

Features

# Diocese, UR collaborate to prepare Catholic school leaders

By Cindy Bassett

Some people view the declining enrollment in parochial schools, the closing of some schools in recent years and the exit of capable teachers to higher-salaried public school positions as signs that the parochial-school system is destined for extinction.

But Sister M. Edwardine Weaver, RSM, offers a considerably different viewpoint. "The Catholic educational system produces benefits for the entire community," she observes. "The whole structure is in the process of changing, but Catholic schools will always exist. The key to their future is strong leadership."

To that end, Sister Weaver initiated a project four years ago while serving as the superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Rochester. Realizing that the burden of leadership will largely fall upon the laity, she saw a need to prepare these leaders academically.

Her efforts will come to fruition this July at the University of Rochester. Educational Administration: Catholic School Administrator's Program is a joint effort between the Diocese of Rochester and the university, and such

collaboration is in itself unique.

It is the first time that a private non-sectarian educational institution in the United States has engaged in such a project. Indeed, even the brochure that details the program describes it as a "mission" — one that will focus on several major areas of development for candidates: law and finance for non-public schools and the philosophy and history of Catholic education.

Such programs would never be offered at a state educational institution, Sister Weaver notes. "My first problem after the conception of the graduate program was to find a suitable location which would also be convenient," she recalls. "An institution such as SUNY College at Brockport must be rigid about the separation of church and state. This would mean that the areas which need to be addressed by a future Catholic school administrator could not be part of such a graduate program."

Nazareth College and St. John Fisher College do not offer graduate programs in school administration. However, faculty from both colleges will serve as visiting professors for the



Sister M. Edwardine Weaver, RSM

of Rochester 36-credit-hour program to be \$10,000 and the alternate state-certification program to cost \$6,000. But thanks to a unique variant of the joint program, some students will only pay a third of that cost.

A matching-funds program has been set up through which the University of Rochester will match dollar for dollar the money raised by the Diocese of Rochester. "This is just another demonstration of the level of commitment and cooperation by the University of Rochester," Sister Weaver remarks.

Thus far, the Diocese of Rochester has received a \$15,000 grant from the John F. Wegman Foundation, Inc., which will be spread over a three-year period beginning when the program commences this July. In addition to helping develop course content and serving as a liaison between the diocese and the UR, Sister Weaver has also been hard at work securing additional funding. Although anyone can apply for the program and pay the cost themselves, some prospective candidates would not be able to take advantage of the program without subsidies.

An initial informational meeting last November elicited a very positive response, Sister Weaver reports. For the July session, seven candidates have already enrolled. "Because of the uniqueness of our program, we have already begun to receive inquiries from the Buffalo and Syracuse area," she points out.

For more information on the graduate program, contact Sister Weaver at the University of Rochester, (716)275-8270, or the diocesan schools office, 328-3210.

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