

*"To commit oneself to working in accordance with the aims of a Catholic school is to make a great act of faith in the necessity and influence of this apostolate. Only one who has this conviction and accepts Christ's message, who has a love for and understands today's young people, who appreciates what people's real problems and difficulties are, will be led to contribute with courage and even audacity to the progress of this apostolate ..., which renews itself according to its ideals and to present needs."*

--Declaration on Christian Education

## The 70's: Responding to change

Faced with overt and subtle challenges, Catholic school leaders entered into a period of revitalization — and refinancing — in the 1970s. Locally and nationally, this period was one of financial difficulties. This involved an increase in the number of schools charging tuition, the challenge of offering a living wage to lay employees, and an increased understanding of the need to care for the poor, especially the urban poor. With the decline in the numbers of women religious who as teachers had subsidized our schools with their lives, the full significance of their contribution became more apparent.

In a pastoral letter to the nation's Catholics in 1972, *To Teach as Jesus Did*, the American bishops reaffirmed their conviction that Catholic schools afford:

*"the fullest and best opportunity to realize the three-fold purpose of Christian education among children and young people (teaching doctrine, building community and serving mankind)."*

In a Catholic school, the bishops said, young people can "experience learning and living fully integrated in the light of faith."

*"The Catholic school community ... is an irreplaceable source of service, not only to the pupils and its other members, but also to society. (It demonstrates) that it is possible to create*

*true communities out of a common effort for the common good."*

The bishops noted that the "real problem" facing Catholic schools:

*"is to identify and lay down the conditions necessary for it to fulfill its mission. It is, therefore, a problem requiring clear and positive thinking, courage, perseverance and cooperation to tackle the necessary measures without being overawed by the size of the difficulties ...."*

## The 80's: Looking toward the 21st Century

The current era is an exciting time for Catholic education, both in this Diocese and in the country as a whole. Catholic educators and administrators are responding with fresh ideas. Multicultural programs appeal to the diversity found in many urban areas. Enriched curricula have been instituted in junior high grades, especially in response to Regents requirements.

More professional methods of financing are coming to the fore. In some parts of the country, capital campaigns

earmarked for Catholic education are helping to support existing schools, increase teachers' salaries, improve school buildings and provide scholarships for students from low-income or minority families.

University of Michigan researchers found earlier this year that Catholic school students' scores on standardized math and science tests are higher than students who do not attend Catholic schools. These results were true across the board — boys and girls; white, black and Hispanic.

Drop-out rates for students in U.S. Catholic high schools stand at 3.4%, compared with 14% for public high schools and 12% in non-Catholic private schools, according to the National Catholic Education Association. The national rate of Catholic high school graduates who go on to post-secondary education is between 83% and 85%.

As our schools endeavor to ready students to take their place in social and political life, it is gratifying to see studies that indicate that Catholic school graduates tend to be more successful than their counterparts from other schools. Social and economic betterment of the poor and disadvantaged is a clear goal of the Church, and increasing numbers of minority students in Catholic schools provides a chance to extend

the earth's resources and wealth over more of the human family.

With the recognition of Catholic school excellence, many students of other faiths have enrolled in our schools.

University of Chicago sociologist James Coleman, whose study of Catholic school education produced many of these statistics, attributed the performance of Catholic school students to the presence in the schools of a "value community" through which the values of parents and the Church are transmitted to students. These shared values constitute an extended family for children that helps keep them in school and motivated to succeed.

Fr. Michael O'Neill, formerly of the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, describes a "faith community" as a

*"pattern or complex of values, understandings, sentiments, hopes, and dreams that deeply conditions everything else that goes on, including the math class, the athletic activities, the dances, the coffee breaks in the teachers' lounge, everything."*

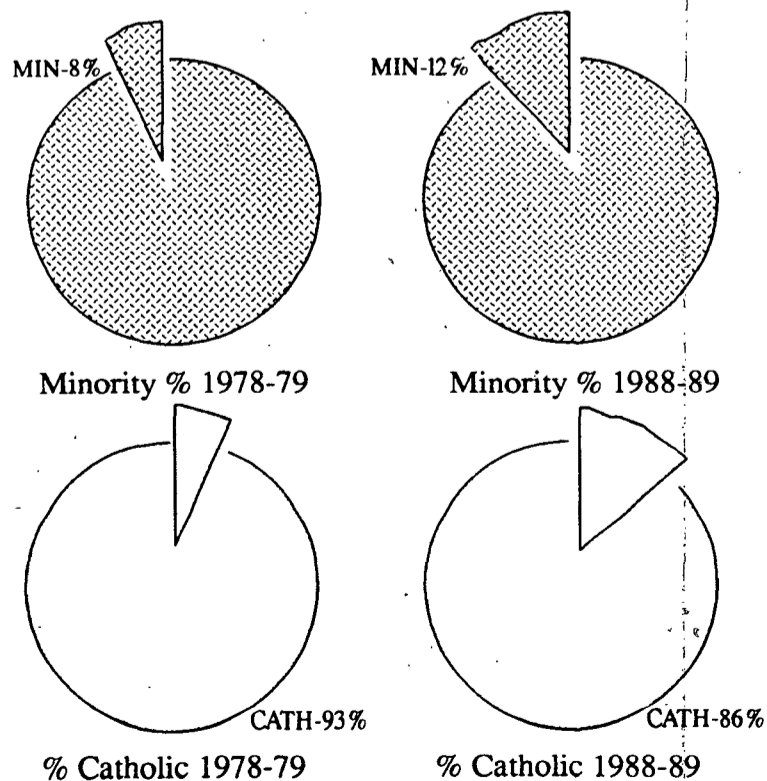
Catholic schools deserve our continued support not only as homage to our history, then, but because of their contributions to the contemporary society of which we are a part. The values they teach enable young people to counter the violence, materialism and technocracy of their world.

Sensitive to the call for a more just society, the Catholic school provides a setting in which, as the U.S. bishops wrote in their 1972 pastoral on Catholic education, *To Teach as Jesus Did*:

*"young people can learn together of human needs, whether in the parish, the neighborhood, the local civic community, or the world, and begin to respond to the obligation of Christian service through joint action."*

In an era when popular culture bombards our youth with messages expounding consumerism, self-gratification, and a narrow, green-backed vision of success, the gospel values are needed

**Increasing percentages of minority students and students of other faiths in Diocese of Rochester schools**



Left: minority students now comprise 21.4% of enrollment nationally, up more than 10% since 1970-71. In our Diocese, 12% of the students are members of minority groups, a 50% increase in the past decade.

Nationally, students of other faiths now make up nearly 12% of school populations, compared with less than 1% 25 years ago. In the Rochester Diocese, they represent 14% of those served; a figure which has doubled in the last 10 years.