

\$25M gift intended to give students purpose in life

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and the program to aid students in Catholic high schools in the diocese. Robert Wegman also said that a portion of the money eventually will be used to extend the voucher program into other Catholic schools in the City of Rochester.

The initially targeted schools are: Corpus Christi at Blessed Sacrament Parish, Holy Family, Holy Rosary, St. Andrew, St. Boniface and St. Monica. One goal of the new program is to boost the combined enrollment of those six schools from the current figure of 1,100 to their full capacity of 1,400 — possibly as early as the 1996-97 school year, Dwyer said.

Using a sliding scale, WIN vouchers will supplement financial aid already available, thus reducing the cost for families to send their children to the schools.

"The greatest obstacle for families has been affordability," Dwyer said in a press release. "Now we can make a 10-year commitment to provide financial aid to a family who chooses to stay with us from preschool through eighth grade."

Bishop Clark noted that the gift "allows families to plan with some sense of security their children's education." He added that it will also help to give the schools a sense of stability in their own financial planning over the next decade.

The gift will also allow diocesan officials to redirect money earmarked for the six schools to other Catholic schools, consequently helping schools not directly benefiting from the vouchers at this time.

Robert Wegman said he and his wife have been helping support Catholic education for a number of years. Before they began the WEE Program about three years ago, they were involved with providing tuition aid to Catholic students.

Wegman said that through that involvement he realized that school officials needed greater sense of assurance that financial assistance would be available in the future.

"We sat down and looked at how we could do a better job of educating the children in these schools," Wegman said. "We decided the best way to do that would be to know exactly how much money (the schools) would receive over the next 10 years."

Although the figure he reached with diocesan officials was \$25 million, Wegman acknowledged that the actual amount could exceed that figure.

The commitment to the schools is also a commitment to neighborhoods in which they are located, Bishop Clark acknowledged. Indeed, he noted, community members have told him that "the schools are a very important part of their neighborhoods' scene, enhancing the quality and stability (of the neighborhoods) in which the schools are located."

A further component of the plan is the "Commitment to Excellence," a modified version of parental promises now required of parents of students enrolled at St. Monica's School, Dwyer said. Parents using WIN vouchers will pledge to be actively involved in the education of their children, and to be actively involved in a faith community.

"It will not be as stringent, but mirrors what they have (at St. Monica's)," Dwyer said.

At St. Monica's, parents are required to be active in the school community and to provide proof of involvement in a faith community — Catholic or otherwise. If they break the commitment, their children will be expelled. When the program was launched at the beginning of the 1994-95 school year, St. Monica's enrollment dropped to 60 students, Dwyer reported. But now that parents have seen the program working, he added, enrollment for the upcoming school year has already increased, according to school figures, to approximately 160 students.

Dwyer said the Wegmans' gift also helps to signal a turning point for Catholic education in the City of Rochester, following years of sometimes controversial restructuring and school closings.

"I think it's kind of a watershed for us," Dwyer said. "This kind of a gift over a 10-



Katherine Cumming
Robert and Peggy Wegman, shown here reading to students at Rochester's Holy Family School, are longtime supporters of Catholic education.

year period makes (the restructured school system) more viable."

Indeed, when the restructuring process began, it was with the realization that assistance for the schools could not be obtained without changing the way the schools operated, Bishop Clark said.

"One of the early emphases was planning for the needs of early education," Bishop Clark said. "We were unable to attract gifts at that time because of various

inefficiencies under which were were operating."

The Wegmans' gift may help to make the reasons for the sometimes difficult process more apparent to the people of the diocese, the bishop speculated.

"I would guess that this wonderful gift will be a chance for people to reflect on what has happened since the beginning of our restructuring," Bishop Clark said. "The reorganization has positioned us very well to offer the option of quality Catholic education to the community."

Moreover, diocesan officials are hoping that other individuals may be inspired by the Wegmans' generosity to make contributions of their own, Bishop Clark acknowledged.

"We have signs of interest on the part of some individuals in what the Wegmans have been doing for schools," Bishop Clark said. "My hope is that it will be a sign to others who will be capable of making financial gifts."

Likewise, Robert Wegman said he would like to see other community leaders become involved in supporting Catholic education. But his immediate goal is focused on the children who will benefit from it.

"If my objectives are reached and the children go to Catholic high school, then 98 to 99 percent are going to graduate from high school and the majority are going to go to college," Wegman said.

Moreover, he is hoping that the children — Catholics and non-Catholics — will receive the same benefits he did from Catholic education.

"It teaches you to have a purpose in life," Wegman said. "You're not just here to enjoy yourself and make a lot of money. You're going to be accountable for what you do in this life."

"I think if we can teach these children the same idea," Wegman concluded, "we're going to help them to be more accountable for their own lives."

Clergy appointments, retirement announced

EDITORS' NOTE: For several years, the Catholic Courier has complied with diocesan requests to publish in June or July a complete summary of all priest appointments effective July 1 of that year. The summary typically repeated numerous appointments that already had been published in smaller groups earlier in the year.

Due to space limitations this summer, the Catholic Courier has been unable to publish the summary, which does include some previously unpublished appointments. We do not foresee having the space — more than a full newspaper page — to publish the complete summary in the weeks to come. But in this and subsequent issues, we will include appointments that have not been published already. Three of them follow.

Father William F. Laird, to priest administrator of St. Vincent DePaul Church, Churchville, concurrent with present assignment as judicial vicar in the diocesan Tribunal.

Father Elmer J. McDonald, from chaplain of the Veterans Administration Medical Center, Bay Pines, Fla., to retirement in private residence in Florida.

Father Mark A. Miller, from parochial vicar of St. Ann's Church, Hornell, to pastor of St. Theresa's Church, Stanley, and St. Mary's Church, Rushville.

We regret our inability to publish the full list and apologize for any inconvenience this may cause.

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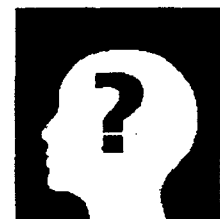
Conversation, hors d'oeuvres and dinner with local celebrities including
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