

# Church must keep schools open, priest says

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — If the U.S. Catholic Church wants to survive, it had better pay more attention to the declining school system that nurtures its most active members, a nationally known priest and educator argued May 1 at St. John Fisher College.

Father Peter Stravinkas, a contributing editor to the *National Catholic Register*, made his case at the start of a five-member panel discussion on "The Future of Catholic Schools." Sponsored by the St. Thomas More Lawyers' Guild, the event was attended by 240 people.

Joining Father Stravinkas on the panel were Brother Brian Walsh, CFC, superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Rochester; Dr. Christopher Lasch, University



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

Author and educator Father Peter Stravinkas (center) was part of a five-member panel discussion entitled "The Future of Catholic Schools," May 1 at St. John Fisher College. Among the other panelists were John Ochs (left) and Samuel Ognibene.

of Rochester professor and author of *The Culture of Narcissism*; Samuel Ognibene, a member of the St. Pius the Tenth Southwest Quadrant Task Force; and John Ochs, a school parent from St. Rita's Parish, Webster.

During his presentation, Father Stravinkas listed several solutions to the financial problems of Catholic schools and, in one instance, touched on an issue close to home: the consolidation of Catholic schools.

Father Stravinkas told the audience that he had heard about the ongoing process of reorganization in the diocesan school system, and said that cluster/quadrant systems have both advantages and disadvantages.

On the plus side, he said, consolidation allows a diocese to invest in upgraded fac-

ilities because "you're pooling resources."

Yet, he asserted, consolidation tends to destroy Catholics' sense of "personal interest" and "ownership" in and of their schools.

The priest said his greatest concern about consolidation was that "very often we end up going to this before other (options) have been tried."

While he claimed he had "no ax to grind" when it came to the debate, he forcefully argued that Catholic school systems — however they are structured — are worth fighting for.

Citing data compiled by Father Andrew M. Greeley, well-known sociologist and novelist, Father Stravinkas said, "all of his research demonstrates that the highest contributors to any parish are those who have gone through the Catholic school

system."

Father Stravinkas also said that the most active parishioners tend to be Catholic school graduates. He noted that of Catholics who leave the church, those educated in parochial schools are 400 times more likely to return than are those who attended public schools.

Despite the compelling argument for maintaining Catholic schools, Father Stravinkas said, the church's hierarchy and laity have grown indifferent to supporting parochial education.

"We need to engage in extensive catechesis of the Catholic population on the importance of Catholic schools," he told the crowd.

The priest repeatedly commented on what he saw as the need for dioceses and parishes to make Catholic education a major financial priority — even, if necessary, to the exclusion of other ministries. He said it makes his "skin crawl" to hear pastors say their parish schools are a financial "drain."

"That's like saying that granny who lives in your house is a drain and a burden, and we can't wait until she kicks it," he remarked sarcastically.

Instead of surrendering to declining enrollment and inflationary patterns that drive tuition up, the church needs to revamp its approach to financing parochial schools and recruiting students, Father Stravinkas explained. He outlined several methods that other dioceses and pastors had tried, or that he had heard discussed by educators and parishes:

- **Annual fundraising drives** — "Many dioceses have found if they have an annual drive specially marked for Catholic schools, the money comes flowing in," he said.

- **Tapping into the business community** — Father Stravinkas recalled how he used a letter from a businessman praising Catholic school students as workers to recruit other students into a school he administered.

- **Recruit Catholic school graduates as teachers** — "We have to reconvince teachers that Catholic school teachers work in a unique apostolate," he said, noting that schools could hire retired public school teachers who were graduates of Catholic schools and want to give back to the system that fostered them. Such teachers have pensions from the public-school systems that would enable them to live on the low Catholic school teacher salaries.

- **Reiteration of the papal encyclical**

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Mike Gallagher of St. John of Rochester Parish was among the 240 people who attended the forum, which was sponsored by the St. Thomas More Lawyers' Guild.

## Tuition increases planned for next fall

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

Acknowledging concern over rising tuition, Father Daniel O'Brien, president of McQuaid Jesuit High School, nonetheless explained tuition increases this way:

"I think basically as long as people are looking for quality, they'll have to pay for it."

Parents seeking Catholic secondary education for their children will pay higher tuition at six of the seven Catholic high schools in the diocese next fall. Tuition will range from as much as \$3,500 for a single student at McQuaid to as little as \$1,320 for one student at DeSales High School in Geneva.

1991-92 tuition for the seven Catholic high schools in the Diocese of Rochester will be as follows:

- **Aquinas Institute** — \$2,820 for the first student from a family. Tuition for a

second family member is discounted \$100, and for a third member the rate is discounted \$200.

- **Bishop Kearney High School** — \$2,425 for one student, with a \$100 discount for the second and third child from a family.

- **DeSales High School, Geneva** — \$1,320 for one student, and a combined rate of \$1,890 for two children from a family. Additional children attend for free.

- **McQuaid Jesuit High School** — \$3,500 for one student. The school is offering a discount of 5 percent to families that pay the full tuition by Aug. 1.

- **Nazareth Academy** — \$2,700 for the first member of a family. If two family members attend, tuition is reduced to \$2,650 each.

- **Our Lady of Mercy** — Tuition for the school's seventh and eighth grades is \$2,550 per student, while tuition for the

high school grades is \$3,250 per student.

- **Notre Dame High School, Elmira** — \$1,950 for the first student, with a \$100 discount off the tuition and fees of additional students attending from a family.

Except for DeSales, which last increased its tuition in 1990 by only \$60 for the first student, the other six Catholic high schools increased their tuition by 7-14 percent over the current year's rates.

Father O'Brien noted that McQuaid's 1991-92 tuition of \$3,500 is up from the current year's rate of \$3,200. He attributed

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**June 2** - given by Mrs. Margaret Driscoll, Fr. Benedict Ehmann, and Mary Rose McCarthy

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