

Parents help school reach new heights

By Barbara Ann Homick
Staff writer

PENFIELD — In the wake of several Catholic school closings, many parents in Monroe County have become increasingly aware of the need to boost their parish school's enrollment.

Parents at St. Joseph's Parish in Penfield decided to get involved with their school before it was too late.

According to Principal Sister Nancy Kelly, RSM, parents within the parish were well aware of the ongoing reorganization plans and the threat of possibly losing their junior high school. St. Joseph's School, which has an enrollment of 475 students in grades Pre-K through 8, could have been one of the schools to lose its junior high, said Sister Kelly.

"We all knew there was a chance of any one of us losing our junior high," the principal said.

But parishioners did not lose hope in keeping their junior high intact.

In order to present a positive image of the school, Sister Kelly followed the guidelines listed in the 1990-91 Tri-Quadrant System Implementation Plan for Monroe County Catholic Schools — approved by Bishop Matthew H. Clark in March — to implement a plan for parents to serve on one of several school committees.

Early last fall, the principal sent a letter to parents, explaining the goal of the committees. She included a questionnaire so parents could indicate their areas of interest, noting that everyone who signed up would be put to work on a committee. Sister Kelly said she was overwhelmed when more than 60 parents responded to the questionnaire.

The parents first met with Sister Kelly for an organizational meeting on Oct. 22, when they divided into committees according to their areas of expertise.

Sandy Kolupski, chairwoman of the public relations committee, expressed amazement over how so many experienced volunteers committed themselves to the project.

After receiving a wealth of information from Sister Kelly in early October, Kolupski said she was impressed that the parents were being asked "to help more or less run the school."

Kolupski said the committees have been very active, holding monthly meetings — either at the school or in the home of one of the committee chairs — to discuss plans and progress. In addition, the heads of each committee meet monthly for an executive session with Sister Kelly.

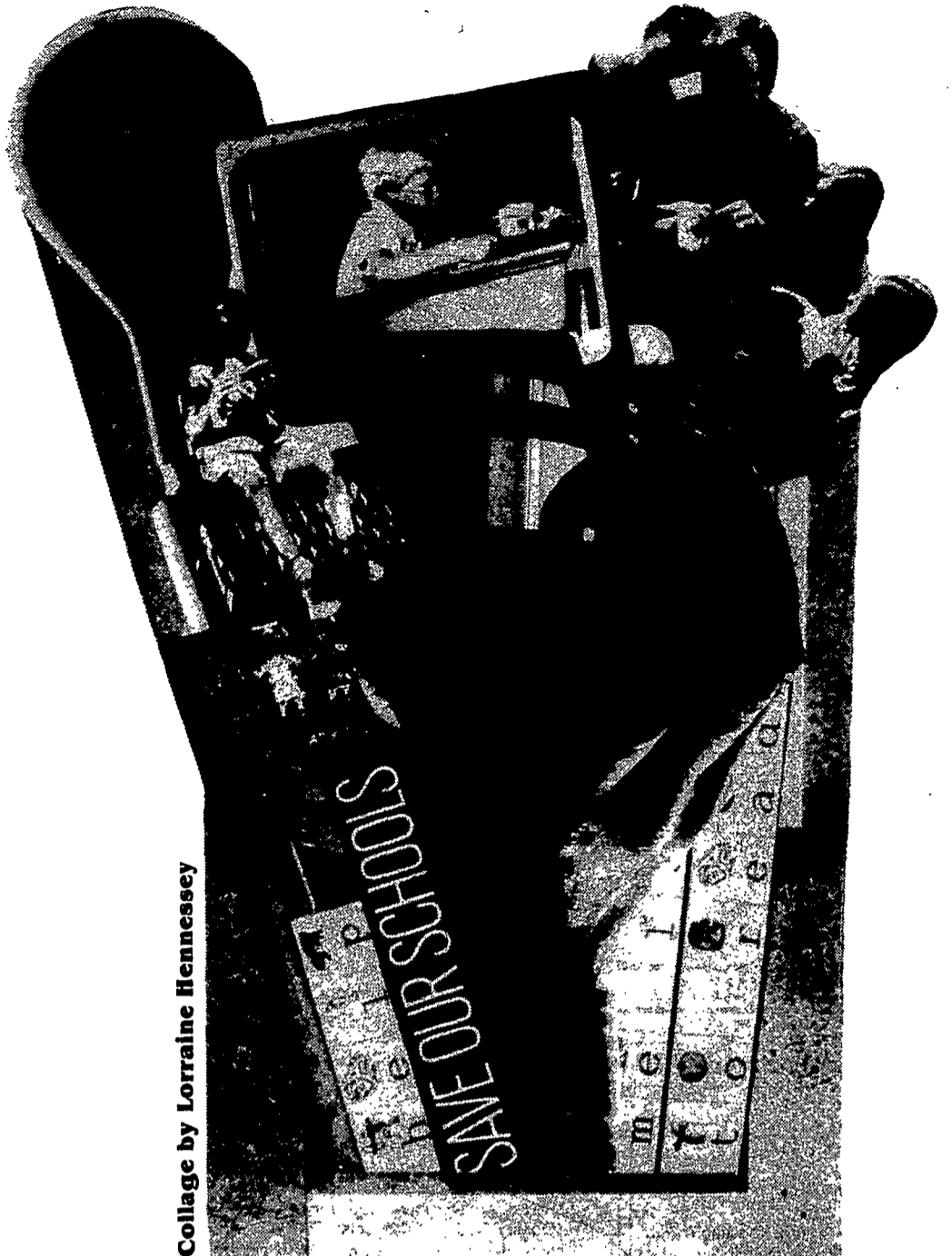
Each of the seven committees — budget preparation, tuition collection, fundraising, volunteer programs, student recruitment, public relations and fund development/alumni association — has a specific task, but responsibilities sometimes overlap among the groups.

For instance, both the student recruitment and public relations committees are working together to update the school brochure. Committee members are hoping to publish the brochure by the end of January, 1991.

Kolupski noted that one of the strengths of the program is the way it allows members from each group to share ideas and gain experience in many different areas.

The six members of the budget preparation committee are commissioned to prepare a school budget within the guidelines set by the Quadrant Board. Headed by chairman Rick LaDonna, the group meets monthly to work on St. Joseph's 1991-92 budget.

Three people assist Sister Kelly on the tuition collection committee, which contacts parents who fall behind on tuition payments.



Collage by Lorraine Hennessey

Another committee — headed by Valerie Equinozzi — organizes and coordinates various fundraisers necessary to meet the school's quota for the quadrant. Each school is given a monetary quota, which officials must raise each year to fund Catholic education in the diocese. The committee's first fundraiser will be a craft show in April.

Janet Dacey, chairwoman of the volunteer programs committee, said her group is concerned with finding volunteer community placements for students. The committee's goal is to show students how they can enrich their lives by helping others in the community.

"We want our children to know what community service is and reap the rewards from it," said Dacey.

Although the junior high has been involved in service projects before — including projects with Melita House, soup kitchens and nursing homes — Dacey said her group wants to see community service trickle down to all grade levels.

The mother of three children enrolled at St. Joseph's School, Dacey said the volunteer committee is already planning activities for the spring. Among those activities is a pen-pal program between the primary grades and an area nursing home.

"It is important to make children aware of the need for volunteer service," she said, adding that youths should be taught that volunteerism is something they can enjoy, not just something they feel obliged to do.

Dacey said she wanted to become involved with the group because she believes volunteer work should be a part of everyday Christian life. "The program entrenches in the kids why we are special and different," she said.

Phil Burke, who heads the fund development/alumni association committee, said his group wants to create a fund development office and organize an alumni association. The five committee members are trying to locate more than 1,400 alumni in order to encourage reunions and more involvement in the school.

The money raised will be used for scholarship and endowment funds to provide tuition assistance and help purchase school equipment.

Burke — who has two daughters at St.

Joseph's — said the program is long overdue.

"The alumni represent a large group that have ties to Catholic education and this school," said Burke, who is an estate planning attorney. "Hopefully they are successful and they will realize that much of their success is based on their Catholic education."

Recruiting new students is just as important as locating old ones, according to Kathy Reynolds, chairwoman of the student recruitment committee. The four-member committee looks for ways to attract new students and sees to the needs of the current student body.

Reynolds said the group is planning a tea for parents in the early spring. The mother of two sons at St. Joseph's, Reynolds said she is impressed by the care involved in the program.

"Parents that are going to stay with the Catholic schools will become involved with their school. They know they have to," Reynolds said.

The aim of Kolupski's 12-member public relations committee is to keep the school and its activities "in the eyes and ears of the public." The committee also plans to publish a monthly newsletter.

Kolupski, who also has a daughter at St. Joseph's, said she is pleased that so many young parents are becoming involved with the school. Kolupski and her husband are both graduates of Catholic schools. She attended St. Salome while he went to St. Stanislaus, and they met at Bishop Kearney High School.

"We went full circle with the Catholic schools and we want to keep them (intact) for our children," she stated.

Sister Kelly noted that if parents hope to keep schools open, they will have to follow this new trend in parental involvement.


"If parents don't believe in and support Catholic education, it will become extinct," she warned.

Sister Kelly quickly added, however, that the commitment to quality Catholic education at St. Joseph's is encouraging.

"Although the schools are diocesan, they really belong to the people," she noted. "And if the enthusiasm of these people is any indication of the success of St. Joseph's, then it will be around for a long time after I am gone."

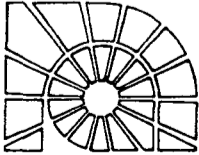
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