

County boards await revised plan

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Monroe County's Catholic schools will enter the 1989-90 year under a reorganized Catholic Schools Office, which will oversee the continuing reconfiguration and reorganization of the county's four quadrants — the northeast, southeast, northwest and southwest.

In late July, Brother Brian Walsh, superintendent of diocesan Catholic schools, announced the appointments of three district superintendents for the entire diocese. Evelyn Kirst will serve as superintendent for Monroe County-West; Sister Diane Marie Erskine, RSM, will be superintendent for Monroe County-East; and Sister Kathleen Murphy, OSF, will oversee schools in clusters outside Monroe County.

These three posts were created to replace the office's previous structure, which designated assistant superintendents in four distinct areas — public affairs; urban education/public relations; curriculum; and planning and development. The existing position of assistant superintendent of personnel was retained in the reorganization.

Brother Walsh explained that the reorganization was undertaken because principals had expressed a need for one diocesan official with centralized authority to whom they could address their concerns. "They were looking for people who would be present to them," Brother Walsh said. "In the past, duties were so spread out that two or three (assistant superintendents) would be in a school building in the same day."

Kirst and Sister Erskine will have their hands full this year, as the northeast quadrant completes its reorganization process and the other three Monroe County quadrant planning boards prepare to submit their reconfiguration plans to the Commission on Reorganization of Catholic Schools by December of this year.

The nine-member commission, headed by William Pickett, president of St. John Fisher College, reviewed the Northeast Quadrant Planning Board's recommendation that five of the region's schools be closed by June, 1990. With Bishop Clark's approval, four elementary schools were closed this June and a fifth, St. James in Irondequoit, will close next June.

Blessed Sacrament Junior High will also close in the northeast next June, and a diocesan-run regional junior high will open on the premises of Bishop Kearney High School in fall of 1990.

The northeast plan mandated the establishment of two new positions on its governance board — a finance director and a transition coordinator, who will be charged with easing the move from a parish-based school system in the northeast to one consisting of quadrant schools supported financially by all the northeast parishes.

On Thursday, Aug. 3, Brother Walsh announced that Sister Anne Guerin, SSI,

had been appointed the northeast quadrant's finance director, and that Sister Kathryn Wahl, RSM, would take on the job of transition coordinator.

Sister Guerin spent the last seven years as assistant superintendent of schools for planning and development. In her new position, she will coordinate accounting procedures for the northeast quadrant schools and oversee the fiscal operations of the quadrants.

Since 1985, Sister Wahl had been first assistant vice principal at Cardinal Mooney High School, where she served as director of personnel, admissions and student activities. In addition to overseeing the northeast reorganization, she will supervise the implementation of the Catholic Commu-

ity Schools Plan, which was developed by the Pickett Commission.

In March, the commission released a draft of the community schools plan, which resembled the northeast quadrant plan far too closely for the comfort of the other three quadrants' planning boards. Several parish and quadrant leaders in the other three quadrants opposed the plan's call for parishes without schools to support quadrant schools with a mandated subsidy.

Pickett commented in late April that the final plan, due to be released Aug. 24, will probably omit the parish subsidy and give more authority to each quadrant's planning board to determine how it will reconfigure the grade levels within the quadrant. The original proposal had called for each qua-

drant to establish a regional junior high and reconfigure its elementary schools to house grades kindergarten through six.

The Southwest Quadrant Planning Board will undoubtedly welcome the chance to determine its own grade reconfiguration, according to Michael Sullivan, co-chairman of the planning board's subcommittee on school models. "I think the school parents from the surveys we've taken are fairly divided over their support for the existing system," he said.

Sullivan noted that his committee is studying different models of grade configuration — including retention of the current K-8 system — because enrollment in the southwest is stable. "In many of the

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Finger Lakes planners find direction

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

Last November, representatives from parishes in the diocese's Finger Lakes region met for the first time as the Finger Lakes Cluster.

Their task was to develop a well-integrated catechetical plan that would give direction to all aspects of Catholic education — schools, religious education and adult education — in the region.

But first, they had to develop a sense of direction for themselves as a group.

"They were talking about goals and objectives and proposals and deadlines before I even understood why I was attending the meeting," said David Duprey, a representative from St. Mary's, Waterloo. "I think there's been a lot of confusion and

lack of direction from the diocesan level. I have the impression that the Finger Lakes was an afterthought because of the situation of the schools in Monroe County."

Putting the situation in a more positive light, Vincent Dewitt, representing Sacred Heart Parish, Auburn, said officials from the diocesan education office had tried to be helpful and to give as much direction as they could. But, he suggested, in trying to develop an overall strategy for Catholic education within a two-year time frame, "I think they bit off more than they could chew."

At times this lack of direction has caused poor attendance at cluster meetings and a dearth of representation from some parishes. Mary Ann Hanna of St. Patrick's,

Macedon, for example, said she has not attended any meetings since the first because she has been busy, but also because "I felt it was a dead end."

But now, 10 months and many meetings later, the representatives of the region say they are ready to begin the task of developing a plan and a time line for implementing it in the Finger Lakes region. They acknowledge, however, that it's unlikely that they'll meet the stated December deadline for submitting that plan to the education office.

"I don't see time lines coming out in December," DeWitt said. "One of the problems is that the diocese has changed its whole administration."

In June, the diocesan staff members who had worked with the Finger Lakes Cluster planning group — James McAuliffe, former assistant superintendent for public affairs, and Sister Virginia Steinwachs, SSI, former assistant superintendent for urban education/public affairs — left their positions with the diocese. A new diocesan liaison has been appointed — Sister Kathleen Murphy, OFM, the new district superintendent for schools in the clusters — but she is not scheduled to arrive in the diocese until mid-August.

"I think it's going to take a meeting or two for her to become acclimated to what's going on," DeWitt predicted.

Cluster representatives have been using the past 10 months to follow the restructuring effort in the northeast quadrant of Monroe County, to study successive drafts of Monroe County's system-framework plan, to assess their own individual strengths and weaknesses, and to come to a common understanding of their diverse needs.

The Finger Lakes region covers five counties, and includes a variety of urban and rural parishes. The cluster has been broken down into four groups roughly corresponding to Wayne County, Ontario County (excluding Geneva), Seneca and Yates counties (and including Geneva), and Cayuga County. In addition to meeting as a cluster, the four groups have been meeting individually. In fact, much of the work in the cluster has been done in these small groups, and Duprey predicted the overall plan for the cluster may actually consist of separate plans for each of the groups.

Unlike the Monroe County quadrant planning boards, the cluster planning group will have to look at how to better use resources for overall catechesis, not just develop plans for schools. This process call for parishes with schools and those without schools to jointly reach a better understanding of the problems faced by each, noted Margaret Redmond, who represents St. Bernard's, Scipio Center.

Redmond pointed out that parishes with schools face problems due to the financial obligations of the schools, while rural parishes, on the other hand, must contend with isolation and the distances parishioners must travel to get to education

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Careful reorganization saved Catholic schools in Elmira

By Richard A. Kiley
Staff writer

ELMIRA — No one in Rochester has to tell Dr. Thomas Curran how tough it is to close or consolidate Catholic schools.

Curran was the president of the Chemung County Catholic School Board in 1969, when that panel tackled many of the same issues a task force in Rochester is now facing.

A massive enrollment decline — coupled with the area's poor economic climate — forced the board to close many parish schools. Under the board's reorganizational plan, the Chemung County Catholic School System became a four-school configuration: St. Casimir's Regional School (pre-K through six); Our Lady of Lourdes Regional School (pre-K-6); St. Mary's Regional School (K-6); and St. Patrick's Junior High School (7-8).

Curran said he has watched from afar as the Commission on Reorganization of

Catholic Schools issued its recommendations for the schools in Monroe County, and he has been puzzled and somewhat disturbed by the process.

"Instead of performing very delicate surgery, they're doing it with a meat ax," said Curran, who is, in fact, a surgeon. "We were very careful in looking at a consolidation plan (that) would move smaller children as little as possible. We looked at demographics pretty carefully."

He added that the Chemung board created a "lightening rod" with the formation of the junior high at St. Patrick's — no Catholic junior high had existed before in Elmira — and that the school board gave "individualized counseling" to families of young children who had to be bused from one side of the Chemung River to the other.

From what he has seen and heard, Curran doesn't think the same concern has been shown for parents and children in the Rochester area — especially those living in the inner city.

"Some of the inner-city schools have been hit very hard," said Curran, who was instrumental in getting emergency funding for Elmira Catholic schools hit by the flood back in 1972. "It's really too bad to see what's happening with the inner-city schools up there."

As Curran pointed out, educating inner-city children was once the backbone of Catholic schools. Yet Father David Gram-kee, pastor of St. Cecilia and St. John the Baptist Churches in Elmira, believes that

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