

ort policies

ucation to ninth- and 10th-grade students.

Under 1985 legislation that established full funding to the end of high school, Catholic schools were obliged to accept any student — Catholic or non-Catholic — who wanted to attend. Those non-Catholic students could, upon request, be automatically exempted from religious studies and exercises.

While a number of non-Catholic students have availed themselves of the opportunity to attend Catholic schools, very few have requested their exemption. They participate as fully as possible

in the religious life of the school.

In fact, in my experience, non-Catholic parents see the religious dimension of the school as important to their child's education and far from requesting exemption, are insistent on religious education. Consequently, the Catholic nature of our schools has not been diminished by public funding.

Prior to 1985, many Catholic parents could not afford the tuition fees charged for students in the senior grades. In addition, most schools did not have the resources to offer technical education, special education, or other more costly programs. Full funding has enabled Catholic schools to educate all Catholic students regardless of economic background and to offer programs to students with different abilities. In other words, we are now able to be truly catholic schools.

Some of the less economically advantaged students come to us with particu-

lar unacceptable behaviors and problems. As publicly supported institutions, Catholic secondary schools cannot summarily eject students who do not comply with the rules of behavioral expectations.

Students and parents have rights that must be protected. At the same time, the law provides Catholic educators and administrators with a wide range of disciplinary measures. Moreover, most of our parents are very supportive and most students want a better life for themselves and see our Catholic schools as a route to a better life.

In short, publicly funded Catholic secondary schools continue to provide a superior quality of education that is firmly rooted in the Catholic tradition.

The American System

Developing a similar system in the United States seems unlikely at this time, however.

Unlike Canada's constitution, the U.S. Constitution has no provision for publicly supported Catholic schools. Moreover, the U.S. Constitution enshrines the separation of church and state, and this has been interpreted very strictly by

generations of judicial decisions. Direct funding by federal, state or local governments of Catholic schools seems constitutionally impossible.

One approach currently being considered in America is a voucher system.

Such a system would involve giving parents a voucher for educational services that would be paid by the government to whatever educational institution their children attended.

There are no voucher programs in the United States at this time. As a result, commentary on such schemes is speculative at best. And since there are no actual examples of voucher programs, there likewise have been no legal cases to test how the courts will react to such schemes.

However, some observations are possible.

Any program to provide vouchers for federal funds would have relatively little impact as federal funds make up a small and diminishing portion of educational revenues. In 1988-89, for example, federal funds accounted for only 4 percent of monies spent on education in Michigan. The deficit has certainly reduced that percentage.

As well, any federal move to impose a voucher system on the states would likely be overturned as an unconstitutional interference in an area of state responsibility.

At the same time, any state scheme to impose a voucher system would encounter real problems. Voucher systems could not be specified to Catholic schools. All private and public schools that meet established criteria would be eligible to redeem vouchers.

One implication for Catholic schools is that under a voucher system, they would be subject to state control in that they would have to meet the criteria necessary to redeem vouchers.

Moreover, it seems that state voucher schemes are unlikely to get too far. States are more likely to aim toward programs that offer parents more choice within the public-school system, such as the one recently developed in Minnesota. There, educational reform has been based on allowing parents and students to cross district boundaries in order to pick a school perceived to be better.

Thus, parents may be offered more choice when it comes to their child's education, but it is unlikely that any state will include Catholic or private schools as an available choice.

We in Ontario are most fortunate to have a constitutional history that has allowed us to have a fully funded Catholic school system. We must still work hard to make sure that the promise it holds is brought to fulfillment.

Our American neighbors are faced with the unenviable task of trying to keep Catholic education alive with very little prospect of any form of governmental support. The survival of America's Catholic schools will only be guaranteed by the commitment of Catholic parents supported by the larger community.

Catholics today have position and economic power in American society. If the economic power of Catholics could be harnessed to benefit Catholic schools, they would have a much better chance of long-term survival.

The pooled resources of the community may result in a system as extensive as ours in Ontario, while maintaining the standards of excellence for which American Catholic schools have been noted.



*'Congress shall make no law respecting
an establishment of religion, or prohibiting
the free exercise thereof...'*

U.S. Constitution, 1st Amendment

Canadian priest has experience on both sides of border

Father Joseph Redican, CSB, is in a position to know both the Canadian and the U.S. educational systems.

Since 1988, he has served as principal of Assumption College School in Windsor, Ontario, which is part of the state-supported Catholic separate school system in the province. In addition to serving at high schools in Toronto, he was dean of discipline at St. Charles College in Sudbury, Ontario.

Father Redican was president of the Ontario Catholic Student Federation from 1968-1970, when Catholic secondary schools in Canada were seeking full government support. Catholic secondary schools finally gained that support in 1985.

Father Redican has also spent time in Rochester, making his novitiate year here during the 1978-79 school year. This spring, he obtained his

master's degree in education at Wayne State University in Detroit, Mich.

Meanwhile, Father Redican remains in touch with the education system in New York — and the financial problems of Catholic schools in the U.S. — through fellow members of the Basilian order who teach at Aquinas Institute and St. John Fisher College in Rochester.