

Building splurge led to costly, worthy legacy

By Father Robert F. McNamara
Guest contributor

Tally the amount of space devoted to local news in issues of the *Courier* from 1949-1959, and you will find that most of it dealt with construction. Church construction. Parish school construction. Seminary construction. College construction.

This was indeed the era — beginning in 1947 and extending to 1966 — of a magnificent splurge in building. Part of a national phenomenon, the construction bonanza is easy to explain. During the 1930s, few churches could afford to build. During the war years, construction workers were not available and the wartime government monopolized construction materials.

Father Charles Bruton of St. Margaret Mary Parish was therefore understandably proud to announce in 1947 that his proposed parochial school was "the first major diocesan school building project in 18 years."

Many of the churches of this period labored under the disadvantage of being planned just before the liturgical regulations of Vatican II, which radically revised the layout of sanctuaries. But the diocese owes to this spirited drive some memorable structures.

The most handsome group, in my mind, are those designed by New York architect J. Sanford Shanley: St. Louis, Pittsford (1958); St. Ambrose (1960); St. Thomas the Apostle (1965); and St. Charles Borromeo, Greece (1967).

Even bolder were the designs of Rochester architect James H. Johnson: Our Lady of Mercy's temporary church (1962); St. John the Evangelist, Greece, an award-winner, (1965); and St. Januarius, Naples



Courier File Photo
In this 1948 photograph, Bishop James E. Kearney lays the cornerstone of St. Anne's School.

(1966).

Several of these designs were further embellished by noted artists: painters like Sister Mary of the Compassion and John C. Menihan; sculptors like Hugues Maurin, Hermann Wiemann, George Kratina, Benoit Gilsoul, Giuseppe Macri and Vytautas Kasuba; and area craftsmen like Wendell Castle, William Keyser, Carl Zollo, and the Secrest brothers, ceramists.

But churches were parish affairs. Diocese-wide was the great postwar program to expand secondary school and college facilities. Three diocesan drives were undertaken under the savvy supervision of Monsignor John S. Randall.

The first one — with a \$3 million goal —

was staged in 1952. Proceeds provided construction funds for two new high schools, McQuaid Jesuit High in Rochester (1955), and the Carmelite Fathers' Mount Carmel High in Auburn (1955); and new homes for St. Agnes High in Rochester (1954) and Notre Dame High School in Elmira (1955). Enough was left over for the enlargement of DeSales High School in Geneva.

Catholic secondary schools were still missing, however, from the northeast and southeast sections of greater Rochester. A second drive for \$4 million, easily over-subscribed, was mounted in 1960. Out of it came two "co-institutional" high schools: Bishop Kearney in Irondequoit and Cardinal Mooney in Greece.

Then, in 1965, a last major campaign for \$9 million was launched on behalf of higher education. The amount realized allowed for the construction of a fine-arts center at Nazareth College; new buildings at St. John Fisher College; and Becket Hall, a residence near Fisher for diocesan seminarians enrolled at the college.

A drive prior to these three campaigns had financed the building of a new St. Andrew's Preparatory Seminary dedicated on Buffalo Road in 1950 — now the diocesan Pastoral Center. Meanwhile, in 1959, the Rochester Sisters of Mercy had opened Catherine McAuley College on their own.

After World War II, more than 20 new schools opened. Some were in parishes which never could have afforded parish schools in prewar days — St. Philip Neri, Rochester; St. James, Waverly; and St. Mary's, Bath.

But in this drive for more schools — especially parish schools — one question had not been seriously faced: Where would the

teachers come from? In 1951 there were 794 sisters teaching, and only 24 lay teachers.

By 1961 there were 820 nuns (the highest figure ever reached), but there were now 320 lay teachers. The sisters, bless them, had worked all along for practically nothing. Lay teachers would have to be paid a "living wage." Therefore, in 1963, the diocese declared a moratorium on founding any new parish schools, "until there are enough nuns to staff the classrooms."

St. Andrew's Preparatory Seminary was closed in 1967, and Mount Carmel High School, Auburn, in 1969. Brighton's St. Agnes closed in 1982, and this year, Cardinal Mooney High School ceased operation.

At the college level, Catherine McAuley College closed in 1970. Becket Hall, for want of college seminarians, was sold to St. John Fisher in 1984, and now operates in the former St. Boniface convent as a discernment center for a small group of priesthood aspirants.

Most of the diocese's secondary and post-secondary schools have survived, although not without discomforts. Nazareth College and St. John Fisher are best off, thanks to the availability of government funding. But to qualify for that aid, these institutions had to assume "independent college" status, severing formal connection with the diocese that promoted their foundation.

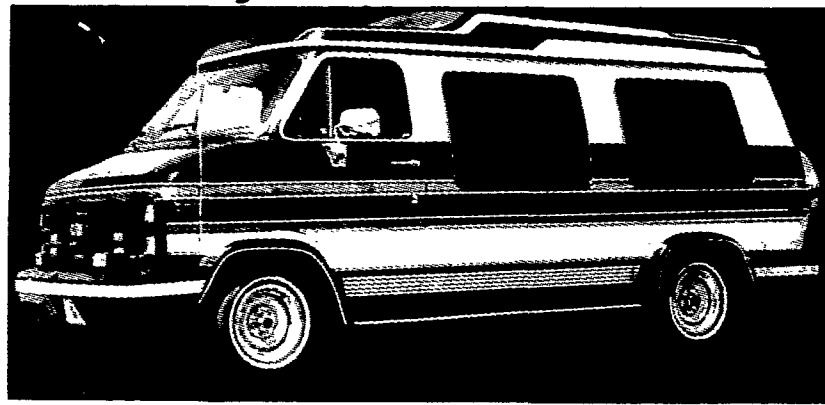
Thus the optimistic building splurge of the 1940s and 1950s was based on a miscalculation of future teaching personnel and future budgeting.

But the Rochester diocese was not the

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