

High praise

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Moreover, the students learn respect for their elders, and what kind of behavior is appropriate, Hornbeck added. "The teachers and sisters at St. Ann's are not afraid to discipline the kids."

"There's a certain standard," acknowledged Marlene Coniff, who along with husband, Michael, have two children — Katharine (second grade) and Matthew (fifth grade) — enrolled at Sacred Heart School in Rochester. The Coniffs also have two children who are alumni of the school. Peter is a freshman at Aquinas Institute, and Kimberly is an Aquinas graduate currently in her freshman year at St. Bonaventure University.

"Morals and values are reinforced," Coniff said. "The way I figure it is if we start them off with a Catholic education, even if they decide later in life to do something else, we at least gave them the basics."

"I feel the kids are protected a lot more," observed John Schillace, who with his wife, Renee, is putting three boys — Michael (seventh grade), Matthew (fourth grade) and Mark (third grade) — through Blessed Trinity School in Auburn.

"They are not exposed to the the drugs, the foul language, you see in public schools," Schillace continued. "I want to protect my kids as long as I can. After eighth grade, they should be able to take care of themselves."

In sending their children to Catholic schools, many of these parents are providing what they themselves received — and in two cases are even sending their children to their alma maters. Michael Hornbeck is a graduate of St. Ann's. John Schillace was in the first graduating class from Blessed Trinity School in 1974.

Sheive, meanwhile, had no experience of Catholic education prior to this year. But alumni of the school helped her decide to send two of her children to Immaculate Conception.

Sheive and her late husband, Edward, had looked into private schools and home schooling because they were not satisfied with the public schools. They had not looked at Catholic schools, however.

But during the 1992-93 school year — the first following her husband's death — Sheive said she found herself worrying at work about her children while they were in public school.

"I had seen a deterioration in the public schools," Sheive said, pointing to increased physical and verbal violence. "It was hard for me to stay focused on my job."

Although Ryan had a good teacher in the public school, the class was too large, Sheive felt. And because the teacher was good, the school kept putting more stu-



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Taylor, a kindergartner at Immaculate Conception School, listens intently to a story in Marlene Cambridge's class.



Teacher's aide Annie Cook assists Taylor with a class project.

dents in her class.

"The public-school system is rewarding the poor teachers and punishing the good teachers by giving the good teachers heavier loads," Sheive said.

After talking with Immaculate Conception alumni, Sheive contacted the

school and enrolled Ryan and Taylor this year.

"This year, I can go to work and have the confidence the children are in a good environment and they're getting a good education," Sheive said. "I can't say enough about the school."

Sheive has two other children. Her oldest son has already graduated from high school, and another son, Ian, has remained in public school where he is in seventh grade.

The decision not to enroll Ian was made in part because Sheive did not want to have him switch to a new school this year, only to have him go to yet another school after graduating in two years.

But the decision was also made in part because of finances.

"I had to make a decision," Sheive said with obvious regret. "I couldn't swing it."

Schillace reported that he does a lot of side jobs — such as snow plowing and landscaping — to help pay the tuition bills for his sons. But he regards the extra work as worth it.

"It's a tight situation," Schillace acknowledged, "but as long as I can work I'm going to get these kids through Catholic school."

The Hornbecks also have to budget carefully to pay tuition. But, Cyndi noted, "It's something that's on the priority list. First comes the church tithe, then comes tuition."

For the Coniffs, the desire to obtain Catholic education for their children has even influenced their decision about where to live.

"Pretty much why we're living in the city is Sacred Heart School," Coniff said.

"Even if we had gone out into the country, we probably wouldn't have gone somewhere unless they had a Catholic school."

Beyond the moral education their children receive, Hornbeck noted, they also receive a quality education in general.

Compared with the local public school, the classes at St. Ann's are smaller, the students receive more direct attention, the teachers often spend extra time to help students, and the students learn good study habits, Hornbeck said.

Hornbeck then cited as an example of the difference between St. Ann's and the local public schools the fact that St. Ann's students take midterms, whereas their public-school peers do not while at the elementary level. Thus St. Ann's students are better prepared to take midterms in high school than are the public-school students.

"It's little things like that," Hornbeck observed.

Schillace said part of the difference is the teachers.

"The teachers seem more dedicated," Schillace said. "They're not there for the money. There's a couple of them there (at Blessed Trinity) that I had."

Catholic school teachers and administrators also recognize some of the struggles parents have to go through to send their children to Catholic schools, Coniff observed.

"Some of the schools, if they know there's a need, they'll work with you," Coniff said. Thus people who may not have the money to pay all the tuition can often provide volunteer services. Her husband, for example, works at bingo games, served on the school board and helped repair the school playground.

Sheive said that she is happy about the decision she made.

"As a parent, I feel that one of the important things I can give my children is an education," she said. "If I can provide an education for my children, I've given them the best gift I could give to help them as adults."

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