

# Parents defiant on school-closing decision

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — After weeks of anticipation, Bishop Matthew H. Clark announced Jan. 10 that three Northeast Quadrant schools — St. Thomas the Apostle and St. Cecilia's in Irondequoit, and St. Stanislaus in the city — will, indeed, close in June.

Schools at Christ the King, St. Ambrose, St. Margaret Mary and St. Andrew's parishes will remain open. All four will be renamed, "allowing parents, students, and staff to create a new identity for the schools," according to a diocesan statement.

The bishop made the announcement during a press conference at the diocesan Pastoral Center, 1150 Buffalo Road, on Friday, Jan. 10. Also present at the conference were Sister Mary Ann Binsack, diocesan director of Faith Development Ministry, and Peter Spinelli, chairman of the Christian Formation and Education Council.

The bishop noted that he had made his decision based on the recommendations submitted by the council. In recommending the closings, the council had adopted the original plan set forth by the Northeast Quadrant Governance Board in the fall of 1991, but latter scuttled by that same body. The governance board withdrew its plan when quadrant parents expressed vehement opposition to the closings.

Meanwhile, members of the Catholic Schools Committee, a parents' group that has been working to stave off school closings, vowed to keep on fighting the closings. Upon learning of the bishop's decisions, spokesmen for the Catholic School Committee said they were sending "documentation" and a videotape in support of the schools to Cardinal John J. O'Connor of the Archdiocese of New York and to Archbishop Agostino Cacciavillan, the Vatican's representative in Washington, D.C.

Explaining his decision, Bishop Clark noted during the press conference that the quadrant was expected to have a cumulative deficit of nearly \$400,000 by the end of the 1991-92 school year. If the quadrant maintained its current number of schools through 1993, he said, the quadrant would be forced to raise tuition for a single child by 21 percent, from \$1,275 to \$1,543.

"We've got to keep manageable any tuition increase," the bishop said, adding that with the closings, tuition for 1992-93 will increase 5.7 percent to \$1,350.

Quadrant parishes also plan on allocating a total of \$1.55 million in school subsidies for 1992-93, a decrease of \$300,000 from the 1991-92 school-subsidy total of \$1.85 million. Pastors and the diocese agreed to the 1992-93 subsidy figure at a Jan. 6 meeting. Bishop Clark pointed to parishes' need to reduce the subsidies as further illustration of the quadrant's declining financial situation.

But the timing of the parish-subsidy meeting, in particular, angered members of the Catholic School Committee. Prior to the Jan. 10 diocesan press conference, about 30 members of the committee conducted a prayer vigil in the Pastoral Center's chapel.

Barry Sullivan, the group's chairman and president of the school board at St. Thomas the Apostle, noted that diocesan officials met with quadrant pastors just before the Jan. 10 announcement of the school closings.

Prior to the Jan. 6 meeting, the diocese pointed to the quadrant's 1991-92



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer  
Cathy Gange (left) weeps at the news that St. Cecilia's School — where her daughter Gina (right) attends preschool — will close this year. The Ganges were among about 30 parents and children who conducted a prayer vigil in the chapel of the Pastoral Center Jan. 10, prior to the diocesan press conference announcing the schools decision.

deficit of \$104,000 as a factor weighing in favor of closing the three schools. Sullivan and other committee members noted that their group had offered the diocese \$100,000 to help cover this school year's deficit, and proposed a raffle they expected to raise an additional \$200,000.

Diocesan officials rejected both efforts, saying they were only short-term solutions to the quadrant's long-term financial problems.

In addition, diocesan officials did not want to comply with the Catholic Schools Committee's request for a five-year moratorium on closings in the quadrant. This request was tied to the committee's fundraising proposals.

Committee members charged that the Jan. 6 meeting with pastors enabled the diocese to use the \$300,000 decrease in the parish subsidies' allocation — in addition to the current deficit — as further argument in favor of closing the schools.

Yet Father John Mulligan, diocesan vicar general and moderator of the pastoral office, countered that the diocese has learned to ask pastors what they could "reasonably" pay the quadrant to support its schools. In the

past, some parishes have failed to make subsidy payments assessed without pastors' input, Father Mulligan said.

He also noted that the diocese and several quadrant parishes were forced to lend the quadrant a total of \$250,000 last year to cover a prior deficit, and that the diocese and the quadrant still have no plan for covering this year's anticipated deficit of \$104,000.

More than 450 students currently attend the three schools slated to close. The quadrant currently boasts 1,842 students occupying 58 percent of the classroom space in the seven buildings now being used, according to diocesan figures. Spinelli claimed that retaining the three schools targeted to close would result in "375 empty seats" in the quadrant.

Such reasoning did not persuade quadrant parents contacted by the *Catholic Courier* that the decision to close the three schools was necessary.

"It makes us sick to our stomach," commented Michelle Nicosia-Damico, who has two children attending St. Cecilia's. She scoffed at the bishop's contention that Catholic education will be available for all students in the qua-

drant next fall.

"He's saying you can go to a school of your choice, but it's his choice," she said.

While sympathetic to arguments that it is financially necessary to close the three schools, Rodolfo Rivera, a St. Stanislaus school parent, said he was concerned about the message the closings send to low-income inner-city residents attending Catholic schools.

Program manager with the community group Action for a Better Community and a veteran public high school counselor, Rivera said such Catholic schools as St. Stanislaus are a bulwark for inner-city parents trying to raise children with self-esteem.

Rivera noted that he was invited recently to serve on the board of directors for diocesan Social Ministry. But, he said, the decision to close the schools is giving him second thoughts about accepting that invitation.

"I see what poverty's all about on a daily basis," Rivera commented. "Please don't let me interpret what I see from this decision what I might experience from my involvement in social ministries."



Kellie Mc Cann/Photo Intern  
John Maurer of St. Thomas the Apostle School and his daughter, Marielle, participated in the Jan. 10 prayer vigil.

## Statement airs concerns about gulf war

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — In their statement marking the year anniversary of the Persian Gulf war, leaders of the Catholic and Episcopal dioceses of Rochester seriously questioned the justification of modern warfare.

Dated Jan. 1, 1992, the statement, titled "Statement on the Persian Gulf War — A Year Later," was issued by Bishop Matthew H. Clark and the Priests' Council of the Catholic Diocese of Rochester, in conjunction with Bishop William G. Burrill and the Clergy Association of the Episcopal Diocese of Rochester.

The statement questions whether modern warfare of the type waged against Iraq could be justified; notes that the euphoria caused by the military victory has blinded people to the human and environmental costs of the conflict; expresses concern that moral issues were not sufficiently discussed before, during and after the war; and

challenges what is perceived as "our nation's commitment to militarism."

Monsignor William H. Shannon, who headed the writing committee on the document, said the document is intended to follow-up the joint statement the two dioceses issued Dec. 7, 1990.

The original statement questioned whether a war against Iraq could fit the church's just-war teachings. In referring to the earlier document, the new statement says, "We made clear that we did not believe that an offensive war in the Middle East would meet the accepted criteria laid down in our theological tradition concerning the just war."

The new document declares: "We are convinced that it is almost impossible ever to justify modern warfare."

In addition, the statement says, "... the euphoria created by the military victory in Iraq has blinded many people to the terrible destruction that was suffered by innocent civilians in Iraq, including the terrible damages and the on-going uncertainties thrust upon the

Kurdish people, not to speak of the environmental damage threatening the whole global community."

This destruction, Monsignor Shannon observed, is among the moral issues not adequately discussed in connection with the war. The priest added that one of the statement's aims is to encourage discussion of these issues.

"I think the point of it is to push the American people to talk about moral issues in moral terms," Monsignor Shannon said. "I think that the idea of getting the citizens talking about the issues from a moral point of view — and not just buying flags — is desperately needed."

The wide-scale destruction in Iraq and Kuwait and the loss of life — which the United States Census Bureau recently estimated to be as high as 150,000 Iraqis — raises doubts over whether war can ever be as localized as the just-war theory would allow, Monsignor Shannon remarked.

In addition, the war raised concerns

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