

Mooney community trying to save school

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

GREECE — The announced closing of Cardinal Mooney High School in June of this year has engendered a tremendous emotional reaction from the school's community. Yet, despite hundreds of pledges of financial support to keep the school open, even some of the most sympathetic observers think it may be too late to save the school.

In this case, the saying might be, "too much, too late," rather than "too little, too late." Many parents and alumni have scrambled to mount an impressive attempt to save the school from its financial woes following the diocese's announcement on Wednesday, April 26, that Mooney was closing due to an operating deficit of \$700,000 and declining enrollment.

More than 400 parents packed the school's cafeteria on Sunday afternoon, April 30, to vent their anger and concern at

a meeting called for by members of the school's executive committee, Mooney's local governing body.

Originally, 30-40 people planned to meet at a local restaurant to organize a larger gathering for Wednesday, May 3, according to David Michael Barry, a school parent and one of the organizers. But word of the meeting spread, and the organizers felt it necessary to move the event to Mooney's cafeteria.

Most of the participants signed a petition asking Bishop Matthew H. Clark and the school's board of trustees to meet with them no later than May 14 to answer questions regarding the school closing and to explore any options to save the school, according to Dave Resch, chairman of the school's executive committee.

Almost 300 people signed pledges to contribute money to the school, Resch said, though he doubts the group's actions

will reverse the decision to close the school.

As of Monday, May 1, Father George Norton, diocesan spokesman, said the diocese had not been formally requested to meet with any group associated with Mooney.

The meeting is a sign of hope, said Brother Lawrence Atkinson, school spokesman and assistant principal, but it will take a lot of pledges of money in a few weeks to save the school, he said, noting that the school has not had great success raising funds to meet its needs in the last few years.

Still, "anything is possible at this point," Brother Atkinson said. He remarked that the school's board of trustees would be open to any plan that can guarantee the

long-range financial health of the school.

Most of those frustrated by the closing said they had no idea the school was suffering financially, according to Resch. He added that if the announcement of the closing had been delayed for two or three weeks, the executive committee could have sought alternative means of financing the school.

However, school officials considered and rejected several plans to keep the school open, according to Brother Atkinson, mainly because the school's mounting financial woes limited time for action.

One plan involved a private group buying the school from the Holy Cross Brothers, the school's operating order. But the plan, which was valid for only three days, did not meet the requirements of either

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Private school rejected; parish council may sue

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The Diocese of Rochester has rejected a proposal to create a parent-run Catholic school in the building currently housing St. Anne's School, but six parish council members plan to pursue further action against the diocese, possibly in court.

The proposal was the final attempt by the school's administration, staff and parents to resist the diocesan-ordered closing of St. Anne's School in June of this year, which was announced in late February.

The closing pitted the wishes of the parish council against the wishes of Monsignor William N. Roche, St. Anne's pastor. The parish council had voted 6-3, with 3 abstentions, to keep the school open through June, 1990, but Monsignor Roche overrode the vote by going to the diocese for approval of his desire to close the school.

The offer to separate St. Anne's School from the parish and make it a private school was tendered more than two weeks ago by Robert Edelman, school principal. In rejecting the proposal, Sister Roberta Tierney, diocesan director of the education division, stated she was upholding the decision of Bishop Matthew H. Clark to disallow any appeal of the school closing.

But the parish council's battle with the diocese and Monsignor Roche is not over yet. Tom Cantin, a member of the parish council, said the six members of the parish council who had voted to keep the school open plan to file a claim with the Center for Dispute Settlement against Monsignor Ro-

che, Father John Mulligan, moderator of the Pastoral Center, and Bishop Clark.

The claim will charge that each party breached an implied contract with the parish council and the school by closing it. In Monsignor Roche's case, the claim states that he violated the parish's constitution by ignoring a series of steps to be taken in the event that the pastor opposes a parish council decision.

Those steps direct the pastor to inform the parish council of his decision within one week of the meeting at which the decision was made. Then the pastor must submit a written statement explaining his decision one week before the next parish council meeting. Finally, if two-thirds of the council members vote to appeal the pastor's decision, it must go to the bishop for arbitration.

The parish council will also claim that Father Mulligan and Bishop Clark breached an implied contract with the parish council. The implied contract was that the school would remain open through June, 1990, if enrollment increased from 1987-88 to 1988-89, and if the parish put into place a bingo plan to raise money for the school. Both steps were taken, Cantin said, but the diocese nonetheless supported Monsignor Roche in his decision, rather than the parish council.

The claim was to be filed by the middle of this week, Cantin said. If all three parties refuse to deal with the parish council members through the Center for Dispute Settlement, then the matter may go to court, Cantin said.

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