

# Education

## St. Monica program focuses on responsibility

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Children are no longer the only ones receiving instruction from St. Monica School staff and administrators.

Beginning this school year, St. Monica's is also issuing strict directives to students' mothers and fathers.

And if families don't abide by every portion of a pact they must sign, they are reminded no less than eight times in the contract regulations that a child "will no longer be considered a student of St. Monica School."

Moral, educational and financial responsibility are the driving themes behind this set of rules at St. Monica's, a pre-kindergarten through grade 5 school located at 841 Genesee St.

Among the contract's requirements:

- Students' families must be registered members of a church and attend that church on a weekly basis. Students will be required to present St. Monica administrators with church-attendance cards — for both themselves and their parents — each Monday. (Church affiliation is not required to be Catholic; in fact, less than 10 percent of St. Monica's students are parishioners at Catholic churches.)

- Parents are obligated to attend all parent-teacher conferences and monthly PTA meetings, and they must volunteer time for fundraising and other school-related activities.

- Parents will not be permitted to fall behind on tuition payments.

Father Robert T. Werth, who serves as pastor of the Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward cluster, noted that only 15 percent of the K-6 parents were volunteer participants last year and the school only had a 65-percent tuition collection rate even after making special payment arrangements.

"We knew we could do a lot better than we were doing," Father Werth said.

Beyond the statistics, he pointed out that the policy will help to promote teamwork at St. Monica's.

"With the church, the school and the parents working together, it's an unbeatable recipe



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Isaac Miller plays in a hall at St. Monica School while his mother, Mary, meets with Father Peter Enyan-Boadu about the school's new policy for students and parents. Isaac, 4, will attend the WEE program at St. Monica's this school year.

for success for the child," said Father Werth.

This policy is modeled after a similar program instituted by Father George Clements of Chicago. Father Peter Enyan-Boadu, parochial vicar of the 19th Ward cluster, once trained under Father Clements and is now implementing St. Monica School's policy along with Father Werth, school principal Sister Mary Marvin, RSM, administrative assistant Carmetha Harris, and Wegmans Early Education pre-kindergarten program director Diane Dinkins.

Father Werth said that school officials are meeting with each student's family to discuss the contract, which must be signed and returned before the child can become officially registered.

Kiara Henry, who turns 5 on Aug. 13, is due to begin her second year in the WEE pre-K program this fall. Yet Kiara's mother, Karen, is not happy about



Father Peter Enyan-Boadu discusses the guidelines of St. Monica's program during a recent interview with Vida Crockett.



Vida Crockett, who is considering enrolling her 6-year-old child at St. Monica's, listens closely to Father Enyan-Boadu.

her new contractual obligation.

"It makes it seem like they're trying to take control of your house. It's like they're trying to trap me," said Karen Henry, whose family is not currently registered with any church.

Henry said her primary motive for sending Kiara to St. Monica is to utilize WEE's day-care services. Because Kiara's tuition is paid on time, Henry and her husband, Patrick, believe they shouldn't be assigned any further directives.

"My husband was very disturbed," she said. "He didn't want to send (Kiara) there, but we've got no choice. We don't have any other family around here to look after her."

Karen Henry added that they will likely enroll Kiara in another school next year.

Father Werth acknowledged that instituting this policy "is a risk, because we don't know how many people are going to buy into this philosophy."

Sister Marvin noted that enrollment last year totaled 80 for WEE pre-K children and 118 for grades K-6 (the school has eliminated its sixth grade for 1994-95). She said enrollment is likely to decline this year due to the new contract's unyielding nature, but is hoping for a

substantial increase in students once the policy's positive effects become apparent to Rochester-area families.

Father Werth noted that a woman religious who once worked under Father Clements, upon hearing that St. Monica School had decided to adopt this program, predicted to the pastor that enrollment would eventually increase.

Mary Miller, whose 4-year-old son, Isaac, is due to begin his first year in the WEE program, adamantly supports the new requirements.

"If you're trying to put out Christian morals and ethics and they're negated as soon as you leave the schoolroom, it makes the teacher's job impossible," remarked Miller, a parishioner at St. Bridget's Church.

"I want this to be successful because we need this in our community. We have been so unstructured for so long," Miller added. "This is requiring people to do what they should be doing anyway."

### Catholic school parent office enacts fresh initiatives

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Since its formation early this year, the U.S. Catholic Conference's Office for Catholic School Parent Associations has undertaken several new initiatives.

Principal among them is the development of the "Parent Power" resource manual to help parents start their own Catholic school parent organizations. The booklet also outlines model educational choice legislation from four states.

In addition, the office has formed the National Coalition of Catholic School Parent As-

sociations. By mid-May, the coalition consisted of 15 state organizations and five diocesan groups, as well as 4,700 schools.

A national advisory committee has also been formed to provide ongoing advice and counsel on a variety of issues dealing with the organizing of parents and nonpublic education in the United States. It had its first meeting in Washington in late June.

Kenneth John Dupre, former executive director of the Catholic Conference of Kentucky, heads the USCC Office for Catholic School Parent As-

sociations. Dupre has already met with parents from New Jersey; an educational choice initiative is on the ballot in Jersey City, N.J. He also plans to meet with groups from 14 other states before the end of summer.

The U.S. bishops, in their 1990 statement "In Support of Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools," called for the formation of diocesan, state and national parent organizations.

They also committed themselves to establishing a national office and to help found a national parents organization.