

Plan would close school, open junior high

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The Commission on Reorganization of Catholic Schools has released a proposal calling for the closing of a Catholic elementary school in southwestern Monroe County and the creation of a regional junior high.

The commission released its plan on Wednesday, Jan. 17. Parishes in the southwest quadrant — one of four quadrants that make up Monroe County's Catholic school system — will respond to the plan at an evening meeting scheduled for Thursday, Jan. 25, at St. Helen's Church.

The plan calls for a reconfiguration of the southwest quadrant over the next three years. If the plan is approved by Bishop Matthew H. Clark, Most Precious Blood School, located at 219 Stenson St., would close in June. Its students would then be sent to St. Theodore's in Gates.

The six remaining schools — all of which house grades kindergarten through eight — would remain open in their current configurations for 1990-91.

Then, in fall of 1991, all schools, except St. Monica's, would become K-6 facilities. A regional junior high would open at Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish's school building, which currently houses Rochester Junior Academy, a Seventh-Day Adventist elementary school, and the clothing storage and distribution center of Birthright of Rochester.

The plan also calls for the establishment of a commission subcommittee to examine

possible alternative sites for a junior high program.

Finally, in fall of 1992, St. Monica's would join the rest of the southeast quadrant schools as a K-6 institution.

Assuming that 100 percent of the students currently enrolled in the quadrant re-enroll next year, the proposal calls for a tuition rate of \$956 per student, according to William Pickett, chairman of the Commission on Reorganization of Catholic Schools and president of St. John Fisher College.

The plan met with mixed reviews in the quadrant.

Father William Graf, pastor of Most Precious Blood Church, said: "I don't like to see any school close or any change that disrupts the lives of our school and faculty or parents."

Yet the pastor said he supported any school closing that could be shown to benefit "the wider community."

Dennis McMullen, the parish's representative to the Southwest Quadrant Planning Board, expressed disappointment over the potential closing of the parish school. He acknowledged the school was suffering from low enrollment, but noted that school parents would like at least one more year to deal with the reorganization.

Low enrollment figures and financial problems were the reasons the southwest planning board recommended that Most Precious Blood be closed, according to Pickett. Vivian Kurdt, chairwoman of the southwest planning board, also noted the board's conclusion that all of Most Pre-

cious Blood's student body could fit in St. Theodore's School in Gates.

When asked for his reaction to the southwest proposal and for enrollment figures at his school, the principal of Most Precious Blood, James Bell, declined to comment.

Holy Family's principal, Sister Lorraine Burns, supported the southwest draft as it stood. "I don't really see any major, major changes in it from what we've heard in the (planning board's) meetings," she said. She also said she supported the concept of a regional junior high because it can offer a wider variety of educational programming than a K-8 program can give its junior high

students.

The former president of St. Monica's school board, Deloris Forbes, expressed reservations over the establishment of a regional junior high. Forbes' criticisms highlighted one issue that divided planning board members — St. Monica's stated desire to remain a K-8 institution so that it can continue to serve its mostly black inner-city student body.

According to section 5.7 of the proposal, the southwest's junior high program would have to demonstrate that it has established a "multi-cultural curriculum" that would meet the needs of the various ethnic groups

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Bishop names members of clusters commission

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has chosen 11 men and women to begin shaping the future of Catholic education outside Monroe County.

The first members of the newly appointed diocesan Commission on Clusters will deal not only with Catholic schools, but with all facets of a well-integrated catechetical plan for parishes in 11 of the diocese's 12 counties.

The commission, which met for the first time Jan. 4 at St. Stephen's/St. Francis School in Geneva, is charged with developing a plan to be implemented by September, 1991. The commission is scheduled to continue in operation until June, 1992.

One of the first tasks of the new commission is to develop a Catholic school system framework that is compatible with the framework being developed for Monroe County schools.

However, in contrast to the Commission on Reorganization of Catholic Schools — which focuses solely on Catholic schools in Monroe County — the clusters commission will deal with all elements of Catholic education, including schools, religious education, youth ministry and adult education.

"It is not a school commission," noted Sister Mary Ann Binsack, RSM, director of the diocesan Division of Education. "It is a commission that has to address all the (educational) issues."

Because of this broader focus for the clusters commission, Sister Binsack explained, Bishop Clark did not limit membership to individuals involved with Catholic schools.

John Gough, chairman of Gough Holding in Horseheads, heads the new commission. The quality of his fellow members has impressed him.

"I think it's an excellent, representative group of the areas," remarked Gough, who is a past chairman of the board of St. Joseph's Hospital, Elmira, and former president of the Notre Dame High School board of governors. "I was very impressed not only with the caliber, but also with

their commitment."

Other members of the commission include Father Robert Kreckel, pastor of St. Mary's of the Lake, Ontario, and Sister Patricia Carroll, SSJ, principal of Holy Family Junior High, part of the consolidated Holy Family Catholic School System in Elmira. Sister Carroll was also a member of the Leahy Commission, which preceded the current commission.

In addition, the clusters commission includes two representatives from each of three cluster planning boards in the 11-county region. These boards, which have been meeting since 1988, will do the actual planning for each of the clusters — the Finger Lakes (Wayne, Ontario, Yates, Seneca and Cayuga counties); the Southern Tier (Steuben, Schuyler, Chemung, Tompkins and Tioga counties); and the Genesee Valley (Livingston County).

Sister Binsack noted that planning board members who serve on the clusters commission will promote better communication between the two bodies. The planning boards will become permanent entities that will coordinate Catholic education in the clusters. Once the commission disbands, the boards will report directly to the diocesan Board of Education.

At the first meeting of the new commission, members voted to add one additional member from each of the three clusters to better represent the whole region at the commission's monthly meetings.

The cluster boards in turn are subdivided into local area groups consisting of several parishes. These parishes, because of location and common needs, are candidates likely to work together.

Geographic distance and limited resources are among the problems with which the commission must contend, Sister Carroll said. She noted, however, that the clusters have the advantage of previous school consolidations and cooperative ministry, such as the Holy Family system in Elmira and the Cayuga Team Ministry.

Sister Carroll pointed out that Elmira's Catholic school consolidation in the early

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Babette G. Augustin-Staff photographer
PRE-MARCH PREPARATIONS — Following a prayer service at Irondequoit's St. Thomas the Apostle Church Sunday night, Father Ralph Fraats blesses 43 parishioners aboard the bus to the Jan. 22 March for Life. For more on the march, see page 4.

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