

Catholic education is way of life for Tier clan

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ELMIRA — Bob and Terry McNamara are living testaments to the tradition and values of Catholic education.

So are their children, Mike and Tom. And Rob. And Patrick. And Joe. And Mary. And Kristin.

Few, if any, families in the Rochester diocese can boast a Catholic-school representation like this one. All seven McNamara children, ranging in age from 6 to 17, currently attend Catholic institutions in Elmira.

"People find it very hard to believe sometimes," Terry remarked. "They say, 'Why would you ever want to make that kind of financial commitment?'"

"But if you really believe in something, you find a way to work it out," she said.

Terry and Bob, who have been married 18 years, can also thank Catholic schools for more than just education: they originally met while attending Notre Dame High School.

They also received the rest of their education at Catholic schools: Terry attended the former St. Casimir's School in Elmira as well as Nazareth College in Rochester; and Bob attended the former St. James School in Waverly and eventually graduated from LeMoyne College in Syracuse.

Bob, 45, who currently serves as vice-president of finance at St. Joseph's Hospital in Elmira, noted that Catholic education "has been a real force in my life — the values, caring and spirit of volunteerism."

Terry, 43, an adult-education instructor at the Beecher School in Elmira, said she has derived similar results from her own Catholic-school background.

"The public schools do a very good job ... but I think the most important thing is that, in Catholic schools, you're getting Christian values in each class — not just once a week at CCD," she said.

Meet the rest of the McNamaras:

- Mike, 17, is a senior at Notre Dame High, 1400 Maple Ave.
- Tom, 16, is a junior at Notre Dame.
- Rob, 14, is a Notre Dame freshman.
- Patrick, 12, is in seventh grade at Holy Family Junior High School, 1010 Davis St.
- Joe, 11, is a fifth-grader at Holy Family Intermediate School, 301 De-



The members of the McNamara clan — Bob, Terry, Mike, Tom, Rob, Patrick, Joe, Mary and Kristin — took time out from their busy schedules to gather for this family portrait Jan. 9.

Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor

arest Parkway.

• Mary, 8, is in third grade at Holy Family Primary School, 421 Fulton St.

• Last but not least, Kristin, 6, is in first grade at Holy Family Primary. She, and her eight older family members, are parishioners at St. Patrick's Church, 604 Park Place.

Mike, Tom and Rob McNamara all supplement their course workload with extracurricular activities: Mike is a district lieutenant governor for the Key Club, which is the high school division of the Kiwanis Club; Tom plays varsity football, basketball and baseball at Notre Dame and also serves as junior class president; and Rob competes in junior-varsity football and baseball at the high school.

The McNamara parents also maintain strong ties with their alma mater: Bob serves on the school's board of trustees, and Terry is active in volunteer efforts.

Tom McNamara feels that his Catholic education has done a good job of readying him for the future.

"There's a lot more discipline (than

in public schools.) The work is harder, but it prepares you for college better," the Notre Dame 11th-grader said.

Rob, meanwhile, pointed out that "you learn a lot besides education" in Catholic schools.

And Patrick has greatly enjoyed his first year at Holy Family Junior High. "Everyone is real nice to each other," he remarked.

The McNamara family's level of commitment to Catholic education is rather exceptional in this day and age, given diocesan school enrollment numbers which had steadily decreased for more than three decades before finally experiencing a slight upward turn in 1992-93.

Despite the fact that the primary schools they attended no longer exist, Bob and Terry pointed out that Catholic education in the Southern Tier has endured in the face of major changes.

Consolidation which began 21 years ago has resulted in the current seven-

school configuration which makes up the Southern Tier Cluster: the three Holy Family schools; All Saints Academy (K through 8) in Corning; Immaculate Conception (pre-K through 8) in Ithaca; St. Mary Our Mother (pre-K through 6) in Horseheads; and St. Patrick's (K through 5) in Owego.

Terry McNamara maintains that careful planning helped ease the difficulty of a 1971 consolidation and 1986 re-consolidation in Elmira.

"We are here to say that you can do it. Maybe the neighborhood school closes, but Catholic education can survive," she emphasized.

Bob McNamara supported his wife's assertion, noting that attendance is on the rise at Notre Dame.

"There are a lot of people around here who still have economic difficulties, but Notre Dame's enrollment has increased the last two years. It's taken a lot of effort on many peoples' parts," Bob concluded.

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