

Catholic schools have adapted to demographic changes

By Sister Roberta Tierney
Director, Division of Education

It is not unusual to hear someone say, "Catholic schools are not the way they were when I went to school!" Not only is such a statement fairly common, it is absolutely right!

Catholic schools have experienced several changes during the past two decades. Some of the changes have touched the basic structure of the schools. Twenty years ago, almost all of our elementary schools were "parochial" schools—that is, part of a single parish. Today, many of our schools are "inter-

parochial" or consolidated. Consolidated schools are available for the people of several different parishes and are supported by those parishes in a cooperative way. This movement evolving in our diocese is a healthy one that responds to the signs of the times and the needs of the people.

Many of our schools were built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They were built in the parishes and neighborhoods where the Catholic population lived at that time. We know that the rate of mobility within the northeastern part of our country has continued to increase in the last two decades. Because of this, our populations have moved, and many

of our fine school buildings have become under-utilized due to changing neighborhoods.

Even though the nature of several of the schools has changed from "parochial" to "inter-parochial," the schools still remain strong Catholic schools. Religious-education programs are an essential part of the school curriculum and teaching, and the schools provide ample opportunities for students to practice their faith and Christian values.

Another change that has evolved within our schools is the system of governance. Most of our schools have established committees or boards at the local level to deal with policy development, planning, public relations and budgets for the schools. These committees or boards have a relationship with an accountability to their respective parish councils and—in the case of interparish schools—a responsibility to several councils. In addition to the pastor and school administrator, several lay people serve on such committees and boards, and participate in the decision making for the present and future of the schools.

The pastor is a key person in the life and development of our Catholic schools. He has the role of shepherd and spiritual leader of the school community, in addition to responsibilities for stewardship and finances. In the case

of a school that is consolidated on an inter-parish basis, it is possible for one pastor to be selected by his peers to serve on the committee or board that sets policy for the school. That pastor, in turn, would have the responsibility of communicating with the other pastors and of receiving their advice and direction regarding the teaching of religion and the school finances.

In addition to this, the pastor, working closely with the school administrator and faculty, shares the concern for the faith and life of the school community. This can be a challenge in light of the many societal pressures now bearing upon our families and young people. It is most important to create opportunities for involving families and faculty in liturgical celebrations, service projects and participation in the life of the parish.

Indeed, Catholic schools have changed a great deal in the past 20 years. That change has been a vibrant response to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, to technological and academic developments, to pressures from society and media, and to the needs of changing neighborhoods.

May our Catholic schools continue in their life and growth to carry out that mission of teaching the Gospel message to all peoples!



Bishop's Office

DIocese OF ROCHESTER
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Dear Colleagues,

I am encouraged and optimistic about the future of Catholic schools in our diocese. During the past three years, we have come to a deepening realization that our schools cannot remain static. Experience and demographic reality make it clear that parents, administrators and parish leaders must unite in search of new ways to maintain the availability of quality Catholic schools for our children. To do this, we are called to be creative, dynamic and flexible.

I am pleased that this consensus is emerging, not only at the elementary-school level, but at the secondary level as well. This makes me hopeful that Catholic-school education for our young people will continue to remain a priority for the diocese.

The isolationism and parochialism that once threatened our future has been disappearing at an increasing rate. Now our diocese is experiencing a new spirit of cooperation, calling parishes, clusters and regions to work together with our diocesan staff to meet the challenges of offering strong programs in faith and morals, of attaining just salaries for our teachers and of stabilizing our school populations.

A consensus is emerging from the diocesan Board of Education, committees and task forces at diocesan, regional and parish levels that we must develop new sources of revenue and that we must collaborate, coordinate and consolidate when this strengthens programs and produces benefits for parish, schools and students.

I am particularly pleased that we have been consistently challenged to provide the alternative of a quality Catholic-school education for minority students and for our poor.

Undoubtedly, the coming year holds many challenges; yet, at the same time, it will provide direction for the future. I am confident that the work of the diocesan Board of Education, the Implementation Committee and the Five-Year Financial Planning Task Force will coalesce, enabling us to meet the demands of the coming year. With almost 1,000 lay people, religious and priests working together to plan our future, I am sure that we will not fail in our goal of continuing to provide Catholic school education beyond the year 2000!

With every blessing, I remain,

Your brother in Christ,

Matthew H. Clark
Bishop of Rochester

This Love Endures Forever

Society, not schools, is under siege

Brother Brian Walsh
Superintendent of Schools

During the spring of 1987, it was difficult to pick up a newspaper or listen to a radio newscast and not be advised of the plight of Catholic schools in general, or of a Catholic school in particular.

Many reasons are put forward to explain or to answer the questions concerning Catholic schools. Few have asked the question: "Is it the Catholic schools that are under siege or is it the society that is under siege?"

I believe that our Catholic schools are as strong as they have ever been—perhaps even stronger due to the infusion of peace and justice issues into all areas of our curriculum. Results obtained on New York state tests and in our standardized testing program attest to the academic preparation of our students. The performance of our students in the Religious Education Evaluation Program of the National Catholic Educational Association consistent-

ly shows an understanding of Catholic doctrine, faith, sacraments and worship, as well as Church history and scripture, at a level above the national results.

Catholic schools are still providing good citizens for the City of God and for the city of man. Unfortunately, the city of man does not hold as high a priority for the values fostered by Catholic schools—love of God and neighbor, self-discipline, other-centeredness, participation in communal prayer, service to the community—as it once did. To support Catholic schools is to sacrifice greatly. Sacrifice is not promoted in the city of man in 1987.

As we work to position the Catholic school in the future of the Church, let us remember that it is not the Catholic school that is under siege, but the society the Church is called to serve. Now, as in the past, the Catholic school provides the Church with the ministry that holds the most promise of freeing our society from siege.

On the cover

Freelance photographer Bruce Wang captured these St. Monica's students chatting about their vacations and the school year ahead. The four children were participating in a summer program at the school.



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