Geneva parish to close indebted day-care center

By Lee Strong Senior staff writer

GENEVA – After only nine months of operation, St. Francis Day Care Center will close its doors this Wednesday due to mounting debts.

But a group of parents has written to Bishop Matthew H. Clark appealing the parish's decision and offering to operate the center on its own.

According to Father Ronald P. Harley, pastor of the church located at 130 Exchange St., the parish council and finance committee – meeting in executive session May 11 – voted unanimously to close the center on June 1. That decision came despite an offer by parents to take over the facility's operation.

That offer was officially made at the May 11 meeting by Penn Yan resident and Geneva attorney David Lee Foster, whose son Parker attends the day-care center.

Father Harley noted that the decision to close the facility came on the heels of a report showing that the facility's rate of monthly debt had escalated from approximately \$4,000 in March to \$9,000 in April.

According to Karen Robideau, the parish's business manager, the center had accrued \$47,000 in debts between the time it opened on Sept. 7, 1993, and the end of April, 1994.

Parishioners and parents of the 62 children in the day-care facility were informed of the finance committee's decision to close the facility at a May 5 meeting. That's when parents first offered to take over the school, leading to the May 11 meeting to discuss the proposal and the final vote by the finance committee and the parish council.

The center had opened in the parish's





Parker Foster held Nancy Henschel's comforting finger after the opening of the St. Francis Day Care Center last September.

former school building using funds from an anonymous bequest, Father Harley noted.

Before opening the day-care facility, parish officials had hired a consulting firm which performed a needs survey. According to Father Harley, the consulting firm, which the pastor declined to name, concluded that the need for day care existed in Geneva. The company provided enrollment projections based on the minimum number of children needed for the facility to be fiscally sound, and the likely number of children to enroll.

"I think we got some really bad advice," Father Harley said.

Parish officials first became aware of

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tom-the center's financial problems, FatherionsHarley said. That conclusion by the pas-chil-tor and parish officials has been criti-fis-cized by Foster and other parents. In ret-r ofrospect, the pastor acknowledged, thedecision to keep the facility's financial

ture would improve.

problems quiet may have been a mistake. "The decision not to (tell the parents) was conditioned on the belief that it would panic people," Father Harley said. "Enrollment was shaky already."

the center's growing debt in January, Fa-

ther Harley explained. Indeed, the fi-

nance committee had even considered

closing the facility at its Feb. 28 meet-

ing. The decision was delayed at that

time to see if the facility's financial pic-

time was not to tell the parents about

Another decision made around that

According to Foster, however, the cen-

Obituary

ter's problems did not stem from its enrollment.

"It's obvious to me that what happened is there were several managerial decisions made early on that hurt the operations of the center," Foster said.

Among the decisions Foster criticized was purchasing expensive equipment; hiring more staff people than necessary, based on the consulting company's projected number of children rather than on actual enrollment; and paying salaries and benefits not in line with what other child-care facilities in the area were paying.

Foster said the parents' proposal called for correcting these and other alleged management problems and poor decisions, and to initially operate the center with just 33 children. The parents would have purchased some of the parish facility's equipment, rented the rooms in the school from the parish, and would have paid their own liability insurance.

But Father Harley and parish officials rejected the proposal, arguing that, despite these assurances, he and parish leaders had a number of concerns – including those dealing with liability issues.

Foster has written to Bishop Clark seeking a reversal of the parish's decision. As of Monday, May 23, diocesan officials had not answered the letter.

Father Harley said the decision to close the day-care facility was an extremely difficult one.

"It's been very painful," he noted. "We struggled with it three, four months. But we had to make (the decision) for the good of the parish."

Foster disagrees.

"What's going to happen here, is it's going to close and they're going to say we tried a day-care operation and it didn't work," Foster said. "It could and would work."

Sister Marie Clare Keele, SSJ; taught at many diocesan schools

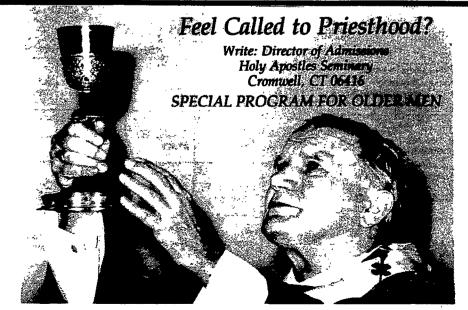
Sister Marie Clare Keele, SSJ, a members of the Sisters of St. Joseph order since 1927, died Tuesday, April 19, 1994, at the Sisters of St. Joseph Convent Infirmary, 4095 East Ave.

A Rochester native, Sister Marie Clare

ny of Padua, Holy Apostles and Nazareth Hall, all in Rochester; Ss. Peter and Paul, Elmira; St. Patrick's, Mount Morris; St. Joseph's, Wayland; and St. Anne's, Palmyra.

In addition to being a much loved and

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entered the Sisters of St. Joseph from Holy Rosary Parish. She was a graduate of Nazareth Normal School and Nazareth College.

During her teaching ministry, Sister Marie Clare taught at many diocesan schools, including St. Patrick's in Corning for 12 years; St. Alphonsus, Auburn (nine years); and St. Joseph's Villa (seven years). She also taught at St. Antho-



respected teacher, Sister Marie Clare was gifted artistically. According to her friends, she was always making pillows, toy dolls and other craft items for friends and sisters.

A Mass of Christian Burial for Sister Marie Clare was celebrated at the motherhouse chapel on April 22.

Sister Marie Clare is survived by two sisters: Ann Jones and Geraldine Hiller, both of Rochester; nieces and nephews; grandnieces and grandnephews; and her sisters in the Sisters of St. Joseph community.

