

## New head sees SBI as key to church's mission

By Lee Strong  
Senior staff writer

ROCHESTER — When Sister Patricia Schoelles, SSJ, was a student at the former St. Agnes High School in Rochester during the 1960s, she knew she wanted to be involved in the church.

But she found her choices of church roles to be limited.

"In those days you could either be a mother or a nun," Sister Schoelles recalled.

She chose the latter path: "It was fashionable to do an odd thing," Sister Schoelles joked.

On August 16, however, she will explore a new path that's opened to her as a woman in the church when she becomes the second president of St. Bernard's Institute. She comes to the school from St. Mary's Seminary and University in Baltimore, where she taught ethics and moral theology, and, most recently, she has chaired the moral theology department.

The times have indeed changed for women, Sister Schoelles noted.

"Opportunities for women have opened up (in the church), and we're able to use our talents," Sister Schoelles remarked. Even women living the traditional roles of mothers and women, she said, "have learned to expand within the church."

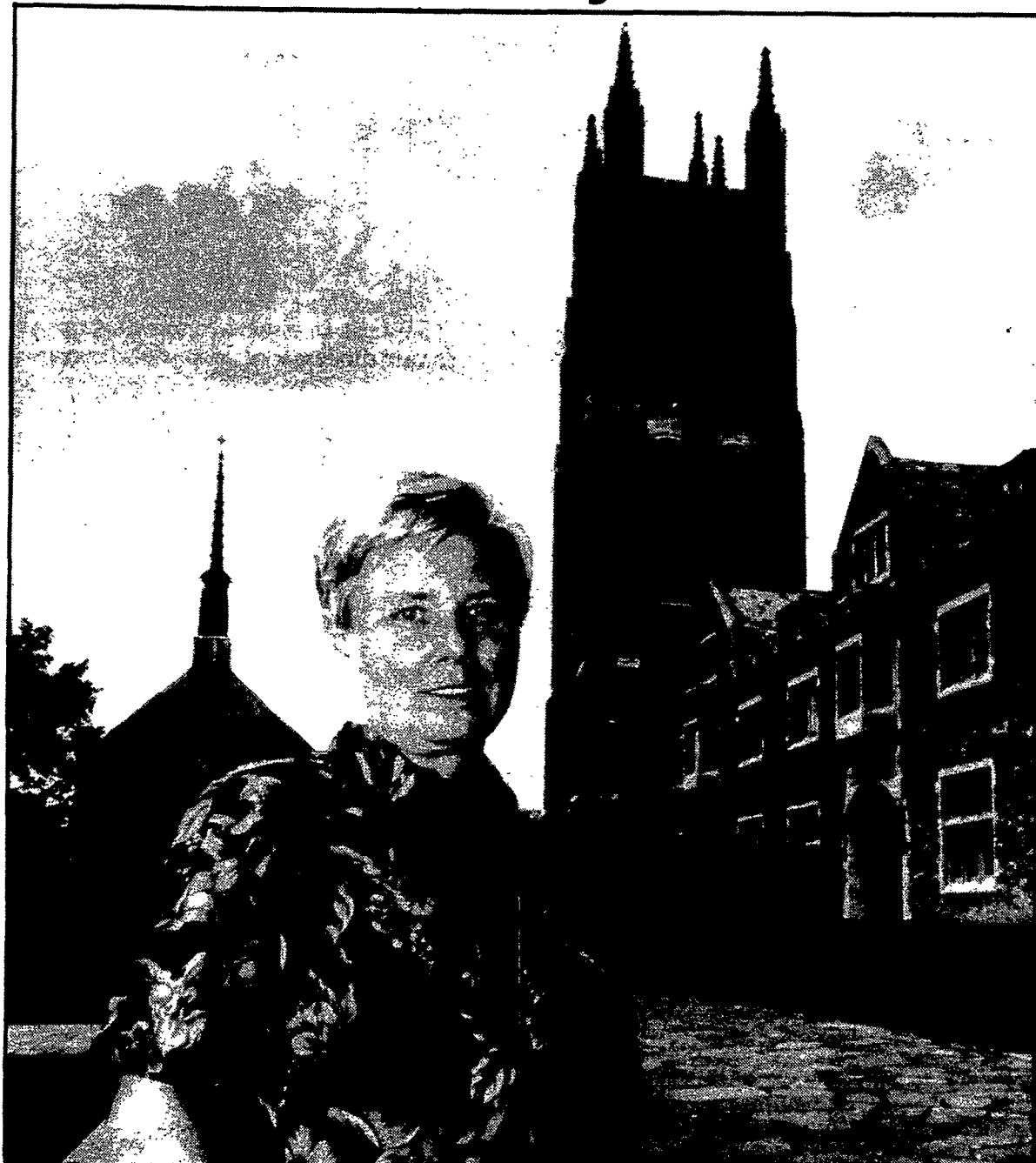
The roots of this new openness can be traced back to the days when she was choosing her vocation, noted Sister Schoelles, a Buffalo native who moved to the Rochester suburb of Henrietta when she around 12.

The period when she was a student at St. Agnes coincided with the ushering in of changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council.

"That was an exciting time in the church," she recalled. "The changes were visible. You saw them happening."

"In a way," she added, "(the church) was just opening up. It seemed you were forming the future."

Sister Schoelles decided to pursue that future as a Sister of St. Joseph and as a teacher.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Sister Patricia Schoelles, SSJ, assumes her duties as the second president of St. Bernard's Institute on Aug. 16.

When she graduated from Nazareth College of Rochester with a degree in English, she began teaching junior high classes at Webster's Holy Trinity School.

Although she had thought of teaching English as her career, at Holy Trinity she also found herself teaching religion and directing the parish's religious-education program — tasks for which she did not feel prepared.

"I didn't know that much about theology," Sister Schoelles said. "I knew I had to study more."

After eight years at Holy Trinity, she went to Notre

Dame University to earn a master's degree in theology — intending to return to parish and Catholic-school ministry.

But at Notre Dame, she discovered that she loved studying theology. Thus, when offered a scholarship to pursue a doctorate at the university, she accepted.

After graduating, Sister Schoelles taught religious studies at Nazareth College from 1983-87. She then moved on to St. Mary's Seminary.

At St. Mary's, Sister Schoelles taught seminarians, but was also involved in the seminary's ecumenical institute. "I found my energy was built up by teaching in the ecumenical institute, teaching men and women," she said. "My energy was built up on the empowering of women as well as men."

In addition, Sister Schoelles became a department chairperson, and headed a faculty committee charged with revising the seminary program.

Through those experiences, she discovered she enjoyed "tapping into other people's energies and focusing those energies."

She applied for the St. Bernard's position because of her desire to continue to lead others, the school's ecumenical setting, and the good reputation SBI and its faculty had among people with whom she had spoken, Sister Schoelles observed.

The new SBI president has had also been pleased with the direction the diocese is taking.

"I think the church of Rochester is going with the times," Sister Schoelles said. "It is open to recognizing that there needs to be diversity."

As president of St. Bernard's, Sister Schoelles said her first task will be to become familiar with the institute itself, the divinity school, and the diocese as a whole. One of her goals, she added, will be to make others aware of what St. Bernard's has to offer.

Rochester is a professional town, she noted, with an educated, sophisticated populace. Thus St. Bernard's, as a graduate school, has a role to play in meeting the needs of those people and of the church.

"I think offering graduate education to educated people is central to carrying out the mission of the church and to the priesthood of the faithful," she remarked.

As a former educator of seminarians, Sister Schoelles said she is also concerned with the ongoing education of priests. Thus, one possibility is that St. Bernard's will offer workshops on topics of professional interest to priests — such as preaching.

In assessing her own role at St. Bernard's — and in the church as a whole — Sister Schoelles said, "I see myself and a theological educator. I think the church benefits from those who are well trained and well educated."



### RECENT COLLEGE GRADUATES

- Still looking for that first break?
- Tired of job hunt rejections?

Discover the secret of successful job search with...

*the Career Advisors Group*

...providing effective approaches for the serious job seeker.

Call for consultation without fee or obligation

**454-3894**

1317 Midtown Tower,  
Rochester, NY 14604

### It all started with a vision...

...the vision of Father Thomas Hickey, who later became the second Bishop of Rochester. In 1902, as Rector of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Father Hickey recognized the need to provide quality Catholic education to the youth of Rochester. His vision began as Cathedral High School, later becoming Rochester Catholic, and in 1922 grew into The Aquinas Institute of Rochester.

Since then, The Aquinas Institute has graduated more than 16,000 young men and women who have pursued careers of distinction throughout the country and the world.

If Bishop Hickey were alive today he couldn't help but be pleased. The seed he planted in 1902 has come to full maturity and continues to branch out. Thirteen years of increased enrollment, The Campaign for Excellence, and our new Science and Physical Education Centre are further extensions of that remarkable vision first seen by Bishop Thomas Hickey over 90 years ago.

**THE AQUINAS INSTITUTE**  
building for the 21st Century and beyond

For More Information Contact  
The Aquinas Institute  
Office of Development  
1127 Dewey Avenue  
Rochester, New York 14613  
716-647-2990



Archbishop Thomas F. Hickey  
Second Bishop of Rochester  
(1909-1928)  
and  
Founder of The Aquinas Institute