

Consolidation veteran offers a list of 'givens'

To the editor:

I was a member of the Consolidation Committee which was given the task of consolidating the parochial schools of Chemung County back in the '70s and I have the scars to prove it. We were the testing grounds for consolidation of Catholic schools in this diocese.

I have therefore been interested in following, from a distance thank God, the progress of the same effort in Rochester and other areas of the diocese.

Whenever efforts of this nature are considered, I think there are some "givens" which should be acknowledged. Here is my list of "givens," which may be incomplete and some of which you may disagree with: ...

1. No one likes to see their school closed whether it is the parish school or their favorite high school. In particular parents of students in those schools are vehement in their opposition to such closings.

2. Declining enrollments in most instances precede the closing of any school. As enrollment declines per pupil costs escalate.

3. At some point the ever-increasing costs of Catholic education and the declining enrollments make the burden of financing that education intolerable for either or both — the parish and the parents. At that point parishes have the options of either closing the school totally or consolidating with neighboring parishes....

4. Some parents choose Catholic education not for the religious nature of that education but as an escape from the public school system where they find problems they do not wish to expose their children to. Frankly I do not blame them but it raises many questions. Unfortunately these parents feel threatened and react accordingly by castigating those who are attempting to upset the status quo.

5. Cheap help — in the form of nun teachers has almost become a thing of the past.

6. You cannot run a school with the proceeds of such things as an occasional bake sale or similar efforts. Real sacrifice is necessary and sadly few parishes or few parents want to or can afford to make that sacrifice ...

7. Well-meaning people full of good intentions will go to almost any lengths to present arguments intended to illustrate there is no reason to close or consolidate any school chosen for such consideration. Half truths, wishful thinking and outright falsehoods abound.

8. Parochialism rears its ugly head and the name of the game becomes to save our parish school no matter what happens to those other parish schools.

Unfortunately for many people the immediate family or parish ties far outweigh the universal church approach. This spirit is engendered, for the most part I think, not by doctrinal differences but is tied to such



Courier file photo

TWO DECADES OF REGIONALISM — Taken at Region 4 West School at Our Lady of Lourdes in October of 1971 — only a month after Chemung County's regional school system was implemented — this photo shows students from three Elmira parishes enjoying art class.

things as the old ethnic nature of parishes, to competition between parishes in such things as sports, by financial ties to the parish, by family history of parish involvement, by pride in parish family, by socio-economic differences between parishes, etc.

9. It is safe to say that those who participate in the decision process are going to be castigated, vilified and held up to ridicule regardless of whatever efforts they have made to be perfectly fair and to base their decision on facts and prayerful consideration rather than emotionalism.

Witness the letter from Kathleen Phelan Allen in the Feb. 1st issue of the Catholic Courier who pointedly refers to our Bishop as "Matthew Clark" throughout her letter rather than as Bishop Clark while granting to "John Mulligan" the title of Father John Mulligan. While I do not always agree with Bishop Clark, I respect him personally and further I respect the office he holds and the authority of that office. I know in my heart that he is following the path his conscience dictates just as I am doing my best to follow mine. Frankly I could do with a lot less "bishop bashing" in the pages of our

Catholic Courier than I see routinely in recent issues.

Many years ago I was president of our parish school board. Our school was bursting at the seams with students and we had almost all nun teachers. Our per pupil costs were \$150 per student per year and the parish paid for all school costs. Compare any of those facts with the situation today. Our school is being converted to apartments, our parish enrollment in Catholic schools is a fraction of what it was formerly, our parish is spending more for Catholic education than it ever has and parents are paying a healthy tuition. It is sad to observe but was inevitable considering some of the "givens" outlined above.

If you think this is bad wait just a few years when the same situation is going to prevail regarding our parishes and a similar committee will be set up to determine which churches will be closed because of lack of clergy to staff them, declining enrollments and increasing costs.

Walter C. Ervin Jr.
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Elmira

Budgets rely on enrollment

To the editor:

We are told we need to reorganize our Catholic Schools — close some and restructure most in order to ensure the future of our Catholic education system. I disagree that this is the answer to our continued success. What we need to do is fill our schools with students! With full enrollment our budgets would balance and our unequalled education system would flourish.

Public schools are constantly citing innovative and creative ways to solve their problems in the areas of education, drugs, violence, etc. These "new" methods include — teaching moral values, helping children learn to make the right choices, a buddy system that enables older children to interact with younger ones, using many hugs, teaching responsibility, helping children to build self-esteem and character, working with family members. Why do we have declining enrollment if we already have what the rest of society is striving to achieve?

Public schools are expecting their teachers to become more involved with

their children and interact with them and their families if necessary to meet any special needs. Don't we take this for granted from our Catholic School teachers and administration? Our teachers are motivated because they love our children and our Catholic faith. Certainly not from their salary which is a fraction of those at any public school.

I write my thoughts because it is time for us to come together in spirit. We are quick to criticize and find frustration in these issues. Our system isn't perfect, but if we reflect, we may realize that we already have what much of our society is searching for. We need everyone — Catholic school parent and parish member to search within themselves, decide what's most important in their children's education, and work together to support our schools. Spread our good news and fill our schools. Enroll your children in our Catholic Schools so that the problem facing us in school year 1990-91 is finding space for all our children instead of restructuring and closings.

Jackie Harrison
Ontario

School plan's flaws don't warrant vilification

To the editor:

Reading recent letters in the Courier and in the secular press, especially those concerning recommended tentative Catholic school reorganization, we are appalled at the charges of autocracy, defiance, and outright hate hurled at Bishop Clark. To our knowledge, the Bishop has not made the recommendations nor indicated as to how he will react to the final recommendations to be made by the Commission. We fail to see why the Bishop should come under fire.

We feel that honest, unemotional rebuttals to the tentative recommendations are both reasonable and necessary to the proper solution of this matter. However, we feel that the invective, rebellion and personal criticism, thrown by both clergy and their parishioners alike, are patently destructive and unChristian.

As to the Commission's tentative recommendations, we honestly don't know, at

this time, how meritorious they are. Certainly some recommendations are flawed, and just as certainly, some have merit worth pursuing. Only time, hard work, prayer, and patient, loving Christian debate will resolve the matter.

One last observation. We and our seven children have experienced many treasured years of Catholic education, which is really a parent/teacher responsibility. One valuable teaching was to love and respect our bishop. Judging from the vilification heaped on Bishop Clark, we wonder what happened to this valued lesson?

We wish to go on record as supporting Bishop Clark who we feel is going about his many difficult tasks in a loving, understanding way. We wish him to know that we love and respect him very much.

Velma and Ralph Bodensteiner
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TGA should sustain weak schools

To the editor:

Picture this — your child is in Guardian Angels School — excellent programs, excellent teachers, very happy children — the school has the highest enrollment of the schools — almost 300 children through third grade — now you're listening to the car radio — latest school closings in Catholic Schools and you hear Guardian Angels School listed as one of them. You begin to wonder if there is another Guardian Angels School? Nope! I called Guardian Angels only to hear this is a quadrant decision — as of late, "quadrant" is closely associated with Catholic Schools.

Later in the day the evening newspaper tells the same story — I also receive a letter from Guardian Angels school this afternoon informing us on the tentative agreement — including the added tidbit of

almost doubling the tuition — why are our children the sacrificial lambs of the schools that aren't meeting it?? (Fundraisers are a part of supporting our schools).

I believed that somewhere in the Bishop's appeal are funds to help these other schools. If not, it should be! I feel this is an unnecessary burden on those of us already paying school taxes to the County of Monroe now to be matched or surpassed by the elementary school tuition.

Bishop Clark is leaving quite a legacy to the Rochester Diocese.

Seminary closing — quadrant?? confusion — forcing many parents to send their children to the public schools. Doesn't he want Catholic Education for our children?

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