

In depth

Farewell

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Genesis Junior High was established three years ago, and its untimely closing has frustrated Bahr's ambition to establish in the diocese a permanent enriched-learning program. The enriched program consisted of triple levels of math and double levels of language arts in both seventh and eighth grades. It also featured mandatory French or Spanish courses for the junior high students.

Bahr bemoaned the loss of the Genesis program. "It's gone forever... It only blossomed for three years," he said.

As the principal mourned the loss of a young program, his secretary spoke sadly of losing a life-long friend — Our Lady of Good Counsel School.

"I've volunteered in the school and church, the altar/rosary society, Cub Scouts, crafts," Vivian Kurdt said. "Forty-nine years. I grew up here!"

Kurdt has been a secretary at the two schools for the last eight years, and was hired the same year Bahr took over as principal. A member of Our Lady of Good Counsel's Class of 1950, the secretary has also seen her three sons graduate from her alma mater.

"It hasn't really hit yet," Kurdt said of the closing's emotional toll. "When we turn the

key on the door it will be very painful."

Kurdt expressed some anger about school parents who have pulled their children out of Catholic schools over the last few years. "The parents are not putting their children in the schools," she said. "If they want Catholic education, they have to support it."

Kurdt serves as co-chair of the Southwest Quadrant Planning Board, one of four such boards working on the reorganization of Monroe County's Catholic Schools. Despite her heartache over school closings, she said she supports the current reorganization of diocesan Catholic schools. She cautioned, however, that many parents "don't want change. They don't want busing, or a raise in tuition."

One way Kurdt will cope with the demise of OLG/Genesis is by taking a new job in the parish rectory. Her duties will include collecting tuition payments from Good Counsel families who are sending their children to Holy Family, a nearby regional elementary school which is adding a seventh and eighth grade next year to accommodate the influx of students from OLG/Genesis. Keeping track of the school's students will make her feel a part of their lives, as she has been for so many years, Kurtz remarked.

Donna Buss, on the other hand, has no such consolation. Buss — whose two daughters attended OLG/Genesis until last year when the family moved to Hamlin — started working at the schools as a volunteer nine years ago. For the last three years, she has served as a secretary, dividing her time between secretarial work and supervising the computer room.

Buss doesn't have a new job lined up yet, but she knows she wants to continue working in a school. No matter where she goes, the students of OLG/Genesis will be a hard act to follow.

"A lot of these kids would call me Mom," she recalled. "I would think nothing of them calling me Mom. I'm going miss them all ... The little ones would give me hugs."

The students often amazed her in the computer room by how quickly they picked up each lesson, she said. "Sometimes, their minds work faster than ours," she observed. "There were times I didn't know answers to the questions."

Likewise Buss, a Protestant, sometimes amazed her Catholic husband with the knowledge of Catholicism she had garnered from working in the schools. "There are times when my husband said I knew more about the church than he did," she pointed out, noting that she had also gained a positive opinion of the church from the Catholics she has worked with in the schools.

Bahr clearly made a positive impression on both Kurtz and Buss, whose faces

lit up when asked about him. "There was never an employer/employee relationship," Kurtz said. "It was like family."

Buss agreed. "It was home. That was the feeling you got when you came in here."

Both secretaries attributed the schools' family atmosphere to the tone set by Bahr. "He's a very, very caring person — very fair," Kurtz remarked.

One example of that caring attitude is seen in the schools' awards policy. "The awards were set up so that every child could get an award," Kurtz said, noting that award topics ranged from academic achievement to attitude. "All (students) had to do was be here and be good to get an award."

Although OLG/Genesis has emphasized continual recognition of its students' achievements, only since the closing announcement was made have the schools

themselves received similar attention from local news media, all three staff members observed. Nevertheless, Kurtz responded affirmatively to compliments about the school, asserting: "We think we were the best."



Eighth-grader Marcus Johnson couldn't control his enthusiasm as he stepped up to receive his diploma during graduation ceremonies.



Eighth-grader Dale Johnson ponders his answers on a final exam.



Principal Thomas Bahr hugs Father Longing liturgy as the pastor presents him appreciation for his hard work and devotion.

Displaced faculty members want to continue value-based teaching

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

IRONDEQUOIT — Maureen Madonia pointed to the basket of fruit on the table in the faculty lounge at St. Salome's School, one of four schools closing this year due to reorganization of Catholic schools in northeastern Monroe County.

"Yesterday, one of the families brought in that fruit basket," the junior high teacher said, "and it brought a few tears."

Tears are one way of handling the end of an educational era in Irondequoit. Joking is another. The teachers at St. Salome's nervously kid one another about trying to find comparable jobs elsewhere in the Catholic school system.

"I'm on my third interview with no prospects," remarked Mary Cancilla, a fourth-grade instructor. "One of my most difficult things is how a lot of us have interviewed for the same job."

Teachers being displaced by the school closings were told to inform Sister Joseph Gilmory Russell, assistant superintendent for personnel in the diocesan Department of General Education, of three schools at which they would like to teach next fall.

Sixth-grade teacher Theresa Pollock was lucky. She got her first choice — a fifth-grade position at St.

Ambrose in Rochester. "Even master teachers didn't get their first choice," she observed.

"I believe the diocese is doing the best they can," Madonia commented. Her colleagues agreed, but even so Madonia notes that the closing of schools means the job market is flooded. "In the past (Catholic schools) always had to be begging. Now they have a choice," she said, wistfully.

Some of the teachers worry that their experience at a suburban school will stifle their chances for a job in a city Catholic school. One woman who asked not to be identified said a principal interviewing her said she didn't have the experience to teach city children, who — the principal asserted — are less attentive in class than are suburban-school students.

"I had three years experience in the city Catholic schools," the teacher groaned.

Cancilla echoed those sentiments, adding: "We have a lot of uninvolved children here (in the suburbs). Children are children."

Despite their possibly bleak job prospects, all of the teachers said they want to stay in the Catholic school system. "We're very lucky to have our ministry as our job," Madonia asserted. "My husband is afraid to leave a Bible on his desk because he might be made-

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Nervous eighth-graders line up in the school's hallway prior to their graduation evening, June 20. Principal Thomas Bahr and teacher Gaylord Ribby look on.