

Educators

Continued from page 1
woman for a teacher. One would also meet a small number of non-Catholics teaching in both a parochial high school and a Catholic elementary school.

Peep inside the religious education classes in your average parish, and, once again, the vast majority of instructors would be white women, though in some parishes, a growing number of Hispanic women could be seen leading the classes.

Female or male, white or of color, many Catholic educators are motivated by a desire to influence the destiny of their church's future, which lies with its children.

Studies of both parochial schools and parish religious education programs rank the desire to minister to or positively influence children as one of the primary reasons motivating Catholic educators to enter and stay in their profession.

"There are substantial numbers of teachers who have indicated to me that they do believe they received a call from God," remarked Dr. Robert Kealy, executive director for the elementary schools department of the NCEA.

One such teacher in the Rochester diocese whose motivation echoes Kealy's remarks is Markell.

"I don't know if I could really teach in a public school because I'm so used to incorporating Jesus and his goodness into the lesson plan," she said.

Ironically, Markell is a Methodist, but she said at the kindergarten level, the religious lessons she's imparting have little to do with complex Catholic doctrine.

"What I teach for religion ... is the love of God," she said. "(Children) just seem to have a natural acceptance of God. They don't seem to have any problem at

all." Someday, if they appreciate her lessons, some of Markell's students will grow up to teach in Catholic schools themselves. Kealy pointed out that many Catholic elementary school teachers are graduates of Catholic schools and harbor a desire to "give back" to the institutions that nurtured their intellects.

Anne F. Myer, who teaches second grade at St. Ann's School in Hornell, recalled that she has known she wanted to teach in a Catholic school since she was in the fifth grade. Growing up in Wisconsin, she spent 12 years attending Catholic schools and now enjoys creating the same sense of God in her students that was created in her by her instructors.

"I have to say after nine years down at St. Mary's, the biggest advantage is the Christian (belief) that you could bring forward in these kids," she said, adding: "And that's something I can't do in public schools."

Several Catholic school teachers emphasized that public school teachers often strive to impart moral values to their students, but nonetheless, the Catholic educator has the freedom to talk about her faith without fear of reprisal.

"Religion plays a big part," said Mary Marlene Sharkey, a pre-school teacher at Holy Cross School in Rochester. "It permeates our day, not just the morning prayer." To illustrate her point, she noted that the class might stop in the middle of the day to pray for a sick member.

The fact that students would be well-behaved enough to listen to a request to stop for prayer also attracts a lot of teachers — especially non-Catholics — to seek employment at a Catholic school. Indeed, the disciplined environment of a Catholic school, replete with involved parish and parental support can be an added inducement for a potential employee.



"I liked the value-centered education and spirituality that I think has gotten more important over the years because of the crazy world we live in," remarked Dolores Holz, who recently concluded a 21-year career as a social studies and language arts teacher at St. Cecilia's in Rochester.

Holz will take up new duties at Northeastern Catholic Junior High in Irondequoit this fall.

She noted that U.S. society no longer is held together by a commonly accepted set of ethical values. Children can watch the Playboy cable channel at their friends' homes or see R-rated films now at an earlier age, an unthinkable thought when she began teaching, she said. Hence,

Catholic schools have a vital role to play in the moral formation of society.

"I certainly believe that you can teach values and stuff like that by your behavior in public schools ...," she said, "but the advantage that we have in our system is we can be specific. We can talk specifically about our relationship with God."

Keeping up with the changing values and concerns of young people has occupied Sister Edwina Butler, RSM, for 35 years. Chairwoman of the language department at Elmira's Notre Dame High School, Sister Butler is a veteran of Catholic education, having also taught at such schools as the former Cardinal Mooney High School.

Her long experience in Catholic schools has led her to conclude that "it certainly would be the Christian philosophy that really is the key to our idea of education. If the whole person isn't educated, then the product is less than perfect."

Perfecting the "product" becomes more of a challenge when one realizes that fewer and fewer Catholic youngsters have been attending Catholic schools as higher tuition rates and closing schools have shrunk the educational choices of many Catholic parents.

For an increasing number of Catholic families, the answer to the need to form their children religiously lies with the parish religious education program. Such programs have grown in numbers conversely comparable

to the decline of Catholic schools in the country.

In fact, many of the first employees of parish religious education programs came from former Catholic schools in the 1970s, according to Wayne Smith, associate director of the NCEA's religious education department.

Smith also explained that a large number of today's professional catechists are being drawn from the ranks of former volunteer catechists — often parents — and from other lay persons and staff members who want to get into professional parish ministry.

Mary Tyrrell fit the above bill as an involved parishioner at St. Michael's in Penn Yan. "I've kind of always been involved in church work," Tyrrell commented, noting she has worked as a parish secretary in the past and has volunteered for parish activities for the last 19 years.

Currently employed as an administrator of St. Michael's religious education program, Tyrrell hopes to develop an extensive catechetical program in the parish's former convent. Like her counterparts in the Catholic schools system, Tyrrell is motivated by a desire to spread the Gospel to children.

"As every year goes by, I see children are subject to more and more outside pressures, and they need more God, they need more church," she said.

She added later that she attempts to make church "fun" for her younger students by involving them in liturgies and teaching them religious nursery rhymes. "It gets them started, and maybe gets them away from 'ninja turtles' for awhile," she joked.

Tyrrell's recently hired assistant director, Walter Savaria, also hopes to touch students' hidden sense of God. "I'm talking about something that's important to them — what life is all about," he said.

It's a good thing that the Catholic educational system is populated by such dedicated people, because none of its employees are destined to appear on TV's *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*.

To illustrate the financial challenges one faces when taking on a church-issued paycheck, one only has to look at the salary of the average Catholic elementary school teacher — \$15,578 according to the NCEA.

Professional directors of religious education, armed with masters degrees, do slightly better, earning anywhere from \$19-29,000 a year, while their counterparts, the religious education coordinators carrying bachelor degrees or no degrees, often make between \$18-\$24,000.

Experts in both fields point out that catechists and school teachers' salaries vary widely across the country, and even in the diocese, but all agree that its not money that is keeping Catholic educators at their posts.

"Sometimes, I'd like to do something without worrying about how much it costs," Holz admitted, "but that's something I share with about 90 percent of the people walking around."

She later commented: "For me, I have had a wonderful time. I love doing what I do. I loved the kids at St. Cecilia's. It was worth it to me."

Is someone you know heading off to school this fall?

Enroll the student in your life in a course on Catholicism.

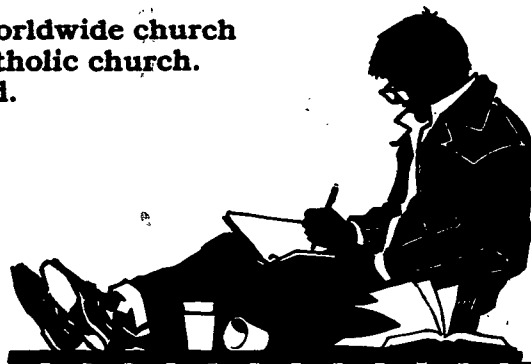
Catholic Life 101:

The latest information on diocesan and worldwide church events; discussion of issues facing the Catholic church. Student participation strongly encouraged.

Required Reading:

CATHOLIC COURIER

for students of all ages



Send the Catholic Courier to:

Student name _____

Address/street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Please bill me I enclose a check for \$15

Bill to:

Name _____

Address/street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Send to: Catholic Courier Subscriptions, 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, NY 14624 or call 716/328-4340

HORSEBACK RIDING LESSONS

Boarding - Training - Lessons
- Visitors Welcome -

BLUE BOX FARM

534 Brooks Rd., West Henrietta
(1/2 mile from the Marroit on Rt. 15)
John & Maryann Vanderzell
334-2598