

Stringent policy's virtues begin to surface

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — In terms of enrollment, it would not be off base to tab St. Monica's School, 841 Genee St., as "the few ... the proud."

When adult participation is taken into account, however, numbers at St. Monica's are thriving in ways never before known.

After a controversial school policy was introduced prior to the 1994-95 school year, several families opted not to send their children to the pre-K through grade 5 school. The new initiative outlined numerous requirements to which families must adhere, or students faced the risk of expulsion.

According to Father Robert T. Werth, pastor of the 19th Ward Roman Catholic Community in which St. Monica's School is located, enrollment for 1994-95 totals 128 students. This 50-percent drop-off from 1993-94 not only reflects the elimination of sixth grade at the school, but also the refusal of families to follow such directives as paying tuition on time; mandatory weekend attendance at the church of their choice; and increased parental involvement in school organizations and functions.

On the other hand, Father Werth said, those who have followed the new policy's guidelines are apparently quite enthusiastic about it.

"We discovered that in many, many families there was movement toward fulfillment of the contract," said Father Werth. "For families who had thought it was a ridiculous plan, now St. Monica's has become a household word."

Father Werth pointed out that only one family has been asked to take its child out of St. Monica's because it failed to follow terms of the contract.

One parent who has had a change of heart is Richard Greenaway, whose daughter, Jovan, is a pre-kindergarten student at the southwest quadrant school. Greenaway said he was initially concerned about time constraints presented by the contract.

"The funny thing that happened to me is that I eventually found out it was not that hard to do. Going to church hasn't hurt a darn member of my family, and it has become more of a focal point of my life," said Greenaway, who attends Rochester's Baber African Methodist Episcopal Church, 550 Meigs St.



File photo
Four-year-old Isaac Miller attends the WEE program at Rochester's St. Monica's School, which has begun to see enthusiasm for a controversial new program implemented at the start of this school year.

In addition, Greenaway has joined St. Monica's PTA planning committee. Meanwhile, his wife, Margaret, is involved in an effort to promote social interaction among students' parents.

"If St. Monica's is to work, then the parents who truly believe in what we're doing have to follow through," Greenaway stated.

The same holds true for school administrators. Father Werth acknowledged that he and other St. Monica's officials have spent considerable time getting this program off the ground.

"We've all had to change our lives because of this," said Father Werth, citing examples such as checking family church-attendance cards, which students must submit at the beginning of each week.

To further help promote St. Monica's virtues, several prominent guest speakers have already appeared at the Catholic school during 1994-95. Among them are Father George Clements, a Chicago priest whose school program in that city served as a model for the new St. Monica's policy; Jacquelyn Dobson, director of the diocesan Office of Black Ministries and acting director of diocesan Urban Services; and Rochester television newscaster Wanda Miller.

Now that the program has begun taking hold, Father Werth hopes that attendance will soon rise. Meanwhile, he said, the school's efforts have received strong encouragement from diocesan officials.

"For the first year, I think it's unbelievably successful," he remarked.

Pro-lifers upset over call for protest moratorium, dialogue

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

ROCHESTER — A letter written by Father David P. Reid, SS.CC., calling for a moratorium on abortion protests and for further dialogue on the issue, has produced puzzlement and anger among Catholic pro-life activists.

Published Jan. 31 in Rochester's *Democrat and Chronicle*, the letter authored by the pastor of the St. Francis of Assisi/Ss. Peter and Paul Parish Cluster was written on behalf of the city's Catholic urban ministers. It follows a call by Cardinal Bernard F. Law of Boston for an end to even peaceful protests at abortion clinics in the wake of the Dec. 30, 1994, shootings at two Boston clinics that left two women dead and five other people wounded.

In the letter, Father Reid called for a moratorium on local protests, claiming: "We see this moratorium as an opportunity to promote dialogue in a manner that is itself nonviolent and respectful of persons whose methods of protest one disavows."

Although confusion stems from whether the Rochester priest is calling for dialogue among pro-life and pro-choice contingents, Father Reid explains that he means dialogue among pro-life activists only.

"My point about the dialogue was not with people who are pro-abortion," Father Reid observed. "We want to talk with people who are pro-protests. We think it would be very good to have dialogue around this."

Father Reid noted the the pro-life movement has a "loony element" using

violent means to protest abortion. The priest said unfortunately the entire pro-life movement is being linked in the popular mind to such extremists as John Salvi III and Paul Hill. The movement needs to discuss new ways to challenge abortion, he said.

However, Kathleen Cannon, former director of diocesan Urban Ministry and a participant in the Jan. 10 discussion among urban ministers that spawned the letter, had a different interpretation of Father Reid's call for dialogue.

"I certainly walked away with the impression that (the intent) was to initiate dialogue between (pro-life and pro-choice activists)," said Cannon, now serving as synod implementation director.

Cannon acknowledged, however, that the letter's wording is vague.

Meanwhile, Deacon William Coffey,

director of adult education and social ministry at St. Mary's Church, 15 St. Mary's Place, had a different interpretation of Father Reid's meaning.

"What I thought he meant was that it would give the whole Christian community an opportunity to dialogue," said Deacon Coffey, another meeting participant. "If he meant dialogue with pro-lifers, I don't think that was as clear."

But, Deacon Coffey added, the discussion was free flowing, increasing the possibility that even those in attendance might have had different understandings about what Father Reid would write on behalf of the group.

Whatever the case in terms of intent, the letter has caused consternation among some pro-life activists — including those who actively take part in

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