Archdiocese to close five schools

By Joseph Nowlan Catholic News Service

BOSTON — The Archdiocese of Boston will close at least five high schools and merge or consolidate several elementary schools in June 1992, when the current academic year ends.

Cardinal Bernard F. Law of Boston announced the decision Nov. 19 at a press conference at his residence. The announcement came with release of a study on "Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Boston: Reaffirmation, Renewal and Collaboration."

"The driving idea of this plan," Cardinal Law said, "is to provide quality Catholic education for as many students as possible."

The study was begun in 1986 when an archdiocesan synod asked that "a comprehensive study of the present system of Catholic schools in the arch-

diocese be conducted" to strengthen the system.

The current fiscal year budget for archdiocese schools is \$96.2 million for 53,000 students in 198 schools — 44 high schools, 138 elementary schools, 12 kindergarten/Montessori schools and four special schools.

The completed study presents an overall plan on how Catholic schools can best meet the needs of students and parents, on both the fiscal and academic levels. "This plan is a form of crisis management for five to 10 years from now," said a consultant to the study, John Convey of The Catholic University of America.

Convey, also at the press conference, pointed to a decline in enrollment as an example of the problems facing the archdiocese. "When school enrollment is down," he said, "it must be addressed because of the burden that the decline can place on academics and on parents."

In spite of long-range recommendations in the study, the cardinal said he knows people's will initially focus on those schools being closed or consolidated.

Cardinal Law called the decision to close the schools "regrettable," adding that "each of these schools has a noble history, a dedicated faculty and student body and loyal parents and alumni."

Three of the five live high schools are located in urban areas. A sixth is to be merged with another high school, but if a merger is not possible, it too

Another proposal is to create six new interparish grade schools, probably in the suburbs, where there is a larger Catholic population. Some have criticized the idea, saying the archdiocese is abandoning urban and inner-city areas.

But Cardinal Law said, "We're not abandoning the inner cities. It has been a principle of this study that we could not abandon the inner city. Our intent is to bring the schools together and provide a higher quality of education on a single campus rather than have the schools competing for a diminishing pool of students."

What determines the areas in which we think schools can be established is not a financial consideration but a population consideration," the cardinal said.

Archdiocesan officials estimate that

in the six high schools affected by the plan, the combined enrollment is under 700 students.

Declining enrollments have led to financial difficulties for a number of schools. The just-released study says enrollments at Catholic schools are down by 28 percent for high schools and by 23 percent for elementary schools.

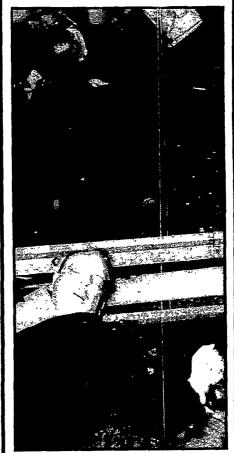
'Our intent and desire is not to withdraw from an area," Cardinal Law said, "but to make our presence more effective."

The plan includes merging in one area two parish grade schools and adding on a seventh and eighth grade to a nearby high school, and in another place consolidating two parish schools to make a new school supported by all three parishes.

Several other parish schools throughout the archdiocese will be asked to look at the feasibility of consolidating with neighboring parish schools if fiscal realities and declining enrollments indicate the need.

The cardinal said the decision affecting the schools would no doubt be greeted with some sadness and anger directed at the archdiocese and him in particular.

"I'll probably be the object for some of it," he said. "But in a way I'd be disappointed if there wasn't anger or sadness following these announcements," the cardinal said at the press conference.



AP/Wide World Photos

SLAIN CIVILIANS — Dead civilians lie in a pool of blood on the street in Vukovar, Yugoslavia, some 100 miles northwest of Belgrade Nov. 21. Refugees fled battlefields from eastern Croatia to Adriatic. The bodies of hundreds of people killed in the three-month siege of Vukovar were buried in mass graves.

