



Catholic schools worth price

To the editors:

A recent letter in the *Courier* raised concerns about the cost to parents for Catholic education (April 4: "Tuition increases place schools beyond many budgets"). As more of the burden of paying for Catholic schools shifts from parishes to parents, it is important to point out what families are receiving for their investment.

The move to the Quadrant system is surfacing the true costs of Catholic schools, many of which have been hidden to parents in the past. Previously, school budget items such as heat, light, building repair and maintenance salaries were part of parish budgets.

In the Northeast Quadrant, as in all other quadrants, the goal is for tuition and parent fundraising to assume 60 percent of the cost of their children's education. With the total cost per student at \$2,200, it is easy to see the excellent value that Catholic education offers a family with two children paying a tuition of \$1,650 per year. This includes the cost of registration, formerly a separate item. The remainder of the cost of educating a child in our schools is borne by parish subsidies, Diocesan fund raising and a small percentage by school fundraising.

As any parent with children in college knows, the cost of education continues to rise. Yet, as a result of consolidation, Northeast quadrant parents and parishes have saved over \$2 million in the first two years of the quadrant system. This savings reflects lower parish subsidies in each of the last two years, as well as rental of former school buildings. Without consolidation the current cost of educating our children would be \$2,640 per child, with a comparable rise in tuition.

Are Catholic schools worth the cost to parents, parishes and the Diocese? With concern about education in the United States continuing to make headlines, Catholic schools are being looked at as models of quality education. A recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* cited studies showing that Catholic school students achieve better results in national educational assessment tests than their public school counterparts, are not elitist institutions that cater to the rich, and are highly successful with disadvantaged minorities.

The academic advantages and moral values of Catholic education offer our schools the opportunity to increase enroll-

ment and retention. The *Wall Street Journal* article cites the Scranton, Pa., Catholic schools as an example of recent revivals. In Scranton, Catholic school enrollment has risen steadily over the past few years, despite tuition increases. Schools are no longer closing. A new elementary school opened this year and overall enrollment is up 3 percent since 1987.

Scranton's Catholic schools, like our own, do not have a lot of money. What they do have, and what we share with them, is, as the *Journal* puts it, "social capital," an intensive interplay among parents, students and staff that goes well beyond the three Rs." Third graders have an hour of homework a night, and parents sign pledges that they will enforce nightly reading requirements.

Just in time to capitalize on the new interest in Catholic schools as a model for the nation, the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) recently launched a national marketing campaign for Catholic schools. The theme, "Discover Catholic Schools" and the logo, a colorful, full-masted ship, suggests adventure, discovery and the mission of Catholic Education.

"To compete in educational choice, Catholic schools must tell the story of their academic excellence and values-based education," says Rev. Stephen O'Brien. Here in our Diocese, we have a success story to tell also. If every parent and every graduate of a Catholic school were to make a personal commitment to participate in an "each one reach one" campaign on the benefits of Catholic schooling, we would fill all our empty seats and more. Word-of-mouth marketing is the most effective of all.

Maintaining the quality of our educational system does involve sacrifice from parents, but in the long view, we are preparing our children to be the leaders of tomorrow and providing an important alternative to the public system. If we believe in the need for strong moral and ethical values and quality education, then the commitment to work for our Catholic schools becomes the cornerstone to a Church and society that responds to the needs of all of our citizens.

Brother Brian Walsh, CFC
Superintendent of Schools
Diocese of Rochester

All Catholics must finance schools

To the editors:

In the April 4 issue you printed a letter from a reader who fears that tuition increases will place Catholic education beyond many budgets. It reminds me of the farmer who picked up a new-born calf and decided that if he could lift it that day, he certainly could lift it the next and the next, but there came a day when the calf had grown too rapidly and he had to give up. The man who wrote has made many sacrifices to keep his children in Catholic School but he has reached a breaking point. I'm sure he understands why the costs are so high but he is powerless to change his own tight situation. I hope he will review it with his pastor.

As I write this, on April 7, I am reminded of today's reading, Acts 4, 34-35: "There was no needy person among them, for these who owned property or houses

would sell them, bring the proceeds and put them at the feet of the Apostles, and they were distributed to each according to need." Today no one is asked to go to such extremes but it would seem that those who have greater means, especially those without the onus of bringing up children, could make extra sacrifices to support the schools and thus lessen the burden of parents who are having a hard time to make ends meet.

In my own parish, those without children are encouraged to help support the school. I don't know how successful the program is but hope this letter will serve as a reminder to those who have overlooked this area of stewardship.

Education is the responsibility of all and not just the few. We are one body and each member must nourish the whole!

Grace B. Carnes
Eagle Ridge Circle Rochester

AIDS remembrance park could help to heal painful loss

To the editors:

It's nice to know that even a problem as devastating as AIDS can inspire a sense of unity and community compassion and permit some sunshine to brighten up the despair that this modern plague has inflicted upon our society.

In the February 1991 "Empty Closet", published by the Genesee Valley Gay Alliance, Bill Callahan proposes the development of an AIDS Remembrance Park "predominated by flowering shrubs and trees." Those who have lost a loved one to AIDS could come to the park for solace, serenity or the fellowship of others in mourning and to "celebrate the spirits of those who, during their shortened stay on Earth, brightened our lives, contributed to the well-being of others and often created works of art, music, literature or theatre."

"The park would not only be a memorial to AIDS deceased, but also a place to be enjoyed by the living," Callahan writes. Those infected, along with people who are fortunate enough not to be HIV-positive, could all enjoy the park. AIDS does not distinguish between gender, age, economic circumstances, race or sexual preference. In a follow-up to his article, Callahan told the Rochester "Democrat & Chronicle" that if a park is established, he will plant a tree for children with AIDS who have been abandoned by parents. The park should be

a project supported by and for the entire community.

Callahan concludes his article: "this proposal 'living memorial' is one that would last throughout our lifetime and the lifetimes of those who follow, so that none will ever forget the devastation AIDS caused so many in the 1980's and 90's. And, hopefully, as the birds circle above the AIDS park, and bees and butterflies light from branch to blossom, the spirits of those no longer with us will be there for us to sense and feel."

Shortly after his article was published, the Rev. Water Szymanski of Calvary St. Andrew's Parish in Rochester, who is coordinating the park project, received endorsements or offers of volunteer involvement from Rochester City councilman Tim Mains, AIDS Rochester, Inc., Rochester Area Task Force on AIDS, the Greater Rochester AIDS Interfaith Network and from Dr. William Valenti, Medical Director of Community Health Network (a non-profit clinic specializing in AIDS treatment). Callahan's article led to a meeting on February 21 with Monroe County Park officials who say they like the proposal and will take Callahan, Szymanski and other interested people on a tour of possible sites.

Several decades ago, two recovering alcoholics started a self-help group that,

once nurtured, rapidly multiplied. Alcoholics Anonymous today benefits millions of people and contributes towards a solution for alcoholism. Significantly, Alcoholics Anonymous inspired a self help movement-e.g. Narcotics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Emotions Anonymous, Parents Anonymous - so that today a self-help group is available to most people in need of assistance and support.

Perhaps if a Remembrance Park for AIDS victims and survivors is established in the region, such parks could also be de-

veloped elsewhere - and not just for AIDS but for other afflictions as well. Remembrance Parks would serve the same constructive purposes as self-help groups and assist to perpetuate the spiritual aspects of human coping and survival - at a time when our country seems to have become a battleground between human spirituality and the forces of indifference and non-caring.

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