

# Mooney's fate shows need to plan

To the editor:

I am a member of Assumption of Our Lady Parish in Fairport, the largest parish in the diocese without a parochial school. Right now, our parish is struggling with the Southeast Quadrant Plan because of money: How much will we be assessed to pay for a school system that few, if any, of our members utilize? Needless to say, there is much fear and concern, and a bit of anger to boot. I personally approve of the plan for our quadrant and the whole idea of a Diocesan School System as well. No doubt, the reason for my approval is because I sat on the executive Committee of Cardinal Mooney High School for the last six years of the school's existence. And I learned a great deal from that experience.

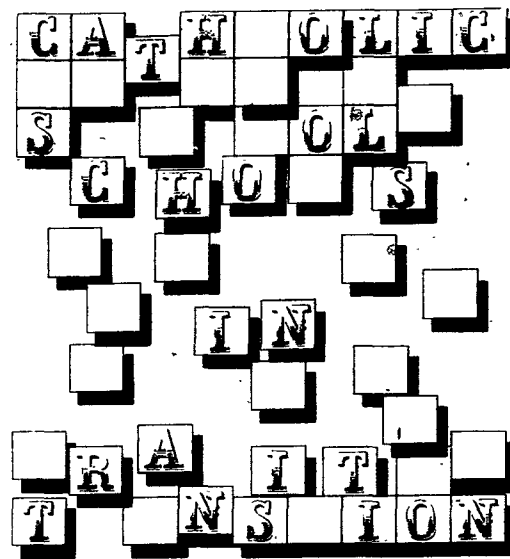
Cardinal Mooney closed for numerous reasons, the primary one being that we were flat broke. It is true that the Brothers of the Holy Cross decided to close the school, but Matthew Clark allowed the whole thing to happen as it did. It is not well known that in the original contract between the diocese and the Brothers of the Holy Cross there was a provision included that stated that if the Brothers ceased to operate a school at 800 Maiden Lane, then the ownership of the building would revert to the diocese, NOT the Brothers. This clause became quite troublesome to the Brothers as they realized that their initial contribution of well over \$1 million dollars to complete the building 25 years ago, and all subsequent monies pumped into the school to underwrite the deficits, would be lost if they closed the school and the diocese assumed ownership. When asked to guarantee the increasing debt, the diocese

soundly said "No." They're no dummies. The Brothers then went to court to try to reverse the original agreement. It was at this point in the sad saga that it became obvious that the school could not hope to open in September of 1989 and the Brothers announced the closing of the school. Shortly after, the Brothers announced their intention to sell the building, mainly to recoup their losses. Everyone knew that Greece would buy the school. By the way, there was no plan between the diocese and Greece, or the Brothers and Greece, to buy the building prior to the closing of Mooney. Here, however, is where the diocese chose discreetly not to press the original contract which could have given it ownership of the Mooney facility. Having participated in some last ditch efforts with the diocese to keep Mooney going, I called Father John Mulligan and urgently begged him not to let the Brothers sell the building, but to pursue a lease agreement with Greece. I was sure that even leasing the whole facility for perhaps 10 years would appeal to Greece, given the circumstances in that district. The diocese, however, said they didn't own the building and it was the Brothers' decision to sell. At this point, when the Brothers, the diocese and Greece could have all been winners, the diocese let a valuable asset be sold. Now, there will never be secondary Catholic education in that section of the county.

The diocese has no interest in secondary Catholic education, although the Pickett Commission pays some lip service to it. The fact is that each Catholic high school in Monroe County is independently owned by an order or a governing board, and here

exists territoriality like you have never seen. For several years the principals of the six Rochester Catholic high school met to discuss the fact that only four high schools were needed. No one, except Mooney, was willing to give an inch. Not only was, and is, the attitude "I'm for me and no one else" in each school, but I know that one school augmented and spread rumors of Mooney's closing years before it happened, and that in one school the children were allowed to cheer when told of Mooney's closing. If this is Christianity, maybe I'll become a Hindu. Thus, when Mooney announced its closure, the diocese knew it would stand to gain substantial funds and the other Catholic high schools secretly cheered for the new students they would absorb. The real losers were the current and future students and parents of the Mooney community — MAYBE.

Matthew Clark chose by his non-interference in the workings of the Secondary Catholic Schools to let Mooney close. In part, don't fault him for this because it would have been fiscally irresponsible to try to bail Mooney out. The debt and deficits were just too big. However, by instituting a policy which follows the premise that the weakest will fold and the strongest will survive, he abdicated his role as the Prime Educator of the diocese and increased the likelihood that territoriality will be strengthened and even encouraged among the Catholic Secondary Schools. Matthew Clark can revoke an order's charter to teach in his diocese, but he chose not to use that power to save the spirit and vitality that was Mooney. He will not press the Catholic Secondary Schools to cooperate, merge or combine efforts, although



he does have some power to do so.

What Matthew Clark has failed to do with Secondary Education, he is attempting to do with the K-eight systems. The fact of the matter is that education is very expensive, and most people don't think it should be, but it is! Whether we like it or not, we will all be paying for education to the day we die because we cannot afford the consequences of not educating our neighbors' children. That should be true of Catholic education as well as public education. As a Catholic, I benefit from Catholic schools even if my parish doesn't have one, and even if my children do not attend. The weakest parish schools will close much as Mooney did and leave nothing for the future children unless we collectively do something to ensure that Catholic education is available to all. If we don't, there will only be Catholic education for the rich. The way to ensure that our whole church be able to benefit is to support a Diocesan School System. That is a hard pill to swallow, especially for pastors and Catholic school parents. Much like the principals of the financially stable secondary schools, their attitude is, "I am for me and no one else." It is going to cost all of us something. It might be money. It might be a longer bus ride for our child. It might be realigning our emotional and spiritual allegiance from one school to another. But if we don't go along with the reorganization, however imperfect it may be and without a doubt it will be imperfect, we will have no Catholic School System and I can tell you, it won't be any skin off the nose of the Pickett Commission or Matthew Clark. The noses that will be bleeding will be mine and yours and our children's. Just ask the people who lost Mooney.

Kathleen Phelan Allen  
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Fairport

## Parents dispute wisdom of southeast school plan

To the editor:

This is our first letter to an Editor and we are writing it with heavy hearts. We never imagined that we would be forced by circumstances beyond our control to dispute the actions of our Bishop. We are the parents of two Junior High students and one Grade school student at St. Rita's. Our concerns over the current proposal from the Diocese relating to the restructuring of our Catholic schools focus on the following three points.

1. As parents of Jr. High students, we have serious concerns about the wisdom of sending seventh and eighth graders to a large Junior High school. While the proposed programs at the Northeast Regional Catholic High are extensive, we do not believe that more sports and more programs can ever replace the loving, family atmosphere that my children have experienced at St. Rita's. Bigger is not necessarily better! While centralizing a large number of students in the Jr. High may be more cost effective, we believe that history shows that some children forced into a situation like this tend to become depersonalized and alienated...
2. The Planning Commission never approached the parishes with the facts con-

cerning what was required to keep the current system viable. There was no opportunity to identify a fee structure or fund drive that would meet the needs of all of the schools while maintaining their parish identities and affiliations. Instead, a plan was proposed that not only projected a 15-20% loss of students from the current enrollment — it depended on it. This is an outrage! To so cavalierly change the lives of so many children when it has not even been proven to be necessary incites my anger as a parent. We were never asked to be part of the process yet it is our money and time that help keep the current system operating...

3. If the Commission Plan is adopted, even if St. Rita's is given a reprieve, we will lose control of our school. Fundraising dollars will not necessarily be used here, curriculum concerns will have to be addressed to some faceless, remote commission and, we believe, the character of our Parish will be irrevocably changed. ... Please be aware that the issue is not to just keep St. Rita's open — rather it is to keep St. Rita's OUR Parish school.

4. I have been told that there are many in the Diocese that feel that the Catholic schools are merely elitist establishments

catering to the suburbs. I challenge these voices in the shadows to come forward and visit our school and see what we are doing with the very limited resources available to us. ...

In conclusion, we are very aware that previous generations of Catholic families put much effort, time, money and love into developing the current school system. We do not want to be part of the generation that presides over its demise.

John and Janet Ochs  
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Webster

## Display of Catholics' disunity over schools stymies pastor, converted Southern Baptist

To the editor:

As a pastor of a parish in Monroe County (St. Augustine's), I have followed with great interest the process of reorganizing our Catholic School system. As a convert to the Roman Catholic Church, who grew up as a Southern Baptist, I am confounded by what I see and hear.

In the church of MY youth, the structure was congregational: each church fiercely guards its independence, setting policies and priorities, determining finances, being solely responsible for its own governance. Individual congregations participate in the Southern Baptist Convention as a matter of their own choice; even the extent of financial support for the work of the Convention can be dependent on the current whims of the leadership of the individual church. When they agree with directions taken by the Convention, individuals and groups support it, when they disagree, they withdraw support.

I was drawn to the Roman Catholic Church because I saw an institution that better reflected the Biblical faith I had come to cherish. Believing that Christ established ONE church, and was still Lord and Master of that Church, I could not explain the loosely connected association of the Baptist church, which can so easily fall prey to self-interest, whether of an in-

dividual pastor or of a whole congregation. I believe that if the church IS the Body of Christ, then the unity of the whole needs to be a top priority, against which other issues must be measured. Believing that Jesus willingly sacrificed His own life for the sake of the Body, certainly no less sacrifice should be expected of me, or any of Christ's faithful followers.

I strongly support the efforts of Bishop Clark to call us to work together for the common good. I respect his authority, and the hard work of those who have put in long hours to discern the common good with regard to the Church's mission of education. Having agonized over the closing of the parish school at St. Augustine's, I see the people of our parish ready now to make new sacrifices for the good of our Catholic Church.

Why then am I confounded? It seems that some who most ardently claim to be supporting "traditional Roman Catholic values" would be much more at home in the Southern Baptist tradition I left behind. How do we pray for Christian Unity among all Christian traditions if we ignore its claims on us who are members of one Church?

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