

Parents knock plan for centralized junior high

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Catholic school parents last week expressed mostly negative reactions to a proposal establishing a centralized junior high in the Southeast Quadrant next September.

The sometimes heated informational meeting conducted by the quadrant's governance board was held at St. John the Evangelist School, 545 Humboldt St., on Wednesday night, Sept. 2.

The proposal would consolidate the quadrant's seventh and eighth grades in the building currently housing Seton Catholic Intermediate and Junior High schools. The schools are now located at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, 165 Rhinecliff Drive.

The plan would also entail the closing of one of two Catholic schools in



Regina Solarek reacts to the news that the proposal would affect 20 Wayne County families — including her own.

Henrietta. The board has yet to identify which school may close.

In addition to Seton Catholic Junior High, four southeast schools currently house junior highs — Corpus Christi, Rochester; Good Shepherd, Henrietta; St. Joseph's, Penfield; and St. Rita's, Webster.

Michael Perrotta, chairman of the Southeast Quadrant Governance Board's Planning Committee, said the proposal would also entail the transfer of about 70 of the 132 fourth-, fifth- and sixth-grade students from Seton Catholic Intermediate to what is now Seton Primary School, located at St. Thomas More Parish, 2617 East Ave.

The remaining fourth, fifth and sixth graders may be transferred to other schools throughout the quadrant, Perrotta added.

Some parents objected to the long bus rides a centralized junior high would create for children living on the quadrant's outskirts. About 20 families living in Wayne County would be affected by the plan to establish a centralized junior high, the board's plan acknowledged.

"You've totally alienated Wayne County with this plan," exclaimed Mary Nicholson, who has three children attending Holy Trinity School in Webster.

Others were concerned that diocesan officials at the Pastoral Center, 1150 Buffalo Road, were compelling the board to opt for a one-site junior high as opposed to two.

"In effect, is this really a proposal that the quadrant wants or a proposal that Buffalo Road approves?" Nicholson asked rhetorically.

In response to objections over the plan, Perrotta noted that the board's members — comprising representatives from each of the qua-



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor
During a Sept. 2 meeting at St. John the Evangelist School in Rochester, Michael Perrotta details a proposal to establish a centralized junior high school next September. Perrotta serves as chairman of the Southeast Quadrant Governance Board's Planning Committee.

drant's parishes — had voted 20-7 last month in favor of a one-site location.

A similar poll among quadrant pastors and principals revealed all but one vote in favor of a one-site plan, according to Perrotta.

But that one principal who voted against the one-site plan — Sister Nancy Kelly, RSM, of St. Joseph's in Penfield — explained that most of her parents found the arguments in favor of a one-site location less than compelling.

"I think the parents need to be polled. I know in the end as a principal I have to sell something, and a one-site school is going to be hard to sell," she stated to a standing ovation from about two-thirds of the parents in attendance.

The governing board had considered establishing junior highs at two different schools in the quadrant, Perrotta said, but eventually opted for one site. Board members and diocesan offi-

cial noted, among other advantages, that a centralized junior high would allow the quadrant to use more teams of teachers in classrooms; offer more programs targeted to specific age groups; offer greater cultural diversity among the student population; and allow the quadrant to establish a number of early-learning programs for pre-schoolers at other southeast schools.

Perrotta expressed sympathy for parents who objected to the plan, but argued that a centralized junior high would provide a better education for all quadrant students.

"We sincerely believe, and the board felt from a 20-7 perspective ... that it was the right thing to do," he said.

The second and final informational meeting on the proposal is slated for Thursday, Sept. 10, at 7:30 p.m. at St. John of Rochester School, 18 Wickford Way, Fairport.

The board will meet on Sept. 14 to discuss reaction to the plan.

Latest draft of women's pastoral draws sharp criticism

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The fourth draft of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter on the concerns of women is drawing criticism throughout the Diocese of Rochester.

Based on early reports of the draft's contents, individuals are expressing concern the letter's latest revision reveals a more traditional focus than was contained in the proposed pastoral's third draft.

Yet Bishop Matthew H. Clark, a member of the writing committee that has been writing and rewriting the proposed pastoral for the last nine years, cautioned that this draft is not a final version of the document.

Indeed, Bishop Clark said he expected the proposed pastoral to undergo a number of additional revisions before the nation's Catholic bishops consider voting on it at their November meeting in Washington, D.C.

"It will be substantially amended," Bishop Clark predicted during an interview with the *Catholic Courier*. And, he noted, that amending process will continue up to and during the November meeting.

The fourth draft — a copy of which was leaked to the media in late August — incorporates revisions stemming from comments and criticisms various bishops made during the NCCB's June meeting at Notre Dame University, Bishop Clark said.

The new draft defends the church's

stance against ordaining women to the priesthood far more strongly than the third draft did, increases the amount of teaching material on sexual morality, reduces discussion of alleged clerical insensitivity to women, and moves from earlier drafts' emphasis on dialogue about issues of concern to women to giving added weight to the bishops' teaching authority on these issues.

Bishop Clark acknowledged that "as the letter has evolved, in successive drafts, it has moved from lively dialogue to an emphasis on church teachings.

"I much prefer the language in the third draft over the fourth draft," Bishop Clark added. "I must say that the earlier draft is much stronger."

Individuals who had read news accounts about the new draft expressed that point more sharply.

"If it was to come out this way, I would rather not see it published," observed Nora Bradbury Haehl, co-chairperson of the diocesan Commission on Women. "It's not that this is not doing anything, it's saying things that are damaging."

Bradbury-Haehl cited not only the expanded arguments defending the church's policy of ordaining only men, but also a seeming shift away from addressing the concerns voiced by women and an increased emphasis on sexual morality.

"As you look at the changes they are making, it shows such a negative view of the morality of women," Bradbury-

Hael observed. "It's just very discouraging that we're going to hang on to the attitude that women are somehow less and are not able to hold church positions."

Roslyn Karaban, a professor of theology at St. Bernard's Institute and a member of the Women's Ordination Conference, likewise predicted that the document would "do more damage than good" if it were published without substantial revisions.

"It's either going to be ignored," Karaban explained, "or it's going to alienate more women and men."

Karaban pointed out that the document's focus has apparently shifted from when the writing process began in 1983.

"I've lost sight of the original intention of the pastoral, which I thought at one point was to listen to the voices of women and to tend to our concerns," Karaban said. "I get the sense that that's been lost."

Indeed, Bishop Clark acknowledged that the current draft has moved away from a focus on those concerns.

"I wouldn't want to say that it no longer deals with the concerns of women," Bishop Clark said, "but it does so less sharply, less forcefully than it did in earlier versions."

This apparent weakening of the document will make it less acceptable to many people, predicted Judith O'Brien, former chairwoman of the diocesan women's commission.

If the document is published in its current form, O'Brien suggested, "the

credibility of the the American bishops and their teaching authority is going to be eroded."

The best that could come of a pastoral letter of this nature, O'Brien said, would be to use it as a teaching document, to "raise consciousness, create dialogue" and to state the "traditional view of the church" as a beginning point for discussion.

Bishop Clark pointed out that the process involved in the writing of the letter has already fostered such discussion.

"It's wonderful that conversations have taken place at such a broad-based level," Bishop Clark said. "I hope that whatever form of the document that we may or may not decide on, it's still not going to be the end of the discussion."

But O'Brien expressed doubts that the fourth draft, if published as a pastoral, would succeed in encouraging discussion.

"I'm concerned that its credibility will be so low for so many people it won't be used as a teaching document," O'Brien said. "It will just sit on the shelf."

Bishop Clark said he had not yet decided how he would vote on the proposed pastoral, and he reiterated that the current form of the document is simply a draft.

"I think it needs improvement," Bishop Clark said. "I hope it will be improved."