

# School supporters question quadrant deficit

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

IRONDEQUOIT — Supporters of St. Thomas the Apostle School claimed on June 1 that the fiscal crisis leading to this month's scheduled closing of three Northeast Quadrant Catholic schools never existed.

But diocesan and quadrant officials countered that claim, arguing that supporters believe the quadrant has no deficit because they misread the quadrant's financial statements.

At the final meeting of the St. Thomas the Apostle School Board Monday evening, June 1, board member Mary Jo Maurer charged that the quadrant had a budget surplus of \$18,306 for 1991-92. The meeting, which took place at the 41 Colebrook Drive school, drew about 250 people.

Maurer challenged the projection made last October by quadrant and diocesan officials that the quadrant would incur a \$104,000 deficit in 1991-92. This projected deficit had been a primary factor in favor of the decision to close schools at St. Thomas the Apostle, St. Cecilia's, and St. Stanislaus in Rochester.

But Fred Seiler, the diocese's assistant superintendent for business and finance, said Maurer had misinterpreted the quadrant's financial statements.

Seiler pointed out that when the quadrant board originally prepared its budget during the spring of 1991, the quadrant board *did* project a surplus of \$18,306 for 1991-92.

By October, 1991, however, revenues were not coming as rapidly as the quadrant board had anticipated in its budget, he said. At that time, it seemed likely the budget would incur a deficit of \$104,000, he said.

Seiler said the quadrant board's original 1991-92 budget anticipated



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor  
Father L. James Callan (left), Dr. Helen Owens (center) and Barry Sullivan reflect on financial reports during the final meeting of the St. Thomas the Apostle School Board June 1.

\$1,854,264 in parish subsidies. After 10 months, however, the quadrant had collected only a little more than \$1.4 million from parishes.

Seiler acknowledged that the receipt of revenues had increased during the past few months, however, and the quadrant now expects to collect a total of \$1,789,264 in parish subsidies.

The assistant superintendent said the quadrant now expects to finish this fiscal year with a deficit of \$15,428. Seiler verified the projected deficit by providing the *Catholic Courier* with copies of the quadrant's financial statements.

Mark Greisberger, a member of the Northeast Quadrant Board's finance committee, echoed Seiler's rebuttal of Maurer's claims in a Tuesday, June 2, phone interview with the *Catholic Courier*.

Yet Greisberger acknowledged that the quadrant board might have reconsidered the decision to close all three schools if the board had realized the actual deficit would be so much smaller than the projected deficit.

"In hindsight, maybe if we had known, it would have made a difference," he said.

In a June 2 telephone interview, Maurer said she had obtained her information about the alleged budget surplus from two people who had attended a quadrant board meeting in February of this year.

Even if school board members did misinterpret the figures, both Maurer, and St. Thomas School Board President Barry Sullivan, said the large disparity between the projected and actual deficits justifies taking a second look at the closings.

"(The deficit) was still too small amount to initiate radical surgery to amputate three schools in the Northeast Quadrant," Sullivan asserted.

Seiler and Greisberger argued that keeping all three schools open would have forced the quadrant board to raise tuition by 20 to 25 percent. Even with the closings, tuition will increase almost 6 percent in the quadrant.

Seiler added that the quadrant will receive only \$1,540,234 in parish subsidies during 1992-93, substantially less than the amount the parishes contributed this year.

No matter how quadrant and diocesan leader justify the implementation of the quadrant system, the tone



Alfred Smith (left) and his daughter, Margaret, applaud the efforts of St. Thomas the Apostle School Board President Barry Sullivan.

of school supporters' statements at the June 1 meeting indicate such a system may never satisfy parents and supporters of St. Thomas the Apostle.

And diocesan officials may still have to contend with a petition to the Vatican recently brought by Sullivan and other school supporters against the diocese. The petition contends that Bishop Matthew H. Clark abused his discretionary authority in closing St. Thomas the Apostle school, Sullivan has stated.

Sullivan has emphasized that he and other school supporters petitioned the Vatican on their own — not as representatives of the parish and the school. After soliciting those attending the meeting, he also collected \$2000 in funds to, in part, hire attorneys in Italy to aid school supporters in their appeal to the Vatican.

## Diocese to eliminate 19 positions at Pastoral Center

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The Diocese of Rochester has eliminated 19 staff positions at the Pastoral Center and the regional offices of social ministry.

According to Father John M. Mulligan, moderator of the pastoral office and vicar general, the cuts were forced by declining diocesan income.

Among the positions eliminated are pastoral assistant for the Rochester area of the Office of the Spanish Apostolate; directors of the offices of liturgy and youth ministry; and the marriage-preparation coordinators for the three diocesan regions.

In addition, the hours for five positions have been reduced, and four currently vacant positions will be left unfilled or eliminated.

The reductions in force are being phased in, with all cuts to be completed by June 30, the end of the diocese's current fiscal year.

The reduction in staff will mean that parishes seeking services from the pastoral office will find that "response time may not be as quick as before, and a lot of services (will be) delivered to clusters (of parishes) rather than to individual parishes," Father Mulligan observed.

He explained that revised estimates of anticipated diocesan income led to the decision to reduce personnel costs.

"The main reason is we've made adjustments in the amount of money —

from the income side — that we expect to get," Father Mulligan said.

The moderator noted that proceeds from the 1991/92 Thanks Giving Appeal — the diocese's chief source of income — and investment income for the current fiscal year are both lower than anticipated. Based on those shortfalls, diocesan financial officials predicted that the diocese would incur a deficit in fiscal year 1992/93 of about \$200,000 unless cuts were made, he said.

Father Mulligan also noted that some of the staffing cuts — including some that were made in Faith Development Ministry — are the result of internal restructuring, not fiscal restraints.

The reduction in staff will force the diocese to put greater emphasis on serving clusters of parishes rather than individual parishes or people, Father Mulligan noted.

"I think it's critical (to keep in mind) that (the Pastoral Center's) focus is serving parish staffs," he said. "We don't see ourselves as serving individuals."

The services provided through some of the eliminated positions will be consolidated or distributed among a number of positions.

Marriage preparation, for example, will be handled by the coordinator of sacramental life, according to Sister Mary Ann Binsack, RSM, director of Faith Development Ministry.

One person — the coordinator for

youth ministry — will handle the duties of the 2.6 positions previously located in the Department of Youth Ministry.

Possibly the most controversial of staffing reductions is the elimination of Father Lawrence Tracy's position as pastoral assistant for the Rochester area of the Spanish Apostolate.

That cut — coupled with the elimination of a secretarial position in the apostolate's office and of the migrant-farmworkers advocate from the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry — seems to indicate a reduction of services to Hispanic population within the diocese.

Father Tracy has been appointed temporary pastoral administrator at Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier parish, according to Father Peter Clifford, director of Parish Support Ministries, which includes the Office of the Spanish Apostolate. Father Tracy will also continue to serve at St. Michael's Parish as sacramental coordinator, and may be named temporary administrator there as well.

Noting that these parishes are predominantly Hispanic, Father Clifford said the priest will continue to serve Rochester's Hispanic community.

Nevertheless, he acknowledged, "There certainly is concern when you affect any person who works with any community. There is no question that in his position in the Office of the Spanish Apostolate, Father Tracy has been an advocate for the community."

Father Tracy also served the migrant communities outside Rochester, and at this time, Father Clifford said, Parish Support Ministries has not yet determined exactly how it will meet the needs of those communities.

Father Clifford said his staff currently is talking with two Hispanic priests from other dioceses about coming to serve in the diocese. If one or both of those priests do come to Rochester, Father Clifford said he hopes that they would be available to work in the migrant camps.

In addition, Father Clifford noted, the Office of the Spanish Apostolate is currently training teams of lay people to go into the migrant camps.

The reduction in staff also affects a number of other diocesan ministries.

In late April, the diocese announced that it would close the Finger Lakes Office of Religious Education, which was part of Faith Development Ministry. Sister Binsack said that a catechetical consultant for clusters — to be based in Horseheads — will provide religious-education services for both the Finger Lakes and Southern Tier regions.

Reviewing the cuts and their likely impact, Father Mulligan explained that the diocese's financial situation required immediate action.

"There's no painless way that we can reduce our budget," Father Mulligan observed. "We've made the commitment to abide by and live on the resources the people have provided."