

Plan's building use-reuse section will be rewritten

Editor's note — This is the fourth installment in a series of articles examining Catholic Community Schools: A System Framework Plan for Monroe County, the proposed plan for the reorganization of Monroe County's Catholic Schools. This week's installment focuses on the use and reuse of school buildings.

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — William Pickett, chairman of the Commission on Reorganization of Catholic Schools, wants to make himself perfectly clear — quadrant planning boards and parishes will have plenty to say about how their school buildings are used following consolidation in each of Monroe County's four quadrants.

Pickett said that when the commission releases a final version of the Catholic Community Schools plan, the language in section 8.0 dealing with facility use and reuse will have undergone some noticeable editing.

The commission plans to delete criteria (listed in section 8.1) for selecting school buildings that would house grades kindergarten to sixth. The current proposal recommends that quadrant planning boards look at a school building's location, quality, size, supportive amenities and potential for reuse when deciding which buildings remain open or are closed.

As currently written, the criteria also ask whether or not a building can accommodate the transportation policies of the public school districts in the quadrant, and any unanticipated future classroom space needs. Finally, when deciding the fate of a school building, the criteria state that quadrant planning boards should consider how much weight to assign each criterion, and how to balance them with diocesan and parish goals.

Members of the Northeast Quadrant Planning Board used the above criteria to determine which schools they would recommend to be closed. But Pickett said the other three quadrant planning boards — Southeast, Northwest and Southwest — objected to using the Northeast's standards, which were developed by the Center for Governmental Research, an independent consulting firm.

In particular, representatives of the three quadrant boards criticized the building-size criterion, which recommends that school buildings large enough to accommodate two classrooms per grade be preferred for K-6 use. Hence, to merit consideration for remaining open, a building would need at least 14 classrooms.

Pickett said that this criterion was useful for the Northeast because the planning board knew that some schools would have to close. But reorganization does not mean

that every quadrant faces school closings.

For example, enrollment in the Northwest Quadrant's schools is stable, and some schools even have waiting lists of prospective students, according to Patricia Glogowski, chairwoman of the Northwest Quadrant Planning Board. Yet the current criterion could target a school such as St. Lawrence in Rochester — which has only 9 classrooms — for closing, despite the fact that St. Lawrence's enrollment stands at nearly 300, with more students on a waiting list, she said.

Glogowski also noted that each school in the Northwest serves a larger geographic area than schools in the Northeast. Hence, closing a Catholic school in the Northwest could deprive some students of Catholic education since they might not live within a reasonable distance of an alternative school.

Pickett said the revised proposal will allow each quadrant to develop its own set of standards for choosing which buildings should house schools and which should not.

Many quadrant representatives have also misinterpreted the commission's request, stated in section 8.4, that parishes "use the income of any reused or sold school facilities for educational purposes," Pickett said. The section was seen as compelling parishes to give up revenue earned from the sale or rental of school buildings to the diocese for educational purposes, he noted.

Instead, Pickett said, the recommendation was meant to encourage parishes to direct such income to educational purposes, while leaving the parish free to use that income for other needs. He remarked that the revised draft of the plan will state this option clearly.

The commission's plan also recommends the formation of Reuse Planning Teams, made up of diocesan and parish representatives, to help parishes decide how to reuse their school buildings following consolidation.

One such team is already forming at St. Philip Neri Parish, where the school is scheduled to close this June. The parish council is forming a committee to examine various offers from prospective tenants for the school building, according to Father Richard Schatzel, pastor. The committee will begin meeting next week, and will probably accept an offer from one of several organizations interested in the building by May, he said.

Father Schatzel noted that the diocese offered to assist the committee by explaining the experience of other parishes that have closed schools and subsequently rented the buildings.

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Annunciation closing moved up

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Low registration figures for the upcoming school year will force Annunciation School to close in June, 1989, according to Sister Diane Marie Erskine, school principal.

The school, located at 1787 Norton St., was slated to close in June, 1990, under a reorganization plan developed by the Northeast Quadrant Planning Board. But not enough parents had registered their children at the school to justify keeping it open through next year, Sister Erskine said.

Annunciation at present houses grades pre-kindergarten-six, and has an enrollment of 137 students. Although she declined to give specific figures, Sister Erskine noted that projected enrollment for 1989-90 in most of the school's grades was fewer than 10 students.

Officials from the school and the diocese met with school parents on Thursday, March 23, to inform them of the decision to close the school. Parents were offered the option to send their children to any

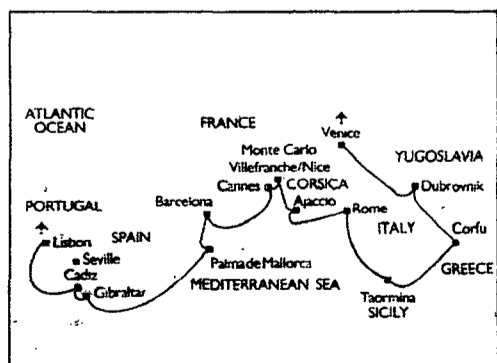
other Catholic school in the quadrant, Sister Erskine said.

Under the Northeast Quadrant Plan, students from Annunciation were to have enrolled at St. Ambrose, St. Andrew and St. Cecilia following the 1990 closing. But the decision to close Annunciation this year was made after Catholic schools had completed their registration for the 1989/89 school year. Diocesan officials thus decided to allow Annunciation school parents to register their students in any of the Northeast Quadrant schools, Sister Erskine said.

All but 10 or 12 of Annunciation's 137 students have already registered with other schools for next year, the principal added, noting that she foresees no problem with placement.

Annunciation is one of five schools that will close in the Northeast Quadrant over the next two years. Three others — Our Lady of Perpetual Help, St. Philip Neri in Rochester and St. Salome in Irondequoit — will close in June under the plan approved by Bishop Matthew H. Clark. St. James in Irondequoit will close in June, 1990.

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