

School closing clouds future of St. Anne's

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — In medieval times, warring factions would lay down their arms on holy days. Parishioners at St. Anne's are doing the same during Holy Week, following a volatile meeting between parish and school officials and parishioners in the school hall on Wednesday night, March 15.

The meeting was called by six members of the 12-member parish council to discuss the process by which St. Anne's Elementary School was ordered to be closed in June. The school closing was ordered by the diocese on Feb. 25, following two months of dispute between parish council members who wanted the school to remain open through June, 1990, and the pastor, Monsignor William Roche, who wanted it closed.

The pastor cited declining enrollment and parish indebtedness as reasons for his decision to override the parish council, which voted 6-3, with 3 abstentions, on Feb. 13, to keep the school open through June, 1990.

The six members have contended that they wanted to keep the school open through next year so that it might be considered in any consolidation moves by the Southeast Quadrant Planning Board, one of four quadrant planning groups working on the reorganization of Monroe County's Catholic school system. Nonetheless, Monsignor Roche went to the diocese following the vote seeking support for his proposal.

The six parish council members have since contended that closing the school will actually hurt the parish financially, by creating an exodus of parishioners who now volunteer at such fundraisers as bingo, and by alienating the parish's young families, who might switch to other parishes with schools.

About 100 parishioners attended the March 15 meeting, and sentiment seemed to favor the dissenting parish council members, although a substantial number of parishioners supported the school closing. Several others said they attended the meet-

ing to hear both sides.

Monsignor Roche did not attend the meeting, but several parishioners in attendance — mostly senior citizens — were vocal in their support of the pastor. The most impassioned support for the six parish council members came from school parents.

Joan Powell, parish council president, opened the meeting by explaining that the parish council had met with Monsignor Roche and diocesan officials from Bishop Matthew H. Clark's office and the Division of Education during January and February, following Monsignor Roche's return from a sabbatical.

The parish council and the school board had voted last October to keep the school open through June, 1990, but in early January, Monsignor Roche informed Powell of his desire to close the school. This set in motion a series of meetings between the various factions, leading to the Feb. 13 vote.

Following Powell's explanation, the floor was opened, and along with it, a flood gate of emotion. Charlie Lalka, chairman of the parish finance committee, reiterated Monsignor Roche's argument that the parish was too indebted to sustain the school. Lalka cited a parish budget deficit of \$27,425 for fiscal year 1988-89 and a projected deficit of \$25,750 for next year. He noted that that these figures take into account projected revenue from a tuition increase that was included in the parish council's proposal to keep the school open.

Myron Lathron, a parishioner for 40 years, loudly accused the parish council members of falling down on their job. "The parish council has done a poor job by not taking care of this," he said. "They want to run a school with 60 children, (and 40 non-parishioner) children. I don't know how you expect to run this school ... You're all blaming Monsignor Roche for this."

Another speaker complained that parishioners had not been surveyed to determine their feelings on the school issue. Powell responded that two years ago, a survey about the school had been distributed to parishioners through the parish



Several parishioners at St. Anne's stated their concerns about the diocesan-ordered closing of their school at a meeting on Wednesday, March 15.

bulletin, but that only 18 parishioners responded.

Powell also remarked that the January and February meetings between the pastor, parish council and diocesan officials were not publicized for fear that rumors of a school closing would hurt school registration. She noted, however, that parish council meetings are open to the rest of the parish.

Kathleen Carmen, a school parent who does not belong to the parish, remarked that she had recently given "a crisp \$100 bill" to the school, and expressed dismay at the school closing.

School parent and parishioner Laura Stern expressed concern about the future of the parish following the school closing. Referring to the possibility of young families leaving the parish, she said, "there is no sense of community in this parish."

One elderly woman was distraught at the statements made by Stern and other young parishioners. "I'm really upset that so many people are saying they're sending their children to another school," she said. "We had a great community. We can have a community again."

Following the meeting, Lathron expres-

sed anger at the way it was conducted. Referring to the six parish council members, he said: "They set (the meeting) to favor their own agenda," noting that parishioners were only given two minutes to state their views.

During the meeting, school parent Juanita Erway stated that she would go to another parish when the school closed. When asked if she would've stayed with the parish had the school not survived a consolidation move by the Southeast Quadrant Planning Board in 1990, she said she might have stayed a few more years, but commented that Monsignor Roche "has alienated" young families in the parish.

One alienated parishioner is Powell, who said she is now attending Mass at another parish. She also said she would probably resign her post as parish council president within the next few weeks.

Monsignor Roche has a supporter in Betty Cashion. She remarked, however, that any parish would lose parishioners if its school closed. "The diocese feels it's time to close St. Anne's," she said. "I think it's time to get on with the transition."

Continued on page 20

When Their Child Needed More Than Their Love, You Showed Them The Way.

Karen and Dale Minardo have all the love in the world to give a child. But when their little boy Matthew was born with Down's Syndrome, he needed more than they alone could give. He needed you. And the help he's getting from a United Way agency. Help that's giving him what every parent wants for a child ... a chance to succeed.

Now it's time for you to show the way to thousands more like them who need you.

So this year when you give to United Way, remember to give the most important thing of all.

 Give it your best.

The 1989 United Way/Red Cross Campaign

