

Given the will, there's a way



"Why do the more affluent parishes have to help the inner city and yet they are now trying to close (the former) down or parts of the school?" continued the angry, 65-year-old Catholic whose anonymous letter we began discussing last week. "They seem to keep St. Monica's open and I'm sure they don't pay tuition. Who takes care of them — 'the diocese' — and our money goes into that?"

"No one, but no one, helped my children get through Catholic Schools," the writer added.

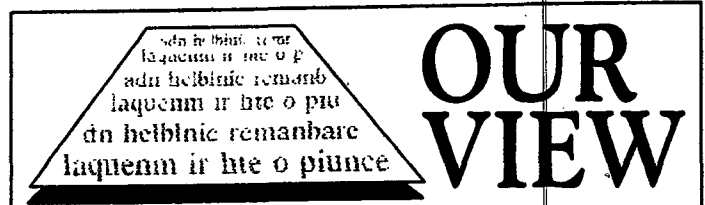
Our correspondent was less subtle than most people would be in stating their views, but traces of her racism-tinged bitterness can be found in comment after comment on proposed school reorganization. Why should we tamper with strong schools to aid schools that struggle, especially those that serve principally non-Catholic students? "Non-Catholic" often translates to "black."

The answer — as Pope John Paul II, Bishop Matthew H. Clark and other U.S. bishops have stated time and again — is that the fortunate are obliged not by charity, but in justice, to share their wealth with those in need.

Nowhere in Monroe County is Catholic education needed more than it is on Genesee Street. For many of St. Monica's 225 students, the school's loving, value-based environment offers a solitary alternative to the stagnation of street life.

Apart from the moral imperative to provide options for the poor, St. Monica's principal Gaynelle Wethers points out that educating young people is less expensive than jailing them.

"Better than 50 percent of our students go on to Catholic high schools," Wethers pointed out. "These



are students not in our jails, not pregnant, not on drugs."

Some St. Monica's students receive diocesan tuition assistance, but overall, the amount is less than that awarded to most other city Catholic schools. Parents of St. Monica's students — many of whom are single parents earning minimum wage — pay \$850 a year in tuition, plus \$150 for before-school and after-school care, when needed.

The same parents work three bingo sessions a week, maintain the school building and grounds, run the lunch program and tutor children. They also support fundraising events, just as their counterparts do at suburban schools.

Our correspondent is also dead wrong in asserting that "no one" helped provide Catholic education for her children. Immigrant Catholics built our system of neighborhood schools at great sacrifice. The contributions of parishioners — even those without children in Catholic schools — have long kept tuition affordable.

St. Monica's Parish continues that generous tradition. Parishioners — many of whom are elderly and live on fixed incomes — contribute 11 percent of the school's budget, and provide the school building free of charge.

The cost of Catholic education has never been higher. Yet as a group, Catholics in the United States have never been wealthier.

Thus, the real question is not whether we can continue providing Catholic education to our brothers and sisters most in need, but whether we will.

— The Editors

Dissenting minority's agenda creates diocesan malaise

To the editor:

There is a malaise in this diocese which goes much deeper than the current Catholic schools crisis, even though the Catholic schools crisis is clearly symptomatic of the malaise. We are a diocese in embarrassing disarray. Why? Could it be because our diocese is being torn apart by highly speculative theological agendas rooted by and large in disobedience and self-serving dissent and in anti-Vatican and anti-papal sentiments on the part of some clergy, some religious and a small number of the laity? It is interesting to note that these sentiments are not to be found in the majority of the faithful, who "walk by faith not by sight." It is amazing how the *sensus fidelium* rejects the agenda crowd.

There is only one agenda — it is the agenda of Jesus Christ, who committed the care of the Church he left behind to St. Peter and his 262 successors. The local

church does not and cannot exist apart from the universal Church, of which the Holy Father is the Chief Shepherd and with whom, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, rests ultimate responsibility for the conservation of those truths we call Revelation, i.e., Sacred Scripture and Tradition. We members of this one Body of Christ, whether laypersons, religious, deacons, priests or bishops owe the assent of faith to the received teachings of the Church and a proper spirit of obedience to those individuals, who govern with proper ecclesiastical authority, starting with our Holy Father. We are called to strengthen each other in our faith, not sow doubt.

We need desperately as a diocese to come together under the leadership of the ordinary, who is called to teach, sanctify and govern this local church in union with all the bishops of the universal Church, of which our Holy Father is the Chief

Teacher. This unity can only be restored in a spirit of mutual forgiveness, profound humility and obedience. We need to rid ourselves of agendas, to get our house in order, and to re-establish a proper spirit of sacredness and reverence for our liturgies and all of the received teachings of the Church. In addition to genuine Christian attention to the seamless garment of mercy and justice issues, we need in love to repair the seamless garment of unity with which the Body of Christ should be clothed. It isn't going to happen in an environment of strident theological dissent and flagrant liturgical abuses.

The *Catholic Courier* can play an important role in this process of reconciliation. Ridding ourselves of the ill-advised and

agenda-laden columns of Rev. McBrien in the *Catholic Courier* would be a wonderful start. They are love-less and divisive examples of one priest's often bitter crises of faith, which do nothing to contribute to the building up of the Body of Christ in this diocese. A second suggestion would be a Lent and/or Easter series of competent "agenda-free" guest editorials or essays dealing with forgiveness, reconciliation and the restoration of unity in the bleeding local church. What a wonderful way for the *Catholic Courier* to contribute to the reconciliation of our diocesan family!

Deacon William Schmitz
Cedargrove Drive
Rochester

School changes must not compromise value

To the editor:

The survival of any business, big or small, is in the numbers which make that business run. The situation faced by the Catholic Schools within the Rochester Diocese is one of numbers which is charged with the emotional desire of providing the best education for our children.

Change may be necessary, but it should be well-planned and well-communicated. Research of factors which will influence the operation of a school need to be complete. A justified proposal which maintains the value of a Catholic Education would be difficult to debate. A simplistic analysis of the numbers within a proposal will always be subject to challenge.

There are many numbers to consider. The number of students, and the number of classrooms. The number of families in a parish, and the census numbers in a geographic area. The number of dollars, and what those dollars can provide. The number of special programs, and the number of hours of involvement by parents and teachers. This list could go on.

The result of these numbers is very impressive. Children with a strong academic background with a thirst for knowledge,

balanced with moral development and social values. An education of high QUALITY.

Our challenge is to make the numbers work together. Quality cannot be obtained by overloading classrooms and teachers. The value of a Catholic education should not be compromised, but rather must be enhanced. The needs of our growing communities must be met with an educational program so full of value that it is a bargain at any price.

As a proud parent of a St. Rita's student, I see the value every day. It is inconceivable to imagine merging the Webster Catholic school students into one building without compromising quality and decreasing value. In a growth area like Webster and Penfield, consolidation can only be viewed as a reduction in the commitment to provide Quality Catholic Education. This is not the legacy our children deserve.

In the face of uncertainty, there is opportunity. But it must be seized, and nurtured. And it must be done together.

Douglas N. Haydock
St. Rita's, Webster

Catholic Courier Letters Policy

The *Catholic Courier* wishes to provide space for readers throughout the diocese to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome all signed, original letters about current issues affecting church life.

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek, insofar as possible, to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters for publication based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions of the letter writers.

We reserve the right to edit all letters. Mail them to: **Catholic Courier, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, New York 14624.** Please include your full name as well as telephone number and complete address for verification purposes.

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