

# Vigil draws hundreds at St. Pius X

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

CHILI — Several hundred people participated Sunday night, Jan. 6 in an outdoor candlelight vigil protesting the effect of Catholic schools' reorganization on St. Pius the Tenth School.

Organized by "concerned parishioners," according to school parent Joseph Gambino, vigil participants sang hymns, marched and prayed the rosary. Several held signs bearing such slogans as, "Don't Mess With Success" and "Where Did Our Input Go?"

At the close of the event, Gambino told the crowd: "We are confident that the rigid 'one-size fits all' philosophy that our bishop and vicar general have adopted will be changed." He called on Bishop Matthew H. Clark "to communicate with St. Pius Tenth's truly chosen representatives," and to "keep Rochester's largest pre-K through 8 school, St. Pius Tenth, whole and open."

St. Pius lies in the Southwest Quadrant, in which a centralized junior high program will be established at Gates' St. Theodore School next year. All but one of the quadrant's schools, including St. Pius, will lose their seventh and eighth grades next year.

Members of the parish's quadrant task force have criticized the reorganization plan for potentially decreasing enrollment at their parish school and adversely affecting parish finances.

The conflict between the parish representatives and the diocese came to a head early in December when Bishop Clark fired Sean Connellan, the parish's representative to the Southwest Quadrant Governing Board.

At the time of the firing, Bishop Clark observed that Connellan "cannot in good faith support my plan," and based his action on a parish task force letter outlining the task force members' unwillingness to



Rebecca S. Roth

Signs supplied by organizers of a Dec. 6 candlelight vigil at St. Pius the Tenth School — protesting the effect of Catholic schools' reorganization — lay in the snow after being returned by participants.

support the reorganization plan.

Vigil organizers distributed a list of questions they wanted participants to use to start "discussion or get you thinking of more concerns about the system." Among the questions was whether the cost of tuition for the new junior high at St. Theodore's would be made public prior to registration next month, and what will happen to the St. Pius faculty members displaced by the reorganization.

The handout also contained addresses and/or phone numbers of Southwest Quadrant Board members, diocesan officials, local newspapers, and two radio stations, including WVOR's "Grouch line."

Father George Norton, diocesan spokesman, said the diocese had no official response to the vigil participants' concerns. When asked whether diocesan officials would meet with the task force members again, he noted that the parish's task force "as far as we're concerned, has been disbanded. It doesn't have any status as a representative of the parish."

The task force was "officially" disbanded last spring by Father Gerald T. Connor, pastor of St. Pius the Tenth, but it has continued to operate on an unofficial basis



Erin Collins was among the approximately 400 people who attended the vigil.

since that time.

Samuel Ognibene, a parish trustee and a member of the task force, said the panel and the school parents remain unconvinced that reorganization will benefit their school. He noted that the parishioners will continue to press their case, though no plans for future protests have been formalized.

"We have presently a quality program,"

he said. "We haven't seen information yet that the program presented would be equal to or better than (the current one.)" Ognibene said he hopes the bishop will meet with a few representatives from the parish to discuss parishioners' concerns.

Bishop Clark wrote to parishioners on Dec. 14, stating: "The time for debate on the school system is past; we need now to be working together to implement the plan in the best way possible. At this point, meetings with parish and school leadership to discuss implementation are appropriate; meetings in hope of reversing the system are not."

One reason St. Pius' representatives may remain unpersuaded about school reorganization is that some of their questions cannot be answered at this time, noted Brother Brian M. Walsh, CFC, diocesan superintendent of schools. Brother Walsh said he and other diocesan representatives met with Ognibene and Connellan last fall.

The superintendent pointed out, for example, that no school system can provide its tuition rates for the upcoming year until increases for salaries and health-benefit rates have been factored into the budget. Diocesan schools usually complete such work in January, he said.

In response to concern by vigil organizers about a \$186,000 deficit in the Northeast Quadrant, Brother Walsh also stated that public information on the deficit problems of the Northeast Quadrant has been available since November.

The superintendent said the deficit occurred because actual enrollment figures for Northeast Quadrant schools were lower than the number of students who registered to attend quadrant schools. He added that teachers who left the system also were replaced by teachers whose salary ratings were higher than those of the teachers they replaced.

— Lee Strong

# Christmas appeal sustains drop in contributions

ROCHESTER — Diocesan officials have announced that the 1990 Catholic Courier/Social Ministry Christmas Appeal suffered losses in both the number of contributors and the total amount collected as compared to the 1989 effort.

Those declines mean that the programs and parishes requesting money for emergency services received less than they had hoped for, noted Judy Taylor, the appeal's coordinator.

"It leaves a number of agencies in the situation of turning people away," she observed.

As of January 4, 1991, the 1990 appeal had received \$62,551 in contributions from

1,309 donors, Taylor said.

In 1989, the appeal garnered \$65,085,40 from 1475 contributors.

The decline is "a reflection of the economy and the pessimism of people when they hear we are going into a recession," Taylor suggested.

In addition, Taylor noted, the Christmas Appeal is competing against other fund drives. Moreover, a number of people who had given to the appeal in past years have since moved or passed away, she said.

Money from the Christmas Appeal provides a pool of emergency funds to be used by parishes, the diocesan Division of Urban Services, and the diocese's regional of-

fices of social ministry. Those funds help families and individuals meet temporary housing, medical, clothing and food needs that are not addressed through regular sources of assistance.

Although the bulk of the money is dispersed during the Christmas season, funds from the appeal are used throughout the year, Taylor said, noting that her office accepts contributions to the fund year round.

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