

Diocesan parishes put buildings to new uses

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

St. Patrick's Parish in Seneca Falls is negotiating the sale of its convent to the local American Red Cross chapter.

Holy Apostle's Parish in Rochester rents its convent to the Association for Retarded Citizens of Monroe County for use as a group home for developmentally disabled adults.

St. Jerome's Parish in East Rochester has given its convent to the Sisters of St. Joseph as a gift for use as a residence for some women religious and as a headquarters for a new ministry to serve the home-bound elderly and bedridden.

Using these three convents for purposes other than that for which they were originally built — as a residence for women religious who are serving in the parish or teaching in the school located in the parish — is typical of a trend in the Diocese of Rochester.

As schools close, the number of women religious decreases and parish ministries change, parishes — and the diocese — are seeking alternative uses for unused or under-used buildings.

"Basically, it's a matter of whether the buildings have a future use (in the parish)," noted Father Dennis Shaw, pastor of the Community of Hope — a cluster comprising Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Holy Redeemer, St. Francis Xavier and St. Michael's parishes in Rochester.

Parishes look at not only the potential for future use, but also at the community's financial ability to keep up the building, and what might be best for the neighborhood, Father Shaw continued.

Thus, several church properties in his cluster have been put to new uses. Holy Redeemer Church has been sold to the Northside Church of Christ, St. Francis Xavier's convent was sold to a private developer and converted into apartments, and St. Michael's School was sold earlier this year for a similar project. Our Lady of Mount Carmel School is being leased to Housing Opportunities of Rochester, which has created 12 subsidized apartments in the building. And St. Michael's Convent is being rented to the Sisters of Mercy of Rochester for Melita House, a program for single pregnant women and mothers.

Other parishes rent buildings to public school systems, day-care centers or social-service agencies. In many cases, the parishes also use the buildings for parish offices and meetings, and for such activities as religious education.

Even the Diocese of Rochester has sold or rented property.

For example, the buildings that housed St. Bernard's Seminary on Lake Avenue were sold to Eastman Kodak Company — which in the 1930s also purchased the site of the former St. Patrick's Cathedral. Diocesan officials are currently weighing the future sale of the buildings of Holy Name Parish in Groveland Station, which is being closed in June.

Meanwhile, the diocese rents the "Bosco House" — the building at the front of the Pastoral Center property — to the Monroe County Department of Social Services.

Diocesan officials follow similar procedures whether a transaction involves the sale or rental of a parish property, noted Father Kevin McKenna, the diocese's chancellor.

The parish involved undertakes the initial negotiations and develops a resolution for the transaction in conjunction with parish legal counsel. Any agreement must be approved by the parish council and signed by the pastor and two lay trustees of the parish.

Agreements are then submitted to diocesan officials for review by diocesan lawyers and for approval by Bishop

Matthew H. Clark. As head of the diocese, Bishop Clark is the legal president of every parish corporation, Father McKenna explained.

If the transaction involves the sale of church property — a process sometimes referred to as "alienation" of the property — the bishop also consults with the diocesan Priests' Council for their input, and state law requires that the diocese obtain an order from State Supreme Court in regard to the transaction, Father McKenna continued.

When a parish sells or rents property, the parish keeps the money, Father McKenna noted. If the parish is being closed, however, proceeds go to the diocese.

But rental transactions are not necessarily intended to provide income for the parish, noted Father William Lum, pastor of Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Rochester. The renting agencies are generally not businesses, but rather orga-

nizations whose purposes benefit the community.

Thus Our Lady of Mercy Parish rents parts of its school building to the Board of Cooperative Education and Greece Continuing Education, Father Lum explained. And because both entities are not-for-profit agencies, the rent is minimal.

"It's nice that our buildings are being used educationally to meet the needs of the community," Father Lum explained.

He noted that the parish also uses the school building for religious education, meetings, bingo and social activities, so leases on the property must be carefully worded to designate what areas of the building are for exclusive use by the agencies, and which are for shared use with the parish.

St. Jerome's in East Rochester likewise has found uses for its former school and convent buildings. In 1993, Trinity Montessori School — which is operated

by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester — began renting part of the old school building, which is now referred to as the parish center. The building also is used for parish activities and religious education.

Meanwhile, the parish had been searching for several years for a way to use or sell its former convent, noted Eugene Lilly, chairman of the parish's finance committee. A study revealed that the convent did not fit into the parish's future plans and was a financial burden, he said.

The convent had been up for sale, but proved unmarketable, Lilly said. Then the idea arose of giving it to the Sisters of St. Joseph.

"Rather than let it go to rack and ruin, we decided to give it to the sisters, since the sisters had used it in the past," Lilly explained. "In the long run, it might have been better to just tear it down and break even, but this makes a lot more sense."

Mystery author, senior senator to address grads

Ralph McInerny, author of the popular Father Dowling mysteries, is scheduled to be the principal speaker at St. John Fisher College's 40th commencement on Saturday, May 21.

McInerny, who will receive an honorary doctorate in humane letters during the ceremony, is the Michael P. Grace Professor of Medieval Studies at the University of Notre Dame and the director of the Jacques Maritain Center. He is the author of more than a dozen philosophical works, including many on St. Thomas Aquinas; ten novels; and 17 mysteries, some of which led to "The Father Dowling Mysteries" television series.

On Sunday, May 22, U.S. Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) will address members of the University of Rochester's 144th graduating class. Moynihan also will receive an honorary doctor of laws degree.

Moynihan, a native of New York City, is currently chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and has been a senator for 17 years.

McInerny is president of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, past president of the American Metaphysical Society and the American Catholic Philosophical Association. He also serves as the editor of *The New Scholasticism* and publisher of *Crisis: A Journal of Lay Catholic Opinion*.

Due to space limitations, the commencement Fisher ceremony will be open only to faculty, staff, graduating students and their families.

Others scheduled to receive honorary doctorates during the UR ceremony are poet-playwright John Ashbery, who was born in Rochester and raised in Sodus; Sardar Farooq Ahmed Khan Leghari, recently elected president of Pakistan and father of graduating senior Awais Leghari; and Barbara Ann Teer, founder and head of the New York City-based National Black Institute of Communication Through Theatre Arts.

Exchange program seeks Monroe County families

International Student Exchange, a new foreign-exchange student program in western New York, is seeking Catholic families in Monroe County to host students for the 1994-95 school year.

For details, contact Carl Romeo at 716/247-1543 or Pat Battisti at 889-4128.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

On July 1, Evelyn Kirst will become the first the lay person to serve as principal of Our Lady of Mercy High School.

Mercy High School hires Kirst as first lay principal

By Lee Strong
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ROCHESTER — When Evelyn Kirst becomes the principle of Our Lady of Mercy High School July 1, she will be the first lay person to head the Blossom Road school in its 66 year history.

But Kirst has a history of being first. From 1976-80, the Buffalo native served as the first lay principal of St. Elizabeth Anne Seton School in Buffalo.

Kirst will be succeeding Sister Barbara Hamm, RSM, Mercy's principal since 1989. Sister Hamm will become the principal of St. Louis School in Pittsford, where she previously had served as principal.

Meanwhile, in order to take up the reins at Mercy, Kirst will be leaving her position as assistant superintendent of curriculum and testing in the Diocese of Rochester's Department of Catholic Schools.

Kirst came to the diocese in 1980. For one year, she served as the director of religious education at St. Augustine's Church, then became the principal of Church of the Annunciation School. She left that position in 1985 to join the diocesan Department

of Education.

Although she had not initially applied for the position at Mercy — she was contacted by a member of the search committee — Kirst said she had been thinking for several years of leaving diocesan administration to serve in a school.

"I wanted to get back to working with students on a daily basis," Kirst said. "That's where you make a difference."

Still, she acknowledged, she was taken off guard when approached about the opening at Mercy.

"I was humbled by the invitation to consider the position," Kirst said. She hesitated at first, but then, "All of a sudden I realized I could get up every day and see students."

Kirst was among 21 people who applied for the principal's position, noted Charla Kucko, Mercy's director of enrollment and public relations. Only a few of the applicants were women religious, she noted, and it soon became apparent that the school's seventh principal would be a lay person.

"It kind of symbolizes a new era and a new direction," Kucko said. "As an alumna, for me it is exciting to see

Continued on page 4