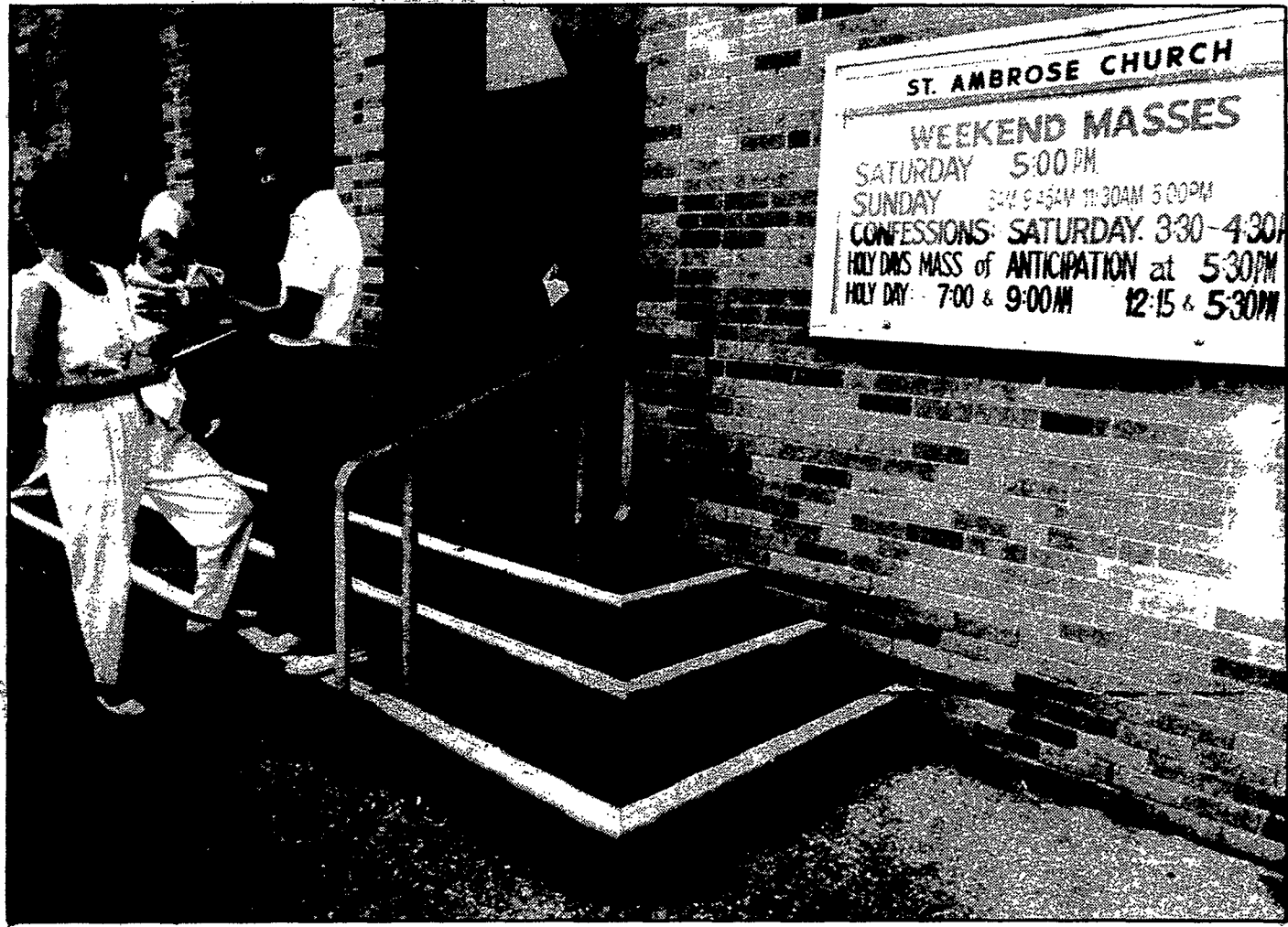
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Celebrating Sunday

Along with fellow worshippers at St. Ambrose Church, Joseph, Suzanne and five-month-old Jamie Giangreco are adjusting to a new Mass schedule the parish adopted just two weeks ago.

Prompted by a diocesan initiative known as "Celebrating Sunday," other parishes have also taken a new look at how they keep the Sabbath. For story, see page 3.

Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal



Losing two grades leads Wayland school into leap of faith

By Teresa A. Parsons

When St. Joseph's School in Wayland reopens this fall, students and teachers won't return to quite the same institution they left in June.

Those who remain will certainly feel the absence of the seventh and eighth grades. They will enjoy new music and art programs. But above all, they'll come to depend on faith in a way different from ever before.

On Thursday, June 18, Father Paul R. Schnacky, pastor at St. Joseph's, received a letter from Bishop Matthew H. Clark, approving the parish's request to discontinue seventh and eighth grades because of low enrollment.

In another letter sent to parents last week, Father Schnacky tempered the parish's sense of loss with a plan to change the way the school is funded.

Instead of paying tuition, families will be asked to attend Mass together at St. Joseph's and to support the parish. No one will receive a tuition bill; instead, money for the school budget will be drawn from overall parish support.

The families of students who are non-Catholics, or who attend parishes other than St. Joseph's, will also be asked to worship together at their own churches, but will be charged tuition as well.

Father Schnacky admits to being idealistic, but he believes the new plan will strengthen the faith of families through greater involvement in the school and in the parish.

"Their faith is the real reason people send their children here," he said. "In the past three or four years, it's become clear to me that, unless the parents are involved, we don't touch the kids at all.

"This brings the school right into the church and makes it an integral part," he added. "We need to integrate families into the parish if we are going to produce leadership material —

kids who are not just instructed in the faith, but excited about the faith."

Junior-high enrollment at St. Joseph's has been low for at least the past two years. This spring, however, only three of the six students currently enrolled in St. Joseph's seventh grade re-registered. All but one of nine sixth-graders planned to return next year.

In April, the consensus at a meeting of parishioners and parents was to "hang on," since enrollment in the lower grades is higher.

But in May, Father Schnacky presented parish council and school board members with his tuition plan, as well as a proposal to discontinue the seventh and eighth grades.

"I had the sense that it could be a tremendous, traumatic experience for the parish if we just said we were closing the two grades," he said. "What I tried to do is to turn the thing around in a positive way, to generate life and enthusiasm, to make our school what it really should be."

Father Schnacky first conceived of doing away with tuition while lying awake early on Palm Sunday morning, wondering and worrying about the school's future.

"It seemed to me that we'd been doing things backwards," he added. "We spent all our time raising the means to do the Lord's work, and then we never got around to doing the Lord's work."

As Home/School Association president and the parent of two St. Joseph's students, Jay Van Ingen did indeed spend most of the past year immersed in school fund-raisers.

"There was no time for me to stop and ask 'What are we doing here? What are our goals and where are we going?'" he said. "The whole idea behind the plan is to get people more behind the Christian aspect of the school than the fund-raising aspect of the school!"

School Board president Bob Cownie was among the first people to whom Father

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Father Paul R. Schnacky

Schnacky confided his idea. After a day of contemplation, Cownie said there was no doubt in his mind that "we were going in the right direction.

"My biggest fear now is of conservative people not being able to accept change," he said.

Parish Council President William Biggee recalled that plenty of people were skeptical of the idea at first. "This was not a fait accompli," he said. "There was extensive discussion, and certainly not complete agreement — at least not at first.

"But you have to know Father Schnacky — he is the most faith-filled individual," Biggee added. "And this is where your faith comes in. This school is very, very important to the older parishioners as well as the younger parents. I think they are going to be very responsive."

After extensive deliberations, the parish finance committee, parish council and school board all chose to support Father Schnacky's plan.

Cownie cites Father Schnacky as the main reason all three groups agreed to take the risk. "People here believe in Father," he said. "He's done so much for the parish."

Teachers — whose salaries will depend on parents' and parishioners' willingness to volun-

tarily support the school — are also enthusiastic about the financial plan, according to Mary Biggee, who has taught fourth grade for the past eight years.

"I really believe that if parents have their children in the school for the same reasons that I... and others are teaching there, they will give in faith and as a sacrifice, and the money will come," she said. "It should work. This is what we're all about."

Third-grade teacher Ann Schubmehl is also confident about the school's fiscal future. "I'm not worried about salary," she said. "The parents are just so caring about the school. The whole parish is."

Although the loss of seventh and eighth grades came as no surprise, it was a blow to Schubmehl and many other parishioners, teachers and students.

Schubmehl has taught at St. Joseph's for 22 years, during which time her children graduated from the school. Despite the low enrollment, she doesn't believe St. Joseph's ever left its students at a disadvantage.

"We produce children who care about studying and doing their work, but we also have the ability to teach them how to get along with one

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