

Southwest parishes split over schools plan

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

GATES — Parishes in Monroe County's Southwest Quadrant are divided in their reactions to a school-reorganization proposal put forth by the Commission on Reorganization of Catholic Schools, chaired by William Pickett, president of St. John Fisher College.

Representatives from parishes in the Southwest Quadrant — one of four geographic groupings that make up the county's Catholic school system — voiced their opinions about the reorganization

draft at a meeting in St. Helen's Parish hall Thursday evening, Jan. 25. The meeting was also attended by commission members and representatives from the diocesan Department of Education.

The draft calls for a reconfiguration of the quadrant's schools over a three-year period. Under the proposal, Most Precious Blood would close in June, and its students would be sent to St. Theodore's in Gates.

Then, in fall of 1991, all six remaining schools — except St. Monica's — would move to a kindergarten-sixth-grade configuration. A regional junior high would

open that year at Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish's school building, although the plan mandates the establishment of a commission subcommittee to examine other possible sites for the quadrant's junior high.

In fall of 1992, St. Monica's would join the rest of the Southeast Quadrant as a K-6 school. The plan also calls for a uniform tuition rate.

Participants at the Jan. 25 meeting voiced reactions ranging from praise for the plan to outright disapproval.

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Babette G. Augustin-Staff photographer
Francis Russo protests silently at St. Louis School Wednesday, Jan. 24, during a meeting of quadrant and school commission representatives.

Commission may change quadrant plan

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

PITTSFORD — The Commission on Reorganization of Catholic Schools may change parts of its plan to reorganize schools in southeastern Monroe County following a meeting with parish representatives last week, according to William Pickett, commission chairman.

About 200 protesters held a candlelight vigil outside St. Louis School Wednesday evening, Jan. 24, before commission members met inside with parish representatives from the Southeast Quadrant — one of four geographical districts that make up Monroe County's Catholic school system. Representatives from the diocesan Department of Education also attended the meeting.

Representatives from parishes and schools denounced the proposal, which calls for the June, 1990, closing of four schools in the quadrant — Corpus Christi and St. Boniface in Rochester, Guardian Angels in Henrietta and St. Rita's in Webster.

Under the plan, two regional junior highs would be established at St. John of Rochester and at Seton Catholic Primary, which is located at St. Thomas More Parish in Rochester.

The quadrant's remaining schools would house grades kindergarten through six.

The plan also calls for a uniform tuition rate for the quadrants. According to the plan's finance section, if the quadrant board discounted tuition for families with two or more children in the quadrant schools, tuition for a family's first child might climb to \$1,250 or more. \$1,250 for a first child.

Following the Jan. 24 meeting, the commission met Friday, Jan. 26, to discuss revising the plan before sending it to Bishop Matthew H. Clark for final approval by March 1.

In the wake of the plan's release, one parish is considering the establishment of an independent school that would operate outside the quadrant's authority, according to William Volkmann, a representative of

St. John's Parish. Volkmann said St. John's would seriously consider such a move should the plan's final draft retain the proposal for a regional junior high at St. John's, which currently houses grades K-8.

At the meeting last week, Volkmann spoke defiantly to the commission members, whom he asked to resign.

"St. John of Rochester ... rejects the proposed changes and the process by which they were achieved," Volkmann said, later

adding, "For the record, St. John of Rochester Parish considers it an insult that we were allowed three minutes to address an issue that we consider so vital to our community."

Volkmann's call for the commission's resignation was dismissed by Pickett. "I think the diocese ... and the people are much better served by this commission ... than by any other alternative I can think of," he said.

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Diocesan officials, pro-choice activists begin talks

By Richard A. Kiley
News Editor

ROCHESTER — Diocesan officials began a dialogue last week with pro-choice activists, in an effort to resolve their differences concerning the use of "rescue missions" at the offices of area doctors.

In a prepared statement issued after the Jan. 24 meeting, Father John A. Firpo, director of the diocesan Division of Social Ministry, said that the dialogue was "the first step in opening a frank and clear discussion" with pro-choice activists.

The Jan. 24 meeting, which ran nearly two hours, took place at the diocesan Pastoral Center, 1150 Buffalo Road. Father Firpo was joined in representing the diocese by Lourdes Perez-Albuerne, associate director for justice and peace for the Division of Social Ministry.

Dr. Eric Schaff, a Rochester pediatrician who has targeted a diocesan priest for his pro-life activity, represented the pro-choice position along with the Rev. Wendy Williams Spaly, one of the organizers of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights.

According to Perez-Albuerne, another meeting is scheduled for the week of Feb. 19. She would not comment any further on the meeting.

In his statement, Father Firpo said that "we have agreed to explore the viability of bringing different groups together to dialogue about the consequences of the tactic (rescue missions) that prevents women

from seeking medical attention."

The meeting was arranged early last month after pro-choice activists picketed outside St. Theodore's Church in Gates, where Father Anthony P. Mugavero serves as parochial vicar.

Schaff and approximately 50 other pro-choice activists gathered last month outside the Gates church on two consecutive Sundays, protesting Father Mugavero's participation in "rescue missions" — demonstrations in which pro-life activists occupy the offices of obstetricians who they believe perform abortions.

At the demonstrations, Schaff said he objected to "rescues" by pro-life activists because the demonstrations block patients' access to medical attention and bother patients already inside the office.

Schaff also is reportedly upset with what he perceives as diocesan approval of the "rescue" tactics.

In a statement on civil disobedience

issued in December, 1988, by the Office of Bishop Matthew H. Clark, the diocese referred to rescues as "one of many approaches" to protesting abortion. The statement continued that rescues "involve the breaking of just laws, such as laws that are necessary to maintain public order."

"It is the unjust law that permits abortion that is being challenged, not the just laws of our nation," the statement said. It went on to state, however, that those who engage in civil disobedience "must be willing to accept the legal consequences of such action."

For Father Mugavero — who, with seven other pro-life activists, was arrested Dec. 28 by Rochester police after blocking the entrance of Dr. David Gandell's Mt. Hope Avenue office — the consequences will be a community-service project. On Friday, Jan. 26, City Court Judge Gary E. Smith ordered the Rochester priest to serve

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